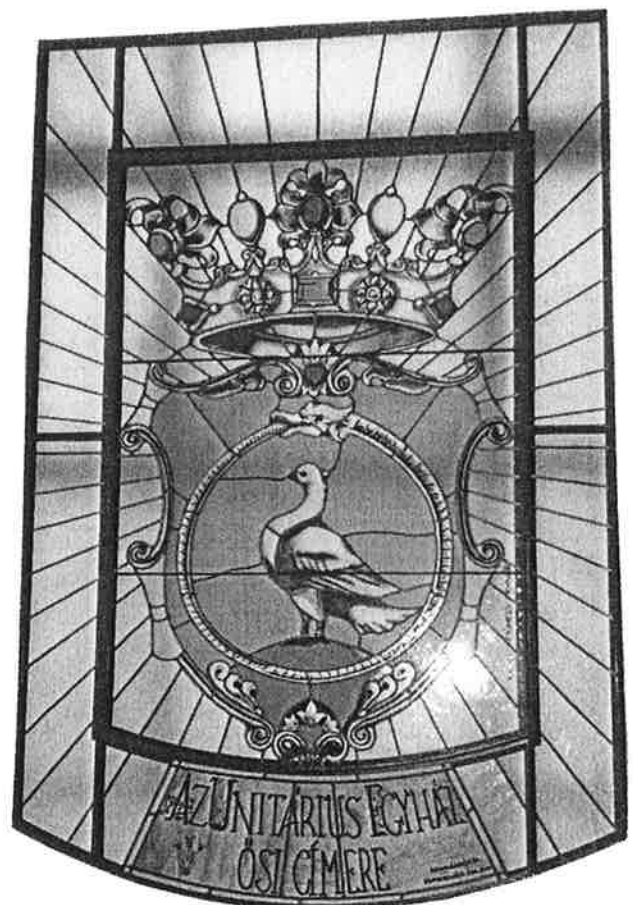
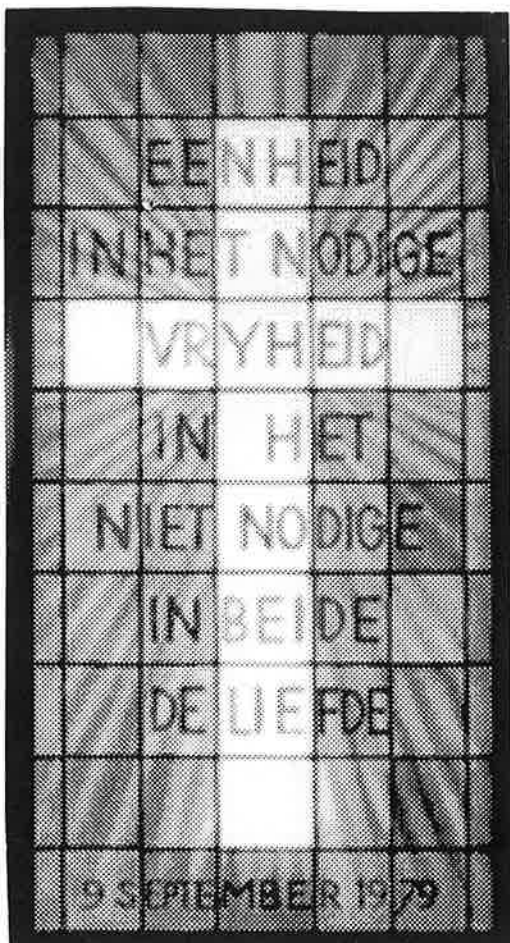


Report

of the Meeting of ministers and scholars of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church in Romania and of the Remonstrant Brotherhood in The Netherlands

April, 18 – 25 2005



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A POSTMODERN PEREGRINATIO

Revitalizing a 400-years-old Relationship

By: Rev. Gyerő Dávid

A little piece of round cheese, bottle of water, maps, sweets and sheets of paper about the theology and structure of the Dutch Remonstrant Church -- this was the content of the colored paper bag that we were given at the Amsterdam airport by our hosts. And we also received lots of hugs, smiles, a good cup of coffee and a wholeheartedly warm welcome. In the midst of the emotional moment, we completely forgot to talk about dinner that night -- so we started our week in the Netherlands with a rather unloaded body, and a rather enthusiastic soul.

The 15-member delegation of our Transylvanian Unitarian Church visited the land of tulips aiming to learn more closely about the present conditions of the most historic liberal Christian denomination of the country. This small community, the Remonstrant Brotherhood, was established in the rather free religious environment of the 1600s, being founded by the native of the land, the theologian Arminius, of whom the denomination was also named arminian.

The following centuries created harsher conditions for the development of the community, thanks to the persecution of the intolerant Catholic and Reformed churches. Therefore, a small group immigrated to the more liberal neighboring lands, but they soon were assimilated into the majority religions. Another, larger part chose deliberately to stay, and hide when necessary. This is how their churches and community buildings were often built in interior courtyards, being disguised by family homes from the street side. The number of their membership couldn't grow either for the reasons mentioned, in the present they have over forty congregations with around eight thousand members.

The organized relationship with our Transylvanian Unitarian Church started in times when religious freedom was more fully recognized both in Western and in Eastern Europe. In the 17th and 18th centuries more than twenty Transylvanian Unitarian theologians chose to continue their western-European studies (peregrinatio in Latin) at a Dutch Remonstrant Divinity School either in Leiden or in Utrecht or Groningen. In spite of the many similarities between the theologies of the two denominations, the Remonstrants always hurried to emphasize that they are not Unitarians. One of the most differentiated fields of their theology is its Christology: they prefer to see Jesus as part of God's substance, rather than as a human prophet and teacher, as the Unitarians call him.

The two world wars and especially the hostile conditions of the late 20th-century Eastern Europe broke the relationship of the Unitarians with their co-religionists in a capitalistic and imperialistic country. Since the political changes in Romania, the two parties kept in touch within the frame of the International Association for Religious Freedom, but without having a special focus on each other. The first pioneers of the Remonstrant-Unitarian partnership were a few congregations, which discovered the other in the midst of the social assistance that invaded Romania from Western Europe. Out of these seeds grew out several well-organized Remonstrant-Unitarian partner church relationships like the ones between Kolozsvár 3 and Rotterdam, Sepsiszentgyörgy and Utrecht, Homoródszentpéter and Bilthoven, Marosvásárhely and Groningen.

One of the leading ministers of these connections, Rev. Tina Geels of Utrecht, became interested more closely by the theology of the Transylvanian Unitarianism, and after researching the field quite intensively, she proposed that it is worthwhile to continue knowing each other through theological dialogue and learning. She initiated and also established the financial conditions, together with a few other ministers and lay leaders, of the conference that invited fifteen Transylvanian ministers and leaders to visit the Netherlands for a theological exchange.

The fifteen delegates were chosen through an accelerated application process. The members of the delegation chose the topic of their lecture to cover all the basic components of the current Transylvanian Unitarian theology.

The following participants presented their lecture in the following fields: Historical introduction to the relationship of the Transylvanian Unitarians with co-religionists in the Netherlands – Kovács Sándor; The theological basis of the Transylvanian Unitarian faith - a general introduction: dogma or principle of faith; outer or inner authority – dr. Szabó Árpád; The place and role of the Bible in the Unitarian beliefs – Ferenczi Enikő; The Bible as a source of the Transylvanian Unitarian liturgy, ceremonies and education - Mezei Csaba; We believe in one God - the substance and qualities of God – dr. Rezi Elek; God's works: creation, providence and Holy Spirit – Molnár B. Lehel; The human being as a child of God: his nature and vocation – dr. Máthé Dénes; The human being and the problem of sin; remission of sins – Kecskés Csaba; Resurrection or eternal life? Salvation of humans – Máthé Sándor; The person of Jesus – Pap Mária; The teachings of Jesus – Czire Szabólc; The church as a religious and moral institution – Gyerő Dávid; The Transylvanian Unitarian worship: theological basis, purpose and order – Székely Kinga; The Transylvanian Unitarian ceremonies: their origins, theological basis and order – Sándor Szilárd; The future of liberal Christianity: will it be the religion of the future? – Kovács István.

Our Dutch hosts found an authentic and very enjoyable frame for all these lectures and discussions: they chose a new Remonstrant church and community to host the events of the day every day throughout the week. This proved to be a somewhat more tiring method, but nevertheless offered an endless variety of knowledge and experiences: the rich cultural and artistic world of Groningen, Utrecht, Leiden, Nieuwkoop and Zwolle. Another special taste of the conference was given by the fact that the Transylvanian delegates were hosted individually with ministers and lay leaders of the Remonstrants. This implied precious personal encounters and spiritual relationships to be established, as well as diverse forms of getting to know each other and having fun together.

The weeklong conference scheduled an evaluation session, a joint religious service and a goodbye dinner for its last evening in Utrecht, the city, which also hosts the national headquarters of the Remonstrants; we visited their offices early in the week. The earlier suggestion about continuing the joint theological journey in Transylvania was transformed into a plan. We fully agreed about the changing of the roles too: the Transylvanians will run more as local organizers, so that the Dutch can concentrate on sharing their theological specialties.

On the morning of the departing day, at the Amsterdam airport, we didn't get a colored paper bag this time. But we carried home within us so much more. There were goodbye whispers, goodbye tears, hugs and pledges exchanged. And there was a quite intense load of the soul and spirit that we carried away from this week. Among them, one of the most important realizations was to discover that it is a must to pay more attention to Europe and especially the Netherlands, next to our partner church relationships with the Unitarians of the United States of America. We all felt that there is power and spirit coming from this relationship, which is uplifting, empowering and enriching.

REPORT AND CONCLUSIONS WITH AN EYE ON THE FUTURE

By: Rev. Tina Geels

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, and indeed for many years before that, there have been incidental contacts between the Remonstrant Brotherhood and the Unitarian Church of Transylvania in Romania. Until now, there is no formal bond between these two Churches. Because of its theological tradition, it hasn't been possible for the Remonstrant Brotherhood to adopt unilaterally the Unitarian position. The so-called Trinity of Revelation remained the core of the confession. In contrast, the Christian Unitarian Church does not refer to Christology but to a doctrine concerning Jesus, His life and works. After all, emphasis is put on the Unity (Unitas) of God. That is way they entered history as the Unitarian Church, established in 1568.

Indeed, the roots of this authentic, liberal, Christian Church are to be found in Transylvania. At present, the Church counts some 70.000 members, including children of 14 years and older (confirmation). The 18th and 19th Centuries witnessed enormous growth in America, which originated from the migratory movement from the European continent. To some extent, these people loosened their ties to their Christian roots. In the second half of the 20th Century the merge freely with the so-called Universalists.

There has always been theological exchange and mutual inspiration with the UU, however not entirely to the satisfaction of the Unitarians of Transylvania. They wanted to hold onto their faith: rooted in the biblical tradition. The mother-church in Transylvania has had a history of four centuries of repression and denial. Despite themselves, they've been perceived as heretics. By rejecting the Trinity and emphasising Jesus as a human being, they positioned themselves outside the mainstream of the Christian tradition.

This development of tradition and Christian culture – in relation to which we have to bear in mind that Transylvania belonged until the Treaty of Trianon of 1920 to Hungary, and therefore to Central Europe – meant a climate, both religiously and theologically, of isolation. The Unitarian Church of Transylvania is not Romanian but belongs to the Hungarian minority in Romania. The Hungarian language, which is still the common language in large parts of Transylvania, contributed to this isolation. Thus, they often sought contact from this tight position with various other Christian liberal movements. And, therefore, also with Remonstrants. Unitarians and other Christian liberal groups in other parts of Europe have remained very small throughout their history. The Remonstrants appeared to be an equal partner. Yet, because of the perceived insurmountable theological differences, the incidental contacts haven't grown into formally established friendships and partnerships, as is the case with the PKN and the Reformatus Church in Transylvania. The theme of approaches and meetings in the past was the subject of very interesting lectures by church-historian Kovács Sándor and Eric Cossee, who presented results of recent research.

After the changes in 1989 the UU (Unitarians and Universalists) from the United States of America became very active in saving their mother-church from extinction. Forty years of communism almost proved too much for this strong, yet vulnerable liberal Christian Church. Strong in its authentic tradition, but vulnerable because of its theological and cultural isolation. Within a few years all 125 Unitarian congregations had been paired up with a UU congregation in the US. These provided much financial assistance, for instance by funding annual scholarships. Our Transylvanian colleagues and their congregations have much to be thankful for in this respect, yet tutors at the Seminary and the leadership of the church did not want to let go off their interest in Christian liberal movements closer to home. They had become curious about the recent developments within the theological tradition of the Remonstrants and their position within the ecumenical movement. I found this out during interviews with various Unitarian ministers and tutors in Transylvania. The results of this research have been published by the Remonstrant Brotherhood in 2002, entitled: "Tochtgenoten in Vrijzinnigheid" ("Travelling Companions in Liberal Christianity"). Since I was very impressed – through these

interviews – by their tradition, strength, and theological reflection, I thought it meaningful to facilitate more intense approaches and contacts.

Some other, existing, congregational ties between Remonstrant congregations and Unitarian congregations in Transylvania served to inspire even more. Moreover, in this day and age a lot more is possible than ever before. The isolation caused by language barriers (on both sides, by the way) was broken because English has rapidly become the second language in Transylvania, as well. What is more, digital opportunities have increased rapidly, European developments have speeded up, and the likely accession of Romania to the EU in 2007 is a reality. The field of operation for ecumenical work has been broadened because of this. In short, we live in exciting times with new challenges.

II. PREPARATIONS

Initially, the plan was to organise a study-trip of the Remonstrant Convent to Transylvania, just like the PKN organises for its ministers. Since the pool of ministers within the Remonstrant Brotherhood is not particularly large, participation proved to be too small, even though the dates (late April 2005) for the study-week were set six months in advance. Given the enthusiastic efforts on both sides we did not want to abandon the initiative for a week of study. Thus, a number of ministers from the Remonstrant Convent decided to turn the situation on its head and invited the Unitarian ministers to the Netherlands for a week of study. This was December 2004. Ten Unitarian ministers and five tutors each prepared a short lecture. We also invited Remonstrant tutors and ministers to contribute to this week of study.

All Remonstrant ministers, ministers emeritus, and pastoral workers were subsequently invited personally to participate. Funds became speedily available. Our offer to our Transylvanian colleagues included the cost of travel and room and board whilst here, which came to some 10.000 Euro. This money was pledged by various donors well in time! Naturally, we needed host-addresses in the centre of the country. The study-week was to take place in various locations to enable colleagues who live all over the country to participate. CoZA was kept well-informed of developments. The magazine AdRem twice published an announcement. Many Remonstrant congregations received an announcement for publication in their church newsletter which explained the aims and contents of the week of study. All lectures were open to all interested people. The governors of the NPB and the VVP were kept informed. Through this, all NPB ministers were also invited to participate.

The organising group consisted of: Ds. Greteke de Vries, ds. Peronne Boddaert, ds. Jan van Nieuwenhuijzen, ds. Tina Geels and Maarten Doude van Troostwijk, MA. Because of his extended international experience, Maarten organised everything regarding travel. He is a historian of East European affairs, with a working knowledge of Hungarian, and also works as a translator. Thanks to the speed of email it was possible to put together a balanced program with equal contributions from the Remonstrants as well as from the Unitarian side. The study-week took place in Groningen, Utrecht, Nieuwkoop, Leiden, Zwolle, and Utrecht again (closing session). At each location a contact-person of the host congregation was present. This person was responsible for organising lunch and dinner.

III. THE STUDY WEEK

On the evening of Monday, 18 April, a number of host-families was at Schiphol to welcome and collect the group of visitors. Clearly, it was exciting, for both parties. Greteke had prepared fifteen folders, which included: the programme, a prepared songbook, maps of the various cities and towns, and some pocket money. It all looked very joyous.

Tuesday – chair of the day: Peronne Boddaert. In the early morning we travelled by train to Groningen; all fifteen visiting theologians and a few hosts. We were very warmly welcomed with coffee in the Mennonite Church by the WIC (Werkgroep Internationale Contacten; Working Group for International Contacts) of the Remonstrant congregation of Groningen. There was sufficient interest shown from Remonstrant ministers and other interested people. The atmosphere was somewhat uncomfortable, but the lectures were presented with gusto. (See programme). The contribution by Ferenczi Enikő regarding biblical theology made a deep

impression on me. During lunch we took part in a walk through the city and a visit to the library of the University of Groningen. When we decided after tea to form a circle for an exchange of ideas, some real contacts were established. People spoke with passion and many questions were asked. We had dinner in a modest restaurant on the Vismarkt. The atmosphere had loosened up: there was a lot of laughter and discussion. Tired, but satisfied we travelled back to the host families.

Wednesday – chair of the day: Maria Dijkshoorn (Member of the Group for European Contacts). After a warm welcome at the National Bureau in Utrecht we started off with a few daily lectures, this time by the bishop, Árpád Szabó, and by Johan Goud. The theme of the day was: the basis of faith and confession. The “concept of a new confession”, as well as the confession of 1940, had been translated by Maarten into English, and was available to the participants, as was the Creed of the Unitarian Church of Transylvania. Perhaps not surprisingly, things got particularly interesting when discussing the passages concerning Jesus Christ.

Openness and mutual understanding were the hallmarks of the programme of this morning. During lunch, Tom Mikkers introduced the synodal board of the Convent after a short explanation. The first lecture of the afternoon: Wibren van der Burg speaking on ethics solicited many reactions. Our colleagues were surprised by the position in social life arising from liberal Christianity. There was not a hint of isolation. This mental space was a privilege. It became the leading theme of our week of study.

The salads at dinner were delicious; there was plenty to drink and lots of laughter. During the evening we had a kind of “intermediate evaluation” with the help of role-playing. The Transylvanians had become Remonstrants and vice versa. Playing our roles, we asked one another questions. Dressed up as humour, many of our guests let us know they were disappointed about meeting just a few Remonstrant colleagues until then. Was this perhaps the case because things in the Netherlands are going quite well and people here are not open to others who could do with some support? The other side asked the question: what do you have to offer us? In which way can we get closer to one another? What is the difference between “I believe” and “we believe”? The Remonstrants asked themselves what the Transylvanians had in common with the Unitarians in America? “Maybe once I will go to Transylvania when I have the time...” Other critical questions concerned: the use of holding on to specific church traditions (how is it possible to be traditional, yet at the same time modern as a community of faith); the convergence of the Christian and national identity of our guests; the ecumenical movement, and much more.

In a certain hidden way we gleaned much about our guests, issues which in the course of the week were further developed. On the one hand they expected a lot from our week of study: they had expected to be able to use beamers for their presentations, which we unfortunately did not have. A few of them had been to Hungary or the US for study. Others had travelled a lot to international conferences. Neither of them was poor in the broad sense of the word. Yet, still, there is poverty: no insurance, no pension, poverty at home, little structure in the community, etc. And a different church structure. In short, today gave us a different, but fascinating story.

Thursday – chair of the day: Maria Dijkshoorn. Everyone was on time in the old church of the Remonstrant congregation of Nieuwkoop. Coffee was ready. People were busy preparing lunch already. And again, we listened to many lectures, although they were short: about 20 minutes each. Afterwards we had time for discussion. The programme contained practical theology and systematic theology. We spoke about church services. One of the ministers had brought his gown, a dashing black cape, to which the Dutch ministers had no answer... We spoke about the tradition of the liturgy, baptism, and communion. We sang together and listened to beautiful, old Hungarian hymns.

Another theme concerned pastoral care and supervision. We would have liked to talk for a lot longer, to have had a lot more time, since we lacked the time to engage in thorough conversation. A pleasant walk in the sun through Nieuwkoop, where a professional photographer took our picture, showed how much effort the Remonstrant congregation had

put into our visit. Even dinner had been prepared by members of the congregation themselves. In short: a very inspiring day.

Friday – chair of the day: Tina Geels (morning) and Maria Dijkshoorn (afternoon). The Lokhorst Church offered its hospitality for this last day of study. The lecture by Marius van Leeuwen on "Remonstrants and Christ" followed up surprisingly well on Mária Pap's lecture on "The Person of Jesus" which she had delivered on Wednesday morning. Christology from below, the true man, the image of God; those appeared to be the key words. Departing from the verse "Who do you say I am" (Mc. 8:27) Mária asked us to write down our own answer to this question en hand those answers round to the others. (rabbi, prophet, true man, image of God, love, hope...). She finished her fascinating lecture with these personal contributions of the participants.

The delicious, partially Hungarian, lunch looked beautiful and had been prepared by an active member of the Remonstrant congregation in Leiden, whose mother was Hungarian. The final lectures concerned the place of a liberal Christian in society, his tasks and duties within the ecumenical movement. After a wonderful dinner: off to the sea for some refreshing wind on the beach of Katwijk.

Saturday – Church Day in Zwolle. Not all guests were present here. Some of them had been too tired out by the previous few days. For most, their stay in the Netherlands was a first and very exciting, with a multitude of new impressions to absorb.

But for who was there: a real happening in the "IJsselhallen" with some 4000 people from all over the country. We were impressed, yet also somewhat saturated. An invitation for lunch at a Hungarian PKN / Reformatus colleague in Zwolle – János Herman - was gratefully accepted by the group. It became clear all knew one another very well. It was a joyous meal, a piece of Hungarian culture on a sunny day in the north of the Netherlands. Fun, food, song, and drink. The afternoon was spent shopping and enjoying the fine spring weather. The evening was spent with the host families, whilst various sub-groups formed for dinner. The Amsterdam delegation, especially, had a particularly enjoyable time.

Sunday – Our guests went to church wherever they lived with their host families. This meant: a few went to the Remonstrant church in Amsterdam, a few in Utrecht, some in the area known as the "heuvelrug" ("hills") to a combined service of the NPB, in Naarden-Bussum, NPB Bilthoven, and in Amersfoort.

At four o'clock we assembled in the Geerte-church with most host families and others who had partially participated during the week. Greteke started off the evaluation session. With a dance in a circle around the large table each of the 35 participants selected a postcard depicting a scene which they considered to represent their experience of the week. We shared our experiences in the group. Some impressions from the Unitarian ministers: we are travelling together on the same road; passing on electricity; we are lonely; hope; lost; where are we?; in conversation; inspiring; a historic moment. Some impressions from the Remonstrant side: listening to each other; encounters; curiosity; happiness; penetrating; continuing; together; sun; a new book; touched; arriving home.

From the conversation that followed: this was an introduction, a start. We had too much information with too many lectures. Yet, this was necessary. Too little time for conversation. A first step. Inspiring. Touched by the passion with which you (Transylvanians) are ministers. Satisfied. The study element was very important. A historic step demanding a follow-up in Transylvania, next year... Many thanks.

After this evaluation we readied ourselves for the final service which had been prepared in the train between Amersfoort and Zwolle (and back). The candles, the silence; a reflection on the vineyard of Nabot, and again we sang Psalm 25,..."Lord, let me know your ways through your Word and Spirit", in Hungarian and in Dutch, just like we did at the start of our week of study. The husband and sons of Fride Bonda performed on the piano and the saxophone; prayers and the blessing...

Members of the Remonstrant congregation of Utrecht had cooked a delicious meal; salads and pudding. We enjoyed this last moment of our shared time with a sense of melancholy. Afterwards, some remained to talk a bit further and exchange contact details.

Monday – An early day at Schiphol airport. Saying our goodbyes and departure of our guests. Until the next time.

IV. LOOKING BACK

Preparations – Took an enormous amount of time and effort. But thanks to the dedication and efforts of the small organising committee we succeeded in doing a lot in a short period of time: from January until early April. The number of invited ministers and tutors – 15 – was quite a lot, but yet appropriate. One doesn't put so much effort into a smaller group.

The programme – We had invited a few lecturers early on in the preparations. When the Transylvanian ministers indicated they, too, wanted to contribute fifteen lectures, the programme was suddenly filled up. (All 125 serving Unitarian ministers had been asked to submit a contribution. A final selection was made out of the thirty respondents). Additional contributions from the side of the Remonstrants were required to balance the programme. This made sure the programme grew in size over time...but this resulted in a too full programme. To select a specific theme for each day worked well, although it couldn't be maintained perfectly. Practical theology, for instance, would have been better served with more attention. In what way are you a minister in different situations? Questions regarding the ecumenical movement and education, involving questions about the identity of the pastor / minister. More and more issues appeared for consideration. But one can't do everything at once. It emerged from the evaluation that most people had considered the programme too full. On the other hand, the participants were keen to receive a lot of information from each side. Each was curious about the other.

Commitment – We had expected more commitment from the Remonstrant ministers. Many times we had to explain how fragmented life in the Netherlands is, even that of a minister, and how full our diaries are. Given that the Remonstrant Brotherhood works with many part-time ministers there is a lot of other work that needs doing. There are no part-time ministers in Transylvania. Everyone works full-time and preaches every Sunday, often in other smaller congregations in the afternoon on top of that. Our guests were present everywhere and at every programme item during the week. It has not proved possible to match this commitment with fifteen Remonstrants ministers. The Unitarian ministers were somewhat disappointed at the absence of their Remonstrant colleagues. But their understanding grew after several explanations from our side. They also noted that there were always different Remonstrant ministers and other interested people present. This resulted in a peculiar group-process. In total, some 20 Remonstrant ministers participated in the various parts of the programme. The commitment and interest from a distance was a lot larger, given the many messages of apologies for not being able to attend. The commitment of the participating Remonstrant congregations was great. Warm welcomes and delicious meals were prepared enthusiastically at the various locations. Financially, too, the congregations were very supportive.

Publicity – The week had been advertised twice in AdRem, thanks to Mijnke Bosman. Apart from that, many church newsletters of the Remonstrants and cooperating congregations published announcements. The boards of the NPB and the VVP had been sent the programme with an invitation. We did not receive a reply, however. The week of study was known among a broader group of interested people (not only Remonstrants) through fundraising at other sources, for instance the Association of Ministers. The Association expects to receive a report for the magazine: "Minister and Society". The PKN has been informed through informal contacts. They are internationally associated with the ICUU (International Council for Unitarians and Universalists). In the week preceding the study-week I received requests for information from Norway and Spain.

Finances – The budget was set at Euro 10.000. More than Euro 11.000 was raised through fundraising and individual gifts. The larger Remonstrant congregations had been approached, too, and contributed as well. A full financial statement is available. Although it is known that

Unitarian ministers in Transylvania have only a small salary, a few host families were surprised to find that some ministers appeared to have brought a fair amount of dollars. Most likely this concerned pocket money, provided by the American partner congregations. This financial support was unevenly divided...Perhaps we could have requested a personal financial contribution; as it was, we covered all costs involved. All in all, we managed our finances very well. We are left with a small surplus which will be used to fund the publication of all lectures and contributions of the study-week.

And finally – this kind of exchange provides us with a mirror. All Remonstrant participants have their own, personal experiences of this. What is noticeable is that the Unitarian Church of Transylvania partially shares a different international network. Both Remonstrants and Unitarians are represented in the IARF, however. Remonstrants participate far more strongly in the broader ecumenical movement. They are members of the World Council of Churches, Warc, CEC, and other organisations. The Unitarian Church of Transylvania is a member of the ICUU and does not partake in the World Council of Churches.

At first, the Unitarian ministers projected their isolated position onto the Remonstrant situation. Their amazement regarding our strong ecumenical position made us reflect on how comfortable our position in Christian Holland in fact is. It was at the same time difficult for them to believe that you can be fully Church, given the small numbers of present-day Remonstrants. We had a lot to explain with regard to the situation of churches in the Netherlands. The lecture by Wibren van den Burg impressed them greatly.

In turn, they were confronted with a mirror by seeing how we are part of the ecumenical movement. It IS possible. The open relationship between the PKN and the Remonstrants offers new opportunities for the future of the Remonstrants. Given the many contacts that already exist between the PKN and the Reformatus Church in Transylvania – some 450 congregational contacts – the development of liberal Christianity in the Netherlands could be influential in the development of the protestant ecumenical movement in Transylvania. The strong showing of the right-wing of the Reformatus Church initiates new processes. Part of the Reformatus Church is not at ease with this development and might be more open to the Unitarians in the near future.

Is it possible to discern a similar situation with regard to developments in the Church in the Netherlands? Should the Remonstrants somehow join up with the PKN international contacts with the Unitarian Church could strengthen the rich and authentic Remonstrant tradition. It would be a delightful, mutually reinforcing, movement. Whatever it is that might be mutually enriching in the future, it will not miss its ecumenical effects. We can learn from each other, originating from a parallel, yet different liberal Christian tradition. Perhaps we could speak of a task assigned to us, given our abundance and comfortable position in which everything is available with regard to education and reflection. A lot of work needs to be done. A counter-visit, as a continuation of this first week of study, seems to be the most sensible, concrete, plan to be developed.

Utrecht, 12 May 2005
On behalf of the Organising Committee.

PROGRAMME SCHEDULE FOR THE VISIT OF UNITARIAN AND REMONSTRANT PASTORS

Monday 4/18	20.00 h.	Welcome and briefing at Schiphol-airport
Tuesday 4/19 City: Groningen Subject: Tradition and history of both churches	10.30 11.00 - 12.30 12.30 - 14.00 14.00 - 18.00 18.00 - 19.45	<p>Arrival in Mennonite Church in Groningen, temporary host of the Remonstrant Congregation of Groningen, Oude Boteringestraat 33, tel. 050 - 31 23 053</p> <p>Liturgical start of the Conference, by rev. Tina Geels and rev. Greteke de Vries</p> <p><i>Prof. dr. Eric Cossee:</i> Freedom in restraint (vrijheid in gebondenheid) <i>Rev. Sándor Kovács:</i> Historical introduction to the relationship of the Transylvanian Unitarians with co-religionists in the Netherlands <i>Rev. Enikő Ferenczi:</i> "The place and role of the Bible in Unitarian Beliefs"</p> <p>Luncheon, town-visit</p> <p>Guided tour by Prof. Cossee in Unitarian library Groningen</p> <p><i>Dr. Elek Rezi:</i> "We believe in one God - the substance and qualities of God." <i>Rev. Lehel Molnár:</i> "God's works: Creation, Providence and Holy Spirit" <i>Drs Maarten Doude van Troostwijk:</i> Hungarian-Dutch relationships</p> <p>Dinner at Humphrey's Restaurant</p>
Wednesday 4/20 City: Utrecht Subject: Foundations of faith and confession. And: ethical questions.	10.30 12.30 -14.00 13.30 - 18.00 18.00 - 19.30 19.30 - 20.30	<p>Arrival at Remonstrants Headquarters, Nieuwegracht 27a, Utrecht. Tel. 030 - 2316970</p> <p><i>Dr Árpád Szabó:</i> "Theological basis of the Transylvanian Unitarian faith - a general introduction: dogma or principle of faith; outer or inner authority" <i>Prof. dr Johan Goud:</i> "Confessing in the spirit of liberal christianity" <i>Rev. Tom Mikkers:</i> The Convent of Remonstrant pastors</p> <p>Luncheon and town-visit</p> <p><i>Prof. dr. Wibren van der Burg,</i> director of the Remonstrant Brotherhood, on Developing a Liberal-Protestant Ethics in a Dynamic and Pluralistic World <i>Dr Dénes Máthé:</i> "The human being as a child of God: his Nature and vocation" <i>Rev. Dávid Gyerő:</i> "The church as a religious and moral institution"</p> <p>Dinner at headquarters</p> <p>Discussions</p>

Thursday 4/21	10.30	Arrival in Remonstrant Church of Nieuwkoop, Dorpsstraat 131, 0172 – 573186
Town: Nieuwkoop	11.00 – 12.30	Rev. Csaba Kecskés: "The human being and the problem of sin; remission of sins" Rev. Sándor Máthé: "Resurrection or eternal life? Salvation of humans" Rev. Florus Kruijne: "Models for pastoral care"
Subject: Systematic and Practical Theology	12.30 – 14.00	luncheon, guided tour in Nieuwkoop
	14.00 – 15.15	Rev. Csaba Mezei: "The Bible as a major source of the Transylvanian Unitarian liturgy, ceremonies and education." Rev. Kinga Székely: "The Transsylvanian Unitarian worship: theological basis, purpose and order" Rev. Szilárd Sándor: "The Transsylvanian Unitarian ceremonies: their origins, theological basis and order"
	15.30 – 18.00	Workshop: Pastoral care in the footsteps of Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, by Rev. Greteke de Vries
	18.00 – 19.30	Dinner, prepared by members of the Nieuwkoop-congregation
Friday 4/22	10.30	Arrival in the Lokhorst-church, home of the Leiden-Remonstrant Congregation, Pieterskerkstraat 1, 071 - 5123392
City: Leiden	11.00 -12.30	Prof. Marius Th. van Leeuwen: "Jesus Christ in Remonstrant history and presence" Rev. Mária Pap: "The person of Jesus" Rev. Szabolcs Czire: "The teachings of Jesus"
Subject: Systematic Theology	12.30 – 14.00	Luncheon and town-visit
	14.00 – 17.00	Dr. Heine Siebrand: "From spirituality to religion?" Rev. István Kovács: "The future of liberal Christianity: will it be the religion of the future?" Rev. Tina Geels: "Our diaconal task in the world"
	17.00 – 18.45	Dinner at University Society
	19.30 – 21.15	Drinks at the Northsea-seaside
Saturday 4/23	09.30 – 16.00	National Ecumenical Church Gathering
City: Zwolle		
Sunday 4/24 in guesthouses		With colleagues to church services in local communities
City: Utrecht	15.30 – 16.00	Arrival in Geertekerk
	16.00 – 17.30	Evaluation
	17.30 - 18.15	Liturgical celebration
	18.30 - 21.00	Farewell dinner prepared by the Utrecht-congregation
Monday 4/25	8.00	Parting and goodbyes at Schiphol Airport

FREEDOM IN RESTRAINT

The orthodox origins of the free, tolerant Remonstrants

By: Prof. Dr. Eric H. Cossee

The Netherlands of 1619 saw the arising of a religious denomination rooted in Reformed and Erasmian traditions: the Remonstrant Brotherhood. The development of this religious community found its direct cause in the resolutions of the National Synode of Dordrecht (1618-1619), that in its *canones* denounced Remonstrantism and expelled its followers from the Reformed Church. In the so-called remonstrance of 1610, followers of the Leyden professor of theology Arminius (1560-1609) argued more scope for his conceptions on the doctrine of preordination as well as on the significance of the confession of faith.¹ In the early stages of Remonstrantism, various Socinians attempted to liaise with Remonstrants. After all, the two movements bear strong resemblances. Both renounce the doctrine of unquestioning preordination, both assert the free will of mankind and emphasize the practice of piety, *praxis pietatis*, and both aim to restrict the doctrines of Christianity to merely essential matters, the *necessaria*. Nonetheless, differences remain. Whereas Socinians vigorously dispute Trinitarianism, Remonstrantism leaves the subject unresolved. Whereas Socinians support a polemical theology, Remonstrants strive for an irenic view.²

Besides acknowledging an albeit limited congeniality with Socinianism, Remonstrantism has always aimed to emphasize its kinship with the mainstream of Christianity. 'The (Remonstrant) Brotherhood has never taken a one-sided Unitarian position.'³ Remonstrant denominational professor G.J. Heering's pronouncement of 1939 is characteristic of the age-long struggle Remonstrants contended with regarding their kinship to Socinianism or Unitarianism. Heering's distant predecessor Van Cattenburgh's writings on the differences between Remonstrants and Socinus⁴, which form the essence of this contribution, pertains to the very same protracted struggle. His doctrinarian survey was an attempt to disprove the Socinian digressions of which Remonstrants were imputed. Now who was this Adriaan van Cattenburgh? What was the intention of his *Specimen*? What was the effect of this document?

Adriaan van Cattenburgh

Adriaan van Cattenburgh was born in Rotterdam in 1664.⁵ After studying theology at the Remonstrant Seminary of Amsterdam, in 1687 he became a minister in his hometown. From 1712 until his superannuation in 1737 he served as a denominational professor at the same seminary, succeeding his preceptor Philippus van Limborch. Van Cattenburgh deceased in 1743. His portrait, which is kept in the vestry of the Remonstrant Church of Rotterdam, shows a well-bewigged gentleman with affable features, who looks upon the world good-humouredly. Of the substantial legacy he left the Remonstrant Brotherhood, (retired) clergymen or their widows and orphans were awarded benefits till far in the 20th century.⁶ Although Van Cattenburgh is characterized as 'a man of profound learning and unfeigned Christian piety, a strong advocate of peace and union amongst the adherents of the sole Lord and Saviour'⁷, it was precisely during his professorship a rift arose with the Mennonites, who up till then had allowed their students to attend lectures at the Remonstrant Seminary. An awkward comment by Van Cattenburgh concerning the 'anabaptists', and his quarrel with the Mennonites'

¹ On inception and history of the Remonstrant Brotherhood (Remonstrantse Broederschap) see: E.H. Cossee (et al.), *De remonstranten* (Kampen, 2000), 9-46.

² Further dilated upon in: W.J. Kühler, 'Remonstranten en Socinianen', in: G.J. Heering (red.), *De Remonstranten. Gedenkboek bij het 300-jarig bestaan der Remonstrantsche Broederschap* (Leiden, 1919), 137-158.

³ Cited by E.H. Cossee, 'Remonstranten en het unitarisme in de twintigste eeuw', in: E.H. Cossee & H.D. Tjalsma (ed.), *Remonstranten en het unitarisme*. [Vlugschrift 17 van de Remonstrantse Broederschap] (Utrecht, 2000), 46.

⁴ For a recent survey of Faustus Socinus' (1560-1609) influence in the Nederland see: Aart de Groot, 'Faustus Socinus in Nederland', in: *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis* 7-2 (2004), 49-55.

⁵ For further biographical details see: S.B.J. Zilverberg, 'Adriaan van Cattenburgh' in: J. van den Berg et al. (ed.), *Biografisch Lexicon voor de Geschiedenis van het Nederlandse Protestantisme*, deel 4 (Kampen, 1998), 87 v. - On Van Cattenburgh's theological significance also see: P.J. Kneegtmans & P. van Rooden, *Theologen in ondertal. Godgeleerdheid, godsdienstwetenschap, het Athenaeum Illustre en de Universiteit van Amsterdam* (Zoetermeer, 2003), in reg. 'A. van Cattenburgh'.

⁶ B. van Stolk, *Bijzondere Fondsen en Instellingen bij de Remonstrantsche Broederschap* (Rotterdam, 1898), 15-20.

⁷ A. des Amorie van der Hoeven, *Het Tweede Eeuwfeest van het Seminarium der Remonstranten te Amsterdam op den 28 October 1834 plegtig gevierd* (Leeuwarden, 1840), 174.

repudiation of the oath, prompted them to abandon their confidence in him and establish the education of their own clergy.⁸

Van Cattenburgh honoured his master Van Limborch by pursuing along the lines of his practically-oriented *Theologia Christiana* in a tolerant spirit. Furthermore, he lay the foundations for a systematic inventory of the Remonstrant writings. To this *Bibliotheca scriptorum Remonstrantium*, published in 1728, a separately paged edition of the aforementioned *Specimen*⁹ was added. By collating the distinctive doctrines of Remonstrants and Socinians, Van Cattenburgh illustrates the contrasts between both movements. Although certain similarities on the subject of the doctrine of predestination are apparent, and Socinian elements may be read in the Remonstrant views on the Atonement (expiation of God's retributive justice through the atonement of Christ), this publication conversely gives 'limpid' evidence (Des Amorie van der Hoeven) of their differences. The doctrine of the trinity was the essential point of this dispute, and here in particular Remonstrants adhered to the orthodox view.

On closer reading of the Specimen: the preface¹⁰

On closer reading of the *Specimen*, a number of parallels with similar publications strike the eye. For instance, the Schiedam minister Johannes Peltius had - with hostile intent - published a *Harmonia Remonstrantium et Socinianorum*¹¹ as early as 1633. In various articles and sections, the *Harmonia* treats the distinctive doctrines of the two movements. The pages are divided into two columns, of which the left conveys the Remonstrants' sentiments, and the right those of the Socinians. At the foot of each page an orthodox judgement, *sententia orthodoxa*, is expressed.¹² Refraining from such arguments, Van Cattenburgh aims to demonstrate the differences between Socinianism and Remonstrantism by letting the quotations speak for themselves. In the elaborate preface, the *praefatio*, he expounds what drove him to publishing this *Specimen*.

