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Sydney Unitarian News

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MODERN UNITARIANISM IN CONTINENTAL EUROPE (Part 1)

In three previous instalments, we traced the history of Unitarianism in the United Kingdom and Ireland from about 1600 to the present day. Now, we will survey the advances made by our confreres in Europe in that period and you will probably be surprised to learn how many countries our denomination is now represented in. Given the diversity of European countries and peoples, we can only expect a similar variety in the origins and histories of these national Unitarian bodies.

First, we must go back to our ancestral homeland of Transylvania, where the followers of Francis Dávid had managed to keep their church system operating despite increasing pressure from the Catholic monarchy. The second Bishop was György Enyedi (1555–97), elected in 1592 and later known as the 'Unitarian Plato' for his writings. His most famous work was the anti-Trinitarian *Explicationes* (1598), which was reprinted in Holland and circulated widely in Europe. While the term, 'Unitarian', was first mentioned in official documents in 1600, the name was not formally adopted by the church until 1638. That same year saw the most savage oppression the church had ever experienced, with most of its properties confiscated and its publications banned.

Bishop Mihály Lombard de Szentábrahám (1683–1758, pictured far left), elected in 1737, is regarded as the second founder of the Transylvanian church, as he rallied its forces and laid down its statement of faith in his *Summa Universae Theologiae Christianae secundum Unitarios* (A Digest of Christian Theology according to the Unitarians), published posthumously in 1787. The Unitarians were fortunate to have the liberal King Joseph II in power at the time, who issued an Edict of Tolerance in 1781 that gave legal status to all Christian denominations in his realm, even though the Catholic Church remained dominant.

This began a period of ambitious renewal in Transylvania, during which many new churches were erected and older ones were restored. New schools were built and a major upgrade of the training system for ministers was implemented. The most important work was done in the capital of Kolozsvár, where a new church was completed in 1796. Designed in the Baroque style by the architect, Antal Török, it has a semi-circular apse, a two-storey spire with Doric and Ionic pilasters, and a Neo-Classical stucco decor.

In the mid-1800s, the British and American Unitarians became aware of their long-lost Transylvanian brethren and quickly made contact with them. The writer, Sándor Farkas (1795–1842, pictured second left) toured the northeastern states of the US in 1831 and wrote a book called *Journey in North America*, which was banned by the Catholic Church in 1834 – probably because he praised American democracy. After 1860, a number of Transylvanian theology students finished their education at the Unitarian colleges in Oxford and Manchester. In 1900, the Transylvanian Church joined those of the UK and US in becoming founding members of the International Association for Religious Freedom at its inaugural conference in Boston.

At the end of World War I, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was dismantled and Transylvania became a part of Romania. The Transylvanian Church attempted to found branches in the rest of the country, including one in Bucharest in 1933, but these were not successful. Today, the Transylvanian Church has 60,000 members in 125 congregations and about 30 small fellowships. Its members are almost entirely ethnic Hungarians and many of them live in Unitarian farming villages, where the minister also acts as the mayor.

There are many picturesque churches in the region, the oldest of which is the fortified church in Székelyderzs, which dates from 1400 and is a UNESCO World Heritage site. It was originally a Catholic church, as its frescoes depict a battle fought by King Laudislaus I of Hungary against invaders from the east in the 11th Century. Much more recent is the church in Mészkő, known as the Alabaster Village because that marble-like mineral was mined there for centuries. Its minister, Ferenc Balázs (1901–37), a noted poet, author and social reformer, rebuilt the church and painted it himself, even the beautifully decorated ceiling.

The situation in Hungary was much different, in that the 100-or-so Unitarian congregations that existed in the 16th Century disappeared completely. Only migration from Transylvania enabled the denomination to be revived in the early 1870s, with a small congregation being formed in Budapest in 1876. In 1882, they were able to acquire a property in the city and build the First Unitarian Church of Budapest. That building has four storeys, only one of which is used for worship services while the others contain administrative offices.

In the following years, more churches were built around the country, including two more in Budapest. The second of those was named after the Unitarian composer, Béla Bartók. Today, the national Church has some 25,000 members in 12 church congregations and 21 fellowships. The other churches are in Debrecen, Duna-Tiszaközi, Dunántúli, Eger, Füzesgyarmat, Györ, Hódmezovásárhely and Kocsord; and the fellowships are in Dévaványa, Dunapataj, Miskolc, Orosháza, Pécs, Szentlőrinc and Szeged. These include five of the seven largest cities in the country (not including the capital).

In the last two years, the Unitarian Church of Hungary has merged with the Transylvanian body to form the Hungarian Unitarian Church, the name now referring to their common ethnicity. Prior to that, the First Church of Budapest was also the headquarters of the Hungarian Bishop (an elected position, as it still is in the united HUC in Kolozsvár).

