

UNITARIAN ORIGINS IN NORWAY DURING THE 1890S AND EARLY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Abstract

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the previously exclusively Lutheran Scandinavian countries of northern Europe became denominationally pluralistic. Until the 1890s, all the nonconformist denominations, with the exception of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, were forms of Trinitarian Protestantism. During the last decade of the century, however, returning Norwegian emigrants brought Unitarianism to Norway, initially to the capital, Kristiania (subsequently known as Oslo). Proclaiming their post-orthodox religion (which has centred on ethics) through such conventional Unitarian means as periodicals and lectures, they appealed primarily to intellectually inclined Norwegians in the capital, but otherwise did not attract a broad following.

1 INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, the nineteenth century was not only an era of rapid theological transformation, but also a time when the ecclesiastical kaleidoscope of many European countries became more complex. In 1800 most of them, at least on the continent, had national churches which claimed at least the

nominal allegiance of nearly the entire non-Jewish population. In Scandinavia, this had been the case since the third and fourth decades of the sixteenth century when, by monarchical decree, Lutheranism became established. By 1900, however, denominational pluralism was evident in one land after another; the number of Christians who adhered to nonconformist churches was usually still quite small, typically amounting to less than 3 percent of the national populations. Nevertheless, Baptist, Methodist, Seventh-day Adventist, and various other traditions, some of them arising from within Europe, others of British and American origins, permanently altered the religious landscape. In once exclusively Lutheran Norway, for example, (at least in its numerous coastal towns), believers whose spiritual roads did not lead to the parish of the established church could choose from a small variety of other forms of the faith. A 'Dissenter Law' enacted in 1845 had allowed the seed of this pluralism to be planted. During the next fifty years most restrictions on employment in the civil service were lifted, which meant that nonconformists were no longer excluded from civil service posts. Of course, evangelisation by non-Lutherans, some of them returning Norwegian emigrants from the United States of America (who had 'sampled' different kinds of religious beliefs and practices in America) sometimes met with stiff resistance from the Lutheran clergy and even, lay members of the state church (which they regarded as the only legitimate form of Christianity). Their defensive hostility was quite ineffective in preventing urban Norway from eventually offering a relatively broad palette of Protestantism by the 1880s and 1890s.

Further complicating the fairly rapidly evolving religious landscape of Norway during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was a radical version of Christianity that appeared in the capital in the mid-1890s when two returning Norwegian-American Unitarians propagated their liberal form of the faith in the capital, Kristiania (which, since 1925 has been

called Oslo). On the surface, at least, they were following a familiar pattern which had been set earlier by compatriots (and, in some instances, other Scandinavians) who had felt called to sail back to their homeland and proclaim their new faith there. This was essentially how Baptists, Methodists, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, and the Swedish-American dispensationalist millenarian Fredrik Franson had served as agents of religious change and contributed additional elements to the changing kaleidoscope of spiritual pluralism in Norway between the 1840s and the 1880s.¹ To a greater extent than most of these predecessors, however, the prophets of Unitarianism challenged an already embattled Lutheran orthodoxy.

The early history of Unitarian tradition in Norway is also significant to the history of religious liberalism globally. Though largely an Anglo-American phenomenon which grew on both sides of the North Atlantic during the nineteenth century, Unitarianism spread to several other parts of the world well before 1900 and became entrenched, invariably on a small scale, for differing reasons. In South Africa, for example, the Free Protestant Church was established in Cape Town in 1867 by David Pieter Faure (1842-1916). Faure had been a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, but left it after coming under the influence of nineteenth-century theological liberalism while a student in the Netherlands during the 1860s which was then under the sway of the prominent American Unitarian Theodore Parker.² To Norway, however, the intellectualist Unitarian tradition came packaged in the cultural and religious baggage of returning Norwegian-Americans in a virtually untold chapter of modern church history.

2 HANS TAMBS LYCHE

The first of the two key Unitarians was Hans Tambs Lyche, a native of Fredrikshald (now Halden). Lyche had attended school in France for two years during the mid-1870s and returned to Norway an enthusiastic supporter of republicanism. During his four years at Kristiania Tekniske Skole (1876-1880) this nascent radical was active in the Nordisk Fristatssamfund and wrote articles for the critical Agrarian politician Søren Jaabæk's periodical *Folketidende* (People's News) as well as other liberal periodicals in Norway and elsewhere in Scandinavia. After completing his studies, Lyche joined the stream of Nordic emigrants to the United States of America. During the early 1880s he came under the influence of the eminent English Unitarian minister Brook Herford's preaching in Chicago and responded by ending his brief career in engineering and matriculating at Meadville Theological School, a Unitarian institution in Meadville, Pennsylvania. Having qualified after two and a half years' study to purvey liberal Christianity, he declined a request to join fellow Norwegian-American Kristofer Janson in the ministry of an immigrant Unitarian congregation in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and chose instead to answer a call to an English-speaking one in Janesville, Wisconsin. After a brief stint in its pulpit, Lyche accepted a similar post in Warwick, Massachusetts. Hostile reactions to his outspoken defence of the anarchists who had been condemned to death after the Haymarket Square bombings in Chicago in 1886, however, prompted this immigrant to leave Massachusetts and the ministry. He fled to rural Georgia and had secular employment for several years before returning to Norway in 1892 after a twelve-year absence from his homeland.³