Van Cattenburgh opens with the observation that nothing is more harmful and poisonous than the envy instigated by the 'scourging dispute', the escalated theological debate, in which a dissentient opinion is compared with doctrines that have long been in discredit. Over a long time and in many parts therefore it was sufficient to condemn a doctrine, if the defenders could be imputed with Sabellianism, Arianism or Nestorianism, or if their view had any common features with some or other heresy.¹³ Names of hatred and revulsion cast a spell, under which dazzlement appears as truth. This, the Remonstrants learned by bitter experience. After ceaseless imputations by their opponents, they issued an overt declaration on their beliefs. Rather than extinguishing the wrath and hatred of their opponents, this proved to add fuel to the flames.¹⁴ Allegations as to Remonstrants being Pelagians and Socinians 'came roaring from lectern and pulpit'.¹⁵ In various publications Remonstrants were

⁸ E.H. Cossee, 'Doopsgezinden en Remonstranten in de 18^e eeuw', in: H.J. Adriaanse et al. (ed.), *In het spoor van Arminius* (Nieuwkoop, 1975), 63-65.

⁹ Full title of both consolidated volumes: *Bibliotheca scriptorum Remonstrantium, cui subjunctum est: Specimen controversiarum inter Remonstrantes et Socinum ejusque asseclas, exhibitum ipsissimis scriptorum verbis*, Amstelodamo, apud B. Lakeman, 1728. (H.C. Rogge, *Bibliotheek der Remonstrantsche Geschriften* (Amsterdam, 1863), 57. Drs. Th.B. Hagendoorn produced a (provisional) Dutch translation of the *Specimen*, from which the following is quoted.

¹⁰ For this essay, the 34 originally unnumbered pages of the preface have been paginated.

¹¹ Full title: Johannes Peltius, *Harmonia Remonstrantium et Socinianorum in variis religionis Christianae dogmatibus non infimis*, Lugduno Batavorum, 1633. (Martinus Nijhoff, *Catalogus van de Bibliotheek der Remonstrantsch-Gereformeerde Gemeente te Rotterdam*, 's-Gravenhage, 1893, 67).

¹² W.J. Kühler, *Het Socinianisme in Nederland* (Leeuwarden, 1980), 67.

¹³ *Specimen*, praefatio, 3. Sabellianism, after the heterodox teacher Sabellius (early 3rd century), denied God's essential trinity and considered Father, Son and Holy Ghost as mere phenomena of but one God. Arianism, after Arius' teachings, (convicted at Nicea, 325), denied the essential equality of the Son and Father, and taught God created the Son before all else. Nestorianism, after the teachings of Nestorius (convicted at Ephese, 431), distinguished the divine from the human person in Christ, and conceived their collaboration to be moral. Each of them deny the classic doctrine of the essential trinity: Father, Son and Holy Ghost are of one nature with God.

¹⁴ This refers to the reactions from Reformed quarters the Remonstrants received upon publication of their *Belijdenisse ofte Verklaringhe van 't ghevoelen der Leeraren, die in de Gheunieerde Neder-landen Remonstranten worden ghenaeamt, over de voornaemste Articulen der Christelijke Religie* in 1621. Although this publication was meant to refute accusations of heresy and to demonstrate the Remonstrants essentially concurred with mainstream Christianity, the *Belijdenisse ofte Verklaringhe* yielded yet new imputations. See: E.J. Kuiper en Th.M. van Leeuwen, *Als een vuurbaken. Teksten over de functie van belijdenissen naar remonstrants inzicht* (Zoetermeer, 1994), 21-72.

¹⁵ *Specimen*, praefatio, 5. Pelagianism, after Pelagius' (convicted at Ephese, 431) teachings, asserted the moral responsibility of the faithful to obey to God's law.

accused of exploiting the article on predestination and matters connected in order to 'spread the sacrilegious words of the Turks, the Jews and the Socinians against the Holy Trinity, and specifically against the divine nature of the Son'.¹⁶

In the next part of the preface, Van Cattenburgh comprehensively dilates upon the polemic that erupted upon the publication of the Remonstrants' *Belijdenisse ofte Verklaringhe*.¹⁷ In 1626 for instance, four Leyden professors wrote an extremely unfavourable review (*Censura*) of the *Belijdenisse*, in the preface of which they saw an undermining of the authority of confessions. Withal they took umbrage at the Remonstrant doctrines, which they considered to show an overestimation of human freedom and responsibility, and an underestimation of human sinfulness, more specifically of the divine power and grace.¹⁸ Van Cattenburgh took particular offence at the *Censura*'s slighting phrase 'were their hearts to speak as loud as their words'¹⁹, with which the writers impugn the Remonstrants' avowal of Jesus Christ's eternal divine nature. In addition he extensively cites from the (published) letter the actual founder of the Remonstrant Brotherhood, Johannes Wtenbogaert (1577-1644) on June 4, 1630 wrote to the 'His Serene Highness the Prince of Orange', extensively expounding his sentiments on the trinity at large and more specifically on the Son of God, while referring to the *Belijdenisse*.²⁰

But whatever was protested or preached, it did not obtain any hearing. Time and again, the opponents ground out the same song: the Remonstrants' articles concealed an unmitigated Socinian view.²¹ Van Cattenburgh attempts to invalidate this argument once and for all. In a concise survey he on the one hand shows the Remonstrants' view, while on the other that of Socinians, ascertaining both are in agreement with the creeds the Christian world recognizes. Basing his case on citations from the *Belijdenisse* and scriptures of their seminary professors Episcopius²², Curcellaeus²³, Poelenburg²⁴, Van Limborch²⁵, Clericus²⁶ as well as from his own writings, he describes the Remonstrant faith. The Socinian view is elucidated by quotations from the Rakow Catechism²⁷, Socinus' own scriptures and those of his followers, including Crellius²⁸, Slichtingius²⁹, and Volkelius³⁰. Van Cattenburgh titled his work *Voorbeeld van artikelen waarover tussen Remonstranten en Socinus en zijn partijgangers verschil van mening is met vermelding van woorden uit hun geschriften*. (Exemplifying articles on which Remonstrants' and Socinus' and his followers' opinions differ, including words taken from their scriptures). He assumes his summary to be effective. 'For he who is not by this *Example* to be convinced, that Remonstrants are branded Socinians out of envy, has eyes imbued in black bile, or must be considered blind in broad daylight'.³¹

Another point of issue are Socinus' enunciations on the orthodox' defence. Van Cattenburgh argues that even Bodecherus, author of the *Sociniano-Remonstrantismus*³², concludes his work with this confession: 'Not all Socinus said or wrote should be rejected, since his work is often suffused with an orthodox spirit'.³³ Indeed, plentiful are the themes on which Socinus is

¹⁶ *Specimen*, praefatio, 6. This observation alludes to the fact that Islam as well as Judaism and Socinianism are consistently unitarian in their conception of God.

¹⁷ On the development of this dispute see: J. Tideman, *De Stichting der Remonstrantsche Broederschap*, deel II (Amsterdam, 1872), 200-236; A.H. Haentjens, *Remonstrantsche en Calvinistische Dogmatiek* (Leiden, 1913), 177 ff and: Kühler, *Socinianisme*, 199-201.

¹⁸ Kuiper & Van Leeuwen, *Vuurbaken*, 72.

¹⁹ *Specimen*, praefatio, 9.

²⁰ *Specimen*, praefatio, 10-13. Also see: Tideman, *Stichting* II, 225 ff.

²¹ *Specimen*, praefatio, 15.

²² S. Episcopius (1583-1647), theology professor 1643-1643.

²³ S. Curcellaeus (1586-1659), theology professor 1643-1659.

²⁴ A. Poelenburg (1628-1666), theology professor 1659-1666.

²⁵ Ph. Van Limborch (1633-1712), theology professor 1668-1712.

²⁶ J. Clericus (1657-1735), literature and philosophy professor 1684-1731.

²⁷ On the Rakow Catechism see: Kühler, *Socinianisme*, 9-24. Moreover: E.H. Cossee, *Aspecten van het Unitarisme* (Assen, 1998), 19 ff.

²⁸ J. Crellius (1590-1633), prominent Socinian theologian and philosopher.

²⁹ J. Slichtingius (1602-1661), belonged to the Polish nobility. Socinian theologian, participated in various ecclesiastical missions, a.o. towards the Remonstrants.

³⁰ J. Volkelius (?-1618), Socinian leader and theologian. Fellow author of the Rakow Catechism.

³¹ *Specimen*, praefatio, 18.

³² As soon as 1624, the Alkmaar minister and apostate Remonstrant Nicolaas Bodecheer attacked his former fellow brothers in *Sociniano-Remonstrantismus*, published with approval of the Leyden Faculty. Episcopius retorted with *Bodecherus ineptiens*, 'Bodecherus' twaddles'. More on this matter in: Kühler, *Socinianisme*, 200 v. For full titles of these writings see: Rogge, *Bibliotheek*, 40.

³³ *Specimen*, praefatio, 20.

fundamentally in accordance with the orthodox, rather than being at variance with them. Besides, if any similarity between a Remonstrant and a Socinian pronouncement is perceived, would it not be on account of both treating the same subject and both being founded on scriptural passages? Van Cattenburgh exemplifies this by citing Bodecherus, who uses quotations from the Remonstrant *Belijdenisse* and the Rakow Catechism to demonstrate they are to all intents and purposes concurrent on the necessity of faith in God, if a life lead in accordance with His law is to bring salvation.³⁴ Should Remonstrants therefore be accused of Socinianism? If merely judging by the sound or apparent similarity of the wording, it might be claimed that for their view on the preordination doctrine, the contra-remonstrants (Reformed) are Socinian! Because Socinus too adduces that 'God with absolute will renounces certain men and peoples the hope for eternal life [...] under the eternal death and condemnation, who are submitted through their descent of the mortal Adam'.³⁵

It is clear, Van Cattenburgh states with a touch of irony, that contra-remonstrants agree with Socinus on several matters that are disputed by Remonstrants. Should we then not reproach *them* for being Socinian? 'And should they not bitterly oppose us as accusers, shouting of atrocious deceit, with which we seek to burden them with injustice?'³⁶ With this trope, Van Cattenburgh outright reverses matters. However, gravity returns as he quotes 'the golden rule' that Christ promulgated as a summary of the entire law and the Prophets: 'In everything do to others as you would have them do to you.' (Matth. 7:12).³⁷ And regarding the contra-remonstrants: 'Let them cease blotting Remonstrants with Socinianism, as they do not want others to blot them with the very digressions they themselves have in Common with Socinus.'³⁸

At the end of the preface Van Cattenburgh resumes the *praefatio's* issue of envy (jealousy), quoting Cicero's defence of Cluentius, in which justice is described as imputation of guilt without envy and demonstrating envy without imputation. 'He who attempts to lead those gone astray back to the straight road, will never succeed by using sharp words and insulting attacks on their opinion.'³⁹ Van Cattenburgh concludes the preface with a citation from James' Letter, in which envy is called 'earthly, bestial and demonic.' 'For where envy and strife reign, life is restless and any deed malicious. But if wisdom is exalted, it is [...] a source of peace, virtuous, obliging, full of compassion and rich rewards, unspoilt by dispute and pretence.'⁴⁰

On closer reading of the Specimen: the doctrinarian segment⁴¹

In seven chapters, the principal doctrines under dispute between Remonstrants and Socinians are discussed. Van Cattenburgh follows the system of the *Belijdenisse ofte Verklaringhe*. In addition he cites from the work of the authoritative Remonstrant theologians mentioned in the preface. Next, the Socinian views on the same issue are treated. Refraining from comment, Van Cattenburgh lets the quotations speak for themselves. Dwelling on the many nuances in doctrinarian formulations from this collation would lead to far afield. A summary of the most significant pronouncements is given here, if needed preceded by a short explanation of the doctrine at issue.

The *first chapter* discusses the evidence of God's existence.⁴² How does mankind get to know God? In the doctrine on God and His characteristics, Kühler observes a strong resemblance between Remonstrants and Socinians.⁴³ After all, both groups emphasize that man is free to make moral choices. From their confession, they consequently excluded from anything that might hinder or deprive that freedom. This manifested itself particularly in their repudiating the doctrine of predestination. In their views on the knowledge of God, however, the two diverge. In the *Belijdenisse* God's existence is undisputed. On several occasions He addressed the Patriarchs through his prophets, and through his only-begotten Son He eventually declared

³⁴ *Specimen*, praefatio, 21 sq. This example also proves Peltius' *Harmonia* (see above, note 11) met haar vergelijkende uitspraken in twee kolommen methodisch voortborduurde op Bodecherus' onderhavige geschrift. Ook Van Cattenburgh ging met zijn *Specimen* in dit spoor verder.

³⁵ *Specimen*, praefatio, 25.

³⁶ *Specimen*, praefatio, 29.

³⁷ *Specimen*, praefatio, 31.

³⁸ *Specimen*, praefatio, 31.

³⁹ *Specimen*, praefatio, 33.

⁴⁰ *Specimen*, praefatio, 34. Cited from James 3:13-18.

⁴¹ The doctrinarian segment comprises 147 numbered pages.

⁴² *Specimen*, Cap. I, 1-7.

⁴³ Kühler, *Socinianisme*, 207.

His will. Episcopius assumes a certain natural consciousness of God. He emphasizes we should not deny the human nature in the divine, but God's existence is vast, and we know God through faith and facts. Conversely, Socinus repudiates the idea of an innate consciousness of God. Only from the Scripture God may be known. Here, in a way, Socinus' view is more rigid than the Remonstrants'.

The second chapter deals with God's immensity and omnipresence.⁴⁴ The *Belijdenisse* says God is infinite, because He fills everything. In the Scripture, however, the measure of the divine is not defined. Episcopius' and Philippus van Limborch's interpretations are concurrent. To Socinus, God's infiniteness implies the impossibility of mankind keeping anything concealed from Him. Here too, we see a more 'rigid' notion of God.

The *third chapter* discusses the controversy on God's foreknowledge.⁴⁵ The debate on the *praescientia Dei*, the foreknowledge of God, had a strong coherence with Calvin's central idea of God's absolute sovereignty. Here the question is posed whether God, if not determining all in advance (preordination), does however foretell or foresee all. The Remonstrants made an effort to stay within the Calvinistic theological scope. By adhering to the concept of foreknowledge, they aimed to do justice to the concept of sovereignty, even though their view on the predestination dissented from Calvin's beliefs. Socinus went even further by repudiating the divine foreknowledge, since he felt mankind would no longer be free should God know all there was to be.⁴⁶ Van Cattenburgh quotes from the *Belijdenisse*, which speaks of God's infinite and unfaltering knowledge. Episcopius refines the foreknowledge, by alleging that God's knowing of future events beforehand. He therefore knows of will-be sins and sinners. The Scripture however acknowledges that God deems mankind capable of changing his mind. Furthermore, Van Cattenburgh cites Socinus' remarks on the foreknowledge being not demonstrable in all cases. Should we then pursue this, we would be giving peculiar interpretations. Crellius on his part acknowledges a limited foreknowledge.

The *fourth chapter*, 'on the three divine persons', as may be expected takes the lion's share of the book.⁴⁷ This part treats the various aspects of the crucial doctrine of the trinity, the essence of the controversy between Remonstrants and Socinians. After discussing the trinity dogma in full, Van Cattenburgh proceeds deliberating upon the three 'divine persons': Father, Son and Holy Ghost. As opposed to Socinians, Kühler emphasizes, Remonstrants adhered to the divine nature of Jesus. Still, this divinity was not inborn, but bestowed on him by the Father. Ergo, the Son is subordinate to the Father.⁴⁸ Thereby they cohered to a certain (subordinationist) form of the trinity dogma, whereas Socinus condemned this idea entirely. Again, Van Cattenburgh opens the chapter by citing from the *Belijdenisse*. God exists in three hypostasis or persons. This trinity consists of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, insofar any other basis of divinity is without any beginning whatsoever, i.e. neither begotten nor inborn. The cited authoritative Remonstrants Episcopius, Curcellaeus, Van Limborch, Clericus and moreover Van Cattenburgh himself are unambiguous in acknowledging the trinity, which they consider in accordance with the Scripture's teachings. We should not aspire to couch in academic speculations that which the Scripture leaves undetermined. We are supposed to bow to the mystery.⁴⁹ In the Socinian repudiation of the trinity, it is rather the rational element that prevails.

The notion of the trinity is founded on a misinterpretation. Assuming one single person in God is ineluctable. Any other notion is untenable.

The *fifth chapter* discusses the Atonement (satisfaction).⁵⁰ This concerns the question as to what was the significance of Christ's expiatory death. Did his passing serve as punishment for mankind, which had fallen into sin, a punishment Jesus voluntarily took upon himself to satisfy God's retributive justice and to accomplish the reconciliation between God and mankind? Or was it rather a sacrifice made to induce God's forgiving love? No more than Socinians do

⁴⁴ *Specimen*, Cap. II, 8-13.

⁴⁵ *Specimen*, Cap. III, 14-22.

⁴⁶ Kühler, *Socinianisme*, 207.

⁴⁷ *Specimen*, Cap. IV, 23-89.

⁴⁸ Kühler, *Socinianisme*, 211.

⁴⁹ Kühler, *Socinianisme*, 212.

⁵⁰ *Specimen*, Cap. V, 90-118.

Remonstrants believe the demand for judicial retribution to be part of God's nature.⁵¹ All the same, Remonstrants believe that Christ's death accomplished something with God. Here they steer a middle road between orthodox Calvinist and Socinians, who dismiss this idea. Using citations from the *Belijdenisse* and Episcopius' writings, Van Cattenburgh exemplifies where Remonstrants diverge from the Socinian view, notably on their adherence to Christ's work of atonement, before as well as after his deceasing. Socinus and his followers reject his, and rather regard Jesus' death as a means of paving the way for God's love of mankind.

This issue, which is referred to in the *sixth chapter*⁵² on the worshipping and invocation of Christ, also goes to the very heart of Christology. Those who profess the divinity of Christ, will have no qualms about worshipping (adoratio) him. But who, like Socinus and his followers, considers Jesus as *verus homo*, true man, will not want to worship him as God. Here too, Remonstrants steered a middle course. They could not concur with Socinians disputing the dogma of a two-natured (divine and human) Christ, though neither did they adopt the scholastic formulations of the Reformed. They simply professed the biblical enunciations on intrinsically incomprehensible mysteries, which incidentally do serve a practical purpose. For instance, Remonstrants acknowledge that Jesus' 'work and endurances as a man [...] is infinitely enhanced by this eternal Son's most close bonds with God'.⁵³

The *seventh chapter* and last chapter deals with baptism.⁵⁴ Socinians did not consider baptism a prerequisite, although were it to be administered, it should be restricted mainly to adults, and in the only legitimate manner, as described in the Bible: by immersion.⁵⁵ The *Belijdenisse* (Confessions) teaches us Remonstrants considered baptism as a public and sacred rite. They were familiar with infant as well as adult baptism, the last however not by immersion. In the pronouncements of Socinus and his adherents, which are finally quoted by Van Cattenburgh, the optional and non-imperative character of baptism is emphasized. The book concludes with an index of the subjects treated, as well as an enumeration of the sources quoted.

Final observations

Van Cattenburgh's *Specimen* was published in an age where Socinianism and Remonstrantism increasingly 'blended' (Kühler), owing to the fact that the first gradually adopted the latter's views. In the course of the eighteenth century, 'contrast outweighing similarity' would no longer hold water. Still, polemics were unremitting, and a study perspicuously collating both movements' ideas was deemed desirable. According to Kühler, it is owed to Van Cattenburgh's work that the attitude towards Remonstrants became more favourable.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, new impediments arose as the renowned Swiss Socinian-minded new-testamentarian J.J. Wettstein was appointed professor at the Remonstrant Seminary, and found himself being imposed numerous limitations by the Amsterdam city council. But when 1751 saw the publication of his textual criticism of the New Testament (an authoritative edition to this day), the government no longer lodged any protests. From this Kühler deduces that Van Cattenburgh's *Specimen* at long last 'yielded its long-anticipated fruit'.⁵⁷ Be that as it may, by publishing the texts devoid of any comment, Van Cattenburgh at the very least followed Cicero's advice not to challenge his opponents with 'sharp words and insulting offensives'.⁵⁸ Thus Van Cattenburgh remained true to the Remonstrants' Irenian theology.

The influence of Van Cattenburgh's *Specimen* had a great impact throughout the ages. It was obligatory literature for the students of the *Collegium Theologicum* in Kolozsvár (Transylvania) during the eighteenth century. The position of the Remonstrants with regard to the Unitarians remained since that period the same, except a few decades of more radical liberalism around 1900.

⁵¹ Kühler, *Socinianisme*, 209 ff.

⁵² *Specimen*, Cap. VI, 119-130.

⁵³ Kühler, *Socinianisme*, 212.

⁵⁴ *Specimen*, Cap. VII, 131-147.

⁵⁵ Kühler, *Socinianisme*, 148.

⁵⁶ Kühler, *Socinianisme*, 253.

⁵⁷ Kühler, 'Remonstranten en Socinianen', 157.

⁵⁸ *Specimen*, praefatio, 33.

TRANSYLVANIAN UNITARIAN CONNECTIONS WITH DUTCH DISSENTERS 1653–1755

By: Rev. Kovács Sándor

Only a small portion of the 16th century left-wing reformation had the chance to develop well organized churches or congregations. There were several spiritualist, Anabaptist, and Antitrinitarian groups spread out on the continent but except for Poland and Transylvania there was no organized Unitarian or Socinian Church. After the defeat of Mohacs (1526), and under the direct protection of the Turks, a new principality called Transylvania was created in Eastern Europe. The special status of this newly organized state permitted a unique style of religious acceptance, which paved the way towards there being four recognized faiths in Transylvania: Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and Unitarian or Arian, as it was called in the 16th century. The most important leaders of the Transylvanian Unitarian movement embodied many ethnicities. Francis David (1520–1579) was half Hungarian half German, Giorgio Biandrata (1515–1588) was Italian, Jacobus Paleologus (1520–1585) was Greek and Johann Sommer (1540–1574) was German. No need to mention that the seeds of antitrinitarianism were sown by the Spaniard Servetus (1511–1553).

Quite an international team! So Unitarianism in Transylvania was not born exclusively from Hungarian parents but is the outgrowth of differing views of a radical movement, which found fertile soil among the Hungarian and German speaking inhabitants of the newly founded country. The Hungarian national character of Transylvanian Unitarianism was shaped much later, and there are no signs at all that the team lead by Francis David and Biandrata wanted to keep the "true religion" inside the Carpathians. Although nowadays Transylvanian Unitarianism is associated with Hungarian culture, Unitarian openness toward new liberal Christian theological currents was ever present. To give weight to this statement, I will present a short history of the Transylvanian Unitarian and Dutch connections. Although in the last few decades several articles have dealt with this relationship there is still much research to be done on both sides. I am convinced that future scholarship will shed new light on the Dutch and Transylvanian Unitarian connection.

The Unitarian Church has always paid special attention to the bringing up of new generations of educated people and to the improvement of the quality of education. Transylvania did not have its own university at home; therefore the peregrinatio in the foreign countries remained the only possibility of ensuring the supply of highly trained educated people. This is why since the very foundation of the Unitarian Church talented young people have always been sent to study to foreign universities so that the church could keep up with the other Protestant churches. From 1567 until 1848 one hundred seventy eight Unitarian students travelled to the „upper countries" and attended 281 academies. The universities from Wien, Padova, Frankfurt am Odera, Leiden, Wittemberg, Altdorf, Heidelberg and Gottingen proved to be the most popular ones. Between 1568 and 1638 the universities of Padova and Bologna, Italy were the most popular. Between 1637 and 1711 most of the students chose Frankfurt am Odera and Leiden for their further training while between the years 1712 and 1848 Wien became more and more popular. Over this entire period 14% of Transylvanian students studying abroad completed all or part of their studies in Dutch universities. Most of them were at the University of Leiden, but we have evidence that they enrolled at the University of Franker and the Remonstrant College of Amsterdam as well. The percentage sounds low overall, but between 1642 to 1775 approximately 49% of Transylvanian students studying abroad graduated in the Netherlands. It is difficult to give the exact number. According to my research, twenty-six students matriculated in one or more Universities, other researchers talk about 30 students.

I will present the most significant Unitarian graduates from Dutch universities during the 17th and 18th centuries. From the beginning I should state that I will not try to prove the direct or indirect influence of the Dutch Remonstrants or Mennonites on Transylvanian Unitarian theology, but I will point out those cases where this influence is obvious. Further scholarship will likely be able to highlight new insights.

Upon their return to Transylvania, the great majority of Leiden University graduates were

appointed as professors at the Unitarian Seminary or as pastors at Kolozsvár's Hungarian or German congregations.

Of the 26 graduates I mentioned, five were later elected bishop of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church. The first two that I will present began their studies in Leiden on February 1653. Benedict Árkosi (1629–1661) nowadays is remembered for being a professor at the seminary and for his prayer book. His still unpublished manuscript is introduced by a lengthy tract about God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, which is followed by three meditations and three prayers for every single day of the week.

I am quite convinced that part of his argument concerning God and Jesus Christ were borrowed from his Remonstrant background. He refers several times to the works of Hugo Grotius.

The other returning student's name is Stephan Pauli (?–1672), who became the pastor of the German Unitarian congregation of Kolozsvár/Klausenburg. I assume you know that the city of Kolozsvár hosted a Hungarian and a German language congregation, and later a Polish one as well. Both German and Polish congregations diminished by the end of the 18th century and joined the Hungarian one. Stephan Pauli kept a diary of his studies and following the custom of his time he made an album of his friends and acquaintances. This handwritten album *amicorum* is worth publication. It contains 26 names -- some of them belonging to or at least associated with the Remonstrant Brotherhood.

In August 1660 three students entered the University of Leiden: Peter Erasmus, Adam Franck, Jr., and Daniel Szentiványi (1637–1689). Two of them are worth special mention. Adam Franck Jr.'s career is the most fabled. He did not return home to Transylvania, but joined the Remonstrants of Amsterdam. In his letter – written in 1667 to the officials of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church – he gives the motives of his decision, and enumerates the religious intolerance of the Transylvanians as the main reason for separating from his homeland church. According to his letter, the in Transylvanian Unitarian Church instead of the spirit of love the "spirit of Dortrecht" was dominant. Franck Adams career and his role in editing the first series of the *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum* is well documented in Attila B. Kiss's Ph.D. dissertation.

Daniel Szentiványi was elected Unitarian Bishop. He was fortunate enough to have purchased Servetus's book, *Restitution of Christianity*, in England in 1665 and brought it to Transylvania.

The intermediary between the Transylvanian Unitarians and those from the Netherlands in the 18th century was Samuel Crell (1660–1747), the distinguished Socinian scholar. He played an essential role in spreading clandestine literature in the Netherlands and in England. In 1698 he received a letter from Stephen Nye, a key figure of the English dissenters, in which Nye described the circumstances of the birth of English Unitarianism. In same letter Nye gives a report of the events taking place in the Anglican Church at the end of the 17th century. Sigismund Pálfi, a student from Transylvania was then in Leiden and Crell asked him to copy the letter word for word and send it to Klausenburg. Crell wanted to inform the Unitarians of Transylvania about these events so that they could get a realistic picture of what was happening outside the continent. The Unitarians in Transylvania paid great attention to Crell, and they often took action according to the information they got from him.

We should mention here that this period was a troubled one for the Unitarians. The first act of the counter-reformation had been to confiscate the Unitarian schools. A new School was built with great effort, but it burned down. Thanks to Crell's connections in England and the Netherlands, the raising of funds to rebuild the School was soon started. Paul Dimjén of Kolozsvár (1655–1720) former Leiden graduate and director of the School visited England and the Netherlands and gathered quite a large sum of money.

The next student who played a key role in the history of Transylvanian Unitarianism was Michael Szentábrahádi (1683–1758). His main theological work was done in the field of systematic theology. A future scholarly analysis of his *Summa Universae Theologiae*, the systematic theology corpus of the 18th and middle 19th century Unitarianism, would likely show the impact of Dutch Remonstrants. During his studies he was supervised by Samuel Crell with whom he had a very cordial relationship. From 1720 until his death Crell was the mentor of the Transylvanian Unitarians studying in the Netherlands.

In order to find further proof of this affirmation we should have a look at some letters written

by Crell. Here is the one written in January 1736 to Stephen Agh (1709–1786) a Hungarian Unitarian studying in Leiden. Like Pálfi and Szentábrahádi, Agh was later elected bishop of the Transylvanian Unitarians. Crell's letter is in response to Agh's letter of the previous year. Crell writes that he is very sorry for not being able to send a copy of his book *Initium Evangelii Joannis* because only forty copies were printed and all were sold. As far as we know this is the first information about the number of copies of the *The beginning of the Gospel of John*... printed in England. Then he tells Agh that John Jackson wrote a refutation to his book and he had already answered him. After discussing the pros and cons concerning the *Beginning of the Gospel of John* he says that "our Johannes Christophorus Seizius" sent him his dissertation written about the Revelation of Saint John 12,6. (*Demonstrationis Mathematicae de 1260 diebus Mulieris et duorum Testium*).

After this valuable information from the field of theology he offers moving details about the sickness of Jean le Clerc. "Clericus has been ill for six years now, only his body is alive, he has been deprived of his spirit and mind, but even in bed he always keeps a book in his hands. However the people living around him think that he cannot read any more. His library was sold by public auction in September 1735."

Then he draws the attention of his Transylvanian friend to the English Socinians giving detailed information about Hopton Haynes. He tells Agh that Haynes is an important personality who works in the royal mint, has four sons and that he can and likes to speak Latin. Haynes was the person who introduced Sigismund Pálfi to Isaac Newton in 1701. We are not told anything else about the relationship between Pálfi and Newton; however it sheds light on Newton's connections with Transylvanian Unitarians.

If we continue reading the letter we are given inside information about Agh's preparations for a visit to England which is to take place in the near future. The fact that Crell drew Agh's attention to those people who played key roles in the birth of English Unitarianism makes surer the presumption of this visit. Beside Hopton Haynes, Crell also mentions the names of Thomas Emlyn and William Whiston.

At the end of the letter we find some very accurate instructions. Crell literally dictates to Stephan Agh what to write to Hopton Haynes. This part shows how well Crell knew the Transylvanian conditions. "You must write to Hopton Haynes on behalf of bishop Pálfi and the Unitarians of Transylvania. Greet him and tell him that the Catholics took away your churches and your schools. Tell him that the Unitarians are sent away from the state functions and only Catholics are employed. Write him about the plan of the Catholics to tolerate only the presence of the Lutherans and of the Calvinists in Transylvania. Tell him that the money which was supposed to serve your studies abroad had to be spent in Vienna (in order to solve the major problems caused by the Counter-reformation)." Crell did not forget to give the Transylvanian student information about the mail expenditure. We do not know whether Agh had ever written any letter to Hopton Haynes, but surely he had never visited England. In 1737, Agh returned home to Transylvania.

The last Transylvanian Unitarian to graduate from Leiden was Stephan Lázár. After difficulties obtaining a passport he started on his journey to the Netherlands. On October 19, 1773, in a lengthy letter, he states his experience-filled journey to Amsterdam in great detail. This letter is very important for church history and brings to light a line of interesting questions for contacts between Transylvanian Unitarians and Dutch Mennonites and Remonstrants. Lázár first passes through Prussian towns on his journey to the Netherlands. In Halle he meets Johann Salomo Semler (1725–1791), the most eminent of the liberal theologians of the time. Then in Berlin he meets many other colleagues. It is probable that he exaggerates that Semler and his companions – the Prussian Protestants – are Unitarian in their beliefs, but it is not unfounded because he found some similarities in their thoughts and ideas, shown by Semler's good will, solidarity and acceptance towards Lázár. It is certain, however, that Semler belonged to a circle of liberal thinkers from the neologist conference of Magdeburg in 1770. It is also not a coincidence that Lazar personally knew and met with A.F.W. Sack, J.J. Spalding, Wilhelm Abraham Teller and J.A. Noesselt, who all belonged to this school of thought. It can be said that Lázár met this group when they had refined their beliefs to their fullest, which consisted in a division between a personal or private religion, and a dogmatic, church-centered faith. According to Semler, dogmas are not timeless realities, but have developed over the centuries and need to be changed continually. Whether dogmas are acceptable or unacceptable must be tested. The only measure is the Bible, the Word of God, and the

personal religious feelings of the individual or "privatreigion." He sees a conflict between open institutionalized religion and personal beliefs. According to Semler, "theology" is different from "religion."

Besides Lázár's Prussian acquaintances, the Dutch Remonstrants and Mennonites gain an important role in his studies, even though István Agh directed him to the Collegians. Among the professors he had very special relationships with Heere Oosterbaam and Hesselink. Both of them were leading figures in the seminary founded in 1735 in Amsterdam. This was not just an ordinary seminary; Lázár notes that its Physics lab is much better than the one in Vienna.

In this very same letter he writes that after finishing his studies he planned to go to Helvetia to purchase books and to meet the professors from Geneva, of whom it was said that all were Unitarian: "In Helvetia the more important people and professors are all Unitarian, so like they say, if an election would be brought about, then it is sure that Calvin would burn rather than Servetus."

In the next letter from Amsterdam (January 24, 1774) Lazar writes that he has just returned to complete his doctoral studies and notifies the bishop that he received the money that was sent to him. He humbly asks for it to be raised by 60 gold pieces, because he is faced with great expenses. The raise is also required because although the doctorate does not have a monetary cost, he is still expected to pay for servants and needs to have his dissertation printed. He further writes that he was in Leiden and had the opportunity to meet Johannes Jacobus Schultens (1716–1778), the professor of Eastern languages, who welcomed him with delight. On the boat to Leiden he suffered a severe head cold and was restricted to bed. Oosterbaam visited Lazar during his illness to comfort him, even canceling classes until the young man healed.

On February 15th, Lazar wrote a letter to his sponsor and a very short letter to his bishop. He sent them in a single envelope addressed to the bishop, so that he would gain knowledge of his wish to remain abroad longer, but he makes it seem as if it is the wish of Oosterbaam. On July the 12, 1774 he writes that he has received the requested amount and that had enrolled at the university in Leiden by June 23rd.

The rector of the University, Gaubius, asked him to show a document about his vocation as a professor of physics so he could attend the lectures free of charge. The document did not arrive in a timely fashion, but by December Lazar had defended his views successfully at the council of the University and received his doctorate. His success made a great impact, even at home, and he received some more financial aid. On February 18 he became ill again and, according to a letter he wrote later, almost died. He recovered his health, but was unable to finish his dissertation. In the end, he completed a hundred theses which were accepted by his professor and also by the senate, and received the highest degree. In his next letter, addressed to his sponsors and bishop, he reports with great joy and pride that on the last day of June he became a doctor of philosophy. He also tells that 300 copies of his thesis were printed and distributed among his friends. In addition, he had managed to print 200 copies of the Unitarian Confession, which were well-received.

His last letter is from Wien, in which he mentions for the first time that during his study abroad he collected a large number of books (900 kilograms) which presented a problem because he had to go through customs in Sibiu/Hermanstadt. Unfortunately, we do not know the list of books he brought back, perhaps because after his death his son sold his library. Lazar was the last Unitarian student in the Netherlands. In Transylvania there is no evidence that he kept any contact with any of his colleagues there. Five years after Lazar returned from the Netherlands, student George Markos left to continue his studies abroad. Although it was planned for him to go to the Netherlands, he ended up going to Gottiga, Germany. And yet, when Lazar left the college in the Netherlands, he had received promises from the Mennonites that every 10th year they would give a scholarship to a Hungarian Unitarian. The relationship between Transylvanian Unitarians and Dutch Mennonites, Remonstrants, and Collegians ended quickly after Lazar's return. The reason for this is the uprising of the German Universities especially of Göttingen. Beginning with the 19th century, English Unitarian connections seemed to take priority. For foreign studies the Unitarians now went to England and America.

I think now is the right time for us to open a new chapter of Transylvanian Unitarian and Dutch connections as we rediscover our common past.

AN OVERVIEW OF HUNGARIAN – DUTCH RELATIONSHIPS

By: Drs. Maarten Doude van Troostwijk

When the organising committee was preparing the visit of our Transylvanian guests to the Netherlands, the idea came up that someone should say a little about the historical relations between Hungary and Hungarians on the one hand, and the Netherlands on the other. Being a historian by training, and having a special interest in matters East-European and a particular fondness for Erdély, I volunteered to talk to you. However, none of this meant – of course – that I knew anything in particular detail about Dutch-Hungarian relations. Thus, when I started to read up a bit on this particular subject I was surprised to find how extensive our relations in actual fact have been over the centuries. It is my aim in this short presentation to present a basic historical outline of these relations.

At first sight, it seems rather strange that two small peoples, each located at opposite sides of this continent should have found common ground. A professor Hoekstra, who taught at the college in Kampen, described these relations in 1931 as follows: "we Dutchmen have much in common with the Hungarians, notwithstanding the fact that there are many differences between us: they come from the East, our cradle stood in the West; they are of Asian descent, we are Germanic; they are hot-tempered and emotional, our disposition is much rather phlegmatic and calm". Now, I am not sure our guests here would like to be described as 'hot-tempered and emotional', but this was apparently the Dutch view – or a particular Dutch view – in 1931. Let us, therefore, look at what has united us over the past 500 years or so.

To the casual observer who is asked the question to compare Hungary and the Netherlands, some aspects may spring to mind. For instance:

- we are both small nations of roughly similar size, especially when the Hungarians living in neighbouring states such as Romania, Slovakia, Croatia, Ukraine and Serbia are included. Yet, nations with some remarkable historical achievements. We have had our Golden Age, one the most productive cultural periods in modern times. Hungary has produced some of the best composers and musicians, as well as great literature. But Hungarians are also notable in the sciences: some 18 Hungarians have been awarded the Nobel Prize.
- we both speak an incomprehensible language to the outsider's ear, maybe more so in the case of Hungarian than Dutch. Of course, we are not the only nations in Europe to do so. Albanian, Basque, and Finnish are not easy to understand either, to say the least. Yet, one thing non-speakers of Dutch or Hungarian are always puzzled about is our distinction between short and long vowels; and they are even more stunned by our ability to actually hear a difference between them!
- we have both been ruled by the Habsburg dynasty. In fact, with some imagination we could say that it was a Hungarian who ruled over the Netherlands before it became independent. Maria of Hungary was the sister of Emperor Charles the Fifth and became governess of the Habsburg Netherlandish possessions in 1532. Previously, she had been the wife of the Hungarian King Lajos the Second – who had died in the battle of Mohács in 1526 – and she had lived in Hungary. She ruled the Netherlands with a strong hand and with a strong will in service of the Habsburg crown.

Dr . Henk van der Graaf, who has researched the subject of Dutch-Hungarian relations extensively, has taken stock of the historical relations between our two nations; in this talk I will rely gratefully on his writings. Van der Graaf has divided this history into four distinguishable periods. The first period runs from the beginning of the 16th century until 1620, in which relations were incidental and individual, yet of some importance. The second period from 1620 until 1790 is characterised by a flourishing peregrination of Hungarian students to the Netherlands. The effects of this movement, both on the Netherlands as well as on the Hungarian lands to which the students returned, were great and lasting. The third period, from around 1790 until the establishment of Communism in Eastern and Central Europe, was first determined by a sudden drop in the peregrination and by a revival in the second half of the

19th and the early 20th century. The last period, from – say – 1950 up to our time has known periods of closure, of tentative contacts, and of a sudden opening of the floodgates of contacts between the two sides of the continent.