The original Norwegian Unitarian Church was founded in Oslo (then called Kristiania) by Kristofer Janson (1841–1917, pictured second from right). He had studied theology there, graduating in 1865, but was not ordained by the state Church of Norway. He became noted as a teacher and author, not least for his play, *American Fantasies*, which was performed in Chicago to great acclaim. In 1879, he went on a lecture tour of the US, where he was recruited by the American Unitarian Association as a pastor for Scandinavian immigrant communities. He was ordained at the Unitarian Church of Chicago in 1881 and went on to found two churches in Minnesota, both of which were originally called Free Christian churches.

(*Continued on p. 11.*)

SERVICE DIARY

Meetings every Sunday from 10.30 – 11.30 a.m.
(followed by coffee, tea and food)

Date	Presenter	Topic
2nd April	Mike McPhee	Unitarians of Eastern Canada*
9th April	Kelvin Auld	Australian Art: Quest for Identity and Space*
16th April	Peter Crawford	Confucius and Atheism
23rd April	Austen Erikson	Effective Altruism
30th April	Michael Spicer	Travels in Vietnam and Cambodia (Part 2)*
7th May	Peter Crawford	Lawyers out of Control
14th May	Kaine Hayward	Brahms' 3rd Violin Sonata**
21st May	Peter Crawford	Towards a New Piety
28th May	Peter Baldwin	The Poison of Identity Politics

* These will be video presentations.
** This will be a Music Service.

[Please check the church website (www.sydneyunitarianchurch.org) for updates. The program for June will be available from the beginning of May.]

Chalice Lighting

Kéž na zemi hoří jen prospěšné, dobré a užitečné ohně *Kéž živým tvorům není plamen zdrojem zkázy, ale přítelem,* *Kéž nám jeho světlo připomíná cestu míru a moudrosti.*	May on Earth, only good and useful fires burn; May the flames be not the source destruction, but a friend; May the light of this flame remind us the path of peace and wisdom.

Submitted by the Religious Society of Czech Unitarians; Czech words by Rev. Jarmila Plotěná, minister of the Brno congregation, English translation by Rev. Petr Samojský, minister of the Prague Unitaria.

Ducanye uru rumuri twifatanije n'abantu bose bababaye kubera bazira ukwemera kwabo, kubera ubukene, kubera indwara, kubera uburwayi, kubura akazi, gutotezwa, ubuhunzi no kuba imfungwa. Bababajwe no kubura ababo, abari mu bihe bya nyuma n'abandi baremerewe n'akazi; Urukundo, ibyishimo n'amahoro biganze mu isi yose, kwishyira ukizana n'ubworoherane biturange.	We light this chalice in union with those who are suffering because of their belief, of poverty, sickness, unemployment, persecution, exile, prison; for the absent, those who are dying, to those who are burdened by work. May love, joy and peace reign in the world and may freedom and tolerance be our virtues.

Submitted by the Unitarian Congregation of Rwanda; Kinyarwanda and English words written by its president and lay leader, Clément Uwayisaba.

[These are the Chalice Lightings from the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists for the months of February and March.]

The Religious Society of Czech Unitarians was founded as the Religious Liberal Fellowship in 1922 by Norbert Fabian Čapek after he had spent some time in the United States. His Prague Unitaria grew over 20 years to become the largest single congregation in the world at that time, with 3200 members. Combined with six lay-led congregations in other cities and towns, which Čapek visited regularly, the national membership was 8000.

Čapek was a dynamic leader and a prolific writer. He wrote many books and hymns, translating some of the latter from English to Czech, and developed the Flower Communion that Unitarians around the world now celebrate. Tragically, he was arrested during the German occupation for listening to BBC Radio, imprisoned in the internment camp at Dachau and, after some time there, he was killed with poison gas in October 1942.

Today, the RSCU has churches in Prague (two), Brno, Teplice and Plzeň (Pilsen); also fellowships in Liberec and Ostrava. A recent addition is the National Wider Fellowship, which welcomes members from all over the country. (Full story in the next issue.)

The *Congrégation Unitarienne du Rwanda* was founded by Clément Uwayisaba in Kigali (the Rwandan capital) after a meeting in Bujumbura with Rev. Fulgence Ndagijimana of the UU Church of Burundi in 2009. It was officially registered with the Rwandan government in 2013 and recognised by the ICUU as an Emerging Group in the same year. With the help of Jean-Claude Barbier's Francophone Unitarian Church in France (again, see next issue), annual training seminars were held in either Bujumbura or Kigali between 2013 and 2015 for trainees from both countries. The new Executive Director of the ICUU, Rev. Sara Ascher, visited the Congregation in February and a report on that is eagerly anticipated.

Kinyarwanda is the national dialect of the Rwanda-Rundi language that is also spoken in Burundi and parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda. The other official languages of the country are French and English – the first because Rwanda and Burundi were under Belgian administration after World War I and the second because the country's eastern neighbours are Kenya and Uganda.