In numerous letters sent from Massachusetts to the liberal newspaper *Dagbladet*, Lyche signalled some of the issues he would subsequently take up afresh in Kristiania. In one of his final missives from the United States, written only a few weeks before he sailed back to Norway, he foreshadowed the

Christological strife in which he would become embroiled by lauding the recently deceased French historian Ernest Renan and noting that Renan's *Vie de Jésus*, a controversial biography in which the man from Nazareth had been portrayed without divine attributes and which had promptly cost Renan his professorship in Paris three decades earlier, was widely admired on North American shores. "He has made a considerable impact on the evolving spiritual life of America, and in liberal circles he is regarded as one of the intellectual giants and great pioneers of our times", wrote this expatriate Unitarian respectfully in this brief piece which appeared under the title 'Aarhundredets store Mænd' (Great Men of the Century).⁴

Lyche's professional activity in Kristiania was not, in the first instance, religious. Rather than resuming his Unitarian ministry, he served as the founding editor, beginning in February 1893, of the fortnightly *Kringsjaa* (Review). Under his guidance, this new periodical served as a vehicle for transmitting many of the liberal religious, philosophical, and political views to which Lyche had been exposed in Massachusetts and elsewhere in the United States of America. Indicative of his editorial interests, it carried articles about and excerpts from the works of such British and North American writers such as the Unitarian Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thomas Carlyle, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Mark Twain and George Eliot. The thematic scope of the articles during the first year of *Kringsjaa* is striking. It ranged from the politics of Prime Minister William Gladstone to the work of Charles Darwin, from the views of the English Baptist Charles Haddon Spurgeon to the controversial American Presbyterian Charles Briggs, from the position of women in modern marriage, from the Trondheim Cathedral to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, and from spiritism to the Transcendentalist model colony at Brook Farm. Lyche did not drift far from his sense of calling to Unitarian ministry, however, and within months of his return to Norway he began

to arrange Sundays meetings at which, rather than conducting sacramental worship that would be familiar to many Christian traditions, he preached, or lectured, in accordance with one dimension of Unitarian intellectual proclamation of that era.

Further propagating late nineteenth-century progressive thinking, Lyche edited another journal, *Frie Ord* (Liberal Words), during its first year of publication, 1894. This periodical also served as a conduit for the purveying of religious liberalism and intellectual modernism, with Lyche's numerous editorials serving as a vanguard for transmission of these ideas to part of the Norwegian intelligentsia. In the first of these, carried in the first issue of *Frie Ord*, he further defined his visions of how the new periodical would serve as an agent for propagating post-Protestant religion and what that modern faith would entail. "'Frie Ord' is an organ for ethical and religious culture", Lyche announced. "That means that, to the best of its ability, it will emphasise the place of morality and religion in our modern society and attempt to let these forces influence and permeate it, so that the culture which is evolving and under construction among us may have not only an intellectual but also a moral and religious character." Far from standing behind a bulwark of historical tradition to fend off the assaults of modernity which had begun to challenge Lutheran orthodoxy in Norway more than a decade earlier and other variations of Christianity abroad for considerably longer, *Frie Ord* would embrace many seminal nineteenth-century intellectual currents and borrow heavily from other religious traditions:

The world in which it exists is that of the telescope and the microscope, the world of Darwin and Spencer. With regard to the creation of the universe or, for that matter, the intellectual interpretation of nature and life, it has far greater confidence in Darwin and Spencer than in Luther, Augustine, or the authors of the Pentateuch. But when we turn to

religious life and sentiments, to the contents and possibilities of the soul, then it prefers Jesus, Paul, and the authors of the Psalms, or Buddha, Lao-tze, and Mencius to modern science.

Lyche thought that science and religion could thus co-exist in a symbiotic relationship, with each serving to amplify human understanding of the eternal truths of the world. The unfortunate cleft between these two broad areas of knowledge, he averred, stemmed in large measure from the unwillingness of conventional Christian churches' to keep up with the times.⁵

In the same leading article, Lyche repeated his antitheological points of departure, namely that "religion is life and not theology, and what we mean by religion and Christianity is not believing in a lot of remarkable things but living greatly, deeply, and in an elevated way". This, too, went hand-in-hand with his convictions that true religion and science were two sides of the same coin and that there could be no real contradiction between them. In full harmony with a pivotal tenet of liberal religious thought since the Enlightenment, Lyche described the world as a place governed by immutable natural laws and order. Hence "Miracles are impossible in such a world. They would be wrinkles in the divine fabric, pieces of a chaos which the world order does not recognise. They would be a slap in the face of God, whose essence the eternal world order reveals and indeed is. They would be not only violations of the laws of nature, but interruptions in the life of God, disharmonies in his being." Lyche appropriated his reading of the Gospel proclaimed by Jesus to undergird his own perception of the utterly intimate relationship between an immanent God and the natural world:

Together with Jesus, we must turn from the old scriptures to 'the lilies of the field'. We must again find

divinity in nature and in everyday life, from which a misdirected proclamation and misleading devotion to miracles have removed him from the view and feelings of people. We find him there. We discover that 'law and order' in science and the 'Father' of Jesus are different words for the same thing, that Jesus only mentioned and understood one side of the nature of the eternal, that with which the sciences do not concern themselves. Power and love are one in this world. We must transform religion into a natural thing, which has its roots in the events of daily life and in our normal, unembellished thoughts and feelings.⁶

Frie Ord did not long survive. However, the indefatigable Lyche continued to write essays for and letters to the liberal daily newspaper *Dagbladet* in Kristiania and even served briefly on the administrative staff of this liberal daily newspaper.⁷ The print media thus continued for a short time to serve as agents for the proliferation of this progressive faith. Lyche thereby laid part of the foundation for the propagation of what might be called the Unitarian version of progressive religious thought in Norway during Scott's formative years as a young adult.