The first incidental contacts go as far back as the 15th century, when Dutch printers published the sermons of a certain Michael of Hungaria and a mathematical work by Georgius of Hungaria. The earlier mentioned Mary of Hungary is of great importance, too. When still in Hungary she came in contact with the writings of Erasmus, who corresponded with the Hungarian court. Moreover, the great humanist dedicated his book "The Christian Widow" to her, two years before she was to become governess of the Netherlands. Since that time, humanist ideas found widespread dissemination in Hungary. The university of Krakow was the scene of many contacts between Dutch and Hungarian humanists. Justus Lipsius, the Dutch academic who was influential in the establishment of the University of Leiden in 1575, corresponded with András Dudith, the notable Hungarian humanist who lived at the court of Stephen Báthory, Prince of Transylvania and King of Poland (1576 – 1586). Marnix van Sint Aldegonde, later to become a senior aide to William of Orange and the alleged author of the Dutch national anthem, studied in the 1550s in Geneva, under Calvin, together with the Hungarian Gáspár Károlyi who prepared the first full translation of the Bible into Hungarian.

There are various other examples of these early contacts, but the real hey-day of Dutch-Hungarian relations came about after 1620. It was the start of the peregrination which would last for almost two centuries. Until this time, only a handful of students, among them a Unitarian student from Transylvania, had enrolled in the Dutch universities. But in the period 1620 to 1790 some 2300 Hungarian students studied at various universities for an average of two or three years. It is interesting to note that between 1578 and 1782 only 580 Roman-Catholic Hungarian students enrolled in the College in Rome. Although most students came to the Netherlands to study theology, many chose other subjects, as well, such as medicine, philosophy, or law. Nor was this peregrination some sort of philanthropy on the part of the Dutch Republic. These Hungarian students often made up a substantial part of a theological faculty and were thus important to the viability and vitality of that faculty. Their presence boosted the international reputation of the university at which they studied.

The Netherlands also played a key role in the printing and dissemination of books which were hard to get printed in Hungary at the time of the counter-reformation. Between 1625 and 1794 twelve editions of the Bible in Hungarian were printed in Holland. Some of the Hungarian students, like Miklós Misztótfalusi Kis, learned the skills of printing in this country. The Dutch Republic also intervened politically, however cautiously, in certain cases where measures of the counter-reformation damaged protestant Hungarians or other protestant groups in Central Europe. Churches in the Netherlands specifically prayed for their Hungarian co-religionists.

Of particular interest, of course, to our conference this week, is the fact that after 1638 Transylvanian unitarian students regularly attended the universities of Amsterdam and Leiden. Although anti-trinitarianism was not particularly welcome in the Netherlands as a doctrine, its followers found refuge here. All in all twenty-seven Unitarian students have studied in this country, albeit often at the faculties of medicine or philosophy since financial support for theological studies was not forthcoming. Nevertheless, the effect of this peregrination on the Unitarian church in Transylvania has been disproportionately large. Of the twenty-seven students, six became bishops; until the Napoleonic era the Unitarian church was often headed by a bishop who had studied in the Netherlands.

The various theological and secular relations that were the result of this century and a half of peregrination did not fail to have their effects on the Hungarian lands. People who had studied in Holland often attained high positions in the Hungarian church. Developments in the study of theology and other studies such as medicine and the sciences were replicated in Hungary. Because of the increased use of the vernacular could these developments influence social life in a broader sense, for instance in improvements of health care, but also in literature and political thought

The peregrination declined in the French period of European history just as fast as it had taken off after 1620. One reason was that the Austrian Emperor had forbidden his subjects to study at universities infected by the French Revolution. One of the main obstacles to a revival of the

peregrination after the Napoleonic era was the introduction of education in the native language rather than in Latin. This made it less attractive for Hungarian students to come to the Netherlands instead of studying at German or British universities. Moreover, the Dutch government had abolished scholarships for foreign students.

One had to wait until the second half of the 19th century for a revival in Dutch-Hungarian relations, when professor Opzoomer from Utrecht introduced the Hungarian student Ödön Kovács to the 'modern theology school'. Inevitably, Ödön Kovács took these new-found insights back with him to Hungary where he was influential in the development of this liberal theology.

The daughter of this professor Opzoomer married the Hungarian student Géza Antal. This couple did much for Dutch-Hungarian relations, not only in the field of theology, but also by translating Hungarian literature into Dutch and vice versa.

Around 1900 a common neo-calvinist movement began to take shape, partially inspired by resistance in the Hungarian church to the ongoing liberal influences in the church. Jenő Sebestyén had been a student of Abraham Kuijper and proceeded to almost establish a subsidiary of Kuijper's Reformed Church in Hungary. This culminated in a political sense in the establishment of a Calvinist Political Union in Hungary in 1923.

With the forced introduction of Stalinism, the door to Hungary essentially closed. Dutch students had to wait until 1968 before they could again follow theological studies behind the Iron Curtain. After 1989 an avalanche of help and interest, but also religious groups, poured into the former communist world, not always with the most laudable intentions. Western engagement often served – and still serves – the particular commercial, political, or even religious, interests of the West more than the needs and wishes of the newly opened countries.

What becomes clear from reading on the history of Dutch-Hungarian relations is that so much of it was determined by war, politics and economics. One of the plausible reasons, for instance, that a full-scale peregrination did not take place in the 16th century is the fact that the Netherlands at the time were engaged in revolt and war. Conversely, it is probable that these relations flourished after 1620 because the Netherlands had become much quieter at the time, whilst Germany was plagued by the 30-years war.

Politics, too, has played its role. The moment Hungary was forced to face East after World War Two, rather than West as it had done for a thousand years, contacts with the Netherlands became very difficult, if not impossible. A century and a half previously, the Austrian Emperor had forbidden his subjects to travel to countries influenced by the French Revolution, another political decision that had its effect on mutual relations.

In economic terms, we see a decline in students studying in the Netherlands because after the French period the Dutch government did no longer provide the financial means to do so. Neither has the end of communism meant economic recovery for the old-communist world, Romania included.

I started this talk by pointing out a few similarities between our two peoples. There is one last, rather unlikely, point that the casual observer might notice when comparing the Netherlands to Hungary. Both countries have a particular connection to Admirals. Our Admiral de Ruyter famously saved Hungarian protestant slaves on a galley. But by as late as 1944 Hungary was ruled by an Admiral, Miklós Horthy. Although Hungary had lost her access to the Mediterranean after the First World War with the collapse of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and the loss of Croatia, Horthy ruled as a Regent of the old Empire, in which he had obtained the position of Admiral, as if he expected the old Empire to be restored.*

Today, we don't need a Dutch Admiral to save Hungarian co-religionists (1676). Neither is it likely that Hungary ever again will be ruled by an adherent to the old order of Central Europe. These are different times, with entirely different challenges.

The aforementioned Kampen professor Hoekstra pointed out in 1931 that both Hungary and the Netherlands had produced a long list of great people over the centuries, on the basis of strong national characteristics and good education. Moreover, both people were nations dedicated to freedom in general, and religious and educational freedom in particular.

Nominally, nothing stands in the way of religious and cultural freedom in this New Europe in which we live. The end of the artificial divide between East and West should have seen a abundant revival of cultural European dynamism. Yet, there is a sense all around Europe that we are losing our distinctive cultures, this time not because of the conscious repressive policies of political regimes, but as a result of powerful and global economic factors. Perhaps it is our challenge of the day, to try to revive and rejuvenate the long-standing tradition of Dutch-Hungarian relations, in the face of a modern world that seems to eradicate unique traditions by the day. Since study and education were the motor behind these relations in the past it seems logical and sensible to aim for a renewal of these intellectual exchanges.

However, this renewed exchange will not resemble the contacts of the early modern age when the use of Latin and the Reformation provided a pan-European culture within which people from difficult nationalities could partake. Ironically, it seems that since the fall of officially atheist communism the trend towards secularisation has only accelerated, especially in Western Europe. A theological exchange like we will be experiencing this week would be nigh incomprehensible for the majority of Westerners. It is, therefore, of great importance for the liberal protestant churches to seriously reflect upon the question to what extent they ascribe to – or stand in opposition to – the present-day political, economic, and moral liberalism that threatens to undermine the very existence of this mutually shared Christian tradition.

* This anachronistic situation gave rise to a well-known, but descriptive, anecdote, as recorded by the Italian Foreign Minister in May 1942. The minister, Galeazzo Ciano, wrote this anecdote down, shortly after Hungary had declared war on the United States (on December 13, 41) after German pressure on Hungarian Prime Minister Bardossy: "Hungarian uneasiness is expressed by a little story, which is going the rounds in Budapest. The Hungarian minister declares war on the United States, but the official who receives the communication is not very well informed about European matters and hence asks several questions: He asks: "Is Hungary a republic?" "No, it is a kingdom." "Then you have a king." "No, we have an admiral." "Then you have a fleet?" "No, we have no sea." "Do you have any claims, then?" "Yes." "Against America?" "No." "Against Great Britain?" "No." "Against Russia?" "No." "But against whom do you have these claims?" "Against Rumania." "Then, will you declare war on Rumania?" "No, sir. We are allies."

THE FUTURE OF LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY: Will it be the religion of the future?

By: Rev. Kovács István

I. Is there such a bright future?

At the end of the 19th century the famous Transylvanian theologian and scientist *Samuel Brassai*, who has been called "the last Transylvanian polymath", wrote a famous article in our periodical 'The Christian Sower' entitled, '*The Religion of the Future*'.

In this article he argued against the various anti-religious free thinkers of his time who, under the influence of philosophical positivism and rationalism, were attempting to create an artificial atheistic "religion" for the future, based only on philosophical speculations and rationalism. By stating very clearly that there is no future for such an artificial religion, which would eradicate the main features of religion: revelation, the supernatural aspect, and belief in a personal God, he concludes his article by saying that the religion of the future is not what the "false prophets of non-belief" are attempting to create because the religion of the future already exists, not as an artificial product but as a natural consequence of religious development namely, Unitarianism. He explains this by saying that Unitarianism deserves this role because it has both: 1. Christian roots and the transcendental dimension of a theistic religion, as opposed to atheism, and, 2: the capacity to integrate the more rationalistic approach necessary to cater for the demands of the increasingly educated society of the future, in contrast to the dogmatic forms of Christianity. Although he was arguing against atheistic rationalism, he admitted implicitly that in the religion of the future rationalism has to play a crucially important role

Looking back from our own time we can ask, was Brassai's dream, that Unitarianism and, implicitly, liberal Christianity would be *the religion of the future*, ever realistic?

The reality of our times awakened us from this dream and taught us that the dynamics of religious development are far from being linear, as modernist rationalism had envisioned it. A hundred years on, the reality of religious life today - when fundamentalism is growing and liberal Christianity is decreasing both in numbers and in social influence - seems to prove exactly the opposite: liberal Christianity it is *the religion of the past!*

Still there is good news. Only those particular historical manifestations and forms of liberal Christianity that are no longer relevant will die; but its enduring spirit has the capacity to receive new birth by virtue of its in-built potential for self-questioning, self-correction, and adaptation to changing times and to new manifestations of the unchangeable. The moment the present manifestation is regarded as final, liberalism lapses into orthodoxy.

The real challenge is to identify those historical manifestations that are no longer relevant, because if liberal Christianity is to have a future then the ability to adapt to the needs of changing times cannot go beyond certain limits. We need to rephrase our values and find new ways of implementing them; we can even attempt new depths and new heights in identifying our spiritual values, but to give up anything of its core values for the sake of adaptation would be the end of liberal Christianity.

In the 19th century, when industrialization and the development of the sciences had such a tremendous impact on the development of a new rationalism, it was natural that liberal Christians should become convinced that it was only a matter of time before liberal Christianity would conquer the world. Scientific biblical-theological research was offering new evidence that, even from the point of view of the Bible, liberal Christianity was the only credible alternative. We can say that the whole 19th century was characterized by a high degree of self-confidence and optimism regarding the values and possibilities of humankind. It seemed that the continuous development of science and society would reveal the ultimate mysteries of the world and would solve, step by step, the major existing problems which are the sources of human suffering.

The 20th century, at its very beginning, proved the opposite. The drive of optimistic self-confidence was broken. The First World War proved that scientific and technological

development meant, primarily, more destructive weapons for more systematic human aggression and the highest number of casualties and the greatest loss of human life in history. In these circumstances, when over-simplified, optimistic self-confidence came to a sudden stop, it became obvious that human existence is more complex and unpredictable than had been thought earlier. In Christianity, this realization was manifested in the rejection of the rationalism of liberalism in favour of dogmatism.

The drive of optimism was broken even further by all the other terrible events and sufferings of the century: the Communist gulags, the gas chambers of the Second World War, the ethnic cleansings in the recent Balkan wars and the several other wars all over the world. The expectations for humankind, of whom constant improvement through knowledge and education were once predicted, had failed. Recent events had proved that human aggression and bestiality are even more characteristic than they had been earlier, in spite of the information revolution, and neither did scientific, technological and industrial development fulfill their promise or solve the major problems of human existence. Indeed, the opposite has proved to be the case. Because of greed and aggression they are endangering the very existence of life over the whole planet and instead of being the source of hope for our future they are threatening it.

It is no surprise that, in this changed world which seems to prove the irrational, irrationality is gaining ground. It is fertile soil for superstition, the occult and fundamentalist religion. But we would make a terrible mistake if we do not realize that there is still a need for a healthy and more spiritual and transcendental religious aspiration that is relevant to this changed human condition.

II. Understanding our strengths and weaknesses historically.

If liberal Christianity is really to be an important religion in the future, this will not happen simply because of an automatic inertia of developmental trends – as was thought earlier – but by being able to live up to its real *possibilities* and *mission* in an ever-changing world. There is a need for it to live up to its historic value of free questioning by, first of all, self-questioning; by identifying its own past mistakes, so they can be avoided, and those values that are worth being preserved.

The historical roots of liberal Christianity can be summed up in the words of Paul: “from the bondage of corruption to the glorious liberty of the children of God”(Rom. 8: 21); and became embodied in the Radical Reformation as a protest against the authoritarian organization and unquestionable dogmatism of the Church. This movement was based on *those basic historical values* which have, from its beginnings, been the core values of liberal Christianity: inner authority; the authority of conscience and reason; individual freedom of conscience; the right to question those religious truths deemed final; critical freedom, including self-criticism and criticism of sacred literature; freedom to preserve and modify meaningful forms, and so on. We can see that in the centre of these values stands *freedom* – in opposition to so many forms of bondage from which the human spirit wanted to break free. The aspiration and struggle for the various manifestations of religious, spiritual and social freedom has remained the characteristic feature of liberal Christianity up to our own time

Through this, liberal Christianity has been a highly influential and transforming force for change, implementing its values within society and so shaping the development of Europe: democracy, the worth and dignity of the individual, entrepreneurial freedom and so on.

On the other hand, liberal Christianity was itself exposed to other influences on society, especially the influence of science and philosophy. Although these were often beneficial for its further development, they also created limitations and led to weaknesses, such as empiricism, rationalism, and so on. The supposedly Darwinian view of human evolution, progressing ‘*onward and upward forever*’, was alleged to be implicit in the New Testament. According to the scientific trends, liberal Christianity reinterpreted the Bible from its own point of view. It tried to find biblical foundation for the contemporary scientific approach, so taking the path of the so-called ‘*modernization of the gospel*’. As Tyrell said: “the liberal Christian looks down the deep well of higher criticism, sees his own image and calls it Jesus.” As James Luther Adams says in characterizing this era, this phenomenon led to many weaknesses which we need to face if we are to understand our tradition:

a. The loss of depth and spiritual feature in the concept of God, man and history

The concept of God became purely immanent losing its transcendental dimension; humans were believed gradually to be becoming better and better; history was viewed as the arena of unilinear progress. In the 19th century under the influence of utilitarianism and Kantianism, liberal Christianity tended to identify religion with the good life, turning it into moralism and again losing the vertical dimension. The protest against the Christ of the creeds, emphasizing the ethical aspect of the teachings of Jesus, led to loss of the transcendental and mystical dimensions of the religion of Jesus

b. The loss of wholeness

The modern way of looking at nature and the environment from the point of view of the human struggle for freedom often presented the forces and phenomena of nature as enemies to be conquered. The approach of free entrepreneurship viewed the resources of nature mainly as sources to be exploited. So nature lost its sacredness and thus was lost also the concept of the wholeness of the universe. The emphasis was put on activist attitudes for the sake of "more" and "better" in various fragmented fields, losing sight of both the consequences and the responsibilities of this activism for the Whole.

c. The loss of historical roots

Being focused on the present and an optimistic view of the future, liberal Christianity often developed an uncritical anti-traditionalism, throwing away in revolutionary mood the values of the past. The past was valued to the degree that it could be used to 'prove' contemporary concepts.

d. Individualism

The original legitimate struggle for freedom of the individual led slowly to an excess of individualism. This led to the value of solidarity within society being lost from sight, along with love and charitable responsibility towards those in need. This is the loss of wholeness at the level of society. The enumerated weaknesses are rooted in the ephemeral historical manifestations of the values of liberal Christianity or in deviations from them because of various influences. We should use our self-critical approach to return to the enduring core of our liberal Christian spirit, in ways that are in accord with the needs of our times.

III. The need to shift the paradigms

In an age when scientific development changed the understanding of all existing things and it became obvious that there is an organic universe of fundamentally interdependent forces and processes based on quantum mechanics and relativity, and where the human condition is in major change, there is an urgent need for liberal Christianity to redefine its position and rediscover the relevance of its mission in this new context. It is a major problem and an *anachronism* to live in a post-modern era according to the patterns and reflexes of the modern age which has slowly passed away.

There is an expectation and a need for liberal Christianity to shift its paradigms:

1. Liberal Christianity needs to realize that, in this age, the values so highly celebrated in the modern age are not relevant anymore or are even counterproductive. Those that are still relevant must be *translated* into the language of our times.

2. Liberal Christianity needs to redefine *its spiritual –transcendental dimension* over against the still present burden of rationalism, and to find in worship and liturgy ways to address the complexity of the human soul and so mediate this dimension in a proper form to people seeking spiritual and religious nourishment.

3. Besides the rationalistic and critical approach towards the Bible which was so important up to now, it is time to let those texts so touch us and be reborn within us that they become, not only the foundation of our arguments, but a passionate, living inspiration through our communion with the past.

4. Instead of individualism there is a need to rediscover the main mission of the Gospel: actively to live the solidarity that is based on love towards our fellow human beings. To dare to

accept the weaknesses, miseries, sufferings and limitations of humankind, but also to see the potential of people who are in need of love and caring affection, and who we once preferred to see only in an artificial way - always sane and healthy, striving towards perfection.

5. There is a need to regain the ability to restore the wholeness that is always being broken.

6. Liberal Christianity needs to go beyond the comfortable, individualistic, "I found it for myself" approach, which avoids even the word *mission*, and has to take responsibility to "spread the word" and offer the values of liberal Christianity to the world. This is especially true of introducing the younger generation, in a responsible way, to our religion and to make sure that they will continue to be inspired by our values.

7. There is a need to preserve our Christian roots and our identity. Liberal Christianity will certainly not be the religion of the future if at a certain stage liberal Christians themselves think it liberal to abandon their Christian roots for the sake of *being more universal: embracing everything while losing the roots and the ground under their feet*. Authentic universalism is always rooted in particularity, having the capacity to be open to the values of other world religions.

8. There is a historical responsibility towards the teachings of Jesus, because only liberal Christianity can prove that the original religion of Jesus is, in its essence, the most liberal of religions.

9. Liberal Christianity not being in captivity to any unquestionable dogma, it has the potential, and thus the responsibility, to promote dialogue among the different religious systems. We saw that the most praised virtue of the late pope was his apparent openness towards the other world religions. The world is tired of wars and conflicts and awaits this openness of cultures and religions. This is a matter of life and death, if we think of the threat of religious terrorism and other sufferings caused by the clash of different religions.

10. In an age when the major issue is no longer the struggle for the freedom of the individual against oppressive authoritarian institutions and dogmas - as it was at the beginnings of liberal Christianity - but rather the struggle against destructive individualism and alienation, and when the main concern is not the survival of humankind against the forces of the nature but the survival of nature against the greed and destruction of the humankind, the main value of liberal Christianity needs to shift from *liberty* alone to liberty combined with *responsibility*, with the emphasis on *responsibility*.

11. In our age when individualism and libertinism fuelled by egoism are threatening the very existence of the world, liberal Christianity must stand firmly for certain values and be a strong voice against such negative aspects as economic liberalism.

12. When the major threat is the loss of all kinds of irreplaceable things, from spiritual values to animal species and landscapes, this responsibility needs to lead to an *attitude of preservation*. The new approach towards the whole of existence must shift from freedom of the individual to *responsibility, to stewardship* of the whole and of all existing life. It must be a shift from individualism to a more communitarian approach, with encouragement to active engagement in society.

13. In the relativity of values of our times, liberal Christianity needs to offer the framework of everlasting, unchangeable values which can inspire and uplift the spirit.

IV. The religion of the future?

We need to go beyond the simplistic approaches of both the hurray-optimistic and the pessimistic, and answer the question in a more realistic and sophisticated way. Liberal Christianity, having the ability of self-correction can, from time to time, after ups and downs, be a Phoenix and be reborn from its own ashes. If it is to burn from time to time, what needs to be burned are the things in whose ashes there are real hopes for the future. It won't be *the sole religion of the future*, but it will be a *humble, meaningful religion of the future* offering not *the*, but *one* authentic answer for the further quest for the ultimate meaning of the human condition in relation to the *Whole*.

THE PLACE AND ROLE OF THE BIBLE IN UNITARIAN BELIEFS

By: Rev. Ferenczi Enikő

If anyone looks at the schedule of our theological education, there will be no question remaining about our appreciation toward the Bible. The same could be said if anyone looks at our liturgy or religious educational practice. But if that person takes a share in any of these activities, realizes that this appreciation is much more complicated than one could wish. As a Christian denomination, and especially as the radical wing of reformation, we appreciate the Bible, but are also critical towards it. This ambiguous position needs articulation.

The authority of the Bible

We make a distinction between the church tradition and the autonomy of the Bible. In Protestantism the Bible is generally conceived as something set over against the church, by which the church's teaching is to be judged, being the only authority (*sola scriptura*), which comes from God himself. Since in our belief the two main sources of authority are God and human (by reason and conscience), the Bible is to be read in the light of reason and conscience. This poses the next question:

The inspiration of the Bible

The Bible is written by humans for humans. With this we express the great value, and not the insignificance of it. It records the spiritual struggle of humans over thousands of years to understand God, and finding a meaningful way to live - in accordance with the recognised will of God. Thus the Bible reflects the actual social and cultural settings, especially on the level of ethos, but also the eternal human wish and determination toward a meaningful life and interrelated connection. It presents the development of the idea of God from anthropomorphic insights to higher spiritual and monotheistic perceptions, and parallel with this the growth of moral sensitivity toward the created world, and especially towards the human community. And since the human condition is timeless, the main insights of the Bible remain relevant for the eternal today, but must always be culturally adapted (we will return to this point in a moment).

We connect the inspiration with the community that uses and values it, and not with the authorship. The value comes from the way it is used, and not from itself. These sapiential (spiritual, ethical) and/or communal values (theological, liturgical, religious-historic, artistic) grant the Bible a special status in our community, which means it is not simply like any other collection of documents, ancient or modern (though by inspiration *per se* cannot be excepted). Does the authority of the Bible depend on how it is interpreted, or does its interpretation depend on its authority? - This is a classical dilemma of Christianity. We understand the church as an interpretative community, and thus: on the one hand we encourage the personal reading and interpretation (the Bible "is its own interpreter"), but on the other we do try to establish certain common interpretative patterns and principles, built on the traditional historical criticism and the later hermeneutical developments and understandings. Now we should turn to some of these interpretative guiding principles.

The Bible as canon. We are aware that the canonization of both the OT and NT was a lengthy and complex process spanning many decades. The NT did not reach its final and settled shape until the second half of the fourth century, heavily determined by the theological ideas of the most dominant groups of the very pluralistic early church. The main unifying factor bounding the NT into one is the central subject of these writings: Jesus Christ as raised Lord. And this theological idea served as its excluding boundary. The character of this understanding became decisive in ruling out other candidates for inclusion in the NT, like the Q Gospel or the Gospel of Thomas, just to name the two most important. They were rejected because they contained "only" teachings attributed to Jesus, without referring to Jesus' death and resurrection.

The Hungarian speaking Unitarians, as a wing of the reformation, automatically accepted the Protestant canon, pioneered by Luther. The re-evaluation of this "unconscious" decision, driven by historical reasons and not theological, might raise one of the future challenges.

On the other hand, in spite of the unifying effort, the NT (also the OT) is as diverse as it could be. In Christianity there has always been a tendency to overemphasise its unity and coherence, especially in the period when the various church confessions were drawn up. Here Ernest Käsemann's recognition is essential and blissfully influential: the NT canon did not

provide a foundation for the unity of the church so much as for the multiplicity of the confessions (interpretative communities). The diversity of the interpretation is founded in the very nature of the Bible.

We appreciate the Bible for what it is. Each part has its value by itself. Thus we cannot accept the typological interpretation, which makes from the Old Testament only a foreshadowing of Jesus, reducing the Hebrew Bible into an "Old Testament". And the same could be said about the canonical criticism, which emphasizes the biblical canon and on the need to treat each book or passage as an integral part of the biblical whole, indeed as a part which must be understood in the light of its particular position in the canon. For example, Psalms 8 must be interpreted not as independent item, but with relation to the Hebrew letter.

The consistency of the Bible

Luther argued for a canon in the canon, seeing as concentric circles with Christ in the centre. We (building on Francis David) argue for a canon in the canon, centred in the depth of the religious experience, ethical values and wisdom expressed. Ultimately what matters is the effect of the text on the person who comes in dialogue with it. Thus the basic principle is to look for the profound, not triviality.

The profound can be recognized and appreciated only in the context of its original culture. Thus another principle is to take "Cultural relativism" seriously. This brings us back to the relevance of the Bible. All the cultures behind the biblical period were widely different from ours. The expression of belief and religious symbols are always determined by their culture. The interpretation is always a dialog between cultures, in this case between ancient cultures and ours today. For example, being divine and human at the same time would not have posed the sort of difficulty it does today. The world of ancients conceived an open universe, with gods coming and going and interfering regularly in the lives and histories of humans. They knew nothing about the laws of nature. But for us, Newton's apple once dropped, always falls. God never does step in to catch it. But for them it happened often. Miracles were everyday realities. They lived in group oriented societies, built up on such basic values as shame and honour, purity, patron-client relations etc. We live in post-industrial, highly individualistic, consume and information oriented societies, having several institutions, one of them being the religion/church, while they had only two: family and politics, the religion and economics being infused in each.

The last couple hundred years produced several interpretative tools in order to make sense of this "alien book". The Unitarians have always been opened to the new scientific results, and integrated them quickly into their theological practice. Today we are more aware than ever of the difficulty and challenge of reading of biblical texts, which now displays a plurality of approaches, some complementary, some in competition with each other. So there is no one single methodology we use to make sense of the text, we combine several hermeneutical approaches. Our methodological purpose could be summarised as: trying to reach a harmony between the diachronic and synchronic readings. For example, ministerial training has a full range of specially designed courses for interpreting the Bible. By these students learn how to use tradition-historical exegetical tools (source-, forms-, redaction-criticism etc.), but also methods (rhetorical criticism, socio-political interpretations, narrative theology, reader response criticism and other new literary approaches) that make them more aware of the interaction of interpreters with the texts they are studying. Then they can combine these models as they feel more meaningful in their ministry, and also encourage people to find their own personal ways of making sense of the Bible. Being more sensitive to the subversive language of the Bible, more aware of the voice of the oppressed, it offers new challenges for us in the dialogue with our own cultural changes.

In summary, we have a quite liberal theological understanding of the Bible, being only one of the sources of the continuous revelation of God, our everyday church life is much more based on it than one would expect from this theological position.

THE BIBLE AS A MAJOR SOURCE OF THE TRANSYLVANIAN UNITARIAN LITURGY, CEREMONIES AND EDUCATION

By: Rev. Mezei Csaba

The Bible is one of the sources of the living faith, but only God's children's reason and consciousness can be accepted as ultimate authority. This is the starting statement of my presentation about the role of the Bible in our liturgy, ceremonies and education. As Transylvanian Unitarian I believe that we are liberal Christians, but we pay attention and consideration to the tradition of the first Christians' liturgy. Even though Bible is not considered the word of God, Unitarian minister in Transylvania cannot be imagined without holding the Bible while going into the Church at the beginning of the worship service. Bible is a symbol and only its presence becomes a part of our liturgy. In the following I will present the biblical foundation for our liturgy, ceremonies and education by showing their origins in the biblical quotations. After that I present shortly our practice of the liturgy, ceremonies and education in order to give a comparison.

Liturgy

In the 16th century during reformation our Church adopted the basic statement on meters of faith of the whole reformation movement: back to the Bible. Going back in time to Jesus teaching we learn that the only indication Jesus left behind regarding liturgy, was: John 4,23-24. "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

However the first Christians very soon developed their first liturgy. We can learn about it from the Acts the epistles of Paul to the Ephesians, Corinthians, Colossians, and Jacob's epistle. Jewish Christians in the beginning followed the liturgy of the Old Testament. According to Acts chapter 3,11 they are present in a place of the Temple called Solomon's porch. The pagan Christians liturgy developed more independently. There were open worships for everybody and the liturgy was simple, usually there was a song, a prayer and teaching. Besides the open worships there were closed worships usually in the evenings as we see in Acts 2,46-47. "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." Sunday, Easter and Pentecost were celebrated apart as holidays. Communion was also an important part of their liturgy and practiced as "agape". Acts 2,42-45 and 4,32-34 are relevant to the statement made above. The Lord's Supper was practiced when the believers partake the bread and wine in the memory of Jesus death. They sung psalms and hymns and the congregation saying "Amen" closed the prayer.

Our day's Unitarian liturgy has kept more or less the main aspects of the first Christian liturgy. In the following I try to describe the order of service just to make a short comparison. We always begin with an opening hymn, followed right away by a longer hymn or psalm. After the second song the minister goes up to the pulpit and starts with a prayer. Prayer is always addressed only to God. After the prayer the minister says the Lord's Prayer than a hymn follows. The minister reads the biblical text of his/her sermon. Every sermon is based on a biblical text. After the bible reading the minister delivers the sermon. After the sermon there is a silent meditation/prayer closed by a short prayer of the minister. The worship ends with the blessing and closing hymn. The newest Transylvanian Unitarian liturgy was adopted by the synod of Vargyas in 1999. As you can easily notice, there are some similarities between the early Christians' liturgy and our. Liturgy is less important it is more a framework for our worship service and has no special theological meaning. The most common liturgical moment of our worship is the reading of the biblical text on which the sermon as the highlight of the worship is built.

Ceremonies

Only two ceremonies are based on Bible: the baptism, and the Lord's Supper.

Baptism

Unitarian baptism is rather a child dedication than a classical Christian baptism for remission of sin. The formula of the baptism in Christian tradition is: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit:" (Mat. 28,19).

In the following I try to describe our way of baptism. First we begin with a song. After the song the minister begins the sermon by an invocation. The reading of the biblical text on which the sermon is build follows the invocation. After the reading the sermon follows. As the sermon is over we say a prayer and the Lord's Prayer. When the Lord's Prayer is over the minister says the formula of the baptism as follows: I baptize you XY. In the name of the truly one God and I admit you among the members of the Unitarian Christian Church for the following of Jesus. Amen. Meanwhile the minister says the formula; he pours some water on the child's head. Ceremony ends with a blessing and closing hymn. In this particular ceremony the Bible plays a double role: first the baptism as a liturgical action has biblical base, secondly the formula is partly taken from bible but is modified according to our belief about the meaning of baptism. In our tradition as I already mentioned we dedicate the child to God and want to assure our community that we consider worthy to raise our children in this particular faith. There is also another aspect of giving thanks to God for the new life.

Lord's Supper

One of the Biblical references of the Lord's Supper is Mat. 26,26-28

"Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" There are other biblical references like: Mark 14,12-16. Luke 22,7-13. 1Co 11,23-25.

As far as the Lord's Supper is concerned, I'd like to believe, that the Unitarians position is as close as possible to early Christian principles. Jesus clearly said: "Do this in memory of me". Therefore the Lord's Supper is an act of remembrance, or condition to bring up memories. The elements of the Lord's Supper are just as in bible the bread and wine. People lined up in circle in the church standing next to one another gain a strong sense of brotherhood and discipleship. The bible provides not only the base of a liturgical moment, but also involves the parishioners to be a part of the whole ceremony.

Other ceremonies: -The confirmation, the wedding and the funeral

Education

Biblical base: Act. 5,19-21

"But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said, 'Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of the Life.' And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and taught..."

Act. 5,41-42 "Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."

Religious education is a bible-centered education. The bible offers colorful stories and powerful teachings for fashioning a new generation of faithful Unitarians. Most of our ethical values are wonderful represented in the Bible, and I am not thinking just about the 10 Commandments of the Old Testament, which is obviously one of the most important one. David's faith makes the young Sheppard a triumphant leader, the prophets' testimony about God's revelation in their lives are all exciting stories for children and adults alike. There are interesting also the records about Jesus' birth, his childhood and his calling for public ministry, but Jesus teachings are the cornerstones of our education. We emphasis on his teachings as the Kingdom of God, about the „True Worship of God“, about Loving God and One-Another, about The Prayer, The Good Samaritan, The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin, The prodigal Son, The Tax to Caesar, The greatest Commandment, The Woman Caught in Adultery and so an. Gradually as the children grow we put aside the practices and the set of beliefs of our Church and let them see the common ground with the bible stories and teachings learned before. When the children turn their 14th year they are prepared for confirmation. Confirmation is a very important event in both the Unitarian congregation and the families of the confirmation children. The confirmation is a part of our religious education and most of the questions in this Catechism are biblically

supported. For example the first question: What is religion? Our answer is: Religion is the love of God and our neighbor.

This statement is supported by 3 different biblical passages:

„And one of the scribes came up and heard the disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, Hear, oh Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.' ". (Mark. 12,28-31)

„And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also." (1John. 4,21)

„Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Mat. 7,21)

Religious education continues after the confirmation among our adult parishioners as bible study group. Studying the Bible is more than just learning about the stories from the bible. It helps them to develop a higher ethical self-expectation. Bible can also offer answers to our-day problems if we are able to actualize the stories.

Conclusion: Bible is a major set of values on which our liturgy, ceremonies and education lies. We have a critical approach to the Bible, but in the same time we want to preserve those values that have shaped our religious belief throughout the centuries. We admit the fact that the Bible was inspired by God, but human beings wrote it. It is not the Word of God, but still contains a lot of genuine values that are worthy to learn and follow. We have a deep respect for the Bible and consider it the major source of our worship, ceremonies and education.

THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF THE TRANSYLVANIAN UNITARIAN FAITH.

A general introduction: dogma or principle of faith; outer or inner authority

By: Dr. Szabó Árpád

From the mosaics of the lectures that will be delivered in these days, will be assembled a brief summary of the Transylvanian Unitarian faith and of the practice of worship in this church. It is our hope that we will be able to give a clear and comprehensive picture of this faith, which partly has been received from our ancestors as a sacred heritage, and from the other part has been shaped by the spirit of ages, including our own age, at the turning point of the Third Millennium.

This present lecture is offered to be a door to the building of Unitarian faith, making easier the entrance to this exciting world, by acquainted the audience with some basic concepts of this theology.

As it is generally known, there is a tradition related to the history of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church, according to this the name "Unitarian" has been already the official name of the Church when it was established in 1568, and legally recognized in 1571. This was a commonly accepted agreement for a long time among Unitarian church historians, and some from other denominations, as well, especially at the end of 19. Century.

Although, this theory didn't squared with the historical facts, it is true that during the big debates between the branches of the Reformation in the second part of the 16. Century, it has been used such understandings on the basis of the two theological concepts: *trinitas* and *unitas*, that the nature of God should be demonstrated either Trinitarian, or Unitarian. From the inscription of Ferenc David's seal: S.T.U.M. which is an abbreviation of "Sigillum Transylvanorum Unitariorum Ministrorum", we should come to the conclusion that David himself should thought to use the name Unitarian as the official name of the church, which is to be founded.

To the end of the 16. Century the protestant denominations from Transylvania as a result of the Reformation have been separated. This is why the summer Diet of the country, held in 1600. at Leczfalva, in its resolutions used for the first time in a legal text the name "Unitaria religio". Later, in 1638 the Diet of Des – with very tragic consequences for the Unitarians, used "unitaria recepta religio" (Unitarian legally recognized religion), and "unitaria magyar ecclesia" (Unitarian Hungarian Church). In 1848, during the Hungarian revolution, the independent Hungarian state recognized our religion and church as accepted by laws, and it is mentioned in the text of the law: "unitarius vallas" (Unitarian religion). The present Law of Cults in Romania speaks about cults, but recognizes as the official name of our denomination: "Transylvanian Unitarian Church".

The Unitarian faith is a historical one. Its roots go back to the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. It changed very much in its appearance during the time passed away, but its essence always remained the same: as a religion of the clean conscience, freedom, progress and open faith.

Unitarianism, having been in conflict with the prevalent orthodoxy, has been charged with being a negative faith. But, Unitarianism rightly understood is the religion of large affirmation. Instead of believing that God spoke to only few men in days long past, Unitarians hold that he speaks to all his children, even to the worst. Instead of asserting that only a few will be saved, they teach that no one will be finally lost to God. Instead of perceiving God incarnated on one man only, they reverence the divinity in all good men as saviours. Instead of accepting a few miracles recorded in the Bible, they reverence the great miracle of Creation and of all life. Instead of finding God's presence mysteriously introduced into a sacrament, they find him revealed as a real presence throughout the universe. Instead of saying that the Bible alone contains the word of God, they hold that every true and uplifting word is inspired by him.

Unitarian religion comprises the essentials of personal religion, the close relation of the human soul to God, the reality of prayer, the consecration of life to the service of God by doing his will and by loving one's fellow men, the restoration of the sinner by repentance and forgiveness,

the sense of deep and assured trust is God in all the changing events of life. There is no region of life where this religion could be left out as having nothing to say.

The main objection to Unitarianism is that it introduces a new method. It lays the stress on the reliability of the human mind to judge for itself and maintains that human experience is a more trustworthy guide than ancient authorities. Its method is that of appeal to reason, conscience and experience generally, and above all to the elemental principles of truth and right which are implanted in the human heart and embedded in the universe. When it is fully developed and employed, it will transform the outlook of men in all their relationships, social, ethical and religious. Its aim nothing less than the kingdom of God.

It is obvious that owing to its method Unitarianism must be a progressive faith. It is an effort to follow truth as God gives us to see truth, wherever it may lead. Its purpose to preserve all that is good in Christian and all religious experience in the past, and to discover the spiritual meaning of human experience and thought today.

Unitarianism is not a system of creeds or beliefs. It is more than anything else an attitude of mind. It is a fresh way of looking at life and religion. Unitarianism is more than a doctrine: it is a gospel.

According to the Unitarian religion one source of the Revelation is reason, thinking. In the future we want to emphasize this principle more importantly. Instead of accepting ready made formulas, let us offer a large scope to the thinking, instead of written word to the inner authority of the religious truth.

A Unitarian who is able to choose the object of his faith, trust nothing with chance, and never let himself to be influenced by force. He doesn't accept without a critical mind the teaching and practice of the ancient authorities. This faith is responsible for. According to our understanding this means that a Unitarian should listen to the different opinions answers to them, and after that he should begin a dialogue. To develop a point of view in the matter of faith, it doesn't mean to withdraw into oneself, who doesn't pay any attention to the opinions of others, and to that what is happening around him. A responsible person will compare his views, accept the debate and critics, pay attention to the others, even gaining an inspiration from them. Nobody has right to force upon a person a faith, which is not authentic as his own, but in the same time his conviction and opinion must be included into a network of exchange of experience, as different voices into the harmony of music.

The Unitarian religion instead of having dogmas as its foundation, has principles of faith, as a firm basis of its theology. Let us take into account of those most important ones.

The freedom of faith means the ability of a human being to make difference between the different forms of the outer compulsion, which are arbitraries and limited.

The freedom of thinking is the next characteristic principle of the Unitarian religion. But if the freedom is not practiced and lived with responsibility, very easily should transform to be licentious. We try to form and develop our faith on the basis of freedom of thinking. A Unitarian reject many of those doctrines accepted by the followers of dogmatic religion, but in the same time he accepts and confesses those which are rejected by the dogmatics. When a Unitarian would like to examine a thesis of faith always takes as a basis the judgment of common sense and requirements of truth.