CAN RELIGION BE GOOD, EVEN IF FALSE?

By Peter Crawford

That finest of all Australian philosophical intellects, David Armstrong, a professor at Sydney University between the 1960s and the 1980s, once said about religion that it may not be true but it may be good. This viewpoint runs in direct opposition to that of Bertrand Russell in his monumental work, *Why I am not a Christian*, where he argued with extraordinary articulacy and elegance that religion was essentially both false and evil. "My view of religion", he had thundered, "is that of Lucretius. I view religion as a disease born of fear and ignorance and a source of untold misery to the human race."

Russell, the most eminent British philosopher of the 20th Century, gave credit to priests for only one thing: the invention of the calendar in Ancient Egypt. Although his polemical work is a text of extraordinary eloquence, I believe its essential underpinning is gravely defective. I believe it is not religion *per se* which is evil but, rather, many types of religion are while other types of religion are good, even if they are untrue. I believe religion can provide a social glue which encourages personal sacrifice in the interests of moral goodness and civilized advancement and, far from being a source of untold misery to the human race, can be a source of untold goodness.

Some types of religion are good and false, while others are open, tolerant, not necessarily false and certainly good. I believe some type of religion is essential for social cohesion and the maintenance of tradition. I see religion as a prophylactic against the sort of froth-and-bubble postmodernism and social decay we are now seeing in the globalised world around us. And, for this reason, I am a Unitarian – in the hope that some of the good side of religion can be preserved, while sidestepping some of the falsities and obvious stupidities. Be that as it may, let us consider some of the good which has been inspired by religion.

I have enjoyed the King James Version of the Old Testament – not the written words, which are a bit heavy going, but rather the read version by Alexander Scourby, a resonant voiced American actor famous in the 1950s. It is probably the best oral rendition of the Bible of any available and a wonderful stream of language equalled only by the plays of Shakespeare. (Scourby was also a distinguished Shakespearean actor.)

I have heard the *Mass in B Minor* by Johann Sebastian Bach and I know of little music that would equal it. I have viewed the artwork of Michelangelo and, despite all the glories of Western art – the Impressionists, the Expressionists – I see nothing that exceeds the works of the Catholic Renaissance artists of the 15th, 16th and 17th Centuries. These are just three of the achievements of the Christian world in the areas of literary, musical and artistic culture, and there are countless others.

So I think there can be little doubt that great religious belief gave force and discipline to much cultural creativity. The biblical stories and assertions in Handel's *Messiah* may be untrue but the music is unequalled – so, here again, religion may be false but good. Monteverdi's extraordinarily spiritual music was inspired by his Catholic ideals, and Brahms and Bach by Lutheran ideals – the list is endless. I simply do not know how one could seriously argue that religion, specifically the Christian religion, has not inspired much of our cultural achievement.

Christians have taught an extreme compassion which, after a long time, achieved many wonderful moral advances. The story of William Wilberforce and his associates, whose efforts led to the abolition of slavery, is a case in point. Having battled long and hard, evangelical Anglicans triumphantly brought the slave trade to an end in 1808. They infused our world with a moral goodness which has been justly celebrated in the world of film and in books of modern history.

Of course it was not always so. Christians involved themselves in the African slave trade from the 16th to the 19th Century but we cannot say that, because they did this, Christianity itself was to blame. Christians from time immemorial simply went along with the situation of their times. But many moral advances were driven by Christians and they represented improvements on what they replaced. Of course, compassion can be excessive, irrational and self-defeating, as when Jesus invoked his followers to turn the other cheek when assaulted, or the ancient Jews talked about 'welcoming the stranger', even though the strangers may be from a hostile and alien culture and wish us only harm. But compassion can be rational and should be a major priority of any civilized society, as all Unitarians believe.

Of course, there is a natural instinct for humans to be compassionate and Christianity has no monopoly on this. But Christianity, with its Sermons on the Mount and on the Plain gives a powerful dynamic to the natural desire to be kind and moral. In a brutal world of exquisite punishments and cruelty raised to an art form, what with the gladiators and people immured and buried alive, in a world of ancient barbarity, the Christians ridded us of many of these evils when they assumed power. Constantine the Great, the initiator of Christian Rome, maintained capital punishment and continued to imprison people who disagreed with him, but the dreadful culture of gladiatorial combat came to an end. So did the more exquisite types of imprisonment, such as locking prisoners in permanent darkness until they went mad. Christian Rome was an unkind place but much less so than the culture of cruelty that it replaced. Despite all the cruelty of Mediaeval Europe, it was nowhere near as cruel as Ancient Rome before Christianity brought a more compassionate resonance.