Before the end of 1893 the ambitious Lyche published a brochure titled *En Unitarisk Kirke i Kristiania* (A Unitarian Church in Kristiania) in which he called for not only the gathering of such a congregation in the Norwegian capital, but also the establishment of a national Norwegian Unitarian society. Aware that the term 'Unitarian' was unfamiliar to most of his potential readers, this returned Norwegian-American explained that "Unitarianism is an undogmatic and rational religious movement which is based on and incorporates those thoughts which belong to our own times and which to a great degree are the fruits of scientific research during this century." He emphasised that, for decades, Unitarianism had not been

exclusively or even primarily with opposing the doctrine of the Trinity or, for that matter, with Christology at all. Instead, it had become a broader religious movement which acknowledged the validity of many nineteenth-century intellectual currents, such as Darwinian evolution and higher criticism of the Bible. With regard to its religious content, Unitarians had long since dispensed with the Old and New Testaments as determinative sources of doctrine. Belief in its infallibility had disappeared among them, Lyche announced. Instead of the Scriptures, Unitarians found their authority and foundation elsewhere, namely solely in *den menneskelige aand og i livets og naturens egen ordning*. Consequently, "Faith must result not from what the Bible says, but from what life and nature, directed through the whole content of the human spirit, teaches us." Unitarianism was thus "complete rationalism" in which revelation was exclusively through nature; there was no belief in the supernatural. "Reason must judge everything. The content of nature is the only source of truth." Despite Unitarianism's commitment to the power and authority of human reason, according to Lyche's portrait of the movement, belief as such was only secondary: "As Unitarianism now is, it offers no system of dogmas ... For that matter, faith is secondary. Emphasis is placed on life and character. It will put ethics into the place in the religious life which has hitherto been occupied by theology." Salvation had become a worldly matter which had no relationship to conventional Christian soteriological and eschatological beliefs. Unitarianism "wishes to save people not by faith, but by morality, by life, and by the intellect. It does not want to save them from eternal hell in the future, but from the power of threatening, destructive drives and from all forms of evil and misery. It does not want to save them only *out of* this world, but *in* this world and for a better, more wholesome and honorable life."⁸

If this description of what Unitarianism's aims appealed to those Norwegians who had washed their hands of orthodox theology

and put their trust in the essential goodness of mankind and the power of human reason (but who had not completely jettisoned the concept of religion as such), Lyche's further comments, about how the faith he had brought back to Norway differed markedly from certain oft-ridiculed aspects of religious life in Norway, may also have resonated with them. Unitarianism, he explained, was as far removed as possible from pietism and asceticism. It did not regard the world as inevitably a place of sadness and suffering where tears and long faces should characterise religion. Rather, the typical Unitarian in Lyche's view was an optimist who enjoyed life; "fearlessly and happy he shall stand before his God like a son before his father." This, he believed, was quite in harmony with the teachings of Jesus.⁹

Lyche's call for the establishment of a Unitarian church in Kristiania and of a Unitarian denomination extending to other parts of Norway did not go unheeded in the state church. How much Lutheran attention it received is impossible to gauge. In any case, in one of the first challenges from within the Church of Norway, Pastor Thorvald Klaveness countered Lyche in an editorial in *For kirke og kultur* (For Church and Culture), a Christian review which he edited. The new movement, he thought, was not merely a passing phenomenon but one unfortunately in harmony with the spirit of the times which would appeal to people in certain undefined circles. He found several vulnerable points to criticise in Unitarianism, beginning with what he perceived as a virtual absence of faith in God. "Does Unitarianism believe in God?" he asked. Klaveness found little to indicate a positive answer. On the contrary, "When Lyche describes the task of the Unitarian church he does not mention a single word about its relationship to God. Responsibility to God, piety, confession of sin, remorse, prayer, forgiveness, childlike faith, childlike love, subordination to the will of God, humility – in short, our entire relationship to God – there is not a word about it." Klaveness' response in this regard

apparently reflected the crucial difference separating his notion of God from that of Lyche's immanentism. "Unitarianism is completely this-worldly," he lamented. "Everything that is otherworldly, supernatural, transcendent is not denied in theory, but in practice set aside."¹⁰