The inner authority. Even behind the freedom there is an authority. The acceptance of this will prevent the freedom to be licentious. The freedom is never be contrary to the authority, and indeed it presumes some forms of it. Unitarianism is emphasising the importance of the inner authority in religion. The outer authority is incompatible with the freedom of a human being and of a community. In the authority it gives expression the spiritual dignity, the intellectual weight, and the recognition of different values. From its content results, that constantly stimulates, obliges, directs the human life, shapes it, and urges a personal decision in the vital problems of a human being. The authority will becoming a guiding power, if it will take its source in the soul, inner approval and acceptance. The inner authority is an engagement towards the highest ideals and values known by us, like truth, fairness, reason and conscience, that is obedience towards the will of God.

Reason and conscience. Both are the function of history and of the present time. Here again the truth is making us free. If we know that the different centuries when humans have been thinking about those problems with which we are dealing today, we should formulate our free opinion much easier. Of course we would not have to think about certain issues, as those generations before us, but if we contrast with the opinion of those thinkers who thought in a deeper way about those issues, we have to recognise our mistake. In the last case every person has to appeal to his/her enlightens reason and conscience.

Tolerance. What is the meaning of the tolerance in our faith. According to this, tolerance is nothing else as love expressed in freedom. In this sense it contains respect not only for the other persons, but for their opinion as well. We should accept and include in our church every sincere religious conviction, with the only qualification, that they should practice and live freedom with responsibility. The authority of truth and goodness upon our thinking and conduct have to accept by everyone. But we never practice tolerance against evil. The respect for the other person should not mean to overlook a sinful act or behavior. We are aware that one of the most sublime and difficult religious demands is to hate evil, but to love a wicked person.

As a conclusion of my short outline I would like to make an examination about the value of a confession in our Unitarian faith. "It is not required to establish a confession, because although we confess our faith with joy, we never make a written statement, and never lay claim for this, if it should be a final statement of the truth." (British Unitarians)
This point of view is familiar and acceptable for many Unitarians in Transylvania. But there are others and not few of them, who consider very important to draw up it as a basis of our faith, not as a final authority, but as a solemn expression of our identity, as Unitarians.

In our history there was a commonly accepted point of view, that Ferenc David never established a confession, because his main idea was progress. But it was in 1571, when he summarized in a few thesis his confession, later when he reached his conviction about "non adoramus", that is, one has not pray to Jesus, as mediator, he could not develop it due to the very demanding historical circumstances. The witness of the history is very clear. But history is not the only critical evidence to the sustainance of truth.

The social point of view is also strenghtening this thesis. Faith is an a priori precondition to the appearance of religion. Religion, church and theology are growing up from the faith. Faith is an individual matter of a person, but religion and especially church are of many. Faith a proper of an individual, but it should be common with many others. Even that church which is emphasizing the importance of the personal faith of its members, strive to realize different social aspects, and in this endeavor the common confession has an important role. Without this, it cannot maintain a religious community, and according to the historical experiences there is no hope for the future without a strong church institution, based on a confession as a source and frame of its religion.

Besides this view of holding together in a church, there is an other aspect of the confession: religiosity, as an expression of or faith. Let me bring two example from our history.

1. It happened at the end of the 18th century, that the members of the Korond congregation converted to catholicism in a big number. The Consistory for to put an end of this decided to issue a confession to strengthen the Unitarian flock at Korond by this.
2. We know a letter from the beginning of 19th century written by Marton Benczedi, minister of Sepsikorospatok congregation to bishop Janos Kormoczy, in which he mentioned that every Sunday he used to read a part from Mihaly Szentabrahami's book (*Summa Universae Theologiae Christianae Secundum Unitarios*) to his church members for developing their religious life and strenghtening their Unitarian consciousness.

But besides what I said in favour of a confession, I have to state that in the Unitarian Church of Transylvania a confession never was a final goal. A confession should have only an instrumental role in the religious and church life of a community. If we give an exaggerated importance to it the religious life will becoming formal and stiffen. A confession always has to contain the fullness of the soul, as Augustinus stated: "Your confession should be as a mirror before you. Look at yourself in it: do you really believe what you confess, and then let enjoy your living faith everyday."

CONFESSING IN THE SPIRIT OF LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY

By: Prof. Dr. Johan F. Goud

1. What does it actually mean: to confess your faith?

1.1. Some (very) general remarks about our cultural situation: anthropological dispute; the quest for spirituality; postmodern relativism; the pluralist challenge.

1.2. Confessing in a liberal Christian way moves between two positions:

- It is more reasonable and more pious to be silent on God
- It is preferable to only re-think and re-say the tradition of faith

1.3. Four characteristics of a real confession (referring to Peter's confession in Mark 8):

- Authenticity: a personal answer to a personal question
- Much more than only the repetition of old words and ideas
- Much more than only words
- Not in conformity with what is considered to be normal, but in many cases 'generally disputed'

"What is to be concluded regarding written confessions starting with the expression 'We believe', which are used in liturgies and elsewhere in the churches? It is evident that 'authenticity' means something different in such contexts. But it seems possible to derive some important insights from the analysis just given. Such confessions have to appeal to the personal conviction of believers; they urge to more than only the pronouncing of words; they are inserted in a tradition of confessing but don't shrink from some shifts in meaning and expression; they are loyal to the actual cultural situation but prepared to take risks." (transl. from *Wij geloven – wat geloven wij? Remonstrants belijden in 1940 en nu*, Zoetermeer 2004, p.22-23).

2. Is a confession needed in our time?

Three reasons to answer this question in a positive way:

2.1. Postmodern man as an unceasingly changing Proteus. He/she needs trustworthy images and a real community of 'friends', pointing beyond itself.

2.2. The religious and cultural conflicts dominating our world and ourselves, require a universal perspective which is embedded in a coherent religious conviction. E.g.:

*Therefore, we believe in God's holy Ghost,
Who surpasses all that divides people
And inspires them to all that is holy and just and good,
So that they will, freed from self-conceit,
Praying, singing, acting en silent,
Praise and serve God.*

2.3. Against relativism and scepticism (a fortiori the indifferentism and cynicism they may lead to), we need to be reminded of the significant values of truthfulness and courage

*We know and desire to accept
That our spirit cannot find peace in the certainty of what it knows or professes,
But in the astonished understanding of what it is bequeathed and given
That our will cannot find its destiny in doubt or indifference,
But in alertness, trust and solidarity with all that lives
That our feelings are not the prisoner of avarice and lust for power,
But can develop in a yearning for all that is different and untouched
That our existence is not completed by who we are and what we have
But by what is infinitely larger than we can comprehend.*

This (perhaps not subversive, but at least disturbing) reminder receives concrete form in the wisdom and the courage of Jesus Christ. E.g.:

*We believe in Jesus Christ, the true man,
Who came and passed by and loved people,
The face of God which looks at us and disturbs us.
He walked with God and was crucified
But lives, beyond His own and our deaths.
He is our holy example of wisdom and of courage
And brings close to us God's eternal love,
That forgives and reconciles.*

WE BELIEVE IN ONE GOD

The essence and attributes of God - Credimus unus deum

By: Rev. Dr. Rezi Elek

The one of the main (basic) theological principle of the Transylvanian Unitarianism is of God's Unity, or believe in One God. If somebody comes to Transylvania he or she may find either inside or outside of the Church a short sentence "Egy az Isten", which means God is One. The proposition that there is One God seems to us exceedingly plain. We understand by it that there is one being, one mind, one person, one intelligent agent, and one only, to whom underived and infinite perfection and dominion belong.

The founder of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church, David Ferenc declared: "My God is my witness that the things which I have learnt, which I have thought and which I still teach, came not from the Koran, or the Talmud, or Servetus, but from the word of the living God. I am sure that I am on the way of truth, and guided by laws of truth. I rest all my explanation on what is contained in Scripture".

David's famous conclusion: "There is no other clearer and more evident teaching in the Scripture than the teaching of God's unity, because the Scripture asserts that God is Father of Jesus Christ and Creator of all things."

I. Our firm believe in One God is based on: biblical, rational and psychological (practical) proofs, arguments.

1. Biblical arguments

The Bible teaches the indivisible unity of God. Let me quote some biblical statements from the Old and New Testament

Deuteronomy 6, 4: "Hear oh Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone"

Exodus: 20, 2-3: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, you shall have no other gods before me".

Deuteronomy 4,35: "To you it was shown so that you would acknowledge that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him".

Isaiah 37, 16b: "...you are God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the world; you have made heaven and earth".

Isaiah 44,6 b: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god".

Isaiah 45,5: "I am the Lord, and, there is no other; besides me there is no god. (See also: 45,18; 45,

Psalms 86,10: "For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God" (see: 18,32).

Malachi 2,10a: "Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?..."

Mark 12,29: "...Hear oh Israel; the Lord our God, the Lord is one". (The scribe said: you are right Teacher: you have truly said that he is one, and besides him is no other (32), and Jesus appreciated "you are not far from the kingdom of God).

John 17,3: "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent".

Romans 3.30: "since God is one..."

1 Corinthians 8,6: "Yet for us is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist..." (See also 8,4)

Ephesians 4,6: "one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all".

James 2,19a: "You believe that God is one; you do well.

I do not want to examine or criticize the Trinitarian dogma, but I consider that the Trinity formulated at the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon was a deviation from the biblical monotheism, was a mistaken attempt to translate apostolic belief in one God, the Father, into the language of Greek metaphysics. Worse still, the creeds were used in coercive and destructive ways to force belief in one living God in these dogmas.

To the first Christians, the idea of a second preexistent person in the Godhead was unthinkable. They did think that the Lord was God of Israel. As a nation the Jews were obviously awaiting the promised Messiah. The disciples expected the Messiah to be born from the seed of David. As it would have appeared to any monotheistic Jew, the term Son of God carried the royal meaning it had acquired in the Old Testament. He designated a human being, a king especially related to God and invested with His spirit.

The total picture which arises from the history is almost like an arithmetic progression. In the first century God is still monotheistic in good Jewish fashion. In the second century God becomes two-in one; from the third century the one God gradually becomes threefold.

The study of biblical theology has brought to light evidence which compels us to consider seriously this distortion of the faith which occurred even Greek philosophy was added to the simple Hebraic framework of the Bible. According to orthodox Trinitarians the Holy Spirit is a third member of the eternal Godhead, coequal and coeternal with Father and Son. For us

Holy Spirit is not a third person but God in action.

2. Rational argumentes

Reason comprehends God as, the highest Reality, and this highest Reality can not be more than One. The reason claims that the only First Cause should be One, and according to our Christian heritage this first Cause should not be anybody else than God Himself or Herself. To speak of God, to use that term at all, is to affirm a transcendent depth in the world. Knowledge of God, one might say, is achieved through a specific sort of cognitive and reactive attitude to reality, which makes the being of God manifest.

3. Psychological (practical arguments)

The logical basis of religious belief is the adaptation an attitude to reality which is prepared to see in it new levels of significance and value and respond accordingly. We regard that the doctrine of Trinity is unfavorable to devotion, by dividing and distracting the mind (soul) in its communion with God. God's unity offers to us One Object of supreme homage, adoration and love, One Infinite Father, One being in beings, to whom we may refer all good, on whom all our powers and affections may be concentrated, and whose providence may strengthen our inner and external life. An undivided Deity spiritually and practically is more favorable to religious respect and love, than three distinct persons, having equal claims on our hearts: three divine persons, performing different offices and to be acknowledged and worshiped in different relations. I consider if Jesus would be remediator between us and God he would be most interesting than the Father. Because our worship would depend on Him.

II. The essence (substance) of God

We according to Bible comprehend God as Spirit and as Love.

John 4,24: "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth"

John 1,18: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is the bosom of the Father, he has made him known".

2 Corinthians. 3,17: " Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of Lord is, there is freedom".

I John 4,16 " God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

The Old Testament when refers to God's essence mentions ruah, and the New Testament pneuma. We believe that God is "not only" his own being, but also "the being of all". God is not simply one being among others, the more actualization of some among the infinite wealth of possibilities. Rather as a sovereign Creator and Redeemer of all things, He is universally immanent in both actuality and possibility, and so is in the strict sense necessary.

III. The attributes of God:

personal; eternal; perfect; omnipotent; good; just; merciful. These qualities result from his fatherly love. (responsive love –according the process theology).

1. Personal

Those who are dissatisfied with traditional religion, but who are not unsympathetic to the theist interpretation of the universe, frequently query the idea of personal God. It always seems to me that a God, who is not a person is not a God at all, and the hypothesis of a mysterious impersonal Power or Force behind all things is, I believe, less intelligent than pure atheisms. It is true that some theists consider that is more helpful to speak of personality in God, rather than to think of God as a person. I am not quite sure what this is really to convey. Perhaps the idea of a personal God can only come through the experience of worship. It is through the exercise the much-neglected art –"the practice of presence of God"- that what Martin Buber has called the I-Thou relationship becomes becomes the undeniable reality of confrontation.

2. Eternal

This attribute of God refers. that God was always and will be forever. (Psalm 102,26-28; 90,2). So, God can not be closed in time, His being unites past, present and future, which are human terms. By this attribute we would like to express God's timelessness. So, God's temporality is not itself temporally determined unlike man's, God's being has neither begun nor will end.

3. Perfect

When we say, "God is perfect" we mean that all of God's creation and activity is the best and most correct, and that the instruments He uses for the fulfillment of his laws are always

the most suitable that could be chosen.

The statement in Matthew 5,48 "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" is a particular expression of the universal religious aspiration of humanity to participate in or be in harmony with perfection. By definition the divine reality is perfect. Of course the question concerns nature of this perfection.

4. Omnipotent

God can do all he wants, but He does not act contrary to his laws. This also means that God is not located in a particular place, but rather is omnipresent and eternal, in the sense that he is directly present to all spaces and times and they to him.

Matthew 19,26a "...with God all things are possible".

This attribute of God also relates that He is omnipresent. God knows everything; God knows my inside, my mind and heart. But God does not hurt the free will of man, does not want to make any pressure on the integrity of my moral life.

(Job 11,7-9 "Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of Almighty? They are higher than the heavens what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave – what can you know".)

5. Good

By this attribute we mean that he does only good with all his creatures, not only with those who are good, but with those who are worthy for punishment as well.

Matthew 19, 17a "Why do you ask me what is good? Jesus replied. There is only One who is good.

When we say that God is good we believe that He created us for good and perfect purposes. God is good not for a few, but to all; God to every individual, as well as to the cosmic world. We would like to express by this attribute God's universal goodness, on the contrary of human goodness, which is some times limited.

6. Just

According to our believe God judges our lives and all of our deeds, rewarding the good and punishing evil. Everyone must bear the consequences of his or her life and works

Romans 2, 6-11. From this biblical text I would like to emphasize that "For God does not show favoritism" (11 verse).

God as Judge is not a particular event of the future, but the ever-present final consequence of each passing moment in the stream of time. By this believe we do not want to "transfer" our present responsibility beyond our present experience and knowledge.

7. Merciful

This means that God gives us time for improvement and to reform our life if we faulted, and forgives us. (Luke 15, 11-24 The Prodigal Son). By God's mercy, we understand not a blind instinctive compassion, which forgives without reflection and without regard to the interests of virtue, the sinner may return to his duty.

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GOD'S WORKS

By: Rev. Molnár B. Lehel

God's existence surpasses the limits of His being, it is the achievement of full agency. His activity does not serve His own interests, but ours, that of mankind, of those created by Him, of the whole world, eventually. It is through His actions that God appears before man. God's agency manifests itself in three forms: 1. in Creation, 2. in Providence and 3. in the Holy Spirit. These are called God's works.

Hereby it has to be mentioned that extensive presentations could be devoted to each of these three works of God, however, for want of time, in the present paper these problems and their biblical references are not dealt with in detail from the point of view of theology, philosophy and history of religion.

In this presentation we are going to discuss primarily our present-day Unitarian conceptions of the divine. We would also like to emphasize that our affirmations referring to these religious conceptions are not considered definitive, since free investigation makes it possible that our religious and intellectual apprehension would become ever deeper and clearer.

1. Creation

In the investigation of the question of Creation we Unitarians have as a starting point that a priori (existing previously, without premises, before empirical facts) religious conviction that everything exists due to and by God.

In the 19th century Darwin's evolution theory brought about great controversy, intense discussions in Christian theology, since the biblical doctrine of Creation was regarded as endangered. The essential point of the discussion was that evolution and creation were mutually exclusive notions, that is, if one accepted creation, then one had to deny evolution, and vice versa.

Dogmatic Christianity was unable to provide an answer that could have settled this controversy reconciling intellect with conscience. It was Unitarian and, in general, liberal theology that realized and strived to prove that there can be no contradiction between creation and evolution. Namely, creation gave answer to the question why there is something rather than nothing, evolution on the other hand sought answer to the question why that which exists is as it is, and not something different. Creation means that the world may be traced back to a primary mover: to God, while evolution refers to the inner dynamic structure of those existent. Creation is related to the phase between existence and non-existence, evolution explains the differences among individual beings.

We Unitarians pay deference to the biblical legend of Creation, but we regard them as the answer given in a certain age to the question of how the world came into being. We profess the principle of creative evolution (theistic evolution), which means, we allow for the principle of evolution, but the absolute starting point for us is God.

The most characteristic feature of God as conscious spirit is dynamic agency. At the beginning God created by means of this agency the causes, the seeds of existence, which, under His laws and providence, are developing towards perfection according to the principle of evolution. It should be also mentioned here that the Aristotelian metaphysical standpoint which has led to the formation of a static world view, that is, to the philosophical theory of steadiness is opposed to the notion of God's dynamic agency. According to it the Universe is an edifice raised once and for all, in which there is no progress but only repetition. God is the immovable Mover in this world, and He interferes only if the process of repetition is obstructed.

We, Unitarians, who accept the principle of creative evolution, believe that we form part of a dynamic world view. This world view implies movement, continuity, change, progress, tension, animation and incompleteness. Dynamism is God himself. It is not only repetition that can be perceived in this world, but also evolution progressing towards perfection. Evolution manifests itself through the restructuring of the simpler into the more complicated, of the lifeless into the living, of the more primitive tribalism into superior social structures. Regress is also part of the process, but a process is nevertheless going on. The order of a developing world, the

harmonization of a dynamic universe requires a Creator and God of Providence, unlike a static world incapable of development.

At the same time creative evolution is held to be teleological and reasonable. By teleology we mean that God directs evolution towards a superior goal, which is determined by Jesus as improvement (Mt 5, 48). It is our conviction that this goal does not only mean the individual's interests, but that of the whole world. Reasonableness is manifested in the fact that we are aware of the goal and of the causes. This realization is specific to man, who is the only creature in the organic and inorganic world capable of striving for the purpose consciously and systematically. This, however, doesn't necessarily lead to arbitrariness, to take other people to be our pawns.

The answer provided by dogmatic Christianity to the question: what this world is like in creative evolution, is that it is completely distorted because of the original sin, according to sectaries the world is the source of sin and therefore it has to be destroyed sooner or later. According to Unitarian theology, the world, as the creation of God, bears the potentiality of goodness, though it is far from being perfect, but still, it is heading towards improvement, progressing towards perfection.

We, humans, who live in close relationship with everything in this world, we, who are governed by intellect and morality, we bear extreme responsibility as regards the preservation of the created world. It is our duty and responsibility to protect this world against pollution, and preserve ecological balance. It is not only an ethical question, but also an obligation deriving from our faith and view of life, since it is possible to contribute to the self-consistent and rational progress of the world only this way.

2. Providence

The direct consequence of God's creative work is that the world has not only been brought into being and then abandoned, but He shows concern, care, love for His creations, for the world. The understanding of God's providence requires faith and awareness of God's intentions. From the point of view of man the divine providence has two momentums: that of the divine plan guiding all creatures with singleness of purpose, and another one of realization of this plan, that is, the ruling of the world. In other words, providence is that efficient divine plan which makes it possible by means of creation, sustenance and co-operation that those existing in the world would realize their goal set for them by God.

Unitarian theology distinguishes the following features of Providence.

a. Providence is the continuation of God's work of creation. God does not leave the world to its own resources, but takes care of it lovingly. This is not to say that He exercises controlling or dominating power over the world, but He refines and improves this world according to the law of evolution.

b. Providence is functioning in accordance with universal laws, which are consequently perfect and eternal. Therefore, God never has to suspend His laws, what excludes the possibility of bias. Since God directs worldly beings according to their nature, Providence does not impeach on the independence of natural beings, and does not encroach upon human freedom. In consequence, the realization of the divine purpose does not mean that the world is governed by fate independently of man's will.

c. God's providence is individual and universal. Individual, what means personal nature, and universal, that is, it extends over all that exists, over even the smallest things in the world.

d. Providence requires provision for themselves on the part of all creatures. Divine providence does not mean that we may shift our problems and responsibilities on to someone else. God has brought the world into being through creative evolution, He takes care of our reaching the ends set for us, but the way the process is accomplished requires active participation from the individual. Man's liberty finds expression in this, too.

One of the most difficult questions of Christian theology arises in association with providence: how is it possible to reconcile the idea of divine providence and the evil to be experienced in the world? This is the question raised in the theodicy, that is to say: why does God allow evil if He is almighty, all-knowing and good?

For want of time we won't engage in the analysis of the problems raised by the theodicy from the point of view of the history of theology and philosophy, limiting ourselves to the presentation of our Unitarian theological view on this subject.

In our judgment the problem of evil is extremely complex, and it becomes really problematic from the point of view of providence when it appears within the dimensions of the individual. In other words, while the individual is only the witness of evil but does not experience it, the problem doesn't become acute. Nevertheless, when someone falls victim of evil then the possible answers become extremely complicated.

Unitarian theology differentiates among the following cases in connection with evil and providence:

a. Moral evil and providence

Moral evil means deficiency of the free agency of man. In other words it denotes all those activities that mean attempts against life (murder, war etc.) or against the values of life (oppression, racial discrimination etc.). It is quite clear from this that moral evil means attempts against God's will and against purity, humanity. Thus the causes of moral evil have their roots in the false scale of values of man and not in God. God does not want moral evil in any way, but He allows it. God's indulgence ensues from the fact that He has created beings with free will, and a finite creature can attain liberty only through the possibility of sinning. That is to say, if God prevented all that is evil then He would deprive His creatures of their most precious possession, of liberty.

b. Physical evil and providence

Physical evil is a deficiency in the co-operation of the elements of nature, which causes pain to man (earthquake, flood, drought, illness, suffering etc.). Our world is not a finite, accomplished, static world, but it is subject to constant development and change, what makes conflicts possible. In Creation God has planted the seed of life, the cause of evolution, and He takes care of the subsistence of life, but the way it is lived is dictated by universal laws. Despite all hardships physical evil may act as a stimulative factor in the life of mankind. It forces man to develop his knowledge and, first of all, it excites sympathy for those in trouble. The tsunami of last December, for instance, stimulated the whole world to unparalleled actions of solidarity and aid, to manifestations of fraternal love.

According to certain opinions, illness is still regarded as God's punishment due to a surviving ancient misconception. Our firm conviction is that the cause of illness is not God, since that would be in contradiction with His fatherly love. Illness is frequently the consequence of the improper lifestyle

Job's dilemma, the question why good people also have to suffer (since it is easier to accept the suffering of the evil), may be settled if we accept the idea that the laws of nature do not distinguish between good and evil people. And God stands by everyone in illness and suffering, He gets closer in faith and by faith, we are not alone, He doesn't desert us.

3. Holy Spirit

By way of introduction we would like to premise that we are not going to enlarge upon the dogmatic Christian doctrine about the holy spirit, that is, upon how it became the third person of the Trinity, and how it rose to divine status.

Our starting-point is that the holy spirit cannot be separated from God and treated as a different person. Our affirmation may be founded on the biblical sentence, which is the most expressive, most perfect definition of divinity at the same time, and which sounds like this: "God is spirit, and those worship him must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4,24). God's essence may be therefore grasped as lying in his spirituality. God is spirit, and it is the spirit in man, too, that God speaks to.

God's spirit is not only active, but also holy. God is Holy Spirit. Holy, holiness are very old attributes of God, and they mean the very essence of all values. The opposite of the holy is the profane. Holy is God himself and that which derives from him. The attribute holy may be associated only with God, he who represents all values, thus bearing absolute value, opposed to which all profane values are overshadowed.

According to our conviction, the holy spirit is God's substantial, inherent agency through which we get into contact with Him. It may be said that it is God's direct influence on us. The purely inner, spiritual nature and significance of Christianity finds expression through it. God may be known to us indirectly from revelations, but we get into direct contact with him by the communication of the holy spirit. That is why we may assert that the holy spirit is nothing else but the living, active agency of God.

The holy spirit is not a person, entity or force that is separate from God, but that agency of God through which He establishes a personal and direct relationship with man. According to this interpretation Pentecost will not only mean the celebration of the institution of the Christian church, but also of the gift of the holy spirit, that is, the celebration of the relation subsisting between God and us.

The agency of God acting by means of the holy spirit means exactly the same kind of activity has been and is performed by Him in creation and providence. For these two acts we call Him the God of Creation and Providence. We do not use the expression: God of the holy spirit, since this could lead to a misunderstanding because in dogmatic Christianity the third person of the Trinity is holds this name. We, Unitarians, use the expression God the sanctifier instead.

The results of the work of the holy spirit are perceivable in two spheres: in the individual's life as well as in the life of the congregation. Its force of holding a community together manifests itself in this latter sphere.

Examining the everyday agency of the holy spirit in man's spiritual life we may come to the conclusion that it bears influence on the intellect, on emotions and on the will at the same time, that is to say, on all the functions of human consciousness. One becomes aware of one's own thoughts and of universal truths due to one's own spirit, own intellect. However, the intellect can produce clear thoughts and show truths only under the inspiration of the divine spirit.

Through the agency of the holy spirit the individual is reborn and becomes a new man. Rebirth is a development process that is an essential condition of inner, spiritual Christianity. John's gospel phrases this thought as this: "In truth, in very truth I tell you, unless a man has been born over again he cannot see the kingdom of God"(John 3,8). This regeneration happens by the agency of the spirit. We cast off the old man, and take on the new man.

The agency of the holy spirit, however, does not only make itself felt in the individual's life, but it has the power to hold together and shape a community. According to Schleiermacher the holy spirit is the conjuncture of the divine with the human, and as this, it is the embodiment of the public spirit. The holy spirit that pervades and raises the soul of the individual stimulates him to understand and approach his fellow-men with love, and by this it sanctifies the community as a whole. Sanctification by the holy spirit is the condition of spiritual elevation and of rebirth in the evangelical sense in the life of the community. The individual's soul grows in and owing to the community. The community, on the other hand, grows, develops and becomes stronger due to the greatness of the individual's soul. The love emanating from man, from individual souls embraces the members of the community; the community in turn raises the distressed, weak, fallible individual soul.

Being sanctified and enriched by the holy spirit has human conditions depending on the individual, too. Sanctification is performed in fact by us ourselves by opening our hearts and tuning our minds, our will to God's will so as His will could work in us without hindrance. This tuning of ourselves to God's will has its special occasions: spiritual meditation, praying, the not occasional practicing of the good, self-examination etc.

As a conclusion, we may say that the holy spirit, God's power working in us exists for us, not because it needs man for exercising its activity, neither because it wishes to serve us, but because its existence, its reason consists in its "being-for-us". The holy spirit is God's presence in us, that is how we all become God's-church.

Unitarianism wishes to proclaim and propagate uncompromising spiritual Christianity. It has endeavoured to shape the human soul in accordance with divine purposes, and guide it. Unitarianism gives support and reinforcement to its followers, so as everyone could work out his salvation. In this endeavour it has fought and fights exclusively with spiritual weapons for the cause of truth, setting an example of how the liberty of conscience and religion as well as tolerance should be experienced. Unitarianism will serve the accomplishment of the kingdom of God giving evidence of historical consciousness in the future, too.

JESUS CHRIST IN REMONSTRANT THEOLOGY, PAST AND PRESENT

By: Prof. Dr. Marius van Leeuwen

In matters of Christology there is not one, unambiguous Remonstrant view. You will find many approaches (see the book *Christus in vrijheid – remonstranten over Jezus*, 'Christ in freedom – Remonstrants on Jesus', 1992). But perhaps all remonstrant theologians who write or preach on Jesus have this in common: they seek a middle course between what may be called 'a Christology from above' (Christ as 'the offspring of God himself', John 1) and one 'from below' (starting with the humanity of Jesus). It is needless to say that the great ecumenical confessions advocated a Christology from above ('the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, Light from Light, true God from true God' etc.). So does orthodox faith: it stresses the uniqueness of Christ by claiming that in him divine and human nature were combined. The Remonstrants tended and tend to a more unorthodox position. In fact, they always seem to have followed in these matters a strategy of 'giving and taking', on the edge of what orthodox Christians considered as heresy.

1. A short history

It all started in the 17th century, with the conflict between the Remonstrants and the more orthodox Calvinists. The Remonstrants presented Jesus Christ as the mediator of divine Grace to all men (an approach 'from above'). But in this matter they were inclined to think 'from below' as well: Jesus as an example of true humanity. Their emphasis was on the 'praxis pietatis', with little interest in speculation. In the Remonstrant Confession or Declaration of 1621 Simon Episcopius wrote: we fully accept the truth of the Holy Trinity, but without any curiosity on how this mystery is possible.

Again and again the opponents of the Remonstrants stressed the Socinian tendency in this theology (and it seems: with some right!). But the Remonstrants, with some right as well, emphasized their orthodoxy: 'we do not deny the divinity of Christ, we never did so!'

Almost from the beginning the Remonstrants championed the scientific study of the Bible. They followed the line of Erasmus, also in this respect. Grotius, Clericus, Wettstein: these leading Remonstrants were trendsetters in what was to be a new, critical approach to the Bible, especially the New Testament. In the 18th century the Enlightenment influenced the Brotherhood as well. Under the influence of this movement in the 19th century theological modernism ('liberal theology') came into being. It was to be the main trend in our church. Among other things this modern theology was characterised by its criticism on all kinds of traditional concepts: the Virgin birth, the two natures of Christ, etc. Could they stand the test of rational reasoning?

At the end of the 19th century the Remonstrant Brotherhood was a completely modern or liberal ('vrijzinnige') church. Many of these liberals thought there was no place for a 'Christology' any more. At the most one spoke of 'Jesology': Jesus as a teacher, an example to be imitated. But, others asked, was this not a moralistic narrowing of Christian faith? What about the 'substance' of that faith, what about such notions as: sin and grace, reconciliation, the gift of new life, resurrection? Karel H. Roessingh (1886- 1925), probably the most influential Remonstrant theologian in the last century, stressed: we need a Christology, in which we dare to speak of these great, indispensable Christian ideas.

2. The 1940 Confession

So again the Remonstrants were in search of a middle course, between a 'lower' and a 'higher' way of speaking. An impressive reflection of this can be found in the Remonstrant Confession of Faith of 1940. Since 1621 there had been no new, official confession. But in a situation of war and oppression, the Remonstrants felt the need of confessing with some authority what their faith was about. The section on Jesus Christ in this confession says (the translation is mine):

'We believe in Jesus Christ,
 Image of Gods holy Being
 and Revelation of His Mercy.
 He came for all men and died for them.
 He brings near Gods eternal love,
 that forgives and reconciles.
 He calls us to labour and struggle
 under the conquering sign of the Cross,
 and is for man and community
 the Way, the Truth and Life'.

There are a few remarkable points here. (1) Jesus Christ is not called God or Son of God, but 'image of Gods holy Being'. I like this way of speaking very much. Jesus is the image of God: through him we get a glance of God. But an image is not what it represents: Jesus is not God himself. There is a wonderful ambiguity in this word 'image'. One can take it as a form of 'speaking from below': *man* was created 'in the image of God' (Genesis 1). But one can see it as 'from above' as well. For Paul, in 2 Corinthians 4:4, speaks of 'the *glory* of Christ, who is the very *image of God*' (is not in the bible 'glory', *doxè*, a quality of God himself, sometimes even a name of God?). And Hebrews 1:3 calls Christ 'the Son who is the effulgence of God's splendour and the stamp (or image) of God's very being...' Here the two ways of speaking seem to be interwoven.

(2) A second point: the 1940 Confession speaks of reconciliation, but in a special way. It is not presented as the work of Jesus Christ, brought about on the Cross, but as the work of God who, in his eternal love, forgives and reconciles. Jesus is the one who 'brings near' this divine love. So again: Jesus refers to God. Moreover, he is seen as a source of inspiration for our 'labour and struggle'. Again we see the attempt to compromise between 'low' and 'high' ways of speaking.

3. Attempts to speak in a new way on Trinity

In Remonstrant theology of the last century, we find several strategies for leaving the matter of the nature of Christ or the nature of Trinity, unresolved.

First of all, I like to quote the warning by Eginhard P. Meijering (born 1940; he is a well-known remonstrant scholar in the field of the history of the dogma): Holy Trinity is not a matter of *faith* (as if all Christians should believe in the Trinity), but a matter of *theology*. This concept is a theme for theologians or sort of a study aid!

How did Remonstrants speak on this theme? Next to Roessingh's influence came that of G.J. Heering (1879- 1956, professor of the Remonstrant Seminary, a systematic theologian). He liked to distinguish between a 'Trinity of Being' and one of 'Revelation'. The first one was dismissed by Heering, the last one preferred. It is, he said, useless to speculate on the way in which the *Being* of God is organized, to question the 'ontology' of Trinity. Who can ever know anything about that? But God revealed himself in an exceptional way in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Ghost. To know this is enough for us: Jesus is an image, a 'revelation' of God. So (without curiosity about the nature of Trinity) we can speak of a 'Trinity of Revelation'. In this line Heering could plead in 1948 for joining the World Council of Churches, notwithstanding its definite Trinitarian preamble: we, Remonstrants, are Trinitarians too, in our own way!

I myself like a more *hermeneutical approach*. By this I mean two things. (1) It is clear that the great dogmas about Jesus Christ belong to the later tradition of Christianity, not to its eldest, most original kernel. But the meaning of any phenomenon is, according to modern hermeneutics (Gadamer, Ricoeur), not only in the origin, but in the later tradition as well. Part of the meaning is what Hans-Georg Gadamer used to call: the 'effective-history', 'die Wirkungsgeschichte' of a phenomenon, a text, a great event, an idea. So these dogmas too, though they stem from later times and evidently were never in the mind of Jesus himself, can be important, indispensable, inspiring. (2) A hermeneutical, interpretive theology tries to reconstruct how these (later) ideas or dogmas evolved. What questions or experiences inspired believers to use them? A reconstruction of this may enable us to join the movement of thought in these concepts. An example: what did the followers of Jesus experience, so that

they spoke about him as a Revelation of God or (almost from the beginning!) as the Son of God? Do we experience, through the narratives about him, in this man a holiness that enables us to repeat these sublime terms, knowing that by them we possibly elevate this exceptional man to a more than human level? In the same way the idea of Trinity can be a sublime 'invitation to thought': what movement of faith is contained in it?

In this way I like to 'play' with these concepts, these old and rich words (some philosophers and theologians speak of 'thick' words: heavily charged by a long tradition). Sometimes their 'load of meaning' seems to be an unbearable burden, sometimes it appears to be a rich source of wisdom.

4. The draft for a new Confession

Finally, what about the draft for a new Confession, that, as you know, is discussed in the Remonstrant church at the moment? It has two remarkable characteristics. (1) It begins with an anthropological introduction, in which is established that all confessions start from human questioning, desiring. (2) Thereupon the text does not continue with God, but with 'God's Holy Ghost', that works along many ways. This Spirit is not related exclusively to Jesus Christ. It 'surpasses all that divides people', so it surpasses the boundaries of religions and confessions. Then follows the part on Jesus Christ:

'We believe in Jesus Christ, the true man,
who came and passed by and loved men,
the face of God which looks at us and disturbs us.
He walked with God and was crucified
but lives, beyond his own death and ours.
He is our holy example of wisdom and courage
and brings near God's eternal love,
that forgives and reconciles'.

It is clear: in this new text the starting point in speaking on Jesus is 'below': he is 'the true man', 'example of wisdom and courage'. More explicit than in the earlier confessions the Remonstrants acknowledge their tendency to an Arian position. But this true man is 'the face of God', he 'walked with God', he lives 'beyond his own and our death'. The starting-point is 'below', but one recognizes the old endeavour to link this kind of speaking with that other (Other?) one – a Christology from above.

WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?

By: Rev. Pap Mária

This is the question Jesus addressed his followers and this is the question Christians have been addressing themselves ever since. The answer to this is the most powerful dividing line between the Christian communities. In searching for answers it does not help that the major testimonies come from the gospels, written with a purpose and considered biased. We have very little documentary evidence from non-Christian sources. We have references about him in the Annals of Tacitus, who tells us that the leader of Christians "was condemned to death in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate". Pliny the Younger informs emperor Trajan that Christians "sing a hymn to Christ as to a god." We have several references in Josephus Flavius and in one of the passages, he talks about Jesus as "a wise man...a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure...and the race of Christians, so named after him, are not extinct even now." The authenticity of this passage is much debated but according to Geza Vermes this brief reference might be an authentic near-contemporary record of what the Jews of Jesus's time actually thought of him: not a God, nor a heretic, but a wise man and a doer of wonderful deeds.

Beyond this early Roman and Jewish sources there remains the four gospels, which although obscure the figure of Jesus himself behind the figure of Christ, cannot efface the human person of Jesus. The gospels do not provide the course of Jesus's life, with its different stages and this implies that it is impossible to write a biography. Jesus himself did not leave a single written word and did nothing to secure the faithful reproduction of his words. Yet there are some facts, which can be discerned about him. Geza Vermes establishes the following profile, according to Mark:

Name: Jesus

Father's name: Joseph

Mother's name: Maria

Place of birth: not mentioned

Date of birth: not mentioned

Hometown: Nazareth, Galilee

Marital status: not mentioned

Occupation: carpenter, miracle worker, vagrant preacher

We have more data about his death

Place of death: Jerusalem

Time of death: under procurator Pontius Pilate, between 26-36 A.D. probably around year 30

Manner of death: crucifixion

Place of burial: Jerusalem

I wish to add one more feature, which Christians tend to overlook:

Nationality: Jewish

These are the bare bones of a life, which was clothed, embellished, transformed by the passion, imagination, circumstances and necessities of his followers. And what was the result: the Christian Church, where the teachings and message of Jesus was obscured by the teachings and message about Christ. Peter Handke in his short "Biography" gives a powerful critique of this Christianity.

Motto: "For what will it profit a man if he gains his own soul and loses the whole world?"
God was born on the night of December 25th. God's mother tucked God in diapers. After a short while he had to flee to Egypt on a donkey. When his deeds became obsolete, God came back to his homeland, because he thought it to be the perfect place to grow up. He grew up in stillness and grew in years and pleasantness.

He longed for the world. He became the joy of his parents, who did everything to make him a respectable man. After a few classes, he learned the carpentry. Then, when the time came, he gave up his trade, to the severe disappointment of his father. He stepped out from obscurity. He wouldn't stay in Nazareth, but he set forth and started talking about the imminence of the Kingdom of God. He performed miracles. At weddings he amused the guests. He chatted out

devils. In this way, he deprived a pig-breeder of his property. One day in Jerusalem, he hindered at the temple the regular business. He didn't take into consideration the prohibition of public meetings and spoke when and wherever he wanted. Because people were bored, he aroused their interest. Meanwhile he preached for deaf ears. As later was made clear in his charge, he tried to instigate the people against authority, having the appearance of being the long expected Messiah. On the other hand, it needs to be stated that God was not inhuman. He wouldn't hurt a fly. He wasn't a misanthrope. If we overlook his slight tendency of showing off, basically he was harmless. Some considered that this God is better than not having any. But most people paid no attention to him. As a result his case became a minor one. He did not say much for his justification and every time he did, he wandered from the subject. Otherwise he kept his statement: that he is, who he is. But most of the time, he was silent. On the Good Friday of the year 30 or 33 of the new era, after a slightly unorthodox process, he was crucified. He spoke seven words. On a warm, sunny afternoon at 3 o'clock, he breathed his last. At the same time in Jerusalem there was registered an average force earthquake. We have got an account about minor material damages.

