

200th Issue

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This is the 200th issue of *Faith and Freedom*, a journal first produced in the Autumn of 1947 by the Rev Eric Price and still going strong as ‘a journal of progressive religion’, with a world-wide readership and high quality contributions from Unitarians and others keen to explore questions of theology, spirituality, and the religious life in its broadest sense ranging over a wide variety of topics.

2022 marked our 75th anniversary and it is clear that we have carved out a place as an internationally-read print journal that speaks to all who have questions about religion and the way faith is worked out in the world. Our writers supply a regular stream of thoughtful and insightful reviews of new books which attract a lot of notice. Our approach meets academic criteria but is also thoroughly accessible to the general reader. Special thanks goes to our loyal and supportive readership across more than three quarters of a century.

Throughout its time *Faith and Freedom* has had only four editors – Eric Price, Peter Godfrey, Keith Gilley and the present writer, and it is pleasing to record that Peter Godfrey continues as our Editor Emeritus.

Across the years we have often been very innovative as a journal. Eric Price made bulk orders available for group discussions. For many years the journal included a separate and highly regarded Devotional Supplement. In more recent times, through the skills of Nigel Clarke, our business manager, we have produced a widely admired colour calendar for our readers. These were attractive and useful productions which also helped to raise funds for the Send a Child to Hucklow Fund. One year when I was visiting Kolozsvár in Transylvania I was surprised and delighted on being welcomed into the Unitarian Bishop’s office to see our calendar hanging prominently on the wall. Another recent successful achievement was to produce as supplementary booklets to *Faith and Freedom* the papers given at the Unitarian Theology Conferences held at Manchester and Leeds in 2016 and 2017 respectively. Through our involvement these have achieved a very wide circulation both in print and online where they are still available to download (<https://velvethummingbee.com/2019/04/05/unitarian-theology/>).

With the arrival of this 200th anniversary it was suggested that we might look at some of the most significant articles of the last 78 years, and there is a lot to choose from. So in this issue I have selected three articles that shed some light on our development.

The first is from our very first issue. *A Declaration of Faith* by Dr Albert Schweitzer set the tone at the very genesis of this journal. It is hard to over estimate the importance of Albert Schweitzer within liberal circles at that time. A polymath thinker, theologian, humanitarian, philosopher, physician, he epitomised the cutting edge of a liberal, questioning approach to religion in the mid-twentieth century. Written for a meeting of the International Association for Religious Freedom, the world’s oldest interfaith organisation, a body which

we have often had close interactions with, it was a considerable coup to have his contribution in the very first issue.

The second article is *God is Necessary* by H. Lismer Short published in Autumn 1958. At the time he was a future Principal of Manchester College, and his article displays the depth and breadth of his scholarship. Essentially an answer to the humanism of that age and the development of a scientific thinking that had unsettled the traditional Unitarian approach to the divine. The article declares that we 'have been satisfied with cosmic explanations or enquiring agnosticisms, and have not sufficiently tackled religion from the end of human anxiety and dread.' The traditional proofs of God no longer hold but 'all the burden of living' still required a place for faith in a personal God.

The final article from our back catalogue in this issue is *A Rational Basis for Religious Belief* by Arthur J. Long dating from Summer 1974. Another Unitarian Principal (this time of the Unitarian College, Manchester) this is another article which displays the writer's considerable erudition as well, in Arthur's case, of his irrepressible sense of humour. What is particularly interesting about this paper is that it was prepared for a long-forgotten meeting between Unitarian and Roman Catholic theologians which took place in 1973. The papers for this encounter still exist and it might be profitable at some stage to revisit them. The basis of this article is not to ask 'Does God exist?' but rather 'What sort of God?', he rejects the argument from revelation and the argument from experience and roots religious belief in a rational theism, 'underpinned by a rational empirical theology', and uses Peter Berger's *A Rumour of Angels* to frame his *apologia*.

New pieces for this issue include *On Reading the Koran* by Barrie Needham, a timely, fair and objective assessment of this crucial text which is so frequently mentioned but very seldom examined. The other is Frank Walker's *The Sybil's Request. Death and Our Human Imagination* which explores how we understand death, Heaven and eternity and ranges over the thinking contained in the poetry and literature of such figures as T.S. Eliot, T.F. Powys and Julian Barnes, and ends, appropriately enough, with a quotation from Harry Lismer Short.

These articles are followed by a great selection of reviews by Graham Murphy, Laura Dobson, Peter Hewis and Helena Fyfe Thonemann, all of which tie into the current world and human situation and many of the themes of this issue so well.

With the production of this significant milestone issue it only remains for me to thank Nigel Clarke for his essential work as business manager which keeps our whole enterprise afloat, Edwin Godfrey for his work as US agent for the journal, and Trimprint, our printers, for their assistance with production and design which is always first class. A particular word of thanks should also go to the Daniel Jones Trust and the Merseyside and District Missionary Association for their financial support to *Faith and Freedom*. Most of all our thanks goes to all our contributors and to our readers, without you there would literally be no magazine.