Klaveness dismissed out of hand Lyche's claim that Unitarianism was a religion free of dogma. Instead of doctrines proceeding from theism, he pointed out, the Unitarians, and particularly Lyche in his recent brochure, professed belief in, *inter alia*, a moral world order and salvation through the nurturing of the moral nature of humanity. These teachings, Klaveness argued, were inordinately optimistic and exclusivist. Furthermore, he took issue with Lyche's proclamation of a religion based on happiness, in contrast to, in his words, a "religion of tears and long faces". Klaveness asked, "What about the massive numbers of suffering people in the world?" This seasoned pastor and Lutheran editor pointed to a reality which, he thought, diametrically contradicted the morally optimistic position of Unitarianism: "There are people who are torn up inside by remorse, whose thoughts constantly return to plaintive, nagging memories in which they are their own martyrs, whose souls are tortured without respite when they look back on their wasted lives. What has Unitarianism to offer them?" What such individuals needed, he contended, was the certainty of salvation through the risen Christ. And this assurance, Klaveness concluded, was the gospel of the conventional church. Because of that, it could be certain of its continued place in Norway.¹¹

Lyche did not succeed in establishing a congregation. His preaching, however, appears to have gained a fairly wide audience, enough to convince a publisher in Kristiania to begin to issue a weekly periodical for publicising the sermons of this returned emigrant. That publishing venture did not long endure, but its failure did not prevent Lyche from printing some

of his lectures as a booklet entitled *Ny-idealismen* (New Idealism) in 1896. One central thrust of these presentations was his advocacy of the creation of what he termed 'ethical societies' modelled after local units of Felix Adler's Ethical Culture Society in the United States of America. These envisaged bodies would eschew all forms of dogma as such: their emphasis would be exclusively on the promotion of public and private morality.¹²

3 KRISTOFER JANSON

In the meantime Kristofer Janson, who had spent an almost identical length of time on American soil as Lyche, sailed back to Norway in 1893, uncertain, by his own testimony, whether he should return permanently. Like Lyche, he both engaged in literary activity and delivered religious and intellectual lectures in Kristiania during the mid-1890s, often using the modest hall of the Arbeidersamfund as his venue. Having devoted most of his time in the United States of America to Unitarian ministry among Norwegians, Janson was clearly oriented towards continuing in a similar vein in his homeland. After beginning work in January 1895 he succeeded in establishing the *Broderskabets Kirke* (Brotherhood Church) in Kristiania, the first institutional manifestation of Unitarianism in Norway. Its leaders applied to the state for official recognition under the provisions of the Dissenter Law of 1891. In a statement accompanying their application, the Norwegian Unitarians declared that their purpose was "to proclaim the principles of Jesus and to live according to them". They also declared in the same document that in their search for truth and "the spirit of Jesus of Nazareth" they were "united to serve God and themselves by serving and loving people". This was an unambiguous expression of late nineteenth-century liberal Christianity which stressed the ideal of brotherly love while downplaying doctrine generally. After debating their application, however, the

Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs and Education declined to grant the non-Trinitarian church the same status which such denominations as the Baptists and the Methodists enjoyed.¹³

The Unitarians did not give up their quest for state recognition. One of them, the lawyer Ole Thomesen, who had recently completed a stint as a member of the *Storting*, or Parliament, and who had retired to Sandvika, took their case in writing to the Church Committee of that legislative body in January 1896. This retired parliamentarian found it objectionable that he and his fellow Unitarians should not be regarded as Christians. "They see themselves as such and have been thus regarded since the earliest times of Christianity", Thomesen overgeneralised. He cited the third-century Alexandrian Christian Justin the Martyr as one prominent member of the church who, although disagreeing with those who did not believe in the divinity of Jesus, nonetheless accepted them as fellow Christians. Attempting to cement his case, Thomesen pointed out that Unitarianism had become widely represented on an international front and had approximately 600 congregations in the United States of America, some 400 in England, and others in virtually every country which had a sufficiently great degree of religious freedom to permit dissenting currents to flow through the public. Consequently, he argued, the Norwegian Unitarians merely demanded official status on a par with that granted to other Christian nonconformists. He proposed a slight change in the Dissenter Law of 1891 so that the definition of "dissenters" in §1 of that statute ("those who confess the Christian religion without being members of the state church") would be immediately followed by the words "including Unitarians". If this request was not granted, Thomesen stated, the Unitarians asked that as a substitute §24 of the Dissenter Law be modified so that they would at least have legal status corresponding to that given members of the Jewish faith in Norway.¹⁴

Meeting on 4 July 1896, the Church Committee declined to change the fundamental (and inherently Christian) definition of 'dissenter' to include the Unitarians. In their report, it acknowledged that some of its members would have preferred to change the law in question so that everyone outside the Church of Norway would be regarded as a dissenter, without regard to his or her beliefs. By adopting such an inclusive definition, the thorny issue of judging who was a Christian and who was not, would have been laid to rest. "However, one finds it appropriate for the time being to take up this point for discussion," they concluded. Consequently, acknowledging that it was a matter of expediency to avoid discussion of that difficult question of who qualified as a Christian, the Church Committee expressed agreement with the Unitarians' second request, namely that they receive the same legal status as Jews.¹⁵

Their recommendation was promptly sent to the Parliament, which discussed it in plenary session. On 9 July the chamber approved unanimously, and apparently without debate the suggestion that the Dissenter Law be modified to mention Unitarians as having legal standing on a par with Norwegian Jews.¹⁶ The following day there was a moderate amount of discussion, the only historically significant aspect of which was a statement by Hans Andersen, a Baptist from Skien, who thought that the Unitarian application highlighted the inherent absurdity of the Dissenter Law, a statute which he explicitly stated he did not respect. The very fact that the Unitarians had to beg the government for legal recognition struck this Baptist, who favoured full separation of church and state, as a *reductio ad absurdum*:

Kristofer Janson is asking the Norwegian government to recognise him and his congregation as Christian, and this is refused. The Norwegian government says, 'No, you are not a Christian.' Then he turns to the

Norwegian Parliament, and it puts him on the same footing as the Jews. Indeed, it is a strange state of affairs when one must apply to the Norwegian government and Parliament for recognition that one is a Christian. Kristofer Janson, the polar opposite of the religion of the state, applies to the state authorities and pleads for recognition that he is a Christian. The Norwegian government is regarded as having a right to determine whether he is one.