I know, it does sound blasphemous, but it shows the great distance between Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ of the Churches. Where do we, Unitarian stand? If the two presentations could be considered both ends of the scale, we are somewhere in the middle.

Francis David, the founder of our Unitarian Church, as all reformers, insisted on a return to Scripture and Jesus's teachings. From the belief in the unity of God it followed naturally the belief in the humanity of Jesus. It was a powerful and dangerous step in the XVIth century to turn from a christocentric belief to a theocentric one. It was a brave thing to proclaim Jesus, the mere man, instead of Christ, the second person of the Godhead.

Francis David believed that reformation meant a return to the true source of Christianity, which can be found in the teachings of Jesus. He was and continues to be so overwhelming for us by his humanity. As a child of God, he shows to us, not just the love and mercy of our Father but the way and the possibility to live according to God's wish. David's conception about Jesus was followed up centuries later by the quest of the liberal Christianity for the historical Jesus. Although the end of this quest had a different outcome than expected, it helped immensely in the clarification and limitations of the different accounts about him.

The theological work started by Francis David, was followed up by other Unitarian theologians, who helped in developing our position about Jesus as part of our liberal heritage. But...

Our Unitarian heritage, with all its liberalism never draw the final conclusion on the question of Jesus. This inconsistency is mainly due to the historical and social background of our Church. The continuous struggle to uphold our Christianity in front of the orthodox Christians, who deny us this right, partly because of our belief about Jesus, has put us in the position, when instead of daring to come up with our own, we tried to fit in the definition provided by others. This stopped us halfway along the road.

Who do we say Jesus is?

1. Child of God, as we all, who becomes a model for us through his humanity.
2. We do not adore him, but try to follow his teachings and his example. This implies a turning toward God and our fellow beings, through a life of service.
3. He is not our Savior, but he shows us the way to personal salvation.

These are very clear and reasonable statements but their implications are problematic even for us. What are the basic problems with our understanding of Jesus?

1. Although the emphasis is on his teachings we still give a great importance to his life and deeds. This is understandable in the light of our understanding of him not just as a Teacher, but a model to follow. What causes the problem are the sources on which our understanding rests and our dealing with them. We accept part of the New Testament accounts and reject others in the light of reason, yet this does not prove the authenticity or inauthenticity of accounts, just the fact that we apply another tool. We want to be sure that there is a consistency between his teachings and his life and we do

not wish to draw a dividing line between the person and his teachings. We tend to overlook or theorize those times in his life, when according to the accounts, he did not measure up to his message or contradicted himself.(or our image of him)

2. His life-events still play a major part in the liturgical life of our Church, so the shadow of the traditional Christianity still lurks in the background. I do consider that this is the umbilical cord to the mainstream, which we are not willing to give up, even if our interpretations of these events are different or even if these events in themselves do not add anything to his teachings.
3. The half-way course is even more detectable in our understanding of Jesus` s humanity. According to our Confession of Faith: "we believe in Jesus, God`s best (perfect) son, our true teacher"; according to our Catechism: "Jesus was God`s greatest prophet".

There is here an almost imperceptible ontological degree, which conflicts with the avowed theology. We do state that Jesus is Son of God as we all are children of God, so we start on equal footing. However at the same time we apply to him certain qualifications like "perfect", "greatest" that remove him from us. We are careful to distinguish in our use of these words, in stating that we use them not on ontological but ethical grounds, yet the uneasiness remains. Between the image of Jesus, the Jew and Christ, the Savior, our answer lays on the middle ground between much more or not enough.

It is a pity that Jesus himself never answered clearly the question in the title and the self-revelation accounts are so unreliable. But does it matter? Would it change our perception of him, if we had an everyday account of his life? Would he count for more or less in our lives if we knew for sure what did he consider himself to be: prophet, teacher, Son of God?

We consider ourselves a Christian Church, a right, which has been denied and continues to be denied to us on theological grounds. Our answer to the question in the title was and still is considered not satisfactory. I am not concerned by what others consider our answer must be but I am concerned by the necessity of reformulating it for us. I think the question will not be settled until we will take the trouble and pain to follow our path to the end.

" Who do you say that I am?" –The answer to this question is important just as far as we know what to do with it. But that is another story.

THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

By: Rev. Czire Szabólc

For us, Transylvanian Unitarians, the *teaching* of Jesus is more important than the *person* of Jesus. This harmonizes well with the conclusions of the scholarly research in the last two centuries: Jesus' message was not about himself, but (the Kingdom of) God. The relatively few sayings in the canonical gospels where Jesus seems to speak about himself and his messianic role (Son of God, Son of David, Son of Man - in the sense of the Dan 1,13 /he used most often as a self-reference the Aramic *bar ʕnasa*: son of man = "man", "a man"/) reflect the tendencies of the early Church after Easter. This importance and indirectness explains why Unitarians were always more interested in a "Jesus theology" rather than in a "Biblical theology". We consider Jesus' teaching as intended to be easily understandable, simple, but very difficult to follow.

Jesus' *ethics* are an integral part of the symbolic moral system of his society, and must be interpreted within it. But its intentional metaphorical design makes easy to translate it to our own culture.

In the gospels *teacher* (*didaskalos, rabbi*) is the most common title used for Jesus, both as an address by others and a self reference. He provoked surprise and questioning at the *authority* with which he taught. Several characteristics could be related to this: Jesus lacked formal training, his teaching did not appeal to past tradition or earlier authorities, his use of two formulas - "Amen" and "I say to you", both particular to his teaching style, both expressing personal authority.

The *centrality* of the Kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching has at least two important features worth clarifying:

1. The concept of Kingdom of God (Greek *basileia*, early Hebrew *mamlaka*, postexilic Hebrew and Aramaic *malkut*) cannot be reduced to a particular meaning or definition, it stands for the many faces of the activity and presence of God, and the human experience, and right behaviour towards this dynamic presence. Thus if symbol, a *tensive symbol* with many levels, which resist being translated into non-symbolic language (Ricoeur-Perrin) ; or better *metaphor*, not readily translatable into something else, saying that cannot be said another way (Ricoeur-Funk); or *theologoumenon*, a way of talking about God, similarly to the paradoxical God-language of the Judaism, not reducible to a single temporal moment (Chilton). Thus we can summarize, the Kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching is about God, the world of the everyday, and the way of transformation for both individual and social existence.
2. Centrality means that everything else points to it, makes sense in its light. Thus Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God, radiating from his religious experience, can be perceived only in the wholeness of the many aspects of his activity: ethical and wisdom teaching, expressed mainly in aphorisms and (subversive) parables; his several symbolic actions, including his table-fellowship with "unclean" people; and his exorcisms/healings.

In spite of the consensus concerning the centrality of the Kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching, there is a great controversy how to *interpret* it. The main controversy addresses the following question: Is the kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching *present or future* reality?

The modern discussion, unfortunately, was deeply influenced by the contribution of Schweitzer, who after having effectively dismissed all previous attempts to reconstruct the life and teaching of Jesus, produced an even more implausible "reconstruction". He declared, that Jesus expected the coming of a "Son of man", other than himself, during his own ministry, by the time the twelve return from their mission, and when that hope failed to take place, he changed course and brought about his own death in order to force God's hand. The scholars working under the control of the mainstream Christian churches, tend to present Jesus' teaching as apocalyptic eschatology, pointing to the near end of the space-time world.

The *logic* is as follows: we are quite sure about the preaching of John the Baptist and Paul. Since for both of them the immanent eschatology was central (John: imminent judgment by God; Paul: imminent return of Christ.), and since Jesus is the "middle term", the "link" between these two, his teaching must also be eschatological.

But there are several points worth considering here:

- Jesus' message was radically different from John's (God's judgement - God's love).
- Paul and the early church expected the return of Jesus, but most scholars (even those who interpret Jesus as an eschatological prophet) do not think Jesus expected this himself.
- The gospels were written after Paul, and reflect the theological ideas of the early church mixed with the Jesus tradition ("historicized christology" as Crossan puts it). All four Gospels reflect the "already and not yet" pattern, so they all know that the kingdom for Jesus was already substantially present.
- More importantly the form of Jesus' teaching. Studies of Q have shown that the earliest stratum of the Synoptic tradition is predominantly sapiential: is dominated by wisdom forms of speech - wisdom sayings, aphorisms, maxims (so well exemplified in the Sermon on the Mount) and parables. The same could be said about the Gospel of Thomas.
- The 1st century Judaism was much more diverse than one would expect. Both apocalyptic and wisdom traditions shaped it, and there are several literary examples where the idea of God's kingdom is a present reality, or better said, a timeless reality (Ps 145,1. 11. 13; Wis 6,4; 10,10; Ps 17,1-3; 46).
- More importantly, there is the *intentionally neglected element of Jesus' teaching: the centrality of creation*. The later Christianity anticipated that Jesus talked about the restoration of Israel that later easily could be transformed into the salvation history of Christianity as the "real Israel".

But Jesus *did not formulate an outline of Israel's salvation history*: he does not refer to God as the God of the Fathers, the language of election or covenant is not dominant (only Lk 4,25; Mk 14,22 liturgical text), the themes like promise of land, exile, special role for Jerusalem and the temple, patriarchs (only Mt 8,11) or other individual figures (only Noah and Lot) from Israel's history are also negligible infrequent. None of the authentic parables of Jesus addresses the issue of salvation history (the Good Samaritan and the Pharisee and the tax collector comes closest, but both have a negative light on the "official" representatives of Israel's salvation history) Comparing the Lord's Prayer with the prayers of Judaism from Tom 13 to the Eighteen Benediction, reveals by contrast just how free the formal is of all salvation history motifs. *In our understanding the Kingdom of God is to be interpreted in terms of creation (wisdom tradition)*. It is the world of everyday creatureliness that serves as a context in which the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus has drawn near and is to be experienced. The same is to be said of the other two areas in which Jesus makes it possible for people to experience the nearness of the Kingdom of God - the table fellowship and healing the sick. Sickness and hunger represent basic needs common to all creatures (Mt 6,25/34 - do not be anxious about your life, what you eat). The Kingdom of God is concerned with the whole person, in their full creatureliness: with health, with the fundamental needs of life, with interpersonal relationships, with a heart that is undivided before God. The final realization of the KG also does not look toward a new reality beyond the present created order. It intends, rather, a transformation of the existing reality and the conditions of life that are associated with it. If Jesus anticipated a near end, he was wrong, as Schweitzer keenly uttered. We think he was not. But either way, the main question remains: *was Jesus wrong about God, about humans, and their relations?*

Now we shall turn toward these elements of Jesus' teaching that resonate deeply in our Unitarian tradition.

Jesus presented *God* not as remote, but directly involved in the lives of ordinary people, a part of everyday reality. God is present in human condition ("is within you") - this basic idea, refracted christologically, became the doctrine of incarnation in the confessions of the early church.

In his teaching God has two names and a main quality. The first name is implicit: God as king, follow from the frequent use of the Kingdom of God: creator, main protector, "first among the firsts". The other is explicit, almost exclusive in Jesus' use: God as Father. And the main quality inclusively follows from it: God as love.

Taking together the first commandment (love God with all your being) and the first petition of the Lord's prayer (God's name may be sanctified), it became clear that God ('s Kingdom) has the absolute priority. But there is the second commandment, "love your *neighbour* as yourself". The two go together, as if the second was possible in long-term reality only as the

corollary of the first. Luke illustrates it with the parable of the Good Samaritan, which makes it clear, that the commandment does not call for the disciple to love everyone, as though that might be possible (sentimental illusion). Only the "neighbours" - whoever God gives as neighbour on the road of everyday life. And this realistically calls "only" for a care which one naturally bestows on oneself.

He invited his disciples into a new *relation*, new in quality or degree, to convert and become as children before God as Father. (Mt 18,3). The call can be understood as a call to realize afresh the relationship God intended for his people (rather like the righteous individuals in the Wisdom literature). To become a disciple, is to be like a child, that is, to revert to a position of dependence.

An aspect of the childlike trust is the prayer. The Father-children relationship enables the disciples to take their concerns and needs to God in full confidence. Jesus assure their disciples that God hears and answers prayers (Q 11,9-13), but this assurance is not that God will give whatever is asked for but that whatever the Father gives will be good (Mk 5,27-28; 10,47-48; Mt 8,8-9; 15,22-27).

The discipleship has several characteristics, like readiness to forgive, hungering what is right (Mt 5,6), sharing in Jesus' mission (!!has been misunderstood by Unitarians?; Mk 3,14; 6,6kv; Q 10,1kv.) readiness to accept the difficulties of the discipleship (Mk 8,27kv; Mt 10,24-25) or disinterest goodness (5,8). Another deeply rooted element in the Jesus tradition is the service, often connected with the motif of greatest/least (Mk 10,41-45parLk; Lk 22,14kv.), or children (the greek *pais* which may mean either "child" or servant"). The reward of the discipleship is the joy in God's presence, and the possibility of plus assignment.

When we look for an "*ethical system*", we should note that Jesus confronted his hearers not with a pragmatic description of what was possible, but with the absolute will of God, who demands everything and who will be satisfied with nothing less. Instead of offering a list of possible situations, he paradigmatically offers examples of the all-encompassing reality that underlines individual cases. His words would be misunderstood if they were used directly, either then and now, to describe his requirements for every possible area of activity. With such statements he is not defining in detail his followers' political, national, social, or economic obligations. Indeed, his statements are intentionally designed to keep people from using them that way by forcing the hearers to move beyond the question, "What shall I do?" to the question "Who am I in the impending Kingdom of God and my neighbour?" (Becker) Individuals are challenged to give an unconditional yes to discipleship, to enter the new community, the family of God.

The acts are the fruits of *character*, just as the good fruits of the tree. Those who have a legal religion are told what to do. It seems that Jesus did not accept the idea that one can do good things unless one "make the tree good"(Mt 7,16-20). This is a radically new understanding of what the Pharisees were standing for.

Jesus tried to *translate the experience of God (as love)* he had into human relationships and forms of community. This is why he began to speak about the new Kingdom of God, which is to speak about life in its corporate aspect, life together. In speaking of KG where human values are reversed, where expandable, sinners, those in shame, beggars, unclean become the center of attention, Jesus gave expression to the idea that God is no respecter of human values and judgements about the relative worth of people. A human being has only one value to God, an ultimate value. No one is unclean or expendable to God, who's love embraces the whole created world. And thus God became the example before disciples, the pulling force toward grows (Mt 5,48) and the ultimate reward (Mt 5,8; Lk 10).

If I would be asked to summarize Jesus' message in one sentence, I would say: What life might be like if it were lived in response to a God whose nature is love. Is this message *relevant* for today? Maybe. Jesus' parables and deeds offered glimpses to this question, of what authentic human community might be. They invite us further imaginative work: how might we imagine life together in such a way that the poor are blessed, the hungry fed, the depressed filled with laughter, and the abused made safe? Does this seem too hopelessly naïve? Perhaps it is. But anyone who risks the claim that in Jesus we have come to know who God is ought at least to remember that Jesus did dream such utopian dreams (Patterson), called Kingdom of God. And aren't we still standing for this?

RESURRECTION OR ETERNAL LIFE? SALVATION OF HUMANS

By Rev. Máthé Sándor

Közel harminc évre terjedő lelkészi szolgálatom alatt, a prédikálás szempontjából, a húsvéti ünnepkör jelentette és jelenti a legnagyobb nehézséget. A többi ünneppel még valahogy elboldogulok, mindig megtalálom a megfelelő témát, s arról úgy tudok beszélni, hogy utána ne legyen bennem az a belső hiányérzet, ami egy sikertelen, semmitmondó beszéd után nyomasztja a felelősen szolgáló lelkészt. Húsvét mindig „kemény dió” volt és maradt. Egyszerűen azért, mert ha saját egyéni felfogásomat viszem a szószékre, akkor bizonyára megbotránkoztatom a hívő embert. Ha meg az úgynevezett „hivatalos felfogás” szellemében prédikálok, akkor meg azt érzem, hogy az nem sokat mond egyszerű híveinknek. Ennek a húsvétról való prédikálásnak az a baja, hogy nem merjük nevükön nevezni a dolgokat s kimondani azt, amit valójában unitárius keresztényekként el kellene mondanunk. Én mindig érzek egy bizonyos fajta kettősséget, ami nemcsak minket, unitáriusokat, de más keresztény felekezetek prédikáló lelkészeit és hívő seregeit is jellemzi: egyéni hitfelfogásunk a legtöbbször eltér attól, amit a keresztény egyház és saját egyházunk hagyománya alapján „vallanunk kellene”.

The dating

Although essentially all Christian faith groups believe that Jesus was resurrected on Sunday morning, the Gospels are somewhat vague when identifying the day of the week and the time of the resurrection. Jesus' resurrection occurred sometime *before* the women visited the tomb on Sunday morning. The writer of the Gospel of John says that Mary Magdalene visited the tomb before sunrise on Sunday; Mark and Matthew say of the visit at about dawn; Luke is not clear. So the resurrection could have happened on Sunday morning, in the daytime just after sunrise. The interval between death and resurrection is given as three days in many places in the Gospels:

Matthew 16:21, 17:23, 20:19; Luke 9:22, 13:32, 24:46: *"on the third day"*

John 2:19 *"in three days"* These passages would be consistent with a Friday afternoon death and Sunday morning resurrection, because of the Jewish "inclusive" reckoning of time. But the Gospel passages cited above are in conflict with:

Matthew 12:40 in which Jesus said that he would be *"three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"*. (KJV).

A final gospel verse which might shed light on the days of the week when Jesus died and was resurrected is: Mark 8:31: *"...and after three days rise again."* Depending on which passage that one accepts as authoritative, a variety of possible days of the week can be selected for Jesus' death and resurrection. If one ignores Mark 8:31 and Matthew 12:40, then the remaining verses are consistent with a Friday afternoon crucifixion and a Sunday morning resurrection. And this alternative is what most Christian faith groups take.

Background

The New Testament witnesses were fully aware of the background against which the resurrection took place. The body of Jesus, in accordance with Jewish burial custom, was wrapped in a linen cloth. After the body was placed in a solid rock tomb, an extremely large stone was rolled against the entrance of the tomb. A Roman guard of strictly disciplined fighting men was stationed to guard the tomb. The guard affixed on the tomb the Roman seal. But three days later the tomb was empty. The followers of Jesus said He had risen from the dead. They reported that He appeared to them during a period of 40 days, showing Himself to them by many undeniable proofs.

Jesus' appearances confirmed

Jesus appeared "alive" on several occasions after the events of that first Easter morning. One of the earliest records of Christ's appearing after the resurrection is by Paul. The apostle appealed to his audience's knowledge of the fact that Christ had been seen by more than 500 people at one time. Paul reminded them that the majority of those people were still alive and could be questioned. Another factor crucial to interpreting Christ's appearances is that He also appeared to those who were hostile or unconvinced. No one would regard Saul of Tarsus as being a follower of Jesus.

Final conclusion: Early Christians believed that Jesus was bodily resurrected in time and space by the supernatural power of God.

The origin of the christian faith

Most of the NT scholars admit that the earliest disciples of Jesus at least believed that He had been raised from the dead. However, if one denies the resurrection, then one must choose from two possibilities: that the disciples came to believe in Jesus' resurrection because of the influence of pagan religions, or Jewish beliefs. But, it cannot be explained as the result of pagan influences on the disciples. First, the parallels between dying and rising savior gods in pagan religions are seasonal symbols. And second, there is little historical evidence of such cults in first-century Palestine.

This leaves Jewish influences. Although the Jews did believe in resurrection, there are at least two differences between the Christian understanding of the resurrection, and the Jewish understanding of the resurrection. First, in Jewish thought the resurrection always occurred after the end of the world. Second, the Jews always thought of resurrection as an event that happened to all of the righteous, not just an isolated individual. Therefore, since the origin of the disciples' belief cannot be explained in terms of pagan, or Jewish influences, it must have been caused by the resurrection itself, we may conclude.

The purposes of the gospel writers

Many biblical scholars have argued that the Resurrection story was shaped by the theological aims of the evangelists. This somehow makes the New Testament writers unreliable. It is difficult to determine the reliability of documents that are intended to be accurate. The suggestion seems to be that it is even more difficult to determine the reliability of documents with known biases. Therefore, in order to overcome our initial suspicion they must meet strict historical standards.

Most critics focus on the inconsistency of the resurrection story. There are differences in the New Testament accounts of the resurrection. We can divide the resurrection accounts into two parts: what happened at the tomb after Jesus' death, and what happened after the discovery of the empty tomb. With respect to the former, the accounts are either inconsistent or can only be made consistent with the aid of implausible interpretations. Concerning the latter, while admitting the accounts may not be contradictory, still very different and hard to reconcile.

Real proof of the resurrection is the disciples' lives

The most telling testimony of all must be the lives of those early Christians. We must ask ourselves: What caused them to go everywhere telling the message of the risen Christ? Had there been any visible benefits accrued to them from their efforts - prestige, wealth, increased social status or material benefits, we might logically attempt to account for their actions, for their whole-hearted and total allegiance to this "risen Christ". As a reward for their efforts, however, those early Christians were beaten, stoned to death, thrown to the lions, tortured and crucified. Every conceivable method was used to stop them from talking. Yet, they laid down their lives as the ultimate proof of their complete confidence in the truth of their message.

Conclusions

Both sides in the contemporary debate over the resurrection assume that the material interpretation of the resurrection is the only possible interpretation of the resurrection. Moreover, most participants in this debate avoid the issue of background probability, and make arguments about miracles that presuppose their world view. Finally, there are serious flaws in the arguments advanced by both sides. And even if those flaws were corrected, the arguments would still not constitute a strong apologetic for the resurrection. On the basis of the available evidences I would conclude that: *a rational person may accept or reject the resurrection.*

Where do I stand?

What I think of Jesus and his resurrection? Do I believe in any kind of resurrection? When I am confronted with these questions, I have to ask another logical question: What difference does all this make to me? Or: What the resurrection of Jesus does mean to me? Believing in the eternal life is the radicalization of our faith in God. Believing in the eternal life is not something we have to add to our faith in God, it is not to believe in something strange. Why?

Salvation

Do we deserve to be saved? Who is our savior? Do we need a "Savior"?

Traditional approach: The authors of the Christian Scriptures taught many beliefs which were adopted into historical Christianity. One is that that people are, by nature, intrinsically evil and sinners. Another is that most people's destination after death is hell where they will be tortured for all eternity. Through personal salvation, a person can avoid Hell and attain heaven after death. Passages which describe salvation are ambiguous:

Paul generally wrote that people are saved as a result of believing in the resurrection of Jesus. The author of the Gospel of John said that one must believe in Jesus as the Son of God in order to be saved. Jesus, as written in the synoptic Gospels, appears to have given two paths to salvation: You can be saved by committing good works and: you can be saved by adopting a simple life and following Jesus' example.

Other passages say that a person is saved, and her/his sins forgiven, through baptism. And so, we have a chaotic situation today where some denominations say that salvation is attained by:

Church rituals; Good works; Belief in: Jesus' resurrection, Jesus' status as the only begotten Son of God, Jesus as Lord and Savior. Or by some combination of these.

One can argue that different faith groups are all equally right. What they have done is to concentrate on some salvation passages in the Bible, interpreting them as true. Then they ignore other passages, interpret them symbolically and twist their meaning. This way, diverse faith groups end up with entirely different criteria for salvation.

"Repent and trust Jesus" belief:

Salvation by repenting of sins and trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior is central to conservative Christianity. They do not believe that people are saved by performing good deeds. The theory seems fundamentally unjust. A significant percentage of the human race has never heard the gospel. According to traditional conservative Christian belief, since they had not trusted in Jesus, they would be destined for Hell. Under this belief system, the vast majority of the population of India would be Hell-bound; only in Christian countries would a significant percentage of people attain Heaven. It seems fundamentally unfair that one's destination after death is largely determined by one's place of birth.

"Confession" belief:

The Catholic church teaches that certain serious sins, if they are performed by a responsible person who is aware of the seriousness of the sin, are called mortal sins. They have the power to send a person immediately to Hell at death. However, certain Church sacraments have the power to absolve the sin. There are New Testament passages that say that if a Christian confesses their sin that they will be healed and forgiven. But the former refers to believers confessing to each other; the latter implies that Christians are to confess to God. We have been unable to find a New Testament reference to forgiveness of sin through a formal church sacrament with a priest. That is to be expected, because priests and sacraments only appeared within Christianity after the last book in the Bible was written. The theory seems unjust. It seems to violate elementary principles of justice for people who receive such massively different "rewards."

"Do good works" belief:

Many North Americans visualize judgment being performed by a kind of cosmic weigh scale: one's good deeds are placed on one side and one's evil deeds are placed on the other. If the good outweighs the bad, then the person is sent to Heaven; otherwise they go to Hell. This belief is based on the assumption that at death, an individual's good and bad deeds are weighed and compared against a passing grade. Those with a high enough grade go to heaven and those under that grade go to hell. This concept is morally indefensible.

"Hell doesn't exist" belief:

Many liberal Christians do not believe that Hell exists. They feel that a loving God is incapable of creating a place of eternal punishment. This concept has some strong arguments in its favor: Many nations of the world subscribe to United Nations declarations on human rights, treatment of prisoners, treatment of prisoners of war, etc. None allow torture. None allow unending punishment. Our attempts at fundamental justice are limited. Since God is all knowing, and loving and forgiving, it is inconceivable to many that God would create a Hell.

Where I stand? Simply: My life is in God's hands. I trust Him. I try to live up to His expectations and to fulfill the two great Commandments: Love your Lord and love your neighbor. I hope I will be saved with those who all are. This is enough for me.

THE NATURE AND VOCATION OF HUMAN BEING AS A CHILD OF GOD

By: Dr. Máthé Dénes

I am not a theologian, but I have also studied theology and I know the general standpoints of the different systems of beliefs of Christian denominations. As the main field of my research work is linguistics, in my short lecture I'd like to speak first of all about the verbal and/or linguistic nature of the theme given in the title of my presentation.

As we know the source of the word-group *child of God* is in the New Testament and mainly in Jesus' words. According to the four gospels, Jesus talks about his *heavenly mission* several times and he speaks about God as his Father. More precisely: he names God directly *Father*. On this basis Christian theologians had and have even now long disputes. According to the theologians of Trinity Jesus' sentences about his relations to God expresses real statements: Jesus is God's Son, God's only Son, and He is the second person of Trinity.

However this problem is not so simple and the systems of ideas on this theme are very sophisticated and contradictory. Partially this is caused by an another expression of Jesus. His prayer, named in the Christian tradition *the Lord's Prayer*, begins with the expression of the plural form of his personal faith: *OUR Father which art in heaven*. On the basis of this statement it can be said that not only Jesus is God's son, but we also are His children. This results from the Lord's prayer. However the ideas referring to this problem are heterogeneous, too. The orthodox theologians includes only those is this relationship, who believe in Jesus the Christ, the second person of Trinity. We have to ask: what are the criteria of being a Christian? More over: are only the Christians children of God, or is mankind in general?

In addition to the above mentioned paraphrases we have another biblical argument to make stronger the conclusion of father-children relationship. The Old Testament states that mankind was created by God on the resemblance to God's face: „Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1,26). So mankind was created by God like the other beings, but differs from all of them in an enigmatic feature, mentioned above. Generally speaking: if mankind resemblances God's image, than mankind has something according to which every human being can be considered God's child. These are general conclusions and they result from the statements of the Bible.

But we have to make up the following question: are these real statements or are they metaphorical?

Here I have to mention a well known fact: to formulate good questions is a very hard task. But what are the criteria of the adequate question? Are these criteria general for all sciences? Is theology a science? What kind of science? What is the object of the theologian research speaking about faith? These are hard questions and sometimes we are ready to put them away or to answer them too easily, even if they are not adequate.

Now let us try to answer my question referring to the status of our religious statements. Generally speaking a real statement is a two-functional verbal manifestation. This means that the statement has not only meaning, but also objective reference. So it is not enough if a statement has some meaning-possibilities. The main criterium for the validity of a statement is to refer to a real object, or a real relationship, or a real state of being. If we speak about *nymph*, we know that this is a mythological being. It does not really exist, and if we state its existence, we can do this only in the frame of the theory of possible worlds.

A metaphoric statement also has the above mentioned two functions: meaning and reference. But at the same time it differs from a real statement in the quality of its meaning and the direction of its reference. Its meaning possibilities are multiple in the context of different semantic fields and its reference is not direct, but indirect, expressing by connotation the feeling and preference of the speaker on the scale of values.

To speak about *God's face* is to speak about an abstraction, which is according to the religious belief the spiritual essence of existence in terms of material existence. So there is a semantic incompatibility in this expression between an abstraction or spiritual existence and a physical characteristics. As it is known this is an anthropomorphism or zoomorphism, as some scholars used to say.

Of course, there is another way of interpreting this phrase: taking it literally as in the ancient mythologies or taking it in the sense of the orthodox Christian theology according to which Jesus Christ is the real /re/presentation of God's face. But the Unitarian theology gives a spiritual meaning to the term, and in this sense it is an anthropomorphic metaphor. To propose that *God is our Father* is also a metaphoric statement, and it results from the patriarchal vision of the ancient times. It means that God is the Creator and expresses the idea that there is a familiar relation between the Creator and human being. So in the case of this anthropomorphism not a human form, but a human relationship is the basis of the verbal expression.

We can conclude that our speaking about God is metaphorical. And if we tell something about mankind in this relationship, than our speaking about human being will also be metaphorical. So if we want to tell something about mankind in a direct way, we have to reduce our thinking to its empirical existence.

In this dimension the most important characteristics of mankind is its *cognitive nature*. The intellectual faculty of human being makes it capable to understand or to reflect the elementary and more complicated laws of physical, social and cosmic world. The result of this spiritual capacity is the knowledge which is not only a mental reconstruction of the world, but also a construction of it.

The cognitive capacity of mankind consists of two interrelated dimensions: *intellect and belief*. Intellect is a quality and a function and a process which involves the whole person in the effort to understand and to control the inner and external world. Of course it is reasonable to recognize the limits of intellect. One of these limits is that the sources of some insights and/or the sources of faith are unknown. It is contradictory but we have to assume that in spite of this limit intellect maintains the right and the task to analyse and to test these insights, including the faith, too.

It is a possible decision of our intellect to say that the religious nature of human being is the result of its consciousness. This is not only a Unitarian idea. Abelard said: „Nothing could be believed unless it could first be understood. By doubting we are led to enquiry and from enquiry we perceive the truth.“ When mankind became conscious of its existence, it became capable to reflect on the metaphysical dimension of the world. From a historical point of view consciousness may have priority and the religious nature of mankind is the consequence of it. I think that this idea does not diminish the value of belief, because religion is able to spiritualize the materialistic understanding of the world, as well as the vision on the nature and vocation of mankind.

Considering the two main modalities of this spiritualizing act, it can be said that the Unitarian idea about *the goodness* of human being by its nature is a response to the orthodox Christian idea that mankind was corrupted by the first human couple in the Paradise and their failure corrupted the whole humanity. In this sense the belief that the nature of mankind is good is the result of the intertextual, more precisely: contra-confessional thinking, rejecting the dogma of the original sin. But this unilateral conclusion neglects the everyday experience: the different kinds of human weakness. A psychological-ethical answer to this contradictory state of being is to express one's belief that man is capable to be good. But this potentiality is to be put into practice. And this is the vocation of mankind.

It is shown again, that every question about the theme of this lecture leads us to the infinite. Every answer tries to capture the infinite and/but the context of these answers is also opening the way to the infinite.

It is an empirical fact that the main medium of the cognitive capacity and the interrelated consciousness of mankind mentioned above is the human language. On this basis it can be said that the well-known metaphor has some true values: language is the house of existence.

THE HUMAN BEING AND THE PROBLEM OF SIN; REMISSION OF SINS

By: Rev. Kecskés Csaba

Introduction

A person representing liberal theological beliefs, especially a minister, continually comes face to face with the question of original sin and the sinfulness of men. Is a few month-old baby, who is taken by its parents and godparents to church to be baptized, conceived and born in sin? The child, whose purity, innocence, kindness, openness to God, Jesus pointed out as an example to his disciples: "... (Lk. 18, 16-17). My task is now to point out in my presentation how Unitarian Theology from Transylvania regards the question of sin and remission of sins?

The definition of sin

We try to define sin from two points of view:

A/. Religious point of view: - Sin is a conscious, deliberate, intentional deed, through which we offend ourselves, our fellowmen and our obligations towards God. In this sense it is such a deed, that God forbid, or it is an act of neglecting what God ordered.

B/. Ethical point of view: - The unitarian bishop Varga Bela gave a suitable definition of sin. According to him sin is disobeying the laws of morality, as a consequence of this we are opposed to God. Thus sin from ethical point of view is a deed against values, in its concrete form against God, man and the world

The origin of sin

Unitarian Theology doesn't teach and doesn't accept the theory of original sin. Our reasons are the following: Jesus didn't teach original sin, it is contradictory to his teachings, that for someone else's faults we would carry the burden of punishment; it doesn't satisfy the requirements of reason; it is incomprehensible for psychology.

Our starting point in the case of the origin of sin is human nature. Human nature heads towards good, and the fact we also sin can't be explained with primary human nature, and with heriting the sin either, but with reasons which come out of man's life circumstances. Which are these existential facts?

A/. The physical existence of men.

If we examine man, our first conclusion is that he belongs to the existing world. Being like this he is defined. His bodily existence motivates his heading towards evil. For example: instinctiveness, the power of customs, his restriction within the categories of time and space, needs to satisfy, like hunger, thirst, sexuality which come from his bodily existence too.

B/. Psychological existence

From psychological point of view it is known that each person reacts differently to stress, psychological burden. Thus we can draw the conclusion that this reaction greatly depends on whether we are psychologically organized, and on the force of the conflict. Therefore the surrounding reality has different meaning to each person. Through his life man elaborates a system of meanings, which presupposes some sort of psychical resonance, a suitable reaction. When the psychical resonance moves only within the „ I-space" we reckon with a false orientation of values, which leads to a narrowing of the reactions to obligations, and finally to committing sin. Thus a deed occurs, which comes from selfish egoism, in fact we don't account of the others as men, and God as our Father.

C/. Sociological existence

Man's life is embedded into the life of the environment, he influences his environment and the environment influences him. Man can „ grow" through society's influences but he can also „ diminish". Social influences come in two projections: good and positive or bad and negative. When man comes under the influence of negative social temper, his nature shows signs of willingness to evil. Naturally for all these, man is not the only one to blame, but his environment too or the driving force.

D/. The existence of free will

Man is master of his free choice. His free choice manifests itself in his general wish for happiness. From ethical point of view free will lies in the choice of values. Sin can be defined as a consequence of wrong choice of values. In this sense we can talk of disorder of values.

All the above mentioned reasons (one by one or altogether), can be the source of sin. Why are these reasons? – we can legitimately ask the question. The answer is not easy. A dogmatic point of view can't answer the question, neither can a humanist point of view. The only possible answer is the state of man's existence: we are not perfect, we only strive for perfection. If we were originally sinners Jesus' appeal to us to strive for perfection would be pointless.

Types of sin

There are several types of sin because sin is closely related to fulfilling one's duties. There are as many types of sins as many duties are not fulfilled. The types of sin are divided from the following points of view.

A/. According to obligations:

1. Towards God
2. Towards our fellowmen
3. Towards ourselves

B/. From physical/ biological point of view:

1. Sensual/ Bodily
2. Selfish

- Sensual sins : a person can't control his temper, his instincts.

- Sins related to selfishness: an urge for power, pursuit of fortune, careerism.

C/. From the point of view of fulfillment:

1. Deeds
2. Neglects

This is the most comprehensive, because it includes not only ethical but also biological and religious points of view.

The consequence of sin

Sin as an evil deed has its consequence, when it occurs in man's life it is a complex phenomenon. Its most concrete forms are the pangs of conscience, when a man feels he has a guilty conscience. This feeling of guilt occurs not only psychologically but physically too. Man feels helpless, incapable of doing something of finding an outway from the world of crimes, despair "bites" his conscience. As a matter of fact the consequence of sin is a feeling of guilt. Conscience reckons the consequences of its anti-value deeds. It recognizes that through evil deeds it distanced itself from God and fellowmen. Its characteristic features from psychological point of view are fear, dread, sorrow, shame, a feeling of being chased.

The next step in the consequence of crime is known as the state of punishment. Punishment at fact is man's self judgement. Regarding punishment the following idea is expressed: evil deed sooner or later gets its deserved punishment.

A classic example of punishment in world literature is the main character in Dostojewszkij's roman, "Crime and punishment", Raszkolnyikov.

Moral evil in the teachings of Jesus

The question of original sin, universal sinfulness of humanity, incapacity to do good don't come up in the teachings of Jesus. In the Gospel the word " sin " appears only once, while for example in the letters of apostle Paul we come across the word more than sixty times.

In the focus of Jesus' attention stood the question of evil, not of sin. He points out as moral evil everything, which opposed to God's will, goodness, truth and love. Evil occurs as a conscious turn away from God's law, not fulfilling of duties, destruction of values, hatred, selfishness, envy, greed, immoral thinking and life.

Jesus acknowledged the existence of evil, but only within the moral world, and didn't accept it as the natural state of men. The willingness to do evil is not a sin on its own. A man can choose ways opposed to the ones he was predestined to out of his moral liberty. In order to do moral evil he needs reason and free will. Without these there is no sin but no virtue either. God gives us free will to choose living according to God's will or the opposite of it.

Jesus judged every form of moral evil, but he constantly loved the sinful man as his fellowman. Jesus searches the solution to get rid of sin through moral ways. This can be reached at as a man renews his life, changes out of his own strength and makes changes. Conversion is an essential part of morality. The conversion (metanoia) in the teachings of Jesus is nothing else but a complete change of ethics, which starting with thinking influences one's whole life, his relationship with other people and with God. Man is capable of change, repent his sins and turn to good. Metanoia is the personal deed of each men, there is no need for mediators, institutions, cults.

Jesus warnings aims at the person, and not only at sinners, but at everyone.

If we want to be good, Jesus believes God's help is vital.

In the Gospel of Jesus we find the image of a loving, forgiving and merciful God.

In his parables like: The unforgiving servant ; Prodigal son ; The sinner woman , - Jesus worships the forgiving God, the loving father, for whom one sinner who repents for his sins is worth more than ninety-nine righteous who don't need repentance and forgiveness. He teaches for everyone that there aren't such deep abysses in our lives, we can't sink so deep down that God wouldn't stretch out his caring hand. He didn't accept the teaching of original sin. He knew that men were sinful, broke the laws of God several times, but he also knew that each man had the opportunity to rise from dust, to return to God.

Getting rid of sin and the question of remission of sins

According to us the process of getting rid of sin starts with the punishment. While in pain caused by punishment man makes the decision that he is capable of being another person. This decision is the condition of getting rid of sin. The first step in the process of getting rid of sin is the acknowledgement of the reason or reasons which led to sin, their annihilation and elimination from man's life. Man tries to restore his physical-psychological balance and lay his relationship with God, with his fellowmen and with himself on new basis.

That is why we, unitarians disregard the concept of substitute amends, - the death of Jesus, as a means of compensating for the sins of humanity, - because according to our beliefs this is not a teaching of Jesus, and it is also against God's image as a loving father, who is always willing to forgive his children Jesus regarding life without sin as man's personal matter for example in the case of the Prodigal son no one can restore the balance in his life but himself.

The next important step in the process of eliminating sin is conversion / metanoia /. This turn means the end of pursuit of anti values in life and the beginning of a life following values. This process is the personal matter of man.

In the complex process of metanoia such important features play a role as self examination, prayer, search for values, good deeds, - features which are in the service of a positive way of life.

Eliminating sin, conversion does not occur from one minute to the other, it is the result of a long psychical process. Conversion can occur several times in man's life. Getting rid of a sin doesn't mean that man is not capable of sin anymore. Man can fall back into sin but the way of renewing, changing is always open for him. This turn manifests itself in its specific form in compensating for. Remedy is the evidence that man turned into a new man.