The evils and wickedness of the Catholic Church are often raised when speaking of the evils of religion. We think of the Inquisition, anti-scientific persecutions and the Church's opposition to contraception, but the amazing positives that have emerged from Catholic culture are often ignored. Over the last century and a half, three very devout Catholics have been central to scientific progress despite the anti-scientific teachings of their church. Alexander Fleming, who discovered penicillin, was a committed Catholic; Gregor Mendel, who initiated the science of genetics, was an Augustinian monk; and a Belgian priest, Georges Lemaître, first conceptualized the 'Big Bang theory' in 1926, one of the great breakthroughs in astrophysics. Somewhere, the spirit of Copernicus and Galileo is still alive in the great network of the Roman Church.

Indeed, it is in the field of education that the Church played a leading role all over Europe from very early times (and, later, in French, Spanish and Portuguese colonies). Was it not the outstanding Jesuit system of education that produced both Voltaire and Marx, two unsurpassed opponents of religion in general and Catholicism in particular? Was it not the Jesuits who educated one-third of the Supreme Court Justices in New South Wales? All over the Third World, Catholic schools are the educational institutions of choice for both Catholics and non-Catholics.

Religious orders provide heartfelt service and dedication throughout the hospital system to rich and poor alike. The best Catholic hospitals provide first-rate medical care with immense personal commitment by nuns, dedicated to a life of compassion free-of-charge in the service of the Church. There are, of course, secular people in groups like *Médecins Sans Frontières* who are just as committed, but the depth and the outreach of Church activity has no real rival in the secular world. In Australia, one-quarter of all health care is supervised by the Catholic Church.

And let us not forget other Christian groups who, in their own way, give dedicated service that would be largely beyond any secular group working on instinctive compassion. The Salvation Army provides unsurpassed community service, housing recently released prisoners who no-one wants to know and rescuing thousands from the scourge of alcoholism. Salvation Army officers provided medical attention and refreshments on the Kokoda Trail during World War II. Wherever troops fought, Army officers were there attempting to bring comfort and ameliorate suffering. It was an American Salvation Army officer who invented the doughnut while comforting troops on the Western front in the Great War.

Then think of Bill Crews and Ted Noffs, whose practical hands-on Christianity at the Exodus Foundation and the Wayside Chapel here in Sydney have brought so much recovery and emotional support to the victims of alcoholism, schizophrenia and drug addiction. John Singleton and others may provide the money but Bill Crews makes it happen. Then there are my favourites, the Seventh Day Adventists, who are pathfinders in healthy living and diet, against all odds growing fast in the Third World.

Seventh Day Adventists are a mini-Catholic Church in terms of social work and compassion. They are clean-living dedicated health workers and missionaries whose work brings order and progress to many of the world's less-developed peoples moving into the modern world. Against this, they are evolution-deniers but they accept the reality of global warming and, while proselytising brilliantly in the Third World, they educate for small families and environmental responsibility. They try to avoid politics and refuse to bear arms. These are irrational positions but there is a spiritual beauty about them, presented brilliantly in Mel Gibson's *Hacksaw Ridge*.

(*Continued on p. 12.*)

UNION MAID

There once was a union maid, she never was afraid
Of goons and ginks and company finks and the deputy sheriffs who made the raid.
She went to the union hall when a meeting it was called,
And when the Legion boys come 'round[1]
She always stood her ground.

(*Chorus*:)
Oh, you can't scare me, I'm sticking to the union,
I'm sticking to the union, I'm sticking to the union.
Oh, you can't scare me, I'm sticking to the union,
I'm sticking to the union 'til the day I die.

This union maid was wise to the tricks of company spies,
She couldn't be fooled by a company stool, she'd always organize the guys.
She always got her way when she struck for better pay.
She'd show her card to the National Guard
And this is what she'd say:

(*Chorus*:)

You gals who want to be free, just take a tip from me;
Get you a man who's a union man and join the Ladies' Auxiliary.
Married life ain't hard when you got a union card,
A union man has a happy life when he's got a union wife.

(*Chorus*:)

Woody Guthrie (1940)

[1] The American Legion was a war veterans' group formed in 1919, noted for right-wing patriotism.

This item serves to commemorate International Women's Day (08 March) and May Day. Indeed, Guthrie composed it during a tour of performances with Pete Seeger in Oklahoma City, when a female organiser complained that they had no union songs about women in their repertoire. (Actually, Guthrie wrote the first two verses – the third was provided by Millard Lampell and other members of their Almanac Singers group because the song was too short.)

Guthrie used the melody of 'Red Wing', composed by Kerry Mills in 1907 and based, in turn, on a piece written by Robert Schumann in 1848. 'Union Maid' was first recorded on the *Talking Union* album (Keynote Records, 1941) with Seeger as the lead vocalist. Since then, the song has featured in countless union and left-wing songbooks (these days, often with a feminist replacement of the third verse) and you can hear renditions of it by Guthrie, his son, Arlo, and Seeger on YouTube (www.youtube.com).