Curiously enough, for some reason which does not emerge from Andersen's speech as recorded in the *Storthings Forhandling* (Parliamentary Record), he voted with all his colleagues in attendance for the secondary request that the Dissenter Law be modified to place the Unitarians on the same legal footing as the Jews.¹⁷ Consequently, the Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs could report to the *Storting* on 29 July 1896 that the change of §24 to do precisely that had been officially sanctioned.¹⁸

The liberal daily newspaper *Dagbladet*, which occasionally carried news about Janson and Lyche, described the foundation of the new church quite sympathetically in late April 1895 when the general process was well underway and the initial congregational council had been elected. In a first-page article, one member of the *Dagbladet* staff lauded two characteristics which set the Brotherhood Church apart from every other religious body. First, he noted its emphasis on toleration: "It is never asked what the members *believe* or *do not believe*." This journalist remarked that the doctrinal openness of the local Unitarian body meant that, at least in theory, a Roman Catholic, a member of the Salvation Army, a Grundtvigian, and a rationalist disciple of Voltaire could be encompassed by it, because the only expectation was a commitment to a Supreme Being. The second characteristic that he apparently appreciated no less than this inclusiveness

was the ideal of never preaching anything that militated against human reason.¹⁹

It is impossible to gauge with anything approaching certainty the quantitative reach of Unitarianism in Kristiania during the years of Janson's ministry at the Brotherhood Church (which ended in 1898 after tensions developed between him and socialist members of his flock who succeeded in gaining control of its council). In his memoirs, Janson recalled that, during the initial period (the length of which he did not specify), attendance at the weekly services varied between 200 and 600. The seemingly indefatigable Janson also delivered numerous other public lectures to advance his liberal religious cause and call attention to that of the working class in the industrialising economy of urban Norway. He sought retrospectively to describe the kinds of people whom he attracted and their motives for attending his services. "Those who streamed in during the first period were essentially people who felt attracted to *opposition* to received dogmas and to the interest I showed in and attention I paid to the workers' cause," Janson related. It soon became evident, however, that such a reactive foundation did not suffice for the establishment of a lasting religious movement and that it did not promote harmony within the congregation. The number of people who attended the Sunday services waned, though to what extent it declined is unknown. Janson lamented that his emphasis on placing responsibility on his audience for making their own moral decisions and thereby living in harmony with the principles of Jesus (in contrast, in his conceptualisation of Lutheranism, to "the old proclamation, in which Jesus was said to do everything in their stead and it was preached that good works were to no avail") alienated part of the congregation. At the same time, in his recollection, socialist members "found me and my personal love of Jesus too orthodox and chose to stage a revolution, in which the congregation should move in the direction of being an *ethical* society".²⁰

According to Janson's retrospective testimony, most of his flock consisted of "less prosperous people", and this intellectually inclined minister regretted that he had been unable to speak to "educated and knowledgeable people with the requisite background for more detailed and deeper understanding". They had largely ignored him, he generalised, "partly because of indifference to religion, and partly because financial considerations made it necessary for me to speak in rooms which were not aristocratic or appealing".²¹

Whatever the actual number of Kristiania residents who came under the direct influence of Unitarianism were, one central point which emerges clearly from a perusal of the Kristiania daily press during the mid-1890s is that the incipient movement gained a considerable amount of attention and, inevitably, incurred the wrath of the Lutheran establishment. Again, this repeated, *mutatis mutandis*, a familiar pattern in the history of nineteenth-century relations between the Church of Norway and nonconformist religious bodies. Some of the earliest Lutheran opposition to Janson focused on his views of marriage and his advocacy of divorce on demand. Journalistic coverage of this reveals much about the attention Janson received in the Norwegian capital. In January 1895, ie the same month when the initial steps towards founding the Broderskabets Kirke were taken, Janson delivered three 'very well attended' lectures on these topics to the Student Society in Kristiania. The Unitarian minister, whose own marriage to Drude Ulrikke Petrea Krog (a pastor's daughter who had borne him no fewer than seven children) would end in 1897, contended in the first of these lectures, held on 9 January, that the words of Jesus in Mark 10:9 and Matthew 19:6 ("What God has brought together man shall not rend asunder") were misused by the church when employed ritually to seal "all kinds of marriages without regard to the couple's personal relationship to each other". This categorical usage, Janson

asserted, was 'blasphemy'. God, he argued, could hardly be said to have created marriages which were concluded for pecuniary reasons, which were the result of external pressure, or stemmed from fleeting sensuality and 'extreme immorality'. Such unions, Janson insisted, were "only demoralizing, and the sooner they are dissolved, the better". The outspoken Unitarian then directly undermined the role of the church as the constituting agent in marriages. The sole basis of a marriage, he argued, was a private one in which a man and a woman declared their mutual love before witnesses. This relationship, not the words of a clergyman or any other official, was determinative: "Only for the sake of society is the declaration to legal authorities necessary. But the marriage as a marriage is equally valid even without such a declaration."²²