The question of forgiveness is related to the issue of eliminating sin. Jesus teaches us about this kind of forgiveness in the parable of the Prodigal son. The father accepts his prodigal son. God forgives thus man's obligation is to forgive also. Our forgiving is not only overlooking or not taking into account of sins but also helping the sinner to turn good, finding the right way of life.

Can our sins be forgiven by men, priests? Only those can forgive against whom we commit sins. If we sin against God, then He is the one to forgive, if we sin against ourselves, we forgive, if we sin against our fellowship, they have to forgive us. Repenting our sins to God doesn't mean that we show him something unknown to him. But still until we don't repent for our sins there is an abyss which separates us from God. If we recognize and reveal them we build a bridge which connects us to God.

DEVELOPING A LIBERAL-PROTESTANT ETHICS IN A DYNAMIC AND PLURALIST WORLD

By: Prof. dr. Wibren van der Burg

Introduction

'How am I to live?' is a timeless moral question; the specific moral answers to this question vary greatly, however. They vary over time, with contexts, and with personal biographies. Although the moral question is universal and some elements of the answer – e.g., precepts such as 'do not kill' – are universal too, the full answer to it is highly context dependent and person dependent.

Ethics, in its broad sense of encompassing both someone's ethical or moral views and the actions connected with those views, always is a response to concrete challenges and problems that one faces. Therefore, an ethics for a small-scale agricultural society cannot be identical to an ethics for a post-industrial globalizing society. In order to know what an ethics for our time should look like, we must analyze the most important characteristics of our societies and their most important problems.

In this article, I will focus on some specific characteristics of western European societies such as the Netherlands. These societies are secular, pluralist, individualizing, and highly dynamic. Many other characteristics should be mentioned for a full analysis – e.g., that they are complex, globalizing, post-industrial information societies – but for the purposes of this text these four characteristics will do. The question is what implications these characteristics have for the way we do ethics.

First, these societies are secular and pluralist. Morality is not embedded in one common religious tradition; there is a plurality of religious and non-religious traditions. In such a pluralist society – at least if people belonging to different groups live in close contact with each other – in moral discussions a direct appeal to religious foundations often is the end of the discussion, because this basis is not shared. Therefore, there is an in-built tendency to try to avoid appeals to controversial religious ideas whenever possible, not as a matter of principled exclusion (as some Rawlsians might defend) but as a pragmatic attempt to try to bridge differences in everyday communication. As a result, there is a tendency to reconstruct ethics as much as possible without reference to controversial religious ideas.

Second, these societies are individualizing. Their ideology, in any case, contains that moral issues should be decided on by free and autonomous persons for themselves. We should not overstate the point. In reality, of course, people are highly conformist and share their moral outlooks with the members of their peer group. And despite some postmodernist claims, there is no shattered and fragmented morality – on most moral ideas there is still broad consensus. Nevertheless this individualization process has important consequences for the issue of how to do ethics. Morality cannot be proclaimed by moral authorities or based on tradition. We expect every person to be autonomous and – although in interaction with parents, traditions and peer groups – to develop her own ethical views.

Third, these societies are in continuous processes of change. Modern technology, globalization, and informatization confront us with new moral challenges. In many respects, our ethics has to change in response to these challenges, just like the ethical views of the generations before us have undergone major changes – think of sexual ethics. This means that ethics is rather becoming a lifelong learning process than a set of timeless precepts learned at about the age of eighteen. Ethics itself has to be dynamic and open to change.

This brief analysis results in a number of practical requirements regarding the way we should do ethics in the twenty-first century. We should try to avoid appeals to controversial religious issues as much as possible and at least postpone them to later stages in the moral argument. This means that, for ordinary decision-making, our ethical views largely become secular in character – even for many devout Christians. Individualization requires that each individual citizen develop her own ethics autonomously, although not in isolation from others. This implies high requirements for individual moral competence. And such an ethics should be dynamic and responsive to change and to contextual needs. This reinforces the requirements

following from individualization. Not only should the individual be morally competent, but she should also be open and responsive to moral change throughout her life and thus be able to critically assess her moral views in the light of changing circumstances. One caveat at the start. I am a philosopher as well as a Christian, but I am not a theologian. In this article, I try to avoid explicit religious and theological notions and literature. I hope to show by philosophical analysis that we need an approach such as that found in the liberal-Protestant tradition; but I will not make an attempt to articulate this approach in a theological or religious way – I will leave that to the theologians.

Ethics and Religion

The challenge of developing an ethics for the twenty-first century confronts everyone equally, regardless of religious backgrounds. I want to focus here on the role religion can play and, more specifically, what the liberal-Protestant tradition can contribute. This may seem paradoxical, as I argued above that ethics in a secular pluralist society should try to avoid an appeal to a controversial religious basis as much as possible.

It is important, therefore, to emphasize that this attempt to exclude religious arguments in ethical debate (including the political debate) as much as possible is not intended as exclusion on principle, as for example John Rawls and Norman Daniels have suggested in their idea of political reflective equilibrium. I believe such an exclusion to be impossible – morality and religion are too much connected, perhaps not for everyone, but certainly for a large group of Christians. Nevertheless, there is a serious problem here. Religious people in a secular world are faced with two contradictory tendencies in their views. On the one hand, as religious people they believe that their religion is in some way connected with their ethics. On the other hand, as citizens in a society, they may have to discuss ethical issues with their secularized neighbors, and they can only do so if they try to find a common ground as much as possible. If they appeal to their religion every time someone asks why they hold a specific moral view, dialogue will be difficult. Therefore, they will try to postpone appeals to controversial religious tenets, and try to explain and justify their moral positions in secular terms. Perhaps, somewhere along the road, they will find an overlapping consensus with their neighbors on some intermediate principles or on some shared ideals or paradigm cases. In other words, they will put religion in the margin of their moral views, but only when and in so far as necessary to justify their views to others. This is not a principled exclusion but a pragmatic marginalization, forced upon them by the demands of communication in a pluralist and secular world.

Although this tendency to marginalize religion merely originates from a practical, pragmatic attitude, it will inevitably have implications for the way people in a secular society see the relationship between morality and religion. As they get used to arguing in public in a secular way, they will internalize this attitude. When thinking about ethical issues, they will also internalize this secularized ethics and marginalize their religion in thinking about ethical issues. Appeals to secular ideas on human rights or tolerance will replace direct appeals to religious convictions. As a result, perhaps with an exception for some fundamentalists, religious people also tend to be partly secularized in their thinking about ethics.

This is a challenge that Protestantism, and especially liberal Protestantism, has to face. Protestantism is characterized by an individualist tendency, and should thus be able to respond adequately to individualization and pluralism. It should, however, also be able to deal adequately with secularization, as a characteristic partly internal to our ethical views.

Dutch Liberal Protestantism

My starting point is that of the Dutch liberal-Protestant tradition, and more in particular that of the Remonstrants. The Remonstrant Church, founded in 1619 by the followers of Arminius, who had been expelled from the Dutch Reformed Church during the Synod of Dordt, is a small church which, over centuries, has developed a consistently liberal character.

A central characteristic of the Remonstrant tradition is its emphasis on individuality, personal freedom, and responsibility. This is, e.g., reflected in the custom that new members may write their own professions of faith. It implies the recognition that there can be different legitimate ways to formulate religious beliefs. Such formulations can never be more than provisional and imperfect attempts (cf. 1 Cor. 13: 12). Therefore, religious beliefs should be open to critical testing, also in the light of modern science, critical scholarship, and contemporary culture. The Remonstrants are strongly committed to the ecumenical movement, among other things because ecumenical dialogue and practice are considered to be enriching (even if frustrating as

well). The Remonstrants identify with the Christian tradition, though not exclusively; they are open to the wisdom embodied in traditions other than the Christian tradition and seek to establish an open dialogue with those traditions too. The ecumenical openness of the Remonstrants is reflected in the fact that they invite everyone to the Lord's Supper who sincerely wishes to take part in it, whether he belongs to the Remonstrant or another church or to no church at all.

The Remonstrants have always been responsive to society and culture. They aim for a connection between religious spirituality and practical action. Even if the word *orthopraxis* does not fit the Remonstrants (as there are various legitimate ways to put a religion into practice), there is a strong orientation toward spiritual and ethical praxis. Many Remonstrants are, therefore, very active in society and in societal reform movements. Both in society at large and within the church, Remonstrants stand for equality, freedom and tolerance, a democratic culture, and human rights. This is, for example, exemplified in the relatively early acceptance of women ministers (1915) and in the decision in 1986, as the first church in Europe, to allow blessing ceremonies for homosexual and lesbian couples.

What does this imply for ethics? In various respects, this liberal-Protestant tradition offers interesting starting points for thinking about the relationship between religion and ethics in our society. Its individualism and openness to pluralism and to personal and contextual variation suit the characteristics of contemporary society. Its openness to criticism and its responsiveness to developments in culture and society correspond well with the need for a dynamic ethics. Its opposition to religious fundamentalism and its openness to dialogue and mutual enrichment show a possible approach to incorporating pluralism and secularism into a religious perspective. Finally, its strong orientation toward religious and ethical praxis rather than to orthodox dogma provides a perspective that, in my view, fits well into the way many modern men and women actually experience their religion. It is especially this theme that I want to explore in the next sections.

Two Models of Religion and Ethics

Dynamic phenomena can always be described in two ways that are not completely compatible. A well-known example is that of the electron, which we can regard as a particle or as a wave, but not as both at the same time. The former model of the electron gives us insights that are less easily seen in the latter model, and vice versa.

This general idea also holds for social phenomena such as ethics or law. We may conceive of ethics as a collection of propositions with regard to norms and values for the good life and the right action – as an ethical code. Examples are the Ten Commandments and the two principles of justice as formulated by John Rawls. However, we may also conceive of ethics as the good life and the right action themselves, as the 'lived morality.' In this case, we address both the daily practices in which we try to act morally rightly and the more reflective practices in which we reflect on what might be a morally right action and a good life.

The former, static, model may be called a product model or a doctrinal model, because ethics is conceived of as a coherent collection or doctrine of norms and values formulated in propositions. This collection is the product of our minds, of our traditions. The latter, dynamic, model may be called a practice model or a process model, because it deals with the practice of our daily life and its often implicit ethical dimension. This practice is a continuous process of action and thought. Both models focus on particular aspects of ethics; both models are required to understand ethics adequately. Both models are, of course, not completely distinct; they refer to each other. We may understand the ethics as we live it only in light of attempts to formulate it and, conversely, we may only understand the morality as we formulate it in light of attempts to realize it.

The same distinction between a doctrinal model and a practice model may be found with regard to religion. In that context it is better known as the distinction between doctrine and life. We may regard a religion as a grand narrative, as a coherent theory about the world (an ontology), about the future (an eschatology), or about how we should live and act (an ethics). Doing so, we focus on the doctrine. Theological and ecclesiastical conflicts are often about the right doctrine, e.g., about the character of God, predestination, or the meaning of the Lord's Supper. Such a doctrine is usually connected with the Bible and with particular creeds and confessions.

We may also regard religion as a set of practices and as a dimension of daily life. Thus we talk about recognizable religious activities such as liturgy, pastoral care, and social work and about the way in which believers in their daily life practice their belief.

Like in ethics, the two models cannot stand alone. If the doctrine is not practiced in any way, religion is mere lip service. For a vital religious practice to be passed on to the next generation it is essential to formulate at least partly what inspires people. Most religions and theological theories try to do justice to both views on religion. However, because these models are essentially partly incompatible, usually the emphasis is on one of the two. Therefore, the two models are usually not present to the same extent in the religious practices of individuals and groups. For example, in the Eastern Orthodox traditions the emphasis in church services is on liturgical practices and ritual, whereas in the Protestant traditions the sermon, as a reflection on the Bible and doctrine, is central. In the Calvinist tradition, the right belief is often pivotal, whereas in the Mennonite tradition the emphasis is on the righteous life.

In the Netherlands, a country where even the Roman Catholics are strongly influenced by Calvinism, religion was usually perceived primarily in terms of doctrine. However, my impression is that in the actual religious experience of many Dutch – and certainly not only those who belong to liberal denominations – doctrine has receded into the background. Practice has come more to the forefront, both in the sense of liturgical practice, rituals, and mystical experience and in the sense of living a good life. Empirical studies of religion indicate that large groups of people believe in 'something' like a higher power or a deeper force; their religious notions, however, are not very precise. Perhaps this force or power is referred to as God, but classical ideas such as the Trinity or Salvation play little or no role in their religious views. They are completely indifferent to conflicts between theologians and churches on themes such as the meaning of the Lord's Supper and who is welcome at it. Their emphasis is on religious experience – in church services, but also in meditation or spiritual retreats – and on a morally good life.

Deductivism or Pragmatism

A second ideal typical distinction I want to introduce is one within the doctrinal model. How should a religious doctrine be developed and how should we justify religious beliefs? According to a deductivist approach, such a doctrine and such beliefs are based on an authoritative religious text (e.g., the Bible), on basic concepts and dogmas, and perhaps on a number of authoritative creeds and confessions. These authoritative texts and dogmas are the basis of a comprehensive religious doctrine and of separate statements of belief. An ethical doctrine is developed in an analogous way in a top-down process of deduction from some general principles or values. In most forms of religious ethics, the ethical doctrine is a part of religious doctrine and is derived directly or indirectly from the same texts, dogmas, and precepts that the other parts of the religious doctrine are based on.

Such a deductivist approach is not unproblematic for various reasons. First, there is the problem of the underdeterminacy of dogmas and authoritative texts. Neither the Bible nor the classical creeds and confessions offer much guidance with regard to biotechnology or contraceptives. Attempts to deduce positions on such issues are often quite unconvincing and arbitrary. Second, it is too static and universalistic. Believing in an agricultural and partly nomadic society of 2000 years ago does not mean the same as believing in 2004. However, if a deduction from a sacred text was valid then, it is logically still valid. Third, it leaves little room for pluralism. If concrete moral and religious norms are the result of strict deduction from indubitable starting points, then someone with a different opinion must be a heretic who must be converted to the true belief rather than an interesting discussion partner from whom one can learn. Religious doctrines and moral views then become immune to criticism. The most important objection is, of course, a more fundamental one. Why should we presume that the Bible, the creeds and confessions, or statements by church leaders and institutions are correct and indubitable? Are they not merely man-made – even if perhaps inspired by God? If the starting points in a deductive system are not indubitable, the complete building of religious doctrine is undermined. It is especially this problem that makes the deductivist approach not very attractive to the modern mind.

A different approach is not deductivist but pragmatist. John Rawls introduced his famous idea of reflective equilibrium as a method for moral theory construction and moral judgment. This

idea can also be used to describe the construction of a religious conviction, of a religious doctrine. In a religious reflective equilibrium process, a variety of elements can be included in order to critically test and correct each other, in an attempt to achieve a more coherent formulation of one's religious views. Elements such as personal religious experiences – including those of others – moral experiences, tradition, the dogmas and stories from that tradition, and religious texts that are considered authoritative or at least inspired can all be brought into the process. However, we should not restrict the process to such distinctly religious elements; a reflective equilibrium process should be open to including all relevant information. Therefore, we should also include the results of modern scholarship, such as critical analysis of the origin and the interpretation history of the texts. We should also include an analysis of the context of application, of the society in which we live. All such elements should be brought into the process of mutual adjustment and refinement.

The elements that are central in the process will vary from person to person. Some persons develop their religious views primarily on the basis of religious experiences, such as the feeling of community in a church service or a mystical experience of contact with God. Others start from practical social activities and experience God in the face of the other. Again others follow a more intellectual path of reflection, guided by appealing stories from their religious tradition. Usually, each of these religious paths will play a role in someone's religious development, with different emphases on different moments in life.

Such a learning process is not purely individual; it is an interactive process in close contact with others, making it possible to test and enrich one's own views. A process of reflective equilibrium is never finished; new experiences, new contexts will continuously be brought into the process and lead to refinement – sometimes to radical revision – of religious and moral views. This is true both at the individual level and at the level of a religious tradition or a church as a whole.

Of course, these two approaches, like the two models, are ideal typical and my sketch is much too brief and, perhaps, in the eyes of theologians even naïve. However, I hope it shows that, apart from the deductivist approach, which is dominant in orthodox Protestantism, there is a legitimate alternative. In this pragmatist approach, a believer tries to reach a coherent formulation of her religious views – probably without ever succeeding – on the basis of both general ideas and concrete experiences, of both religious beliefs and moral intuitions. This pragmatist approach has important advantages over the deductivist approach. It is contextualist, as concrete experiences and contexts are incorporated into the reflective equilibrium process. As a consequence, the religious doctrines that flow from it can be more practically helpful in guiding believers in concrete problems. It is dynamic, because the personal system of belief evolves with a person's development during her life, and, at the collective level, with the evolution of a society. And it is pluralistic for two reasons: because it acknowledges that every attempt to formulate a religious and moral doctrine is always a provisional, imperfect attempt, and because it acknowledges that people may legitimately arrive at different doctrines, depending on their personal biographies, experiences, and contexts.

A Pragmatist-Practical Approach

By combining the two distinctions, we get two ideal-typical approaches. On the one hand, a deductivist-doctrinal approach, in which the doctrine is central to the identification of religion and in which morality is deduced from fundamental religious tenets and texts. On the other hand, a pragmatist-practical approach, in which practices take primacy and in which religious and moral views are always formulated provisionally in a continuous process of reflection. The relationship between religion and ethics differs in the two approaches. In the former approach, ethics is – or is not – derived from religion. Most contemporary discussions about the relation between morality and religion presuppose this approach. The discussion focuses then, e.g., on whether a morality needs a religious foundation or not. Both believers and non-believers have, in my view, successfully argued that we do not need a religious foundation for the basic rules and principles of morality, for minimal social morality. Although usually a religious foundation can be provided for minimal morality, it is not necessary. Morality, as a collection of basic rules and principles for a peaceful cooperation within a society, can stand on its own.

However, this is only part of the story. As soon as we switch to the latter approach, we understand that things are not that easy. When a person develops her own moral and religious views, there is no neat separation between the two. My moral and religious views are

intertwined and interdependent. In a non-foundationalist, coherentist approach, moral rules and principles do not rest on one or more singular foundations, but on the whole network of views a person is committed to. That network includes someone's religious views. The same holds vice versa. My religious views are also partly dependent on my moral views. I strongly believe in human rights and equality of the sexes. When I come across religious texts from my tradition (e.g., some texts by Paul) that contradict those moral norms, I will rather revise my religious views than my moral views.

Following the pragmatist-practical approach, we would find it absurd if a believer said her ethics and religion were completely independent. My ethical views and my religious views are both embedded in the larger network of my views. From an external, neutral perspective, of course, it is possible to say there can be an ethics without religion; we see proof of that all around us. Our atheist or agnostic friends are not immoral, or at least not more so than our Christian friends. And from a political perspective, we may also hold that social morality can stand on its own. But if I, as a believer, see how my religious beliefs and moral beliefs are intertwined and mutually correct and support each other, it is impossible for me to stick to a strict separation of the two.

This does not imply that whenever I discuss moral issues I will always need to refer to my religious views. My moral views are based on an entire network of supporting considerations, and normally it will do to refer to secular arguments. Thus, in a conversation with a partly secular audience, I will usually only refer to secular arguments. In an ethical discussion within my church, however, I will also refer explicitly to arguments with a religious nature. It depends on the context, on the discussion partners, which type of argument is best brought forward.

It will be clear that a pragmatist-practical approach is a more adequate response to the challenges of the twenty-first century than a deductivist-doctrinal one. In the Introduction, I suggested that a contemporary ethics should be contextualist, pluralist, and dynamic, and that it should avoid a direct appeal to religious dogma as much as possible. On each of these criteria, the pragmatist-practical approach fares better than a dogmatic-doctrinal one. Such an approach also fits well into the liberal-Protestant tradition. A synonym often used for liberal Protestant is 'undogmatic'; the emphasis is on praxis rather than on dogma and doctrine. And liberal Protestantism accepts that, although we cannot do without formulations of our beliefs, these are always provisional and open to criticism. There is a legitimate plurality of religious paths and of doctrinal formulations, and a religious way of life is a life-long process in which someone's moral and religious views evolve.

Some Problems for Liberal Protestantism

Here I could stop - but that would be too easy. Liberal Protestantism has some characteristic weaknesses and vulnerabilities, and these can also be discerned in the pragmatist-practical approach. Orthodox Protestantism may, in the eyes of the outsider, often present unwarranted claims to certainty, based on the authority of the Bible or interpretations thereof and the creeds and confessions, but at least they offer the prospect of certainty. And orthodox Protestantism may perhaps be out of tune with modern times, but at least they present a critical perspective. Liberal Protestantism has to provide an alternative on both accounts. How should we deal with uncertainty and how should we provide a critical input that prevents us from becoming completely conformist?

Liberal Protestantism cannot claim certainty, and it should not aspire to it either. On the contrary, its openness to plurality and further evolution implies a principled stance that all our statements are never more than provisional. However, that should not lead us into passivity and apathy. If we have done our best to formulate and critically evaluate, it is the best we can do. We have reached the highest level of trustworthiness we can reach. This may be an adequate justification for action. For many of our beliefs (e.g., on human rights, on precepts such as 'do not kill' and 'do not steal'), the level of trustworthiness will be high and we will act upon them with great confidence. As regards other beliefs, we may be less certain of ourselves, perhaps because we know that others have opposite views. In those cases, we cannot refrain from acting, but the fact that we are less confident about our beliefs and that there is a plurality may influence the way we act upon them; for example, by regarding our moral views on sexuality as a private matter and accepting that others may have legitimate different views.

Living in a postmodern society is living with uncertainty. That should, however, not prevent us from living conscientiously and acting on the beliefs we may reasonably trust. Rather this than

flee in sham certainty, pretending that we know the truth, indubitable truth. Fundamentalism may seem an attractive alternative, but it probably does only so to those who are prepared to ignore reality.

The second challenge is, in my view, a more serious one. One of the criticisms sometimes brought forward against liberal Protestantism is that it merely uncritically follows societal developments and presents no radical Christian perspective. I think this criticism is unjustified if one considers reality. Liberal Protestants have always been at the forefront of reform movements and committed to social action. They are, indeed, sometimes less critical of social developments of which other churches are highly critical. Examples are equal rights for women or same-sex marriage. However, that is not because they are uncritical, but rather because they are critical toward some traditional values, including some that have traditionally been associated with Christianity. Precisely because of their emphasis on praxis, they have been fully part of the world and taken their responsibility. The fact that they are often not active in organizations or political parties on the basis of confession may make them less visible as liberal Protestants. Nevertheless, there is no ground at all to assume that, in general, they are less active and less critical toward society.

However, their basic attitude may make liberal Protestants vulnerable to a tendency to be conformist and conservative (I use this term in a purely descriptive sense). As they are open to the world and willing to incorporate insights and experiences from science and culture, they may more easily conform to prevalent trends and developments. Moreover, the pragmatist-practical approach, with its appeal to reflective equilibrium, has an inbuilt leaning toward conservatism. The risk of reflective equilibrium is always that we merely systematize our prejudices and preferences. In terms of religion, we run the risk of merely turning our personal experiences of bliss, harmony, or unity with the whole (if these are our religious experiences) into a coherent doctrine, leaving aside every critical perspective that this world is not as it should be. Moreover, the individualist tendencies of both Protestantism and modern society reinforce this risk by emphasizing individual choice in religious and moral issues, thus reducing the possible critical input from tradition, religious authorities, or the religious community. This should not be regarded as a problem specific to liberal Protestantism, however. In my view, both within the New Age movement and within the Evangelical movement similar individualist tendencies can be discerned (although they should not be identified with these movements) in which the critical dimension, the perspective of reform of this world, is lost. As for the New Age movement, the reason is that the emphasis is on individual growth and there is a strong focus on experiences of harmony rather than on tragedy and conflict; as for the Evangelical movement the reason is that it lays emphasis on personal Salvation. In both movements, the critical, collective perspective that moves us to radical social action may be too easily ignored.

How can liberal Protestantism counteract these tendencies? In my view, it should start acknowledging rather than ignoring them. I see various directions in which liberal Protestantism can and should counteract its inbuilt tendencies toward conservatism and conformism.

First, this can be done by emphasizing the need for a religious community. Believing is a social practice – even if, in the end, an individual's conscience is the ultimate authority. Protestants should be aware of the risk of hyper-individualism and aberrations in developing one's own system of belief – the number of secessions in Protestant history should make Protestants keenly aware of this risk. If believing is a lifelong learning process, we cannot do so on our own; we need the stimulus and criticism of others. We need a religious community. I believe there is a serious weakness in liberal Protestantism here. It is often said by liberal Protestants that they can very well do without a church. They do not need to go to church services on a regular basis; they experience God in nature or in daily life. There is much wisdom in this approach – a church is certainly not an essential mediator for salvation. However, the risk of such a purely individual path of belief is that one only chooses those experiences that are convenient, that confirm what one already believes. Learning is, however, also being confronted with things that do not fit, with stories that make one feel uncomfortable, with criticisms on familiar ideas. These things are sometimes provided by the religious community – not necessarily by traditional church services, perhaps also by religious salons, discussion meetings, or pastoral care. If we take the idea of religion as a lifelong development seriously – and liberal Protestants should – then we also have to accept that we

cannot live up to that idea entirely on our own. We need others; we need a community to help us in this process, perhaps not necessarily in the form of traditional church institutions or church services – these may not be what many searchers for spiritual wisdom nowadays seek. We may need to be creative in developing new institutions, new forms of community, new ways to foster religious development. Even so, we should beware of being too individualistic in this respect.

Second, religion – or, broader, spirituality – implies a different perception of the world. It is not that we have different theories of the world. The story of Creation in Genesis is not an alternative scientific theory, but an invitation to look at the world as a gift, as something precious that we are asked to guard as stewards. A religious ethics implies not so much a different substance as a different attitude and, to some extent, a different input in the reflective equilibrium process.

How can we foster such a different attitude, such a different perspective? One way is to go to a very general level, the level which is farthest from reality, that of ideals. We should purposively open ourselves to ideals or, in religious terms, to visions. It is the Kingdom of Heaven that inspires us. Even if it cannot be realized here on earth, it is not completely other-worldly. The prophets of the Old Testament, the Sermon on the Mount – they make us realize that this world is not what it was meant to be, and that we ourselves are not what we were meant to be. Religious visions thus both offer a critical perspective on this world and an attractive perspective on how it should be. I think this is one of the most important aspects of a religious practice: to make us fully aware of how much the world is in need of reformation. By considering the perspective of the Kingdom of Heaven, we perceive the world differently. Abstract stories may appeal to us, may motivate us, but they can never do the trick alone. It is also concrete experience that moves us, especially in the form of contrasting experiences – it is the direct contact with others, with suffering and injustice. Concrete experiences may help to enrich us, and also to challenge our established perceptions. I believe that one of the important aspects of a religious tradition is that it offers us these experiences; it confronts us with the suffering of others, with the needs of the world; it makes us sensitive to these needs. It may also provide us with experiences that make us feel in harmony with the world, supported by something which is bigger than us, which transcends our limitations. In both ways, it transforms us.

Denis Müller argues that “the enlightening capacity of theology depends greatly on the fragile balance between experiences of resonance and experiences of dissonance.” Although I would rather apply this idea to religion than to theology, I think it is an important warning for liberal Protestants. As strongly influenced by the traditions of Humanism and the Enlightenment, we probably more likely run the risk of being too optimistic and neglecting the darker sides of life. (Whereas, conversely, we sometimes are critical of the inclination of more orthodox Protestants to overemphasize those darker sides.)

This fits in well with what some theorists of reflective equilibrium have argued. Michael DePaul has argued for the need to search for new experiences, which he calls ‘formative experiences’, which may enrich and transform our moral faculties. This may lead to a marginal modification of our views, but also to more radical transformations. Marian Verkerk added that searching for new formative experiences is not only necessary in order to enrich our faculties, but also to transform ourselves. Inspired by feminist philosophy, she argues that we sometimes need to transform our self-concepts as well, in order to make our moral views on how to act correspond with our personal view of who we are. We have to become different persons, and in order to do that we also need to address the general social and political interpretative framework.

Both authors refer not only to actual experiences in order to reach this enrichment and transformation, but also to fiction, like in literature. Both authors thus, though in secular terms, argue for what we might call ‘radical conversions’. I believe this argument for the role of – actual and fictitious – enriching and transforming experiences has parallels in the way a religious tradition can enrich and transform ourselves. It can enrich our experiences and our faculty of judgment, intuition, and perception; it can also more radically transform our moral personalities in the sense that we become different persons, that we perceive the relation between ourselves and our social and political context differently. The ways in which religion can do this vary – there is more than one spiritual path. For some, a church service can have such an effect. It may be a song or a prayer that has a special appeal, a sermon that sheds

new light on an ancient text, or the blessing at the end that gives new strength. For others, there may be other experiences.

Conclusion

Let me conclude. The role of religion for ethics is not in providing foundations for moral norms; it is not in providing completely different moral norms than a secular ethics would do. I believe that it is primarily in the way it enriches and transforms our experiences, and the way in which it stimulates our spiritual and moral development and provides a critical input into the process. It may thus lead to a process of transformation or, in more traditional terms, conversion, enabling us not only to develop moral views, but also to find motivation to act upon them. There has been a tendency among liberal theologians and philosophers to adopt a strategy in which religion and ethics are separated. I believe such an artificial separation in the long run has a negative influence both on the vitality of liberal ethics and on the vitality of liberal Protestantism. Therefore, I have tried to sketch a pragmatist-practical approach to the relation between religion and ethics that, in my view, does more justice to the pluralist, secular, individualizing, and dynamic character of western European societies. It does not offer easy distinctions or simple answers; it does not offer certainty. However, should we deplore that, or is it merely an adequate reflection of the complexity of life in the twenty-first century?

FROM SPIRITUALITY TO RELIGION?

Or, the Dilemmas of a Less Than Perfect Church

By: Dr. Heine Siebrand

In J.K. Rowlings bestseller *The Philosopher's Stone*, Harry Potter finds in an unused classroom the Mirror of Erised. It shows 'us nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts' reveals professor Dumbledore. This revelation the professor says 'will bring us neither knowledge or [sic] truth'. It is the modern conception of religious belief, perhaps that's the reason that Harry Potter is a haunting bestseller, for it can offer us no certainty but what it can offer is some useful information about our lives' deepest desires. Perhaps this warning can help us not going astray in our subject today. But also I would beg you to listen with some irony in your mind, since religion can only be earnest if it has an enjoyable spin-off.

Dilemmas

Many, if not most, liberal theologians not only believe in the imperfection of their conviction but they also hope for it. Questions are more important than answers, they use to say. Many see doubt as the ultimate function of religious belief. Indeed, in this view, belonging to a religious community includes accepting a great many dilemmas that can distract us from moral and spiritual truths. Our hearts can lead us in one direction, whereas our heads lead another way. The price of this is clear enough. Liberal Christianity is not only reluctant in showing the world the deepest desires of its heart, but it very often also fails to do justice to intellectual honesty and integrity. In order to avoid the sacrifice of the heart or the sacrifice of the intellect, liberal belief bears its lot in resignation and remains silent in public. Now if this is the case, it will be worthwhile to consider some liberal Christian dilemmas that confuse us.

Let's consult the dilemmas some of my colleagues recently did find out in present liberal religious thinking. Despite the general inclination to act in a kind and friendly way, liberal Protestants do have some serious problems making them what they are. They are ambiguous. Although the firm beliefs they hold, they think that it is possible that the opposite might be true as well. This is what we call: a dilemma. Among the various dilemmas that can be detected, there are five of them that give rise to the inner conflict called a dilemma. I mention them in a random selection.

In the first place, there is (1) the dilemma of the Bible. Despite its central role in liberal Christian belief, anyone knows that it contains only very few material that cannot also be found elsewhere in world-literature. The notion of a moral and spiritual obligation to it is key, although at the same time it is not considered to be a holy text. According to Tromp, apart from some prophetic writings, such as Isaiah or Jeremy, and the testimony of Christ, the rest of the bible has only very little lasting value.

Another problem is (2) the dilemma of thinking and believing. Despite our high intention to balance belief and thought (*Denkend Geloven, Denkende Glauben*) in ordinary life it turns out that the pinching power of thinking, Knoppers argues, can only be overcome by the jump of belief. Perhaps God does not exist, who knows? But in keeping intact the precious heritage of old-time religion, in singing, praying and preaching, perhaps something very special may still happen to us by force of those outdated liturgical instruments (*Adriaanse*). You never can tell!

The third dilemma to be mentioned is (3) the dilemma of grace. (Remonstrant believers do not like this word very much, perhaps because it suggests some kind of authority. Therefore they do prefer the word spirit, where non-liberals would rather use the traditional word grace.) Grace as the principle of God's caring love, as opposite the idea of a blind unmoved power. To liberal believers this should not be a dilemma, Cossee argues, since it is the undeserved joy that gives a new perspective to our personal lives. This notion is connected to another theme (4) the dilemma of I believe as opposite We believe. Where does their spirituality come from? Liberal believers are far better (sometimes) in telling what their personal belief is. They do find themselves ill at ease in defining what they believe as a collective group. This hesitation should be overcome also in view of the outsiders (*Holtzapfel*). Last but not least, we have the dilemma which may interest our

Unitarian friends with unflagging enthusiasm, which is (5) the dilemma of Christ as an hermeneutical principle. The Remonstrants got started by exploring orthodox Calvinist radicalism and Unitarian reductionism and they did their utmost to escape both of them as if they were their Scylla and Charybdis. (The separation of God and Spirit e.g. will not remain without effect in character, spirituality and in the (public) action as well.) Kubacki understands this attitude as weak and outweighed. It was an attempt to follow a moderate course in theology as well as in public life. If I understand him well, he asks for a thought-provoking escape from this controversy, in presenting Christ as our most valuable resource. This will be the most promising answer to the needs of our times. It is important to understand that the sole function of being moderate is not enough for the existence of a separate autonomous theological and spiritual tradition. In an imperfect world, as we all very well know, a moderate course goes hand in hand with the idea that indifference and a lack of even a weak commitment are morally permissible.

Dissent

Now to reassure you, it is not my plan to discuss either of these dilemmas. I leave them now for what they stand for. Without exception all of them do represent strong and interesting barriers in our spiritual and theological life. It was not a waste of time, as you perhaps might think. For I need them greatly, since they represent the choices – or the lack of choices – that make people to what they are. In the world thus created, the colorful spiritual world of the liberal believer, it is sensible to think about how all of this might interfere with the actual questions and problems of the outside world. What we feel and spiritually believe can have at least some effect on our choices, and hopefully this will somehow also be appropriate to the needs of the less than perfect world we live in.

Nowadays philosophers, theologians and social scientists make a useful distinction between spirituality and religion. Spirituality is the way you handle your belief. Modern spirituality confines its attention solely to the immediate expression and manifestation. 'As a product of time and chance' (Rorty). It uses secular and religious language, often related to bodily experience, but without attending a religion in particular or being committed to a church. When you ask them what their religion is, they do mention – quite confusingly – the name of a church, which, however, they never pay a visit. In former days what spirituality stood for, was the personal expression of a certain religion. Religion precedes spirituality. Now most people give us the impression that they in some way or another have plugged in into spirituality, but they prefer not to belong to any religion at all. What William James called the psychological reality has now become a spiritual reality for many people, who are afraid of entering the metaphorical reality of the church. So the actual situation is upside down: most people say they do all kinds of things with their convictions, but they refuse to be counted as holding religious opinions or truisms as such. 'Hence we see among the men and women of our time, and not just in some philosophers, attitudes of widespread distrust of the human being's capacity for knowledge. With a false modesty, people rest content with partial and provisional truths, no longer seeking to ask radical questions about the meaning and ultimate foundation of human, personal and social existence' summarizes the late John Paul II the now prominent worldviews in an encyclical letter *Fides et ratio* describing the actuality of our day. On the sad occasion of his funeral, many younger people were paying their respect to his memory. When interviewed by journalists, they implicitly corroborated the Pope's own analysis. In answering that they did adore him exclusively as a spiritual person, having no interest at all in his political and moral ideas for example on birth control. If this is a true analysis, and there seems no reason for doubt, then there must be a great and promising future for liberal Protestants. They fit perfectly well to the needs and comfort of modern people of our times. They do not know exactly what they believe. They are morally advantageous and outspoken, but most importantly, this is not necessarily the outcome of their religious beliefs. They do not discuss to the bottom the religious dilemmas they are faced with. And most of all: they have a keen interest in an open religious belief that refuses to be outspoken, but stands firmly for a spiritual attitude that is full of freedom and love, being furthermore tolerant to other believers. What more do you want?

In the Netherlands the theological discussion is dominated now by Harry Kuitert, who shows great solidarity with those who find difficulties in belonging to a church or religion. He holds on the one hand high standards on religion, for better and for worse still being a member of

his Protestant Church of the Netherlands (PKN), but who has at the same time developed himself into an advocate of far reaching religious freedom. To put it shortly, he proclaims that being religious can be defined as the deep feeling of being addressed (aangesproken worden). As a result, he finds himself close to those people who do not visit any religious institution at all, but who view themselves as deeply convicted to a spiritual way of life. It is up to any person to make up his or hers on choice, on the sole criterion of being addressed by words and rituals or not. Kuitert says farewell to the question of truth. The idea that God might very well not exist, is not interesting or bothersome any longer. Far more interesting is the fact that in the Bible or elsewhere I can find poetical, religious or philosophical sentences that comfort me. Starting with a campaign against sentimental Jesus-spirituality, his final move is giving up the idea that ultimately man lives in the sight of God. All of this for the benefit of his principal view that man him- or herself is the producer of his or hers religious viewpoints: 'All we say about 'above' comes from 'below' (alles over boven komt van beneden). So we are left with the rather fundamental impression that religion is the play-garden of all people, where they can do what they like. Thus turning religion into an empty thing, that waits to be filled since mankind, as he firmly holds, has always been and will always remain incurably religious. In handling religion this way, Kuitert thinks that the compelling reasons we may have not to hook ourselves up to some prescribed religion, can be overcome. Critics say, however, that he failed to make clear what the role and function of religion can be, when people know that what they believe might be rubbish and devoid of any reality at all. When they look into the mirror, will they not succumb to mere sadness, knowing that there is good chance that they have sacrificed their religious and personal integrity to some queer fabric of their own minds? Is it me you are looking for? It is not just the words that speak us about God. Not through any positive means the memory of God can be brought back to us. Deus semper maior. Or, in the same sense, but following Franciscus of Assisi directing us to the children and the poor who are in need of our help since they have no one to help them: Deus semper minor. God beyond God as Tillich did teach us. It is this ambiance that Kuitert finds his new way. Not by following the traditional idea of a physical or spiritual being that exists somehow somewhere beyond the range of our ordinary experience. No one knows what God looks like. Therefore God beyond God is not about a being, but it is in the absence of such a being an ultimate and temporary experience itself. Kuitert says that he knows only one experience that responds to this semper maior of anything. It is this challenging vigilant question: 'Where is Abel your brother?' How we are addressed to do something about the fear and unhappiness of others. Religion is about the fact that we feel and experience that we are part of the eternal tissue of reality.

What conclusions can we draw from all of this? What chills us mostly I think is (1) the fact that the question of truth has been given up. This regards our culture in general, as we have seen, but it regards also Kuiterts approach to religion in particular. Secondly (2) there is a very important difference between general spirituality as we see it everywhere today and the primordial question 'Where is Abel your brother?', since modern spirituality, due to its disloyalty to religion, simply has no sense of the religious roots of that question. He still has the benefit of a religious background. Finally, (3) we usually use the word God as referring to a being. It could just as well be applied to an awareness or experience. A moral invitation to chose good goals and pursue the things we have to do for our fellow human beings diligently. I presume that especially our Unitarians friends are listening with pricked up ears. From a moral point of view their expectations must be very high now. Since it is exactly, in so far as I do understand, what they believe: the only goods that exist are the goods of this life. But when all is said and done, the question how all this would exist without the all-powerful unity of God? I am very much interested how they view and can justify how those moral obligations can exist in the absence of God?