Woodward Wilson Guthrie (1912–1967) was born in rural Oklahoma and left for California in the 'Dust Bowl' era of the Depression. His many experiences of the conditions of working class people on the way formed the basis of his songs – indeed, his first album was entitled *Dust Bowl Ballads* (Victor Records, 1940). Despite his many later songs and live performances, no other albums were produced in his lifetime. Guthrie was diagnosed with Huntington's disease in 1952 and hospitalised from 1956 until his death.

Pete Seeger (1919–2014) was born in upstate New York, the son of composer and musicologist, Charles Louis Seeger. His father had been engaged by the University of California at Berkeley in 1912 to establish a music faculty there but was forced to resign in 1918 because of his pacifist views. After Pete was born, the family went in a homemade trailer to the American South to bring musical uplift to working people there. After they returned to New York, he enrolled at Harvard but dropped out in 1938 because he was more interested in politics and folk music. He began performing with a group called 'The Vagabond Puppeteers' and met Woody Guthrie in 1940. Much more can be written about Seeger's lengthy career but it will have to wait till another time.

THE AMERICAN LEGION MARCH SONG

Who obeyed their country's call?
Those prepared to give their all;
On battlefields united, now in peace together stand
Upholding the traditions of our land — so

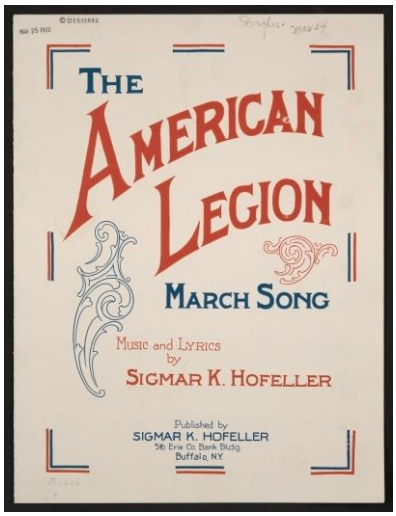
(*Chorus*:)
Let us raise our voice in song as Legionnaires,
Our purposes are strong,
Of our Post we are proud, and our ambitions are alive,
Thus for its welfare we will ever strive.
World War veterans are we,
Staunch advocates of world democracy,
Our constitution, true, tells just what we are pledged to do,
On that score we mean to fight,
We know our cause is right, for Justice and Liberty.

We, our duties realize
One cause, to immortalize
Our spirits ne'er will fail us, as thru Life, as we wend our way
We're consecrated to the U.S.A. — so

(*Chorus*:)

Sigmar K. Hofeller (1922)

[Any idiosyncrasies of spelling and punctuation were in the original text, taken from the musical score preserved by the Library of Congress.]



This item is presented, partly for the sake of fairness and partly for lack of any better ideas. While Woody Guthrie would have known about it when he wrote 'Union Maid', the only recorded attack by the American Legion on a union hall occurred in Centralia, Washington, on 11 November 1919.

As bad luck would have it, the Legion's parade on Armistice Day passed the hall of the Industrial Workers of the World, who were generally regarded as Communists, and some of the marchers stormed it. The forewarned unionists were armed and they fired, killing three of the assailants. In subsequent fighting, after the Legionnaires returned with weapons, three more were killed and others on both sides were injured. An IWW member was later arrested, dragged from the police station and lynched. No-one was ever charged over that event but eight IWW members were sentenced to 25–40 years for second-degree murder.

The American Legion is a veterans' organisation that was formed in 1919, initially by American servicemen in Europe who were concerned about their futures. Those concerns were recognised by the US government, which authorised a Caucus in Paris and chartered the Legion after a conference in Minneapolis produced a constitution for the organisation. By that time, the Legion already had one million members.

In the early 1920s, the Legion successfully lobbied for a 'soldier's bonus' and jobs for returned servicemen. It was instrumental in the creation of what is now the Department of Veterans Affairs. Its headquarters are in Indianapolis, Indiana, and it has a legal office in Washington. Today, its membership stands at over 2.4 million in 14,000 posts worldwide. Its posts (chapters) are organised into 55 departments in each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, France, Mexico and the Philippines.

The composer of the March Song and even whether he was authorised by the Legion to write it are somewhat mysterious. There definitely was someone named Sigmar Kaiser Hofeller (1895–1964) who was born in Albany, New York and died in Houston, Texas. However, what little the Internet has to say about the man is that he served in the US Air Corps in World War I, had been a semi-professional stage magician and worked most of his life in radio advertising, sales promotion and selling investments. Hardly a musical background but the Legion hasn't replied to my query, so I guess we'll never know.

CAMBODIAN MYSTERIES

By Michael Spicer

Cambodia's land and people are pulled taut by paradox and contradiction. Its history is majestic, tragic and intriguing, with many unexplained, unexplored mysteries. This article will explore three of these puzzles which continue to confound scholars and lay people alike. Firstly, it will explore a medieval mystery; then it will examine the tragic events of the 1970s; and, finally, it will consider contemporary Cambodia. All of this has been inspired by the author's recent trip to that country. The article does not seek to provide any definitive answers to these mysteries and probably throws up more questions than solutions.