In the second lecture, delivered two days later to another audience which filled the auditorium, Janson argued strongly for liberalising legal provisions for allowing divorce. His reasoning on this question proceeded from the arguments he had put forward regarding the issue of marriage. Only when there was genuine, mutual love did a marriage actually exist, he reasoned. Janson took to task his counterparts in the Church of Norway for making its existence objectively contingent on words "without regard to the participants' subjective relationship" and thereby necessarily concluding that divorce was inadmissible. This Unitarian, by contrast, saw no reason not to permit 'voluntary divorce' as a logical counterpoint to voluntary marriage. Fears that dissolutions of marriage would follow *en masse* were groundless, Janson argued, because only in extreme cases would couples actually risk the unsavory social consequences of ending their marriages. He also rejected as unnecessary the proposition, which was raised at his lecture, that the Christian response to marital difficulties was not divorce but rather suffering and toleration. Those Christians who felt called to endure problematical marriages, Janson responded, should be free to

do so, but they should not be thus required. "Everyone is his own judge," he concluded.²³

Indicative of at least part of the less enthusiastic public reaction to these controversial lectures, the conservative Kristiania daily *Morgenbladet* received a flurry of hostile letters after giving the first two prompt and detailed coverage. One of its editors conceded that Janson's theories were "detrimental to the cohesion of society" but defended his newspaper's decision to report them at length on the grounds that they would be debated regardless, and it had therefore seemed prudent to give the public the most precise coverage possible. Accordingly, *Morgenbladet* also reported the third lecture, which was said to have been less well attended than the other two, in which Janson concluded his series by focusing on the Mosaic grounds for divorce in the Pentateuch and contrasted them with what Jesus said about the matter in the gospels. In a highly provocative argument, the Unitarian declared that Jesus, under the influence of the Essenes and John the Baptist, had been captive to the 'ascetic ideal' of the Jews and thus never sufficiently liberated to attain a sufficiently high perception of the pure essence of marriage. Consequently, Jesus had not been able to 'liberate himself' to reach an appreciation of what Janson proclaimed as 'free divorce'.²⁴

The controversy about publicising these views did not immediately die. In a letter to *Morgenbladet*, the theologically conservative Lutheran bishop of Kristiania, F W Bugge, expressed his opinion that Janson's views would have been quite insignificant had not the daily press given them extensive coverage and thereby created an audience twenty times as large as that Unitarian could gather before his pulpit. Furthermore, by reporting the lectures, the press had brought Janson's attacks on 'prevailing religious and moral concepts' directly into private homes and families, whereas his live

audience consisted largely of people who already shared his aberrant views. Bugge urged those newspapers which were concerned about the preservation of Christian values to exercise greater caution in reporting anti-Christian positions.²⁵

In mid-February Pastor Thorvald Klaveness gave a public lecture in Kristiania in which he sought to dismantle Janson's arguments in favour of 'free divorce'. This moderately liberal Lutheran clergyman (whose evolving general theology we considered above as one indicator of theological change in Norway in the late nineteenth century) contended that far from being in harmony with the times, Janson's radical notions regarding divorce actually countered contemporary movements to elevate women's marital rights. Klaveness pointed out that couples which, by the consent of both husband and wife, chose not to continue their marriages, were already free to terminate them. A legal change giving either partner the right to do so unilaterally, however, would generally be a 'source of suffering' on the part of the wife who, in Klaveness' view, "is of a more faithful nature" than the husband. He also reasoned that divorce was generally reprehensible because it robbed children of one of their parents, thereby denying them their fundamental right to have both a father and a mother. A more detailed analysis of his argument lies outside the scope of this study, but at any rate it illustrates a hostile reaction to Janson on the part of the state church clergy.²⁶

Inevitably, much of the Lutheran reaction to Unitarianism in Kristiania focused on fundamental theological questions, especially those pertaining to Christology, which indicates how seriously some members of the established church took this (resented) new player on the religious field. Before the end of 1895, there were a series of debates between Lyche and Janson on the Unitarian side and Pastors Aamodt and Ihlen and a theology student, Ø C A Strømme, on the Lutheran side.

