

# BUF NEWS

September 2024



**“Wholeness does not mean perfection: it means embracing brokenness as an integral part of life.”**

*Parker J. Palmer*

## **Next Meeting at Barrow Castle**

**Sunday 15 September**  
**10.45 Coffee, 11.15 Worship**

***Theme: Wholeness***

**Led by Kay**

## Reflection: Cultural Christianity

A recent article by Madeleine Davies, a senior reporter for the *Church Times*, suggests that in spite of the dwindling numbers of attendance in nearly all of the traditional Christian denominations there is a growing affirmation of the Christian contribution to art, music, and perhaps most important, morality. Thus an atheist such as Richard Dawkins can happily accept the label of “Cultural Christian” while remaining a total sceptic on all the tenets of that faith. This is nothing new – many people over recent centuries have been Christians “in name only” and regarded the metaphysical aspects of religion as doubtful at best. It is also no surprise to students of secularisation, who have debated the issue of the so-called “death of Christianity in Britain” for decades, but recognise that it is also alive and well in e.g. Pentecostal Churches. Times change.

One of the key points of Davies’ article is that principles regarded as universal truths are in fact drawn from the message of the Gospels. She makes much of Jesus as the revolutionary, with a preference for the poor and outcast (shades of Liberation Theology here). However, she ignores the fact that the “golden rule” of treating others as we would be treated ourselves is not unique to Christianity, and indeed is present in some form in all the major faiths and secular philosophy.

Churchmen/women are portrayed in her article as sympathetic towards those who wish to belong without believing in the Church of England. But she also questions how long, in the wider society of the UK, the historical culture of Christianity will last without its theology being part of an individual’s belief system. Religious people need the supernatural, she suggests. In that they are on a spectrum with those who are spiritual but not religious, or take a purely psychological view of personal growth, as my own research showed.

How does this inform Unitarianism? First, we belong in the category of dwindling numbers of members, with a high age range. Second, we have a historical emphasis on reason, rather than metaphysics. So far so gloomy. However, we also have a welcoming approach to those who come seeking a place where their personal beliefs do not preclude their belonging. I also like to think that we have a strong morality without judgement, a powerful social conscience, and a lively spiritual focus. We may be Cultural Christians, as well as people of faith. For me, that is the category that is missing from Davies’ article.

Make your own minds up by visiting <https://www.newstatesman.com/cover-story/2024/08/the-rise-of-cultural-christianity>.

Kay

Our young people are continuing apace with their education. While Toby, Nancy, Iris, and Evie move up a year at Secondary School, George has entered his final sixth form year, Joshua his final GCSE year, and Rhosi has opted for an Art & Design Course at college instead of A Levels. We wish them all well.

## Poem of the Month

### Cabbages

If God were as ungenerous as man,  
He would make cabbages to feed the kine,  
On some unbeautiful and heavy plan,  
Meet for mere beasts. But in his craft divine  
He fashions them, and colours them instead  
With gold and misty blue amid the green,  
Softly with purple, gallantly with red.  
He curves their leaves and traces veins between;  
Bejewels them with drops of rain and dew;  
Caresses them with wind, and, crowning boon,  
With lunar light transfigures them anew –  
Great silver roses 'neath the autumn moon.

*Teresa Hooley*

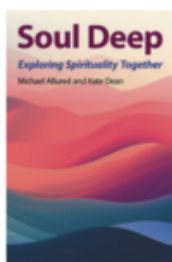
**Places Still Available!**  
***Retreats at Hilfield Friary, Dorset***  
**Intergenerational, 29-31 October**  
**Adults, 15-17 November**  
**Ask Kay for more details**

## Words to Ponder

[T]here are a lot of communities operating in our culture that are experimenting with new ways of being church. I have friends who are devoted to justice and faith but who feel quite ambivalent about institutional churches. They are deeply committed to weekly house meetings with prayer, food, and support, but they are not necessarily in “church” on a Sunday morning.

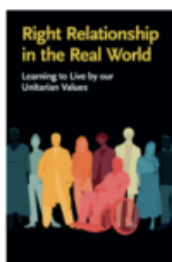
From *Seeking Paradise* by Stephen Lingwood

## Recent Lindsey Press Publications



### **Soul Deep: Exploring Spirituality Together** £10.00 by Michael Allured and Kate Dean

An eight-week course of spiritual exploration for small groups, created to encourage personal reflection and shared insights. Each session plan includes readings and activities, with practical guidance for facilitators, to help participants find meaning and spiritual fulfilment in their daily lives. Michael is the Unitarian minister at Golders Green, and Kate is the minister at Rosslyn Hill Chapel (Hampstead).



### **Right Relationship in the Real World:** £7.00 **Learning to Live by our Unitarian Values** Edited by Jane Blackall

Contributors to the Hucklow Summer Schools in 2022 and 2023 explore ways of nurturing authentic relationships with oneself, with others, with the Earth, and with God; and they consider what it means to be truly real, and how we can make space for others to do likewise. Each chapter ends with questions to encourage congregations to set up small groups to explore the themes more deeply.

## Finally . . .

Life-giving Spirit,  
Thank you that your guidance is not  
an imposition of your will over ours,  
Wringing all pleasure and spontaneity from our lives.  
Thank you that it can come naturally,  
As like a loving parent  
You let us chart our own path,  
Guiding us gently from behind.

*Kathy Keay*



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