The 12th and early 13th Centuries CE were the high point of the Khmer Empire, which dominated much of modern Indochina, in the process constructing the magnificent Angkor Wat temple complex and the imposing city of Angkor Thom. There is no greater concentration of architectural riches anywhere on Earth, designated as the Eighth Wonder of the World. The world's largest religious building, Angkor Wat is still a point of pilgrimage for all Khmers and, since being 'discovered' by the West through the French, is an attraction for tourists from around the world. The following paragraphs take the reader on a quick tour of these magnificent sites.

Suryavarman II (1112– 52), who united Cambodia and extended Khmer influence across much of mainland Southeast Asia, designed Angkor Wat in his devotion to the Hindu deity, Vishnu. Built around the same time as Notre Dame and other European gothic cathedrals, it soars towards the heavens. It is surrounded by a rectangular moat (signifying the cosmic ocean) which, at over 190 metres wide and 1.5 and 1.3 kilometres on each of its long sides, makes its European counterparts seem like mere puddles. The layout is based on a mandala, with the five-towered temple structures shaped like lotus buds in the middle of the complex. These are protected by the outer walls, which are covered in over 2000 engravings of celestial dancing girls (*asparas*), each with a unique, enigmatic smile.

Angkor Thom, the 'great city', was founded by the legendary King Jayavarman VII in the late 12th Century. The internal city was set over 10 square kilometres but the extended metropolis covered over 200 square kilometres – arguably the greatest city in the world at this time. It is believed to have sustained a population of 80,000 to 150,000 people.

The wooden houses and palaces have long since decayed but the heart of the complex still survives, protected by an 8-metre high, 13-kilometre long wall and surrounded by a wide moat. Hundreds of stone faces greet visitors to the city as they arrive across the causeway to any of the city's five gates. Giant stone faces stare down, smiling mysteriously, from the towers.

Bayon, the city's most unique temple, is shaped like a pyramid. The symbolic temple mountain rises on three levels and features 54 towers, bearing more than 200 huge, yet strangely personal, stone faces. The towers are linked by galleries, which contain bas-reliefs showing everyday life in Angkor and depicting famous battles. As well as this enormous monumental architecture, the empire had an extensive road system, a complex hydrological system, built to take advantage of a monsoonal climate, and extensive trade partnerships with the rest of the world.

Why the complex empire collapsed relatively suddenly by the late 13th Century is still a mystery. In a salient point for our society, overpopulation of its cities and climate change bringing an extended drought to the region have been suggested as important factors. The difficulty in finding a definitive answer for Angkor's collapse can be found in the lack of historical documentation. Much of Angkor's history is detailed in Sanskrit carvings from its temples and from reports from its trading partners. However, documentation over the last decades in Angkor fell silent.

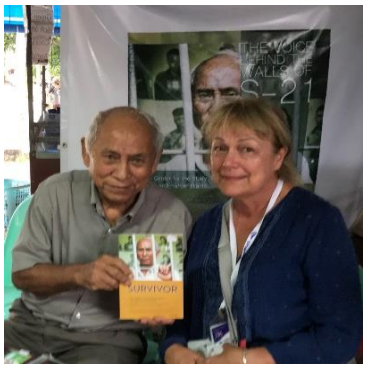
Cambodia's recent history of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge is also shrouded in mystery. How such horrors could have been inflicted on their own people by a murderous regime belies comprehension. The 1984 film, *The Killing Fields*, is both moving and frightening, and it details how the US dropped more bombs on Cambodia than the Allies had used in the whole of World War II. The one million refugees who were driven from the countryside into Phnom Penh were driven back out again by Pol Pot. Phnom Penh became a ghost town and two of its horrors from this time are described in the following paragraphs.

The Tuol Seng Museum can be found in a former high school in Phnom Penh. It was the notorious Security Centre 21, where at least 12,000 people were brought for interrogation – only twelve would survive. At those times, few knew of its existence. Its victims were fed into one of Cambodia's killing fields at Choeung Ek, a quiet place in the country outside of Phnom Penh, where as many as 20,000 victims died, anonymous victims among the millions who died throughout Cambodia scarcely forty years ago.

Tuol Seng was preserved by the Vietnamese after they ousted the Khmer Rouge in 1979. The staff who fled only managed to destroy a small part of the meticulous, ghastly records. The remaining records have been designated by UNESCO as part of the memory of the world. The former school classrooms had been crudely converted into individual cells. Large black-and-white photos of the victims stare down in each section. Every prisoner brought there was already guilty – all that remained was to extract a confession. Methods for extracting such confessions were barbaric: water boards, pincers for pulling nails, electric wires, cages for centipedes and rods for regular beatings.