The Dilemma of Telling the Truth

Considering the dilemmas we recounted above, the notion that telling the truth can be at odds with our real beliefs, is perhaps the major problem for our modern and post-modern world. It is a difficult dilemma to choose between what you know and what you believe. And this dilemma arises easily for those who prefer a moderate theological attitude avoiding any conflict and leaving the things as they are.

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians can be summarized in just these three words: Peace unto

you! It seems as if his message needs no further comment. That is to say: at first sight it seems as simple as that. If only it were so easy! But to understand the author of this letter and the people of Ephesus he is writing to, we need some more information. What kind of a city was Ephesus? Not a small country-village, but a big city, a metropolis and the main port of Asia Minor. From the sea shore one could see a wall nine kilometers long protecting the city against foreign enemy-intruders. Who was the author writing to? In a city of that size, there must have been many different religious traditions and influences. The author of the letter – one of Paul's pupils we believe – tries to convince the Ephesians that, through the events of Jesus' life, they are intimately connected to God's love and eternal freedom. He is concerned about the small parishes of Christians living separated from one another. He fears that the isolated communities may become a danger for their unity. The situation he describes is not far removed from that of the small liberal parishes in our modern world. How can the believer have the assurance that the one God can be regarded as holding together this immense diversity of place, time and opinion? What hope is there for humans if there is no personal ground of being taking care of our reality? For most people this is the most fundamental question about believing in God. That God somehow or another must have a relation of awareness and purpose with the universe.

In this context, the English feminist theologian Daphne Hampson tells us an interesting experience. She had been wrestling for a long time with the question whether God is always there to interfere when things in our lives happen to go wrong. It sounds like our question; is God always there to make peace and unity for us? Or is it better to reduce this to an experience? Hampson presses the question by telling us about the following incident she. It shows that in our daily there is always a gap between how things are and how we desire of hope them to be.

'I was driving to the nearest station, some miles from St Andrews, to catch the last train south to Birmingham that night (a journey of some seven hours). I was to give a day school the following day. Suddenly, and inexplicably, my engine faltered. Realizing that I would not reach the station in time, I stopped in a lay-by near a shop, a cluster of houses and a hotel, but otherwise out in the country. I cried out to God; trying then to concentrate on God, remaining wholly open and aware. I supposed that perhaps a hundred people were converging on Birmingham the following day expecting me to be there. During the next few minutes I discovered that the shop's telephone was out of order (only that day!) I could not rouse anyone at the hotel and knocked helplessly on doors to no avail. I was reaching the point where the houses end and the open countryside begins. At that moment a taxi came at snail's pace down the uneven farm track which joins the main road at that point. I ran to it, the driver telephoned for another cab-and I made the day at school, at which I then recited these events!'

What had remained with Hampson was that there seemed to be two, and only two alternatives open to her audience. Namely either God 'sends taxis' or it was 'just chance' that there just happened to be a taxi. Hampson then tells us that she herself believes in neither of these options. 'Wouldn't it be bizarre,' she says, 'God sending taxis! Since, if God does so, then why doesn't he always do so?'

We all know of far more important cases than sending taxis. We can think of the great disasters threatening the world, the dangers of hunger and thirst, violence, tsunamis and warfare. But the other option is also difficult for a religious person to believe. It cannot be that all such happenings are only there 'by chance', when we believe that God is actively present in our world!

It is a thrilling question and people of all times have been wrestling with it. We believe that our Lord is always there. His presence is felt and experienced in a very direct way. In the psalms it is said that not a feather of a bird can fall to the earth without God's notice. Today, when we come together to celebrate the unity of the Church, we flock together since we say that we believe in the unity of the Church, and the unity of mankind. But at the same time we are not unaware of that strange feeling, the feeling that deep inside we know that we celebrate this feeling time and again. We devote our time in our churches, we pronounce our intercessions. We feel that we share the same mood, the same spirit of love and unity. But still deep inside we know that the ideal response to our wishes, our ideals our hopes has not yet arrived. It is here that one can be deeply impressed by the incident I described about the taxi. Are we waiting for unity and peace as the God-sent answer to our

sincere hopes? When Daphne Hampson recited the story of her car-incident to her mother she was overwhelmed by her reaction. Her mother simply said: well done! She felt very glad with that answer. Now she knew that her mother understood far more about God's presence in our lives and in our world, than she did. That God is neither sending taxis when we are in trouble catching our train in time, nor leaving us alone in a life where all and everything is simply happening by chance. Our contact, or perhaps better our connectedness with God, is presumably of a far more different kind. When we ask for unity and peace, it is better to start with concentrating on this awareness in ourselves. It is like Jesus who is supposed having said to his pupils: 'My peace will be with you, my peace I let you!' By asking ourselves whether our love of God is so basic in our lives, that we really do stand open for peace and unity. Whether we see the taxis of our hope and future passing by at snail's pace, whether we call them to wait for us or not.

Christianity across all times and ages has considered itself in the first instance as the way to the future. Christians were called the people of the way! The letter to the Ephesians gives testimony of this: 'Jesus Christ came and pronounced the good news: peace to you who were far off, and peace to you who were near by, for through him we both alike have access to the same God, in the one spirit.'

It is clear that, theologically speaking, she does not want to ground her belief solely on such an intuitive awareness. She prefers to speak of God in terms of the existence of another dimension to reality. She loves to call dimension of reality God. The problem is that a lot of people keep telling us that Christians do believe in God, but they never say that they do believe that God exists. The conclusion seems inescapable that this type of Christianity has developed into some kind of humanism. The most serious criticism she gives to liberal Christian believers is the argument that they play with fire. The argument runs as follows: liberal Christians say they believe in God and at the same time they proclaim that the Bible is full of myths, which they no longer can believe in 'literally'. Nevertheless in their religious services and in their sermons they never stop repeating those stories they regard as myths. Even far worse: most of the stories they read have come to consider as not necessary. Now, she says, you need to be careful, for the repetition of the myth may have the effect of consolidating of belief in it on part of the other (often less educated) Christians. The question is inevitable: what are you liberal Christians going to do, what is your reaction, when you audience by chance will admire those old stories in the literal meaning you in fact do reject yourselves? In line with this, what about your tolerance, if for example the majority of some talented young enthusiasts in your parish, become orthodox. To put it in other words: do liberal Christians not run the risk, in always repeating the old-time religious texts, that liberal belief will never be far from conventional. Is this the reason perhaps, that as a result liberal Christianity only now and then in history can show its real face?

The Tissue or Network of Our Convictions

'It is not an accident that the early Christians were described by their heathen neighbors as atheoi. They had left the house in which dwelt many worshippers of the gods. Christianity was not thought of as a religion. The Christian way of worshipping made people irreligious. Religious people know what they should pray. With Christ, the era of religions which know what they should pray comes to an end. Jesus turns people out of the house into the open.' The house of religion, illustrated by those famous words of Dorothee Sölle, is empty. God wants to be found on the road between Jerusalem, Damascus, Jericho and elsewhere. Some will find him, by others he will be overlooked on their hasty ways of self-love and personal ambition. Somehow, in these words, we hear also part of Kuiterts approach, in their common search for authentic experience. Sölle does consider God as a different world – as Hampson does – but where God stands for is this world differently. But all of the theologians referred to here, so much is clear, give non-naturalist answers. Sölle and Kuitert both take a position in the theological tradition of Schleiermacher, which means that they believe in an intuitive experiential awareness of God in ordinary life. Hampson is in opposition to this, since she believes that what God stands for is a totally different reality. Furthermore Sölle and Kuitert as well in some way or another are fascinated by the paradox of intimacy and ultimacy, nearness and distance in religious experience. Theologians like Sölle and Kuitert adapt the model of "kenosis" (Philippinians 2,7), which means that they adhere to the self-emptying of God and in line with this, the ongoing dismantlement and emptying of religion. In other words: the outpouring of God in the alienation of human life

and becoming part of it. Kenosis reflects the process of the alienation of the spirit (Cf. e.g. Noordmans saying *de Geest naar buiten gekeerd*), in God and from God in the field of history and of human interaction. Ontology and metaphysics, in this view, can no longer be the starting point of doing theology. In experience we can become aware less of God's being but more of God's becoming.

The idea that religion is an empty form is supported by many scholars today. The truth of conviction is no longer being questioned; the question is rather whether people do treat what they believe with their hearts and their minds in a truthful way. In view of the fact that people want spirituality, it is perhaps a little bit unwise to confront whole generations with religion that have grown up without any belief in religion. Therefore it is just a great advantage that liberal Christians can live with many dilemmas, as we have just seen, failing to solve one of them. This unique ability of ours makes our church particularly attractive. It is a house where a different language is being spoken. By the fact that the people gathered in that house do pray, they acknowledge that they are not independent beings. This experiment with language, the language of prayer, opens a space for an explosion of imagination. Spirituality has become a very expansive concept. The accent is on the fact that every person inhabits many convictions (*Zuurdeeg*). We should not be so naïve to think that always the same conviction is dominant in our daily life. What religion therefore stands for is the mechanism to generate belief (*McCutcheon*). But as such is an empty form. The basic form of religion, it is said, is not about reflection, opinion or moral statements. Basically religion is the internal drive to do something. Mankind is incurably religious. Piety and honesty are the religious expressions of the desire to do good things (*Spinoza: begeren en handelen*). Religion can challenge conventional understanding: as e.g. the prophets in the Bible, who had an overall inclination to be fair and good. From a moral point of view they were reliable persons because of their life style considered to be *bona fide*. If we consult their opinions or worldviews, than very often they would appear to be outdated and legendary. Modern religious spirituality, *McCutcheon* says, 'shows people who occupy their own silent and static interior world, making them ideal friends, orderly citizens, yet disquieted muses. The fiction of faith thus makes selves more governable.' This is exactly the reason why spirituality is the necessary passage to go through. In the making the discovery of the deepest desires of our hearts, in having this experience, people nowadays make their first steps on the way to some mature kind of religious belief. Religion is in the making. Therefore Christianity might turn out to be THE religion for modernity (*Zizek*).

It seems to me that we arrived at the point where we perceive two ways. One way is the way of actively living spirituality. Spirituality considered as primary to religion. On this way we find theologians as different as *Kuitert* and *Sölle*. They vote for experience. We do not know by now whether this will happen to grow into the direction of a (renewed) religion again. This idea as such must be inspiring to us, since until the middle of the last century Remonstrants did not view themselves as a being church but more or less as a religious congregation or society. Our self image as a church is, so to say, rather young. We were and we are a church indeed, but we would like not to behave in a church-like manner. One of the best examples I think was the approach of *Van Holk*, who held high liturgical standards and was at the same proclaiming that Jesus' project about the Kingdom of God had tragically failed. 'He melted together the ideas regarding the son-of-man, the suffering servant of God, and that concerning the Messiah (...) Jesus was not the expected Messiah: He was more than that (...) Because he taught us and imitated the way to God, since in His life and death we see how great the love can be, if a human being is driven by the Holy Spirit....'

The other way is the way of what would like to call: diplomatic spirituality. Liberal theologians are experts in this field. We trace the contours of the conscious or unconscious beliefs that structure the diversity of our life and thought. Since we are so divers in our beliefs, theologians are masters in concealing the imperfection of what we do have in common and what not. In confrontation with this unending quest, theologians are becoming more or less diplomats. The outcome is some sort of diplomatic spirituality: a continuation of theology in a pastoral, poetical and liturgical terminology meant to conceal our differences. But words cannot be the stand-in for experience. (This was perhaps *Kuiterts* most important insight, that God is not the word, not a being, but an experience.) I am not

saying that this is not necessary. It is the price to be paid for our principles of freedom and tolerance. From tolerance pseudo-tolerance or repressive tolerance can easily emerge; when it happens that the virtue of being tolerant becomes an instrument of resignation to keep ourselves out of any confrontation (Kinneging). When we try to live and work with the suspension of ready (religious) answers, I conclude from this, that what perhaps is most needed now is the (perhaps temporary) suspension of religion, as a preparation for a Christian spiritual and therefore experiential engagement with ordinary life. Is it not a piece of irony that we as liberal Protestants, almost always happen to behave like a traditional church, although our spiritual capital as well as our deepest roots invite us to be critical by principle towards any religious authority culture?

The Mirror of Erised

Let me finish this lecture with a short summary. The argument is that liberal Protestantism has some important features that do correspond perfectly with modern ideas on spirituality and religion. In my view the most prominent dilemma, behind all the other interesting dilemmas mentioned, is the dilemma of telling the truth. Dilemmas can only be solved by discussion. On the other hand, modern spirituality is not much interested in opinions or truth. It pays more interest in truthfulness. What people believe is completely groundless if what they believe is not consonant with their way of life. Religion resembles too often the building of cathedrals nobody wants to live in.

Finally, I would like to refer to Harry Potter, who is the master of wit and irony in a much to serious world. One of the amazing secrets he discovers in an unused classroom at Hogwarts the Mirror of Erised. It is forbidden to look into this mirror. The reason is clear. When you look into this mirror you will not see who you are, but you will see your deepest hidden desire. So when Harry looks in to the mirror he sees his dead parents waving their hands in order to greet him. There's also a professor at a hidden place in the room. He is watching Harry. Harry asks him what the mirror shows when he looks into it. Anyone would suppose that what he sees are books, since he is a real professor. But the truth is that when he looks into the Mirror of Erised, he sees nicely knit warm socks. Apparently this is his greatest hidden desire! In line with this piece of magic, perhaps when we take a look into the mirror of our liberal Protestant dilemmas we learn that the first desire of our times is spirituality rather than religion. Only by passing through what we need most we can be able to find our way back to religion. Let us profit from the fact that we are a less than perfect church and that is our deepest hidden desire to be so. Perhaps in being so we can contribute, from our Christian point of view to the spiritual needs of our times. Only in sharing this religious experience with others, we may surely find inspiration (metanoia) for the contours of our future religion.

THE UNITARIAN CHURCH IN TRANSYLVANIA

- A RELIGIOUS AND MORAL INSTITUTION

Matters of Principle and Draft Strategic Plan for Organizational Development

By: Rev. Gyerő Dávid

1. Social Vision for the Future

The Unitarian Church in Transylvania activates for a society, which is to be characterized by the following elements:

Quality-led view instead of a quantity-led view, as a continuity of the Unitarian tradition;

A religion searching for God and approaching God, helping and serving humans;

Awakening to the values and identity of this religion;

The living of an individual faith to reach a spiritual, intellectual and physical health;

Unitarianism becomes a manner of living;

Through deepening the spirituality of Unitarianism, there is a healthy excelling of its members from society; the religion shows in practice that the individual carrying it belongs to the Unitarian Church;

The people of the future find their homes in a genuine Church, which is a serving and helping institution, according to the spiritual needs and social demands of the constituency;

The characteristics of this membership are humbleness, quality-lead view, consciousness, conviction and consistency;

In order to reach this stage, the religious education offers spirituality already in the early ages for children and later for youth. Each young person has a possibility to choose his/her own religion: they receive religious education, but also the freedom of choice.

There is a continuous education through generations following each other; also, this education makes people be passionate about their religion, they care for it and they express this caring;

Also, the Unitarian ministerial education is radically transformed. The ministers are part of each social action of the church.

Their quality education and service is inseparable from the awakening of the lay members: the lay identity shows in a certain independence from the clergy.

There is a two-pole communication between laity and clergy. In this relationship, ministers keep a certain authority, but this is an inner authority, characterized by professional education, moral and personality notability, authentic speaking and acting.

The many kinds of harmful lacks of unity are over; at the same time the tradition of allowing the existence of the differences of opinion lives further.

In society, getting rid of the social and dogmatic barriers and acknowledging the inner authority lead us towards lifting the interdenominational disagreements, in the name of the international acceptance of Unitarianism as a Christian faith. Respecting values means respecting religious differences too.

There is a positive view on life by strengthening the national identity as well, by ending up with the "lamenting Hungarian identity". Nationalism is transformed into loving the nation, which can't be separated from a tolerant national identity.

The insurance of the universal human rights in Transylvania means private equity of chances and communal emancipation for each Hungarian on his/her native land.

The positive view of life is basic also to reach the health of the whole society: the social justice and solidarity are indispensable parts of it.

The human-centered religion means also being family-centered. The church which realizes the importance of an united family helps these families in their healthy survival.

Unitarianism means getting ruled by traditional and progressive forces. Its spiritual, intellectual, moral, cultural and national values are forming powers of a social overall picture.

The total correction of the actions against life, humanity, environment and society are also parts of this picture.

2. Organizational Vision for the Future

Extension

The purpose of the Unitarian Church is to exist as the organized religious community of the Unitarian people in Transylvania. It aims to be present in the cultural, economic, politic and church life of the Transylvanian Hungarian society as a responsible and influential institution.

Its membership comes from the Unitarian tradition, but we don't exclude the other religious people who express their belonging here, because of their religious needs, values and Hungarian entity. It is important for us to offer the chance for every Unitarian person to meet the essence of the Church: it shouldn't be our fault, that even one Unitarian person is not involved in it because he/she didn't know about its existence, or because he/she didn't like it.

Services

Our services need strengthening first of all in their religious site: through programs, projects and publications to lead the people realize that they should live a real and useful religious life. First, we must discover the incomplete areas of the church leaders through spiritual practices, then widen the religious activities to reach out to the members as well.

Many members have financial problems, being unable to contribute to the programs of the Church. We must find ways to encourage them about their importance to the church, and also to offer financial help for those who really need it. An effective way for this could be the widening of the already existing social and scholarship program. This could serve also as a way of the very important talent discovering program: to help and motivate the young talents, to secure the local and national leader's replacement, and to assure the constituency for the Unitarian high schools and seminary.

Human Resources

Analyzing the issues of human resources should be done on three levels: local, district and national. In order to do church work on either of these levels, a person needs inner inclination towards human activities, interest for the church work, juvenile mood, free personal, financial, spiritual and mental comfort, and certain qualifications. Therefore, the church convenience can be developed through search for new talents, for replacing leaders and through training and specialization.

Financial Basis

The financial situation of the Church can be called satisfactory, compared to the general condition of the national economy in Romania. An even stronger financial security needs a new economic strategy in changing the proportions between the different income sources of the church, as well as the proportions of the expenditure categories.

Infrastructure

The equipment of the Church is appropriate, compared to the funds available for purchasing them. From the point of view of the infrastructure, the area where most improvement is needed is the one of the local congregations and the districts. First of all, there is an urgent need to start using a computer in each congregation, and also to get connected to the Internet - the latter is hindered also by the inappropriate telephone system of the country. The work of the districts would be much improved by the mounting of the district office infrastructure with needed supplies. The activities of the local congregations and maintaining a helping relationship with them on the district level could be improved a lot by purchasing a district vehicle.

Image & Public Relations

The quality public relations and image positioning of the Church requires a few specialists in the Headquarters office to cover the planning and implementation of the areas of protocol, image and positioning. The principle of this image-creating work is to continue the authenticity of the Unitarian religious and social work: our main values should not be professed only in theory, but they should radiate from us all the time, and our services should reflect these values which we serve.

The core purpose of creating a proper image is to attract our people close to the congregations, and also that the Unitarian Church to be considered a unique and constructive part of the Transylvanian Hungarian social, cultural and religious life. During the direction of this appreciation, we should pay attention to dismiss the false beliefs created about us (such as the rumor of our non-Christian theology) so that our real values, purposes and tools are well known. We ought not be considered a church, which wants to deprive members from other faith traditions, but as a possibility for more, which is free to be joined by anyone who accepts our values.

3. The Mission

The Unitarian Church in Transylvania is the religious and moral organization of the Transylvanian Unitarian people, holding together and stimulating its members towards living religious spirituality and value-centered way of life. In order to reach self-respecting Unitarian spirituality, mentality and behavior based on liberal view, openness, tolerance, freedom of conscience and search for justice, the Church organizes religious and cultural programs, practices projects, fastens regular services to create a healthy society and to prevent social injustice, edits publications, shares information, provides professional forums and training. And first of all, preaches the good news (euangelium) of Jesus about the one God, creator and providential father of all humans.

4. The Examination of the Organizational Culture through its Basic Values

Openness: the inclination towards unceasing widening, towards welcoming new ideas and values; welcoming people from other faith traditions; in general, accepting the differences; conscious interest, being able to give, to leave barriers until a certain limit. It is the stage of spirit of those who desire and work for progress.

Tolerance: a human quality forming, developing and limiting the character in a positive way, which offers multiple chances and assures constant communication; an ability to overlook and forgive; not kowtowing: bowing together.

Spirituality: the motivating force of the actions; a chance for survival, a greatest opportunity for the mind, through which it cannot be always reached though; deep essence, nurturing basis, "spinal column"; the starting point of all the basic values. It is the leading force of the practical activities, the summary of the ideal and mental values.

Liberalism: realizing autonomous ideas, which carry the nuclei of the new; where nobody is obliged to do anything; weighing things, a healthy selection; more than openness, because it also means living the accepted values; being free from dogmas and prejudices.

Purposefulness: always strive towards a defined purpose; knowing ahead what and how to do; tendencies that show forward, and upward.

Elasticity: condition for finding ways out, for easy changes, accepting differences which all aim at progress, in order to reach a well-defined vision for the future; applying new ideas after weighing them; a method of dealing with troubles where original ideas can be changed through improvisation; it is readiness for compliance to change.

Spontaneity: reflex-like reaction based on accord and trust, which finds the needed solution even in unexpected situations; sensitivity of circumstances and problems, which has the aims always as target.

Ready-to-develop: quality improvement of the work, stepping towards higher levels in the knowledge of the actual conditions.

Continuity: undertaking and assuming the religious and social problems, which produced the birth of the church, in the present as well; accepting the vision; respecting the basic values.

Traditionalism: bridging the change between generations, to avoid rupture between past and present, present and future; bringing to life of old traditions in a modern world, enriching it through them.

Colorfulness: people with different capacity and interest peacefully coexist within the church; being open towards other values, to be informed about them; reaching out to different aspects of life, working on these on various levels; approaching a theme from many points of view; composed, organic relatedness between certain disciplines.

Understanding: accepting other people's life and values through empathy; its results are the welcoming and inclusive approaches.

Assistance: a positive quality based on attention and listening to others; support for the outsiders, which helps them create a home and find themselves in it; undertaking other's fate.

Being good organizers: objectivity in evaluating our possibilities; knowing why, when, how, with whom, by what, what is possible and necessary to do.

Connections: building human relationships for friendship, knowledge and connections; not to work alone, but for us with others.

Professionalism: the theoretical purposes are realized in a most perfect way in practical reality too; getting rid of possible barriers; a quality-based approach.

5. The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis

External threats:

The political changes could bring again extremist forces to lead the country, which tend to "solve" the national minority issue by restricting the minority organizations. An economic crisis can tear the economic basis of the Church even if in the present is quite stabile and independent.

The churches professing extremist dogmas may express their religious intolerance by forced and deliberate converting, financially advantageous membership offers or spiritual and mental terror. But some inner phenomena of the Unitarian Church can be dangerous too: the deepening of the generational differences, the diverse opinions forming cliques, people with limited human values may have malice, envious or exploitative approach (trouble makers). Other kind of even more damaging dangers are the moral and intellectual dirt flowing in through the media (Coca-Cola culture); the depreciation of the spiritual and cultural values, the ravage of the international tripe, the acceptance of the entertainment forms of low level, the materialistic view, the consumer culture, the spread of the mass production methods.

External opportunities:

We need to cooperate with the other Transylvanian Hungarian churches, as well as the Romanian churches, on a more diverse basis. External affairs should be built in still unknown and unexplored directions, like reaching out to the funds of the European Union supporting cooperation. The professional training possibilities of other organizations aiming organizational strengthening should be more often taken advantage of. We must use the opportunities offered by the multimedia sources like constantly updating our web page, and must submit inner news, data and information towards the media channels.

Internal weaknesses:

The lack of a living spirituality on certain levels; the too tolerant approach of the Unitarian religion; the interpersonal mistrusts, the lack of a needed attention to each other; the deficiency of sharing and directing the tasks; the leaders and members of the local congregations are not motivated enough; we are weak about securing the replacement of the leaders; our central efforts of helping the activity of the local congregations is deficient; as a reaction, the congregations have passive reactions towards the requests of the Consistory, and which is even more sad, their own duties.

Internal strengths:

Our ministers and some lay leaders are having a strong sense of vocation. We mostly ignore personal interests, and also being materialistic. Our team character is growing; our external relations and connections are more or less well organized. We are well known in the Transylvanian Hungarian life, we have some high quality national and local programs. Our publications are published regularly, our grant application system works well enough. We are actively built into the political and economic structures. We are keeping our traditions, we are exacting, we are purposeful, and we are open-minded.

6. Asking Strategic Questions, Setting Strategic Objectives

We must renew and open up our inside and outside mission. How can we do that best?

We must reframe the ministerial calling and vocation. How can we do that best?

We must reactivate the lay membership. How can we do that best?

We must change=develop the leadership styles and power. How can we do that best?

We must simplify and update the organizational structures. How can we do that best?

7. Scheduling The Vision: A Working Plan

Objective	Forms of implementation	Time	Place	In charge
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8. Detailed Part Strategies

- Finances
- Fundraising
- Human resources
- Public relations
- Marketing of services
- Administration

9. Writing the Strategic Document

THE TRANSYLVANIAN UNITARIAN WORSHIP

Theological basis, purpose and order

By: Rev. Székely Kinga

When I was a child I was taught that out there in the big world there are millions who share my liberal religious views. Members of the different nations pray to God as I do, read the Bible as I do, follow Jesus' teachings as I do. There is a small group of people even in the Netherlands, I was told, with a strange name, the Remonstrants, who are our brothers and sisters in faith. Very good, I thought. In spite of this information we had only one link to the Netherlands in the dark Communist era. The Dutch Reformed Church used to send us a Christmas parcel each year. So we had our coffee, sugar, cacao, flower, corn flakes for Christmas. No Remonstrants though.

At this moment I'm very thankful to you, who have organized this theological conference that the things I have been taught are not lies, that after about 25 years I can experience that there really are sisters and brothers from the Remonstrant brotherhood.

With this paper my job is to present to you the Transylvanian Unitarian worship. What an easy task, I thought when I learned that this was to be the subject. Only later did I realize that my task was overwhelmingly demanding. As I'm sure, you have already experienced there are expressions that we use every day but when the time comes to explain them, suddenly we start doubting. Do these expressions really express what we want to express? Have we been using the right expressions for our message? The same hesitance came on me, when I started to define what does worship mean. Everybody worships something in some ways. We, back in Transylvania worship, you, here in the Netherlands worship, the Indonesian Muslim worships, the last tribe in New Guinea worships, everybody does it. But what is worshipping? Human beings have been created in such a way that they like the rituals. They-we like to build up, to express our thought and feelings through ceremonies. This general statement that everybody does rituals, does ceremonies is true. In this way we humans are all the same. What makes the difference among us is the purpose of that ritual, of that ceremony. Some worship their bank accounts, some worship their beauty, some worship their intelligence, some worship the powers of hell, and finally some worship God. But-a question rises again: who is God? What is she/he? Again, do our God-expressions express the true message of our beliefs? Can all religious worships be defined holy and sacred?

The religious worship expresses the religious values, the beliefs through which we approach the facts of life. In our Unitarian theology religious worship has to express our religious Unitarian beliefs. Better said this would be the ideal link between theology and worship. These days the reality of the relationship between theology and worship is somewhat contradictory. On one hand we have an almost perfect set of religious beliefs, but on the other hand our "far from dynamic" worship can hardly express the richness of our religious beliefs. Only some very charismatic preachers and music directors can channel by their "performances" the beauty of our Unitarian beliefs. There is also a well founded excuse for the failures mentioned above, and that is that our theology isn't framed by unquestionable dogmas. Beyond a few unquestionable principles such as respect for life, respect for differences, compassions with all human beings, and gratitude toward God, Unitarians in Transylvania can build up their own theology with the help of divine revelation, human experience (emotions and knowledge), and sacred books. In other words the liturgical persons in the Transylvanian Unitarian worship are not fully responsible for the result of the worship. Do the church attendants have a religious-spiritual experience during the worship service? Do the liturgical persons have a religious-spiritual experience during the worship service? This may depend on the complexity of many components of religious life. I'm going to share with you a personal experience. There are Sundays when I, as a minister, as a liturgical person, think that through my sermon I have reached out to the whole universe, that everybody had an astounding religious experience. Then I look at the pews, and what do I see? People sleeping nicely in the pews. What has happened with the religious-spiritual experience I was yearning after? How can I express the theology I follow, I believe in, when people are sleeping throughout the worship service? Of course I value sleeping a lot, but I would like all of us to experience something holier than sleeping during a worship service.

I would like to raise two main questions about worshipping. My *first question* is: How strongly does our worship express the religion, or the religious values we believe in? My *second question* regarding worshipping and religion is: What is the ideal relationship between worship and religiosity? Do we have to be religious in order to worship? Do we have to worship if we call ourselves religious?

At a board meeting in my congregation I was complaining about church attendance. Why can't you find, or sacrifice, an hour of your life to celebrate your life, to experience some devotion?—I have asked my board members. And one of them answered: what is the religion good for? Look at the situation in the Middle East. They are so very religious, they pray many times a day, they actually dwell in the churches, and they kill each other every day. Do you want us to do the same?

In my answer to this short and sharp question I have tried to focus the board members' attention at the thin line between being religious and being aggressive. It takes a certain amount of aggression to confess your religion, because you declare a true belief, which might offend the other whose beliefs are different from yours. However up to this point you haven't done anything wrong. But it takes only one more step to confess that your belief has to be true for everybody else. When you cross this thin line, then you have already left the realm of religiosity, and have stepped into the realm of aggression. The way we worship might offend another believer, and we have to be aware of this.

In the following I will try to list the Transylvanian Unitarian worship possibilities, which are officially set up for the congregations in a Liturgical Book, which has been approved by the Synod of the church. I will also mention the so-called unofficial possibilities, which are mainly used as alternative ways of worshipping by the youth, and children.

1. A description of our general Sunday worship service is:

Opening hymn, standing

Second hymn, sitting

Prayer, standing

The prayer said by the minister is not from a prayer book, but out of heart, the minister's heart. The minister needs to combine his/her thoughts/feelings of prayer with that of the community. This is sometimes successful, other times it isn't. When people tell me, as to a minister, that the opening prayer spoke about their thoughts and their feelings, I know that my prayer was meaningful and useful. When people say nothing I know that my prayer couldn't reach the depth of their hearts.

Lord's prayer, standing

Middle hymn, standing

Biblical reference of the sermon, standing. The text taken from the Bible can vary from 1 to 10 verses at most. If it's short we repeat it, if it's too long we say: these words are the core message of my sermon.

Sermon-sitting. The sermon's length can vary from 12 minutes to 40. The ideal length of a sermon is 25 minutes. Some ministers argue that a true preacher doesn't use notes, but speaks freely. The gospel needs to come out of one's heart, they say, it shouldn't come from a sheet of paper. The Holy Spirit gives the power and the courage to speak. Some ministers argue that speaking freely from the pulpit is the most obvious sign of being not prepared for that speech. These freely told sermons are like poorly made surgeries on a sick body.

Silent prayer, standing

Closing prayer, standing

Blessing, standing. Even though our Liturgical Book says that ministers should raise their hands asking for God's blessing, there are some ministers who argue with this and they hold their hands in front of them in a praying position. Some ministers argue that we can ask for God's blessing, and we even can play an intermediary role between God and the congregation. Some argue that everybody can ask for God's blessing, and there is no need for a special person to channel this blessing.

Announcements, sitting.

Closing hymn, sitting.

2. Morning devotion, evening devotion. These devotion times aren't longer than 15 minutes. They contain an invocation, a biblical reference, a prayer, the Lord's Prayer, silent prayer, and blessing. They also contain two opening hymns, and a closing hymn.

3. Holiday worship services

Being a Christian church, we use a liturgy built upon Jesus' life. According to the chronology of his life we divide the profane time of a year into two parts, two seasons: there is a holiday season of the year from December through May, and there is a season without a religious holiday; that's the period between June and the last Sunday of September. We have communion at least four times a year in the holiday season. These occasions are: Easter, Pentecost, Thanksgiving, Christmas. We can also have communion (it's optional, the board of the church decides upon it) at special occasions, such as: general assembly of a community, village or town days, celebrating together with pilgrims from the partner churches, etc.

On the last day of September we celebrate *Thanksgiving*. This holiday isn't related to a particular event in Jesus' life. It's a combination of the pagan and Christian traditions, and it has a lot to do with the rituals of the agricultural society. We give thanks for the new wheat, the good harvest, and for the strength God has given us to be able to work on the fields, and later enjoy the fruits of our work.

From December 24th through 27th we celebrate *Christmas*. The season before Christmas is called Advent, a time for preparing, and waiting for Christmas. In our church worship service we celebrate the birth of Jesus. We call Jesus the Son of God, nevertheless all humans are called the children of God. We call Jesus our Saviour. He is, he can be our Saviour through his teachings, through the example of his life. He doesn't have to be killed (crucified) for us in order to be our saviour. We accept him our Saviour because we believe that if we will follow his teachings, and the example of his life we can be saved from our weaknesses. We believe that God has created all humans good, that he/she placed upon us the heavy task of free will. Everybody is responsible for his/her deeds. Only God can forgive our misdeeds. We also use other metaphors for Christmas, saying that at Christmas we celebrate the birth of love, the birth of light, and the birth of life.

6th of January isn't an important holiday, but we still pay attention to it. That's the day when we celebrate the baptism of Jesus. In a rural setting (in villages) that is the day for starting the yearly official family visits. It is also the date for starting the Carnival season. Especially in a rural setting the religious holidays are combined with the folk traditions and many rituals are still performed which are partly Christian and partly pre-Christian religious in content.

Good Friday is a very important occasion to worship. There are two liturgies used on this holiday. In some churches there is a general worship service, in others there is a devotion kept and the music director, alone or with a group, performs the Passion. Again in a rural setting the women who attend church dress in black, the colour for mourning. We mourn Jesus' death. We remember the painful act of crucifixion, and in our prayers or sermons we try to talk about the meaning of suffering. Suffering belongs to human life together with joy and happiness. If humans are ready to take the blessings, the good, from God, they also should be ready to take from him/her the suffering. On Good Friday we also talk about martyrdom. Do we need martyrs? How do the martyrs influence our beliefs, our religiosity? The huge question on Good Friday is: Is there something in my life, is there something in my spiritual, or physical environment I am ready to die for? Would I be able to sacrifice my life for a conviction, an idea, a belief?

Easter is the holiday when we celebrate the eternity of our spirits, and the human spirit' and love's victory over death. We deny the bodily resurrection, but we are open to talk about miracles, and talk about clinical death. Our emphasis isn't placed upon bodily life, but upon the spiritual and emotional life. In an Easter worship service we try to make people (ourselves) overcome fear of death. We also try to help people (ourselves) prepare to die one day, and until then to have a dignified life, and hopefully a dignified death.

Ten days from Easter comes what the Trinitarian Christians call Assumption Thursday. We can call it *Holy Thursday*. The literally translation from Hungarian is Thursday of sacrifice. On this Thursday we celebrate in our worship service the metanoia, the conversion of the disciples, who having been frightened on Good Friday became hesitant about their calling. The disciples could not realize in what way can Jesus be followed when he's dead. On that Holy Thursday

they realized that they don't need to see Jesus' physical body in order to follow him. We also talk about the meaning of miracles, and about the different religious experiences humans can have. Can I, as a Unitarian, have visions, images. Can dead people deliver their message to me? Our answer is yes. People who already died can talk to us, because the human spirit is eternal, and because love is stronger than death.

On *Pentecost* we celebrate in our worship service the power of the Holy Spirit, and the formation of the first Christian community. We consider the Holy Spirit to be God's loving power, which helps people overcome fear and weakness. With the help of the Holy Spirit were able our forebears to build and protect their homes, their churches, and their culture. Talking about the calling or the realizations of the Christian Church we don't deny all the terrible misdeeds, which have been done in the name of the Christian Church, or Christian religion. My newest comparison to this issue is, that even though we know that many people use making love for making money, or making other people suffer, we still wouldn't stop making love. In other words it's not our fault, that many people have been misusing the Christian ideas. As I already wrote above, there is a very thin line between being innocently religious, and being brutally religious. Because both the innocent and the brutal is committed to his/her religion, which is a normal way of being religious. The situation becomes anomaly, when the religious person, in this case, the Christian is convinced that killing people is also a way of being committed to one's religion.

4. Week day worship services

Before the holidays with communion it is compulsory to have preparing worship services. We call them faith strengthening worship services. In general our congregations have these weekday worship services between Christmas and Easter. For five or six days we have evening worship services. Now a days we share the ecumenical program of that week long worship service. There is a chosen biblical text to talk about every evening. We invite guest speakers from different congregations, even from different religions. The liturgy of these worship services follow the liturgy of the general Sunday worships'. In general at these faith strengthening worship services there are short performances at the end of the service. Someone recites religious poems, or sings religious songs, both from the old and the new tradition. At the end of the week an agape is held, where the congregants share food and drinks.

5. Special occasion worship service

Religious church life can not be separated from the life of the society. The society's huge shaping influences are the historical events. We call an event historical whenever there is an outstanding change regarding politics, economy, or spiritual attitude. In our tradition on the following days we hold a special worship service:

-*Memorial day of the Diet of Torda*. On January 13th, 1568 the Diet of Transylvania voted for the very first time in Europe the freedom of religion. Whereas in other European countries religious (denominational) wars troubled the different societies, in Transylvania the Diet agreed on honouring many different Christian denominations. Of course during the dark years of Communism we weren't allowed to celebrate such a historical event, but since the fall of the Communism we commemorate this event.

-*Memorial day of the International Liberal Religious Contacts*. On the third Sunday of March we celebrate the partnerships we have with different liberal religious traditions. During their history liberal Christian and Unitarian Christian ideas and communities were in general oppressed. It is a relief and a joy to be able to celebrate the liberation of our tradition. It is also a joy to celebrate the strong links, which bond us into partnerships.

-*March 15th, holy day of the Hungarian Nation*, remembering the freedom fight, revolution from 1848-49.

-*Mother's Day, first Sunday of May*.

-*Day of the Reformation*, remembering Luther's brave act of publicizing his ideas. It is celebrated on the last day of October.

-*All Souls Day, or Day of the Death, 1st of November*. Some congregations have worship services in the churches, some in the cemeteries. We remember our forebears who have already passed away. We put the flowers of remembrance on the graves, and lit the candles on the graves to symbolize the light of the eternal human spirit.

-*Francis David Day, 15th of November*. Francis David is the founder of the Unitarian church and religion in Transylvania. According to historians there are two dates, which can be taken

as the date of Francis David death: November the 7th and November the 15th. On the 7th November the Francis David National Youth Organization organizes a pilgrimage to the fortress of Deva, where Francis David was imprisoned, and where he died. A worship service is held in the fortress. On November 15th the congregations celebrate the day of Francis David. At this occasion the children groups and the youth groups give a memorial performance after the church service.

-*New Years Eve*, at 11 o'clock in the evening. In a rural setting after the church service there are two monologs recited in the front of the churches. One monologue is a farewell from the past year, one is a welcoming to the new year.

-*First Day of the New Year*. Again in a rural setting, next to celebrating the new year, this is the occasion when the Golden Book of the congregation is presented. This book contains the donations and the volunteer work of the congregants.

Next to these worship services for special occasion we also can worship at the beginning and of the end of the school year. Once a year there is a national/international gathering on a hill next to Udvarhely.

6. Youth and children's worship services

The liturgy for these special worship services aren't in the Liturgy Book, but we still use them. We mainly learned these from our United States experiences. The National Youth Organization also helps the youth groups to set up an alternative worship service for themselves. In general at these services next to the organ we use guitars, and other musical instruments, and next to the minister lay persons are involved in both the prayers and the sermon.

As a closing remark I would like to address two major issues regarding the present time of our religious tradition:

Is our religious tradition able to give a suitable religious satisfaction to its followers?

What do we do for the coming generations of our tradition?