These encounters, which were held in the Unitarians' auditorium, also received media publicity in the Norwegian capital. One held on 9 December dealt with the divinity of Christ. One pivotal point that was argued and which is particularly germane to this study was Lyche's contention that he and his coreligionists were not primarily concerned with opposing specific Christological doctrines as such. Instead, their underlying interest was in redirecting the perception that the 'philosophical doctrines' and 'theological speculations' were essential to salvation and that, consequentially, people who did not accept them should not be recognised as Christians. "Not doctrines, but the spirit of Christ and his love should form the foundation of true Christianity," declared Lyche.²⁷

4 HERMAN HAUGERUD AND *UNITAREN*

The cluster of Unitarian intellectuals in Kristiania, were briefly able to propagate their post-Protestant views beyond the Norwegian capital early in the twentieth century through a monthly journal entitled *Unitaren* (The Unitarian). Herman Haugerud served as its founding and only editor in 1906 and 1907. To a considerable extent this periodical was evidently a one-man show, as Haugerud wrote many of the articles which it carried. Others were written by such local liberal religious thinkers as Kristofer Janson and Richard Eriksen, the latter of whom would emerge as a prominent theosophist. *Unitaren* also had British and American input, however, chiefly in the form of articles by Anglophone Unitarians which were translated into Norwegian. Thematically, Haugerud's lengthy essays were largely expository pieces clearly intended to place before readers in Norway certain basic elements of contemporary religious liberalism to which most of them had not previously been exposed. The titles accurately reflect the general content of these pieces: *Unitarismen* (Unitarianism),²⁸ *Unitarismens fader*

i Amerika, William Ellery Channing (The Father of Unitarianism in America, William Ellery Channing),²⁹ *Altruisme* (Altruism),³⁰ and *Den liberale kirke* (The Liberal Church).³¹

Haugerud used the first eight pages of the first issue to present the case for Unitarianism as the religion closest to that taught by Jesus (as opposed to theologians), as the religion for *oplyste mennesker*, and as one quite in harmony with modern science and moral philosophy. A comprehensive summary of his portrait of this dissenting faith lies outside the scope of the present study. Certain seminal points, however, of Haugerud's presentation of Unitarianism are particularly germane, because they underscore tenets which were also embodied in the thinking of various other Norwegian religious liberals.

Vital to an understanding of Haugerud's beliefs is an awareness of his commitment to the myth of progress and his rejection – and probable misunderstanding – of the concept of myth. He rejected the account of Adam and Eve in Genesis as an explanation of the human condition generally as incompatible with modern science: "Among educated and knowledgeable people these days the creation story and the narrative of the fall into sin in the Garden of Eden are regarded as only myths and fairy tales," Haugerud announced. He did not evince the slightest awareness of the symbolic value of religious myths; instead, he weighed them on the scales of modern science to determine whether they were literally true or false; if false, they should be discarded. In harmony with this commitment, the returned Norwegian-American Unitarian professed his belief in Darwinian evolution. Far from being a highly developed *homo sapiens*, he declared, Adam was a lowly creature far inferior to twentieth-century man. Accordingly, Haugerud held people of his own day in high esteem. "We do not believe that humanity is fallen, but that it has gone forward and upward for tens of thousands of years", he announced confidently. Indeed, this optimist declared during the first decade of the most war-torn

and bloodiest century in the history of the human race, "We belong to a species which has never stood higher than it now does in its intellectual and moral evolution."³²

At the centre of Unitarianism, Haugerud explained, was the man Jesus of Nazareth. Born of a man and a woman, this *religiøs geni* had brought a message of brotherly love to his fellows, showed unsurpassed compassion for those who were suffering, healed the sick, consoled those who grieved, encouraged the lonely and rejected, and awakened sympathy among people wherever he into contact with them. He did not, Haugerud insisted, atone for the sins of people on the cross or otherwise regard himself as the redeemer of fallen humanity. Nor did Jesus of Nazareth, in his view, claim that only those who called him divine would be holy after death while all others would suffer eternally in hell.

Unitarianism, Haugerud informed Norwegian readers, emphasised moral principles as the core of a religion in which every person could determine how closely he or she would live according to the ideals taught by Jesus. In connection with his reference to a belief in an immortal soul, Haugerud explained that the soul of every person would survive bodily death and live on in a spirit world, "where we reap the fruits of our conduct on earth". Similarly, Haugerud explained, "we Unitarians believe that everyone is rewarded and punished according to what he deserves. One reaps what one has sowed". After all, he reasoned, "we live in a moral universe, under a moral governance of the world, and it is up to ourselves if we experience good or evil when our worldly lives are over." This rejection of the evangelical doctrines of universal sin, divine grace, and atonement, however, arguably led him into a contradiction. Arguably squaring the circle, a page after professing that behavior in this life would determine whether one is rewarded or punished after death, Haugerud could express his belief in universal salvation. It seemed

impossible to him that an all-loving and omniscient God would have arranged the cosmos in such a way that some people would not eventually voluntarily subordinate themselves to the will of the heavenly father and be happy and blessed in the end. After all, he reasoned, God was not a heartless tyrant, but “a good spirit of justice and compassion”. How unrepentant, wicked people would both get their due according to their conduct and somehow be eternally blessed and happy Haugerud did not reveal.³³