Prisoners were not meant to die there. A signed confession (report) was demanded by the authorities. Prisoners too weak or ill had their wounds cleaned by 'medics'. "The real doctors had already been killed, along with intellectuals, professionals, priests, diplomats and people with glasses or soft hands" (Alexander Hinton *Man or Monster? The trial of a Khmer Rouge Torturer* Duke University Press 2016)

Duch, the man who ran Tuol Seng, was a former teacher. He was a leader with exacting standards in his gruesome work. He epitomises Hannah Arendt's famous desciption: "the banality of evil". At his trial in 2009 (one of only a handful of Khmer Rouge henchmen to be tried), he presented himself as a human striving to do his best in impossible circumstances. Duch had developed methods for extracting information while running an earlier prison, training illiterate teenagers to practise on animals and inmates. At S21, he 'perfected' his techniques. Many of the S21 reports have his careful comments in the margins from the red pen carried in his pocket, possibly reflecting his training as a teacher. A hideous monster on most levels but so ordinary on another level.



What of Duch's specific victims? I met Chum Mey, a mechanic spared because he could fix things, in the grounds of Tuol Seng. One of only twelve to survive, he signed a copy of his book and smiled calmly in the hideous surroundings where he had witnessed so many horrors. His resilience was remarkably similar to that of some survivors of the Holocaust whom I had met on visits to the Sydney Jewish Museum.

Are there lessons to learn from Tuol Seng, as a microcosm of an unspeakably much larger horror? Historians, sociologists and ordinary citizens can only continue to document such events in the hope that some of this tragic bewildering puzzle can be explained.

What of contemporary Cambodia? Cambodians can look back 800 years earlier to the glories of the Khmer Empire, when Khmers led the world in development and artistic endeavour, but they are now the poorest nation in Southeast Asia.

Only forty years earlier, terror and horror stalked Cambodia. However, it seems puzzling that Hun Sen, a former Khmer Rouge commander, has been the Prime Minister since 1985. He has consolidated his position and that of his Cambodian People's Party to a situation of highly centralised power, where the opposition has been effectively muzzled and press freedoms are non-existent. Critics have accused him of rigging elections, corruption, patronage and nepotism. Protests against his regime have been brutally crushed, even as it sold off 45% of the total area of Cambodia, mainly to foreign investors, threatening hundreds of thousands of people with eviction.

However, despite all of this, there seems to be hope and resilience on the streets. It is remarkable how warm and genuinely friendly the Khmer people are to visitors. This, in itself, seems paradoxical. In Oudong, a former capital of Cambodia, we were honoured to witness the funeral of a famous monk. Thousands had gathered for the ceremony and there were parades full of colour and pageantry. The mourners blended together to celebrate the death of this great man. It was the auspicious time for his funeral, even though he had died some 14 years earlier! This seemed to sum up the feeling that here is a people who are willing to wait with patience and serenity for the justice and fairness which is rightfully theirs.

[For the benefit of non-members, Michael Spicer is our Secretary and this article is based on his presentation, 'Travels in Vietnam and Cambodia (Part 1)', at our church on 26 February. He was accompanied on that trip by our Treasurer, Nadia Repin, pictured above with Chum Mey at Tuol Seng. Part 2 of Michael's presentation will take place on 30 April, so we can look forward to an article on Vietnam in a future issue. (See also his three-part series on Myanmar in the Aug/Sept 2015 issues, and those of Feb/Mar and Apr/May 2016.)]

(**Unitarianism in Europe**, *cont'd*)

In 1893, Janson returned to Norway and founded his Brotherhood Church, which he led for three years. He also founded a church in Aarhus, Denmark, which evidently did not last long. His successor in Oslo was Herman Haugerud, who had also spent time in the US. The church was renamed 'Unitarian' but it closed shortly after his death in 1937.

From about 1983, some theology students at the University of Oslo formed discussion groups which eventually merged to become the Unitarian Association. They restored Janson's church building over 1995–2005 and succeeded in having it re-registered under the original by-laws.

Today, the Norwegian Unitarian Church is led by Rev. Knut Heidelberg (pictured far right), who managed to be ordained in the Béla Bartók Church in Budapest. He follows that tradition, for which reason the church's other name is the Bét Dávid Unitarian Association, which means House of (Francis) Dávid. There is also the Norwegian UU Fellowship, formed in 2007 by American UUs and some locals, most notably Galen Gisler, an oceanographer who has served two terms as treasurer of the ICUU. As of 2009, the two groups are represented internationally by the Unitarian Umbrella Organisation of Norway.

The German Unitarian Religious Community began life as the Religious Community of Free Protestants in 1876. In 1910, its pastor Rudolf Walbaum met some American Unitarians at a conference of liberal theologians in Berlin and added the designation, 'German Unitarians', to the name of his group. In 1926, he formed the German Unitarian Group in collaboration with Rev. Clemens Täsler, co-founder of a free church in Frankfurt.
To circumvent a Nazi ban, the organisation merged with other groups to form the Free Religious Community of Germany. After World War II, the German Unitarian congregations resurfaced with British and American help, though some of the more traditionally oriented churches left when the organisation took the Unitarian name in 1950.