If we analyse the church attendance in a Unitarian church in Transylvania on a general Sunday a very poor picture displays. Only a 10 or 20 percentage of the congregants attend church on a regular Sunday. Some ministers and lay people argue that the poor church attendance is due to the very high expectations we set for ourselves regarding human condition, and human behaviour. Be like Jesus was, be like the forebears were who were actually similar to Jesus, we preach every time. The ordinary human being feels so far from this example. We can not achieve that performance, they say, and subsequently they feel no need to listen to these idealistic views. Others argue that the liturgy and the core message of the prayers and the sermons are poor, and they don't offer any religious satisfaction for those who attend the regular Sunday services. As a conclusion I can say that at this moment the majority of the followers of the Unitarian faith and tradition in Transylvania are "holiday believers", who practice their faith only on important holidays.

Regarding the coming generations of our tradition my conclusion is that we have to pay more attention to them. Those forty years of Communism, when religion was persecuted, have marked even our present time. Those adults who are the parents now, during Communism where children, and they had no possibility to have a regular and suitable religious education. Religious spirituality didn't find a place in their lives. In general they all agree that there is something missing in their lives, but they hesitate to declare that the missing part is religious spirituality. Subsequently they can't pass anything religious to their children. Devoted ministers and devoted lay people can make a change in this regard. As it is normal to offer our children a home, so it has to be normal to offer them a religious tradition, a church, where they can find joy, love, and peace. Of course they may leave this spiritual home if they aren't satisfied with. But it's our duty to give them the possibility to learn about our spirituality, our religious beliefs. So God help us in doing this life-saving work.

THE TRANSYLVANIAN UNITARIAN CEREMONIES: their origins, theological basis and order

By: Rev. Sándor Szilárd

A. The origin of Transylvanian Unitarian Ceremonies ⁵⁹

1. *The first Transylvanian Unitarian Book of Ceremonies*, it was written by Ferenc David⁶⁰. There is an erudite assumption of having this book of religious ceremonies written by first Transylvanian Bishop and edited in Printing Company of Gaspar Heltai⁶¹ in years of 1557. Ferenc David looked at religious liturgy in a simple view, "being cleaned from ungodlike and undignified ceremonies what may hurt salvation of human being", accentuating the "non adoramus and non invocatus" ⁶² of Jesus Christ. It may be interesting to mention that bishops Balint Radecki (in 1624) and Gergely Mihaly Almasi (1694)⁶³ letting us know that to the end of XVII the ceremonies of Transylvanian Unitarians it was used according to book of Ferenc David. *The first book of ceremony it was edited by Balint Radecki in 1626, and this book it was reedited 1694 by Mihaly Geregely Almasi.* ⁶⁴

2. It may be interesting also to mention shortly about the "law of ceremonies" - according to "Systema Universae Theologiae Christianae" written by Transylvanian Unitarian bishop Mihaly Lombard Szentambrahami ⁶⁵ This Unitarian minister lived made study for three years in Netherlands with his remonstrants friends. He met the famous theological professor of Amsterdam Limbrock Filip, who influenced his philosophy and theology. Szentábrahám Lombárd Mihály (1683? -1758), in years of 1712-1715 studied in Leiden⁶⁶, too. In his "Systema...", on the pages of 64-83 is treating about ceremonies. On the page of 64 in the paragraph of 18, he is discoursing about "law of ceremonies". Writing about as about this "prescriptions of laws", he is mentioning ceremonies, as being "exterior sides" of religious acts, as the expression of human cults forward God.

3. Ferenc Jozsef⁶⁷: in years of 1878 edited the "Essays of church liturgy". In the same time on his book "Little Unitarian Mirror" he wrote about religious ceremonies of Transylvanian Unitarian church.

4. Synod in Vargyas in 1999: The actual orders of service for worship ceremonies are regulated by enactments of this Synod⁶⁸

B. The goals of Unitarian ceremonies⁶⁹

1. The goal of ceremonies: are *between formalism* (recognizing ceremonies as tools for indemnifying salvation) *and unreasonable rationalism*. We confess of needfulness of ceremonies, but these are not necessary exclusive tools of salvation. The ceremonies are not mediate automatically the divinely grace being linked with salvation. In this sense he ceremonies do *not have the character of "opus operatum"*.

2. The significant intentions of ceremonies are the alteration of spirit and of character and to prepare us to follow Jesus' preaching in our life: to combat our animal's nature in us and to reach the human ideas - other words - to become more humans. The ceremonies are tools for this accomplish these ideas; they do not bring accomplishments but help to achieve the goal. We shall not change the tool with goal. First of the entire helping humans to become more follows of Jesus, and the exterior expression of this values have place in ceremonies. First

⁵⁹ Source of inspirations: edition of Keresztesy Magveto and www.unitarius.hu/szertartas/szertart.html, www.unitarius.hu/400ev/istentisztelet.htm

⁶⁰ See Hungarian pages at http://www.mimi.hu/magyarok/david_ferenc.html

⁶¹ See Hungarian pages at http://www.mimi.hu/magyarok/heltai_gaspar.htm

⁶² Unitarians do not pray to Christ for his help, Unitarians pray directly to God

⁶³ See the homepage about Transylvanian Unitarian Bishops mentioning on footnote nr 4

⁶⁴ See the source in http://www.unitarius.com/kernag/magvetok/2003/2003_34/2003_34_Kovacs5.htm

⁶⁵ See : <http://www.unitarius.hu/english/bishops.htm>, <http://www.vjrkft.hu/carus/honisme/ho040200.htm>, <http://www.unitarius.hu/tanulmanyok/szentabrahami.rtf>

⁶⁶ see <http://www.leiden.edu/index.php3>

⁶⁷ See the doctor thesis of Rev. Dr. Elek Rezi

⁶⁸ See the zip at <http://www.unitarius.com/magyar.html>, for English version visit <http://welcome.to/petrosani/>

⁶⁹ See Theological Essays by Red. Imre Gellerd

step: education. Second step: ceremonies. *The spiritual- ethical values cannot replace or substituted with any ceremonies.* From this ensue, that ceremony is not giving salvation. Without active participation for salvation's attainments, any activities and efforts of ceremonies are useless.

3. The ceremonies are the tools of education via Jesus to the kingdom of God. The spiritual targets of ceremonies are to express, to attend, to intensify, to build, the Christian character, the Jesus-liked humankind. To affect human mind, heart and will, to work for Christian personality. Commemorating Jesus and prompting us to follow his teachings. So the ceremonies do not have any miraculous power and we do not confess that we may be able to change the will of God.

C. The theological basis of Unitarian ceremonies

1. The acts of ceremonies have two sides: the human and the divine. According to Unitarian theology, we do not sacrifice any sides for other one. The ceremonies are human actions, having divine presence.

2. Our liturgical actions are not finished or closed definitely. Even if we cleave to our traditions, in the same time we look carefully to have chance for continuation for development.

3. It is important to regard the individual and the communion respects as well. The Unitarianism striving and requiring endorse of balance the individual and the common expectations.

4. The Unitarian ceremonies have to be in balance with requirements of culture. Unitarians never did and never will practice ceremonies, what would not be received by religious ethical convictions.

5. In Unitarian ceremonies – without breaking the unity of them – can get on types of history, traditionally, folkloristic, or regionally forms in it.

6. Because of progressive and deeply human characters the ceremonies never impact with state law.

7. Ceremonies show the balance of practicing the principles of universal and of exclusive clergy.

D. Conditions of elements of Unitarian ceremonies⁷⁰

1. Chapel⁷¹ - the special place for Unitarian ceremonies. The chapels have white wall and the central point of chapel being the pulpit usually with corona above the pulpit. The main elements of chapel are: tower with bells, pulpit with corona, Lord's Table, bench of woman and of man, balcony with organ.

2. Objects of ceremonies: Bible⁷², Singing Book⁷³, organ⁷⁴, chalice and plate⁷⁵, baptism's cup, bells, minister's robe, flags⁷⁶.

3. Symbols of ceremonies: bread and wine⁷⁷ and clean water⁷⁸

⁷⁰ See Keresztesy Magveto fuzetei : Szerartasok es vallasi Szokasok az Unitarius Egyhazban , by Gyorgy Boros ,1932 Cluj

Kolozsvar

⁷¹ To see some memorial Unitarian church visit <http://www.unitarius.hu/400ev/templomok.htm>, and to see the pictures of

laying of the corner stone ceremonies in year 2004 visit www.lorinfo.ro/unitarius

⁷² We use the translation of Gaspar Karoly as well the new translations

⁷³ First of Singing Book is related to Ferenc David, it is important to mention the singing book of Sandro Székely , now we

use the additional form of Marton Palfi

⁷⁴ can be traditional and we have electronical, too

⁷⁵ being used in Lord's supper

⁷⁶ of woman and youth alliance or other church associations, and for funeral service

4. Positions during the ceremonies: sitting and staying.

E. Singing

The congregation sings by staying or by sitting. All of the religious songs (for every occasions of ceremonies) are in one singing book.

F. Prayer⁷⁹

The prayer is expression of individual experiences of conversation with God. We say free prayers, and we say Our Father, and we use the silent meditation⁸⁰ in Transylvanian Unitarian ceremonies. We focus on chances of renewing our human soul and finding the spiritual way to fill ourselves with positive energies, hope, faith, love, trust. Instead of asking bread, we ask energy to be able to work for bread, we pray for ourselves, for each other's, for our family, for our church, for peace etc.

G. Preaching

This is the most important part of ceremonies. The minister read a text from the Bible and according to the message of that verse expressing the message. The goal of preaching is to awake the conscience and active the human will forward to direction of Kingdom of God.⁸¹

H. Baptism⁸²

The baptism is a ceremony, when we record the human being to be member of Christian church. The goal of baptism is to express the happiness for new life and express the happiness of parents and of grandparents and it the same time to accentuate the responsibilities of parents for the gift having from God. To be Christian is no mater of baptism, but the mater of lifestyle by following Jesus. The baptism can be in chapel or in hospital or in some cases can be in parents' home. During the ceremony of baptism is used a cup with clean water, and water being turned to the head of whom is baptized.

I. Lord's Super

It is a ceremony of recollection of Jesus life and teachings for putting in practice his teachings. The piece of bread and the sip of wine are symbolizing Jesus life and teachings. The important part of Lord's Super is auto-examination, finding the sins in us, forgiving for those hurts us, and decisions of retrieval. We life forth times year with Lord's Super: Christmas, Eastern, Pentecost, and Thanksgiving.

J. Ceremony of confirmation

This ceremony is a festive manifestation of strengthens in Unitarian faith, as the symbolical crossings childhood and becoming in adolescence. Becoming youth also it means the conscious life and follows for teaching of Jesus. After the preaching, youths give answer for questions from catechism and after it is a pledge of youths for Unitarian Church and religion, Lord's Super, the reception for becoming parishioner, and blessings.

K. Wedding's ceremony

For a new family, it is important to start with religious-ethical steps. The wedding ceremony it is for these first steps of new families. Usually this ceremony it is celebrated in the chapel. The importance of wedding ceremony it is to accentuate the importance of oath the young couples make for each other's.

⁷⁷ for Lord's supper

⁷⁸ for baptism

⁷⁹ Visit homepage to see the new prayer book edited by Unitarian Association in Transylvania <http://www.ulosz.ro/>

⁸⁰ look point j) number 8

⁸¹ Read the sermon in: <http://w3.enternet.hu/Sándor64/cffr/articles/book-advertizement.htm>

⁸² See the question and answer from Catechism on footnote nr 33

L. Funeral service

The funeral service it is for those who live and listen the words. The goal of preaching is the apposition of death, enhancing the positive aspects of who are going away, consolation for mourners, deepening the faith in everlasting life, the awareness of judgments the life after life and in the same time trusting in love of Heavenly Father.

SOLUTION FOCUSED PASTORAL CARE. AN INTRODUCTION

By: Rev. Florus Kruyne, Remonstrant minister and pastoral supervisor.

A. The problem solving paradigm.

There are different models of Pastoral Care. Most of them are based on psychological theories and psychotherapeutical approaches. The most common model of pastoral care is pastoral counselling based on the client-centred therapy of Carl Rogers.

The basic assumptions of this therapy are the 'self-actualizing tendency' in the client and the 'unconditional positive regard', 'empathy' and 'congruence' on the side of the therapist in order to unlock the experiencing process and self actualisation tendency of the client.

The Rogerian approach is one of the representatives of the *dominating paradigm* in therapy and other forms of helping. In fact this paradigm originates from the natural sciences as applied in the medical science (diagnosis – treatment system). In the frame of this paradigm fits the actual development of 'pastoral or philosophical diagnostics'.

This paradigm is formulated by G.Egan (amongst others) in the realm of the helping disciplines and can be called 'the problem solving' approach.

According to his description the problem solving approach has three stages. First the problem-clarification (what is the problem (diagnosis), what causes the problem, how does it feel etc.), second the problem-differentiation (what *exactly* is the problem, what is the core of the problem, are there alternative ways to look at it?) and third the problem solving (how to handle and solve the problem concretely in daily life?). The gaining of insight in and understanding of the problem is an important means and a condition for the solving of the problem.

B. The solution focused approach.

Besides this paradigm there has been developed *another paradigm* called the 'solution focused' approach. This psychotherapeutical movement is based on the ideas and practice of Milton H. Erickson, Paul Watzlawick a.o. They developed the 'brief therapy' which was aiming at *coping* with the problem (mainly by reframing techniques) The analysis of the problem and gaining insight in the problem was considered as an useless, time wasting detour. Donald Capps translated this approach into a model of pastoral care.

In the line of the 'brief therapy' Steve de Shazer developed his 'solution focused' therapy. He proved that there is not a necessary link between the problem, the understanding of it and the solution. This is quite an uncommon idea and even shocking to us, ministers and other helping professionals.

In the following I will give a brief outline of the 'solution focused' approach, because I think this is a very useful *addition* to the other, better known models of pastoral care.

1. Indication.

When Solution Focused Approach (SFA) is indicated?

- when some kind of help-need/question arises, at the very beginning of the pastoral contact or in the last minute of the contact ('doorknob talks')
- when someone is going round in his/her problem circles (problem carrousel) and problem focusing is not helping anymore

2. What to do globally?

- give space to the problem story, but do not get into it. Do not let yourself pull into the problem carrousel
- be empathic but not too much
- the aim is not to understand the problem but to help to cope with the problem
- try to change the focus from 'problem talking' to 'solution or coping-talking', from the past or the present to the future, from backward to forward, from going round in circles to going into a direction
- change the title of the story, from a 'problem story' to a 'success story' (reframing)

3. What to do more specifically?

3.1. Setting the goal.

Try to find out the goal of the client.

By questions like: 'What do you want to become different?'/To what are you looking forward?'/For what are you living?'/How do you want to be remembered?'/What are you going to do about it (the problem)?'

Put, when it is helpful, the 'miracle question': *'Suppose, during your sleep tonight a miracle occurred and the problems that brought you here to speak with me are solved. But you were sleeping so you are not aware that this miracle has occurred. Tomorrow morning when you wake up, what will you notice that will tell you that this miracle has happened?'*

3.2. Clarifying the goal.

What is more precise and concrete the goal?

By questions like: 'What *precise* will be different?'/How does this change look like?'/How will you notice that things are different?'/How will others notice that things are different?'

Put 'Socratic' questions (what, who, where, how etc.) to clarify the goal and make it more concrete. The aim is to formulate an attractive and reachable goal.

3.3. Exploring the exceptions and project them into the future.

There are always moments in the present or in the past when the problem is not there or less present. These moments are the exceptions. In these exceptions the strengths, competences and sources of the client are manifested. The stepping stones for the solution are already present!

To explore the exceptions **questions should be asked like**: 'Are there moments the problem is not there or pieces of the miracle already happen?'/What did you do when the problem was absent?'/What did another person do when the problem was absent?'/How are you keeping things from getting worse?'/What is helping you to master the problem?'

To project these exceptions c.q. strengths into the future, questions should be asked like: 'What would it take for you to make this (exception c.q. strength) will happen more often?'/What could be a first step?'/What does it take for you to take the first step?'/What will help you, support you?'

3.4. Giving feedback and formulate an attractive and reachable goal.

During the last part (a quarter) of the session the therapist gives positive, supportive feedback to his client by affirming the strengths, competences and sources of the client and complimenting him for that. Finally he proposes an attractive and reachable first step as solution. Mostly the solution is *doing more of what already worked, or doing something different from what did not work.* At the end of the session, the client can take independently a first step into the direction of the solution. It is not needed that he gained insight in his problem.

4. What kind of relationship?

The relationship between the therapist and the client can be characterized as 'cooperative exploration', the cooperation between two experts. The client is the expert regarding the solution and the way towards the solution of his problem. The therapist is the expert in helping the client becoming aware of what he already knows, i.e. the solution and the way towards the solution. In this sense the therapist is the 'midwife'. The SFA takes into account that the client can be in different positions. The first position is the 'visitors' position. In that case one is sent by his boss or her parents, one has no problem-awareness and no motivation. The second position is the 'complainers' position. One has problem-awareness but the others are the problem. The third one is the ideal one, the 'client' position. One has problem-awareness, sees oneself as part of the problem and is motivated to work on it. The task of the therapist is to guide, if possible, the client towards the third position.

5. Some guidelines and rules for the therapist.
 - a. 'If it's not broken, don't fix it!' Don't problemize something which is not experienced as a problem by the client.
 - b. 'Once you know what works, do more of it!'
 - c. 'If it doesn't work, don't do it again. Do something different!'
 - d. An attitude of 'not-knowing' is needed, not knowing what the problem is or the solution for the client.
 - e. The frame of reference of the client has to be respected unconditionally. The therapist must fit in with the idiom of the client. The frame of reference can of course be questioned, but in a non-judging way.
 - f. The client should be seen as the expert regarding the solution and the way towards it.

6. SFA as a model of pastoral care.

Almost all of the psychological theories and psychotherapeutically movements can be connected with theological, biblical and religious notions and thus translated into pastoral models, although in the one case this connection is made more convincing than in other cases.

In case of SFA it is not so difficult to connect it with biblical notions and integrate the theory as well as the method into pastoral care.

Especially the forward-focus of SFA is fitting well with the eschatological perspective of the Christian faith with its 'already- not yet' dynamics.

The exceptions (absence of the problem) and strengths or competences of the client can be seen as 'grace events' or the influence of the Holy Spirit creating in us 'the new nature which is constantly renewed in the image of its Creator...' (Col 3:10). Put more simply: The client can be seen as the fellow human being in whom God is already working towards a solution.

Not the focusing on the 'old nature' (the problem) but the focusing on the 'new nature' which is put on by the Spirit, is creating this hopeful atmosphere which is typical of SFA.

CONTEXTUAL PASTORAL CARE

By: Rev. Greteke de Vries

Theoretical backgrounds

C.P. according to its founder is based on Buber's search of justice of the human order, in the domain that exists between Ich und Du. The founder is Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, an Hungarian-American psychotherapist, Boedapest 1920 - .

To summarize the whole approach: it is about healing by meeting, dialogue.

Its purpose is: to introduce the truth of each individual in the systemic approach of peoples relationships, plus bridging gaps between individuals by relational bonds and balances. Truth is: relational reality of individuals and groups. Fundamental attitude of the pastor: to activate peoples responsibility for the wellbeing of the next generation. By taking up this responsibility, one takes care for themselves and their 'neighbours'.

Relationships in which all people, by forms of existential (bij geboorte) or gained (verworven) loyalties are connected, have, by its nature, consequences for one's actions.

In satisfying relationships, everyone acts responsible towards the other, one can be and wants to be aware of the consequences of ones actions. By doing so, every one gains trust. One gives, one receives, one is aware (or not even so!) of a dynamic balance among each other. Not 'rules' regulate the interactions, not functions (topdogs, slaves, enemies, friends, scapedogs, identified patients, outsiders etc.) determine the roles one play in the social organization of relationships. Well, yes, as a matter of fact they do, and they do determine limits of conduct, they entangle interactions etc. etc. and differentiation of roles can organize space and freedom for the individuals (who are in this systemic approach seen in terms of conduct-categories), BUT: there is more to say about peoples interactions. In C.P. one looks at people as individuals within their relationships, and these relationships are, as said before, characterized by dynamic forces of essential giving and taking. One can (as a pastor) call on peoples responsible willingness to inquire, to investigate the consequences of ones conduct for each other individual in the relationships in which this person is involved (or even not involved, but connected). 'Context' implies existential openness of mind, by which one (pastor and clients) looks at consequences and influences of ones conduct on the wellbeing of others. One is liable (aansprakelijk), and by accepting ones liability, one can validate oneself. Willingness to accept consequences of ones conduct is the key to restore unjust balances in relationships.

Now a little more concrete:

The reality of relationships can be seen in four fundamental dimensions, according to Nagy.

1. Biological, social and economical objectivable facts (sex, where one is born, what handicaps one has, siblings, work, housing etc.);
2. Individual psychology: subjective experiences and emotions. How one experiences life, oneself; how one acts in order to fulfill ones needs, satisfies ones impulses. It shows by looking at goals of actions: love, attention, power, pleasure; of motivations like agressions, happiness; traits and qualities of character: independency, (a)social, solistic etc. Methods in this dimension seek explanations and treatments: what is the matter, what causes this particular behaviour? DSM IV. The interests of the client in this dimension are: centripetal, directed towards himself. It is about his own individuation.
3. Systems of transactional patterns, systemic theories that are about conductregulating principles (power, controle, hierarchy etc.) and conductregulating patterns (homeostatics, unions, triangulating, scapegoating) that are blocking or enabling changes. So: how people are connected, how they cohere, so: their cohesion or its lack of it. Who is who in the system? What disturbs and what flows?
4. Etics of appropriate attention. This is Nagy's speciality. Or: earned trust. It is about justice, in all the other 3 dimensions.

So: 2nd dimension: one can act because one needs to fulfill a psychological urge or need (hitting someone, working hard to gain ones attention, to get approval); one can act because one wants to follow a certain rule of the transactional system, 3rd dimension. But: these actions are not necessarily just. One also is not necessarily trustworthy.

People do get involved into conflicts when they feel: something is not fair! I've not been

treated right. Sometimes one knows this is the case, sometimes one knows exactly and rightly who was in fact unjust.... but more often one does not know this at all. And yet one acts, hurtful, angry, frozen (one does not really act at all); one screams, one curses, one kills. Unjustly, I've been done wrong! That is the message they send. I was mistreated and now I mistreat someone else!

Once the client finds the key to bring the balances between and among people into a dynamic interaction, once the client sees the challenge to an active and responsible position in the relationships, he/she is activating processes of change. At least in him/herself, regarding the relationship, possible as well in the interaction in the relationship itself.

Reliable relationships are the result of:

- a. recognizing the investments of the other in the relationships (you give the other credits for their investments, for what they give, what they do have done. Nothing is selfevident!)
- b. responsible reacting towards each other
- c. taking care of the balance between give and take (when one always gives and one always takes, something goes fundamentally wrong.). C.P. adds to the centripetal direction of one's conduct: the centrifugal interests: one reckons with the other, takes into account the rights and needs of the other / others in his / her interactions.

So: the source of individual freedom (autonomy) is, according to this approach: one can give and take, one can strengthen one's personality by giving and taking, one can earn credits, one can validate oneself by giving to others.

The pastor tries to find the contributions every one in the relationships make. How, visible and invisible, obvious and not obvious at all, knowingly and unconscious is one helping to make this relationship work? The pastor brings dialogue in process. He / She tries to make the client to see the credits of some-one else, and give these credits to the other. The pastor also helps to find possibilities of help for this process of gaining trust and responsibility. (an aunt, a teacher, but also: self-validation as a key, a lever (hefboom)): everything that gives some space, some strength.

So: the contextual pastor looks at the other dimensions from the fourth dimension.

1. If I meet a person who is adopted, I look at this person's loyalties with the natural family and the adoptive-parents: perhaps his/her difficulties has a link to this adoption as a fact of life.

If I meet a person who is blind, I sense that this person has been treated ill by mother nature, and that perhaps somehow he tries to compensate it by something, in order to get the balance straight.

If I see people born into Hungarian families, but not in Hungary, I think: this might give them some trouble in their interactions with Roumanians of other nature.

So: there are some objective facts that can make 'trust' in other persons, in life itself, not selfevident per se...

2. a contextual pastor won't focus on anger or depression as an internal process the client has to deal with by himself (with help of Freudian transference of medication – which can be very helpful), but also and prior: he/she will focus on anger or depression as relational indicators. With whom is the conflict, what right does he want to get, how does she express unfairness, what does she try to earn, to restore with anger/depression? (I pay you back, by being angry at you, by keeping silence, by getting sick, by ignoring you; or: I work so hard, I really try to be a good person, you must like/love me now.)

Multidirected partiality is a keyword here, with everyone (even the deceased or the unborn) who is involved. The pastor is not the umpire. Also the interests of all parties, persons involved, he has to take care of. She, the pastor, tries to understand the (underlying dynamics of conflicts, the so called unfinished business a person is dealing with. But the interests of the person these conflicts are with, the pastor takes also into account.

The motivation behind this all is: power nor altruism can, in the long run, attain the same as a just balance of give and take. One wants to give the other credit, when/if one is convinced that the other is contributing to make one's life worthwhile.

Because I expected you to contribute to the success of this week and to my life therefore, I wanted to spend time and energy in organizing this event. If you skipped the program and went out to make fun by yourself, I would have to work very hard not to use my energy against you. In contextual language: I had to do my best to exonerate you, I had to try to look

at your motives for your conduct and what that would gain for our relationship, or for you your self in your more significant relationships.

I mean: skipping the program you would have unintentionally given me a break and a rest, and I could be thankful for that. But I could also learn, that you might have gone to a store or a meeting elsewhere to gain something that is in the end much more important for your life and your beloved ones than this meeting.

So: I take the responsibility to weigh the interactions among us, to find out what you give and what you take, to me, from me, but also from and to others. Can I trust you, or trust you again, would be the question that defines the balance between us, from my part. And ofcourse, you weigh your actions too. And hopefully together, in a dialogue in which we motivate our actions, our intentions, our goals, we compare our scales and try to find the balance that does both of us justice. And even after you had gone home and I was by myself, I could have tried by to dynamise the balance, to not let it freeze in anger of whatever, and validate myself by taking responsibility for wanting to see your possible motives and goals of your behaviour. And seeing what you gave me. Or, other example, even a child that acts out can give by doing so. Maybe it binds the parents together, maybe it keeps another child in the safe-zone.

Perfect justice, by the way, does not exist. Is an idealized goal. And that can cause injustice. One expects too much of the other, destructive idealizing one can call it: they other can only fail. Nobody is perfect and nobody is a monster.

Finally: I said in the beginning that the consequences of ones behaviour comes down on the shoulders of the next generation. That is so, because there is a fundamental connection between early (earlies) and later relationships. One has legacies from earlier generations that one takes along and transmits towards new generations: cultural values and norms, but also patterns of behaviour. One is responsible fot these connections, one validates oneself when one wants to be responsible for the generations to come. Bringing bad legacies towards an end, in order to free the next generation from burdens from the past... a beautiful but very difficult obligation.

Workshop

And now, to go over to the more practical side of this pastoral attitude (not: model, is too fixed): one can use a so called genogram in order to make visible the clients loyalties, difficulties, patterns in relationships etc.

We have heard about my colleagues' patient in the hospital and how he tried to make this man move on with his life: future-directed instead of frozen in the past.

I am not sure whether this man experiences himself as a man with problems, but let's say he has asked for some help and guidance. He wants to be a supporting husband, and he seemed not to be able. Maybe he has also expressed some mental paralyses, as my colleague has suggested. Something like: I don't know what to do with my life. Now what would a contextual pastor do?

What do we know about him? (genogram)

How do we want to get into dialogue with this man?

1. What facts? What more would you want to know about him?
2. What can you say psychologically about him?
3. In systems, what is his role? How does he interact?

And finally:

4. can we make a very temporarily hypothesis about what he might think is fair, just in his life?

And what is unfair? So: what can be his truth in his close relationships? Do you see ways for this man to heal, to make himself be worthwhile, to move his balance of giving and taking? Are there meetings that could take place, that might help him? What other sources of help could he explore with your help?

You might want to talk this over in small groups.

And then the main question is: do you consider this approach a pastoral approach? what theological questions does it raise? what do you like about it and what not?

You also might want to talk about your own pastoral approaches.

THE DIACONAL MEANING OF THE CHURCH

By: Rev. Mrs. Tina Geels

"A church is diaconal or she is not." This is a remarkable start of a short lecture about the diaconal meaning of the church. Although the church is male in her organisation, with a long patriarchal tradition; she is female in her essence, a body of mercy. With care for those who lost their way in life. Sharing in love, searching for wholeness and happiness.

This female origin of the church is, with a male structure of organisation, rooted in the old Jewish tradition of the Bible. In the heart of this old tradition we hear about care for the widows, orphans and aliens. We are taught how to feel responsible for our neighbour. Think of Deuteronomy 24:17,18. "You must not deprive aliens and the fatherless of justice or take a widow's cloak in pledge."

Due to her origin the church is diaconal or she is not... Diaconal in the meaning of serving God and mankind. So the church is a social and spiritual community more than an institute, although we do need forms of structure and organisation.

Considering this background and tradition I was very much surprised about the recent debate in our country where engaged ministers talked about stopping the Diaconia within the churches as social care and support. They emphasised that our society took over this social support. Why should we continue with all these initiatives and social projects? It is spoiling time and energy, and does not bring in new churchmembers. We had better spend our time and energy in our mission in the world: proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

But I think if we will lose the Diaconal basic of our belief, the church will become an unbelievable institute. If there is no longer any social action as a consequence of our belief, how shall we transmit our mission?

A church is Diaconal or she is not...

This means that this serving in daily life, is the reason of existence of the church anyway. How can we proclaim our mission, liberal or orthodox if there is no consequence in our way of living, in making choices, in sharing of all the blessings we receive in our daily life?

The incarnation, where the apostle John speaks about at the end of the first chapter of his gospel, means that

the lifestyle of justice and mercy has become reality. In this way it is our confession that justice and mercy is the heart of our mission, of our creed.

Our belief is not a free philosophy good for me, it is not an ideology but a special style of life which asks from us commitment in taking certain decisions.

It is a style of life which also gives us that special responsibility for the well-being of others as well as for ourselves. Physical, mental and spiritual. Or social/ political, psychological and spiritual. These fields of explanation are all in the stories, parables and lessons we find in the Bible, the source of our religious life.

In this sense the Bible- with its basis in the old Jewish tradition, is our guide: how to learn and take our responsibility for real humanity on earth, nearby and far away.

If we want to explain this special spirituality, down to earth, we can consider one of the capital words in the OT. *dabar*- which means: word and action, in one. Not only words without any consequences for our daily life.

At the same time is our action rooted in this same centre of belief.

One of the other basic words in the OT is- *justice*. We do justice, like Jesus where we can heal people, with love and attention. Where we can come to real solidarity with those who did not win in their lives, in sympathy. By listening, by being nearby. By sharing of our blessings, material and spiritual.

We find this way of living also in the Sermon on the Mount. In the Golden Rule: "Treat others as you would like them to treat you". (Matthew 7:12)

Back to the OT, we find examples of this *sedaka* in many words of Moses and the prophets. We find the exact meaning of Justice in the heart of the Torah, the 5 books of Moses. In the middle of Leviticus, chapter 19:17-"You must love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord." And we find this word in the gospel of Mark, 12: 30- 32. "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is the One God. You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all

your mind and with all your strength. And you must love your neighbour as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these." So the Bible is a religious book but also a ethic book. It leads us on the way towards the fulfilling of the Kingdom, the city of peace- Jerusalem. In this way Jesus was guiding his pupils. In a new way he gave the impuls to do Justice, inspired by the Holy Spirit. The spirit of love.

Now we can put the question: how to create these locations of peace and charity? How to handle in this direction, we find in the epistles of Paul. He gives the people advice and tools how to found real christian congregations. How to settle places of charity. For example in 1 Tim. Paul is concrete, when he speaks about the professions of the Episkopos, the presbuteros and the diakonos. There mission is mentioned several times.

Unfortunately these professions were organized in the early church in a strict hierarchical way, analogue to the organisation of the social and political life during the hellenistic period. Although the charity was not neglected. It was taken seriously from the very beginning of christianity. The Diaconia belonged to the essence from the christian faith. The first christians shared their lives, material and spiritual. We can read about it in the Acts of the Apostles. 2: 41- 47. The first christians were exeptional in their lifestyle. They felt responsible for their neighbours. They gave a funeral for them who could not afford. For exemple. This was irritating and strange, but strong and brave as we know.

During the Reformation, back to basics, we find a new impuls in churchlife, referring to that moving, starting period of christianity. The church did keep her tradition of justice and mercy. Unfortunately stongly dogmatic rooted as well in a new Calvinistic structure. This was the mainstream of the Reformation.

Still when we look to the tradition of the Remonstrants Brethern, this basic principe of christian belief- the Diaconia was not strongly mentioned. Maybe of the severe, dogmatic struggle against the Orthodox protestants, which took so much energy. The later liberal christian church in Holland was more interested in philosohpy of reilgion than in Justice and mercy. Of course not all of them. I think on account of the great oecumenical movement in Holland during the second half of the 20e century, the diaconal mission of the church became more visible in the liberal christian churches, the Remonstrants as well.

There was charity in her tradition but not really related to the basics of christian faith. We must also consider that the Remonstrant Brethern became a church only in the French time. Before thas period they called themselves a Society with members. Becoming a church the Remonstrant Brethern got more tools for the congregations in the stucture and the organisation of church-life. And we became more intergrated in the oecumenical movement in Holland. Member of the WCC in the beginning period. Sharing also liturgical richness from the past, including the catholic tradition of the church. Sharing now the diaconal mission and responsibility for justice in society.

That is why we do have a sepearte Diaconal institute in the central organisation of the Remonstrants. I am the secretary of this institute. We have four departments: For Inner Diaconia, Peace, Durable Development and European Contacts. We organize central meetings and try to give inspiration to the local Diaconal committees of the Remonstrant congregations. Where possible we try to coöperate in the eucumenical fields of the Council of Churches in Holland.

We are conscious of our liberal protestant tradition as Remonstrants, still we are part of the mainstream of the Protestant churches with a similar democratic organisation in the congregations, the heart of the protestant church in all her diversity, with her pastoral care and diaconal statements. Inspired by the Spirit of God. With the responsibility for justice.

How can we put out the Diaconia? Our root, reason of existence, is not to expell if we believe in the kingdom of God. That is why we do say: a church is diaconal or she is not. This inspiration for mercy and justice leads us on the way towards God. C. Halkes in Handbook for Diaconia, p. 187:

"Where we do justice in mercy there we see how church is growing."

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CoZa (Commissie tot de Zaken van de Remonstrantse Broederschap)	500,-
Geloof en Samenleving (Instelling van de Remonstrantse Broederschap)	500,-
Diaconieën vd. Remonstrantse Broederschap:	
Amersfoort	150,-
Amsterdam	250,-
Den Haag	500,-
Rotterdam	500,-
Utrecht	750,-
Particulere remonstranten	280,-

Bijdragen in natura:

Kerkenraad Rem. Gem. Groningen	huur Doopsgezinde kerk
WIC Groningen (Werkgroep internat. Contacten)	lunch Doopsgez. Kerk
Kerkenraad Rem. Gem. Nieuwkoop	lunch + diner
Kerkenraad Rem. Gem. Leiden	huur Lokhorstkerk + lunch
Landelijk Bureau Remonstranten	lunch + diner
Gastadressen	ogies, ontbijt, diversen

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UNITY AND DIVERSITY

Expression of thanks by Rev. Szilárd Sándor

We have a common faith to share. "We" it means many things, and in this case "we" it means the "representative" of faith, we may call different, and the same time being very common, and that is why we can share with each other. "We are" who can share "something" - I and we also - call faith. We call our faith "Remonstrant " and we call our faith "Unitarian" . I am not telling , that that these two words are the same, what I am saying is that our faith is called differently. In the same time I am saying that this faith is common. It is common, because both of us are liberal Christians. It is common because this faith is a gift from God and building for us a bridge where we can walk humble, with love. This bridge is the spiritual bridge when we pray to the Lord, and this bridge we can use to have the religious language we can use in our talk as a divine "tool" for dialog. We talk and we share our common faith. Language can be named "tool" using the human expressions of words, but religious language being used as a dialog it is sacred, because it gives us freedom of love and hope, and faith we can share. Thank you Remonstrants brothers and sisters and friends for the invitation to this conference, and thank you for your holy words, you use as a human tool for dialog. You are welcome to share your faith on the pulpit in my congregation, telling the gospel to us! Keep in touch and share our common faith and help our people to have our "divine language" we can share as a dialog of understanding each other, and helping our homeland to be more close to the Kingdom of God.
May our Egy Isten bless all of us! Amen and amen.

CONFESSIONS

The 1940 Remonstrant creed

We believe in the holy, almighty God,
our Creator and Lord,
whose wisdom is unfathomable,
whose judgment surpasses everything,
He is just and merciful,
our heavenly Father,
who desires to include everyone in His love;
the source of all that is good.

We believe in Jesus Christ,
the Likeness of God's holy Being
and Revelation of His Grace.
He came for everyone
and He died for everyone.
He brings us close to God's eternal love,
which forgives and reconciles.
He calls us to labour and struggle,
in the victorious sign of the Cross,
and is for man and community
the Way, the Truth, and Life.

We believe in God's Holy Ghost,
who opens our hearts to the Truth
and pours into us, inspiring us,
so we unite in worship
and in the holy service of God,
in the freedom of the Spirit
and in the love for each other.

We believe in the Communion of Saints,
in which the Church of Christ is rooted,
being one in diversity.
As witness to Christ on earth,
the Church carries the holy task
to preach the Gospel
and to lead the souls
on the eternal road.

We believe in the Kingdom of God,
that is and will be
through God's will and power.

This Kingdom breaks through
where Christ rules the hearts,
and it will come in fullness
when Christ has triumphed.
Then God in His eternal glory
will be for ever: everything in everyone.

Him be the praise and the glory
in time and for all eternity.

Amen.

1 We know and desire to accept
2 That our spirit cannot find peace in the certainty of what it knows or professes,
3 But in the astonished understanding of what it is bequeathed and given
4 That our will cannot find its destiny in doubt or indifference,
5 But in alertness, trust and solidarity with all that lives
6 That our feelings are not the prisoner of avarice and lust for power,
7 But can develop in a yearning for all that is different and untouched
8 That our existence is not completed by who we are and what we have
9 But by what is infinitely larger than we can comprehend.
10 Therefore, we believe in God's holy Ghost,
11 Who surpasses all that divides people
12 And inspires them to all that is holy and just and good,
13 So that they will, freed from self-conceit,
14 Praying, singing, acting en silent,
15 Praise and serve God.
16 We believe in Jesus Christ, the true man,
17 Who came and passed by and loved people,
18 The face of God which looks at us and disturbs us.
19 He walked with God and was crucified
20 But lives, beyond His own and our deaths.
21 He is our holy example of wisdom and of courage
22 And brings us close to God's eternal love,
23 That forgives and reconciles.
24 We believe in the Eternal
25 Who is unfathomed love, the reason of our existence,
26 Who points out the road of freedom and justice
27 And beckons us to a future of peace.
28 He is the holy Word that speaks truth,
29 The white Light, the Source of all that is good.
30 We believe that we ourselves, weak and vulnerable as we are,
31 May be called friends of Christ through God's grace,
32 Called to priestly office and prophecy and pastoral service.
33 We believe that the churches, fallible and divided,
34 But in all diversity one in spirit,
35 Are the temporary signs of that friendship.
36 We believe in the future of God and men,
37 In a divine patience that offers time
38 To live and die and resurrect,
39 In the Kingdom that is and will be,
40 Where the wolf and the lamb graze together
41 And God will be for ever: Everything in everyone.
42 Praise be to God and the glory
43 In time and for all eternity
44 Amen

The Unitarian creed

I believe in One God, creator of life and providential Father.
I believe in Jesus, the best son of God, our true teacher.
I believe in the Holy Spirit.
I believe in the mission of the Unitarian Church.
I believe in forgiveness of sins and eternal life.
Amen.

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H.J. Adriaanse

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