5 CONCLUSION

Even in the changing environment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Unitarianism was an exotic transplant on the religious landscape of Norway. Within the nation's frontiers, it never spread to any noteworthy degree beyond Kristiania and its environs, and eventually it became virtually extinct in Norway. However, this was not before it made a certain appeal to some of the most radical thinkers there who still retained some kind of belief in a deity, but who had become alienated from the confessional Trinitarian Christianity of the Lutheran tradition and who could not find a spiritual home in the recognised free churches. Its emphasis on the immanence of God, its interpretations of the Son of Man Jesus of Nazareth as a teacher of the ethics of *agape* and a prophet of divine love and forgiveness, its embracing of many nineteenth-century intellectual currents, and rejection of religious dogma as such resonated with much that intellectuals like the novelist and self-taught amateur liberal theologian Arne Garborg had already begun to proclaim by the mid-1890s. If Unitarianism never became fully *stufenfähig* in much of Norwegian society and its exponents such as Kristofer Janson were thus compelled to live lonely lives on the periphery of its religious terrain, the advent of this radical current nevertheless opened an additional door in a country where the days of

exclusive Lutheran guardianship of the ecclesiastical scene were long past.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The history of the development of Protestant pluralism among Norwegians in Norway and the United States of America during the nineteenth century is related in detail in Frederick Hale, *Norwegian religious pluralism: A Trans-Atlantic comparison* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1992).
- 2 D P Faure, *My life and times* (Cape Town: Juta, 1907) remains the principal published source of information about this post-orthodox Afrikaner.
- 3 Chr Brinchmann, "Lyche, Hans Tambs", in A W Brøgger and Einar Jansen (eds), *Norsk biografisk leksikon*, VIII (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1938), 540-541; Paul Knaplund, "H Tambs Lyche: Propagandist for America", *Norwegian-American Studies*, XXIV (Northfield, Minnesota: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1970), 102-111.
- 4 H Tambs Lyche, "Aarhundredets store Mænd", *Dagbladet*, 21 October 1892, 1.
- 5 H Tambs Lyche, "'Frie Ord'", *Frie Ord*, I, no. 1 (1 October 1894), 2-3.
- 6 *Ibid*, 8.
- 7 "H Tambs Lyche", *Dagbladet*, 16 April 1898, 1 (obituary).
- 8 H Tambs Lyche, *En Unitarisk Kirke i Kristiania* (Kristiania: n. publ., 1893), 1-2.
- 9 *Ibid*, 4.
- 10 Thv Klaveness, "En unitarisk kirke i Kristiania", *For kirke og kultur*, I (1894), 89-92.
- 11 *Ibid*, 92-96.
- 12 H Tambs Lyche, *Ny-idealismen* (Kristiania: Olaf Norlis Forlag, 1896).
- 13 Idar Handagard, *Kristofer Janson* (Oslo: Damm & Søn, 1944), 21; Kristofer Janson, *Hvad jeg har oplevet* (Kristiania and København: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1913), 266.
- 14 *Kongeriget Norges fem og firtiende ordentlige Storthings Forhandlinger i Aaret 1896. Femte Del, indeholdende Dokumenter, indgivne til Stortinget og dets Afdelinger* (Kristiania: Det Steenske Bogtrykkeri, 1896), Dokument Nr 21.
- 15 *Kongeriget Norges fem og firtiende ordentlige Storthings Forhandlinger i Aaret 1896. B. Indstillinger til og Beslutninger af Odelstinget og Lagthinget* (Kristiania: Johannes Bjørnstads Bogtrykkeri, nd), 305-306.
- 16 *Kongeriget Norges fem og firtiende ordentlige Storthings Forhandlinger i Aaret 1896. Niende Del, indeholdende Stortingets og dets Afdelingers Forhandlings-Protokoller samt Register* (Kristiania: J Chr Gundersens Bogtrykkeri, nd), 179.
- 17 *Kongeriget Norges fem og firtiende ordentlige Storthings Forhandlinger i Aaret 1896. Ottende Del, indeholdende I. Forhandlinger i Odelstinget. II. Forhandlinger i Lagthinget* (Kristiania: Centraltrykkeriet, 1896), 1254-1255.
- 18 *Kongeriget Norges fem og firtiende ordentlige Storthings Forhandlinger i Aaret 1896. Niende Del, indeholdende Stortingets og dets Afdelingers Forhandlings-Protokoller samt Register*, 186.
- 19 "Broderskabets Kirke", *Dagbladet*, 25 April 1895, [p1].
- 20 Janson, *Hvad jeg har oplevet*, 267.
- 21 *Ibid*, 268.
- 22 "Ægteskab og Skilsmisse", *Morgenbladet* (Kristiania), 10 January 1895, [p2].
- 23 "Ægteskab og Skilsmisse", *Morgenbladet*, 12 January 1895, [p2].
- 24 "Ægteskab og Skilsmisse", *Morgenbladet*, 17 January 1895, [p2].
- 25 F W Bugge (Kristiania) to *Morgenbladet*, undated, *Morgenbladet*, 24 January 1895, [p1].
- 26 "Fri Skilsmisse", *Morgenbladet*, 16 February 1895, [p2].
- 27 "Om treenigheden og Kristi Guddom", *Morgenbladet*, 10 December 1895, [p1].
- 28 Herman Haugerud, "Unitarismen", *Unitaren*, I, no. 1 (April 1906), 1-8.
- 29 Herman Haugerud, "Unitarismens fader i Amerika, William Ellery Channing", *Unitaren*, I, no 2 (May 1906), 17-26.
- 30 Herman Haugerud, "Altruisme", *Unitaren*, I, no 3 (June 1906), 38-43.
- 31 Herman Haugerud, "Den liberal kirke", *Unitaren*, I, no 5 (August 1906), 65-73.
- 32 Haugerud, "Unitarismen", 1-4.

33 *Ibid*, 7-8.