The Community has 23 branches, though their website only names those in Detmold, Hamburg, Kassel, Leipzig, Lübeck, Munich and Osthofen; also the regions of Baden-Württemberg, Donautal (Danube Valley) and Vest Recklinghausen (in North Rhine-Westphalia). Its headquarters are in Kassel and they own a modern conference centre at Klingberg (near Hamburg), as well as a publishing house in Ravensburg.

The German Unitarians describe themselves as deliberately lay-led and tending toward humanism, though they recognise diversity and other faith traditions. They also have an independent fellowship for young people, known as the Union of German Unitarian Youth.

There is also the unaffiliated Unitarian Church of Berlin, which was founded in 1948 by Hans Georg Remus, a descendent of a Polish Brethren family that moved to Prussia after those early Unitarians (known then as Socinians) were expelled from Poland in 1658.

Similarly to the German experience, the present-day Unitarian Church of Denmark Society was founded in 1900 as a liberal Christian group called The Free Congregation and only took the Unitarian name in 1992. However, even in its first year of existence, the Free Congregation took part in the conference in Boston that founded the International Association for Religious Freedom, in conjunction with many national Unitarian bodies. Although two other Unitarian congregations existed long ago, the only group left is in Copenhagen.

Their chapel, the House of Unitarians, opened in 1927, partially funded by Nina Grieg, the widow of the Norwegian composer, Edvard Grieg. The architect, Carl Brummer, was asked to design a building which reflected the Unitarian ideals of tolerance towards other religions. He sought to achieve this by combining a Christian basilica shape with two balconies typical of Jewish synagogues and a fret that Greek Orthodox temples have.

Services are held on alternate Sundays, followed by a 'Debate Café'. Occasionally some evening activities and services are also conducted. The expressed aim is to bring religious, philosophical and scientific views into agreement.

[Part 2 will appear in the next issue. One day, a pictorial version of this series will go on the ANZUUA website and then you will be able to see what many of the churches in Transylvania, Hungary and Denmark look like, along with maps and pictures of some of the minor personages mentioned in this article.]

(**Can Religion Be Good?**, *cont'd*)

To date in this article, I have written only of the Christian religion and, of course, there are many other religions. Buddhism, for example, has the potential to spread inner calm and tranquillity of mind, although it may have been limited in its ability to stop the warlike propensities of the Japanese and Burmese. Mao Tse-Tung's mother was Buddhist and it seemed to help little in terms of her son's humanity, but the Dalai Lama has provided inspirational spiritual leadership to many in the West who have sought a different way. The Shinto religion of Japan emphasizes reverence for nature, which probably explains the Japanese love of the seasons and variations in weather. Many of these sentiments, like compassion, are instinctive among people but religion adds intensity and structure and lasting dedication to ideals of goodness.

Much religion is irrational, even if it is seeking a humane path. As Stephen Prothero argues, the founders of religion start with a consuming problem. In the case of Christianity, this is sin and they then provide a solution, which is faith and works according to the Scriptures. Then there is a reward, say, salvation. Then there is the veneration of a hero class of saints in the case of Catholicism, or of great people of the faith in the case of Protestants and Dissenters, which we Unitarians once were.

This paradigm does not mean that people may be good or evil or a combination of both. Religions are many and variable. How can Jihadic Islam be compared to the militant compassion of Mother Teresa? How can the non-theistic scriptures of the Buddha be compared to the pure monotheism of the Koran? How can Jesus, defending the prostitute from stoning ("Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.") be compared to the mandatory stoning for adultery in the Old Testament? Religion is as variable as the human condition itself and, whether true or false, it may be evil but, as David Armstrong said, it may be good. And hopefully that is why we are Unitarians.

[Peter gave an address on this topic in the church two weeks ago (19 March). The second part of his article on Japan in the previous issue has been deferred to the next one but the good news is that he now plans to write more than one follow-up article on that subject.]

Membership renewals for 2017 are due from 01 January and they must be received before the Annual General Meeting in May. Those wishing to join our church can use this form by way of application but should not send payment until their membership is accepted.

MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL FORM

I, (name) _____

of (address) _____

_____ Postcode _____

Phone(s): (home) _____ (other) _____

Email: _____

I apply to join/renew membership in (delete one) the Sydney Unitarian Church and agree to abide by the rules as set down by the Constitution and management of the church.

Signature: _____ Fee enclosed: $_____*

Cheques should be made payable to: Treasurer, Sydney Unitarian Church. Membership will be valid for the calendar year 2017.

* Annual membership is $20 and includes the SUN journal; subscription to the SUN only is $15.