

**“How Shall We Live? Part III:
Christian Fundamentalism in the United States”
February 27, 2005
Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
Bruce A. Bode**

Call to Worship

Holy and beautiful is the custom by which we gather on this Sunday morning.

Here we come to give our thanks, to face our ideals, to remember our loved ones, to seek that which is permanent, and to serve goodness, beauty, and the qualities of life that make it rich and whole.

Through this hour breathes the worship of all ages, the cathedral music of all history, and blessed are the ears that hear that eternal sound.

Lighting the Chalice (spoken in unison)

Though our knowledge is incomplete,
Our truth partial,
And our love imperfect,
We believe that new light is ever waiting
To break into our hearts and minds,
To enlighten our common path,
That there is mutual strength in willing cooperation,
And that the bonds of love keep open the gates of freedom.

Responsive Reading

MINISTER: Cherish your doubts, for doubt is the attendant of truth.

CONGREGATION: Doubt is the key to the door of knowledge; it is the servant of discovery.

MINISTER: A belief which may not be questioned binds us to error, for there is incompleteness and imperfection in every belief.

CONGREGATION: Doubt is the touchstone of truth; it is an acid which eats away the false.

MINISTER: Let no one fear for the truth, that doubt may consume it; for doubt is the testing of belief.

CONGREGATION: The truth stands boldly and unafraid; it is not shaken by the testing:

MINISTER: For truth, if it be truth, arises from each testing stronger, more secure.

CONGREGATION: Those that would silence doubt are filled with fear; their houses are built on shifting sands.

MINISTER: But those who fear not doubt, and know its use, are founded on rock.

CONGREGATION: They shall walk in the light of growing knowledge; the work of their hands shall endure.

MINISTER: Therefore let us not fear doubt, but let us rejoice in its help.

CONGREGATION: It is to the wise as a staff to the blind; doubt is the attendant of truth.
(Robert T. Weston)

Reading

This morning I will be speaking about Christian fundamentalism in the United States. One of its main features is an apocalyptic understanding of our present age. This is a belief that the end of the world is upon us. It will be ushered in in a cataclysmic, supernatural way by Jesus who will literally return to the city of Jerusalem and set up a 1000-year reign of peace.

That reign of peace, however, will be preceded by a seven-year period of tribulation in which the terrors of hell will be loosed upon the earth. Those who believe, however, those washed in the blood of the lamb, will be spared this tribulation by means of a “rapture.” That is, the true believers, those who have faithfully awaited the return of their savior, will miraculously and instantaneously be lifted out of this difficult world and brought to a safe place to be with their Lord, thus avoiding the terrors that those “left behind” will suffer.

I use that phrase “left behind” with deliberate intent because there is a series of novels, “The Left-Behind Series,” now twelve in number, that is premised upon this rapture scenario. These novels have sold over 60 million copies and have, on occasion, been the number one best-selling book on the New York Times best-seller list.

Some of you may have recently read an article by Bill Moyers titled, “There Is No Tomorrow,” which has been circulating on the web since early February. In that article he writes of something called “the rapture index,” a numerical index that can be found on the web indicating how close it is believed we are to the end of the world. It is understood that we are very close indeed, just one number away. Moyers’ article also details some of the implications of this belief, for there are now a number of persons in positions of political power in our country who either hold these ideas themselves or are politically connected to those who do.

The scriptural basis for the idea of the rapture is a single verse in one of the letters of the apostle Paul, who also believed in his day nearly 2000 years ago that he lived in the end times and that Jesus would return in his lifetime to complete his work and bring to

fulfillment the Kingdom of God. My reading is from Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica, chapter 4, verses, 13-18.

We want you to be quite certain, brothers, about those who have died, to make sure that you do not grieve about them, like the other people who have no hope. [Apparently some members of the church in Thessalonica were concerned that those who had died had missed the Kingdom of God]. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and that it will be the same for those who have died in Jesus. God will bring them with him. We can tell you this from the Lord's own teaching [that is, from the teaching, as Paul understood it, that Jesus gave when he was still physically alive, though Paul never knew Jesus personally], that any of us who are left alive until the Lord's coming will not have any advantage over those who have died. At the trumpet of God, the voice of the archangel will call out the command and the Lord himself will come down from heaven; those who have died in Christ will be the first to rise, and then those of us who are still alive [which Paul apparently expects] will be taken up in the clouds, together with them, to meet the Lord in the air. So we shall stay with the Lord for ever. With such thoughts as these you should comfort one another.

(The Jerusalem Bible)

This is the biblical passage on which the rapture idea and the twelve recent "left-behind" novels are based.

“HOW SHALL WE LIVE?: PART III: CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM IN THE UNITED STATES”

(NOTE: This manuscript contains extended quotations from fundamentalist sources that were not used in the spoken sermon because of time. They are included here for the sake of a fuller understanding.)

Introduction

This is the third part of a sermon series titled, “How Shall We Live?”, an attempt to maintain our balance and find our way in the midst of a wobbly world and in a society that has seen increasing polarization, particularly as illustrated by the last presidential election.

In part one of the series I began by asking whether our civilization and society was on an inevitable downhill slide. I drew on poet Robinson Jeffers who, already in the 1920's following World War I, began to speak of "our perishing republic," comparing it in one poem – “Prescription for Painful Ends” – to an exhausted horse that has stumbled, regained its balance and continues to run, but one that must fall. Jeffers claimed to have felt a change in the rhythm of the running hoof-beats in his time.

So I asked: Do you feel a similar change in our time? Has something shifted in the gallop of our world? Do civilizations, like individuals, inevitably decay and die, and is ours now at that point?

Or is our present experience just part of the normal ups and downs of social and political life, and is it our closeness to the scene that perhaps exaggerates the current situation, so that if we were standing further away we wouldn't be talking "collapse"?

It's not really possible to definitively answer this question, for as Robinson Jeffers also says, "...the future is a misted landscape and no man [one] sees clearly."

Yet in a follow-up sermon discussion in this sanctuary relating to this question, the majority opinion expressed was that our republic and civilization was on a downhill slide, with several persons believing it would end in collapse, and that quite soon.

With that promising beginning I turned in the second sermon of this series to the subject of fundamentalism, one of the new, powerful forces in our world and the immediate cause of 9/11 – with the response to 9/11 by our current administration being perhaps the chief polarizing fault line that has divided our country and even our world.

Following the lead of scholar Karen Armstrong, I looked at fundamentalism as a global phenomenon, a response and reaction to modern scientific, rational and secular culture that is now world-wide. That is to say, as scientific and secular culture spreads throughout the world, which it has been doing since the 16th and 17th centuries, at first there is an attempt to accommodate the new perspective, to work with it and take in its insights; but when that accommodation is perceived on the part of some to fail, one of the responses can be an attempt to return to the "fundamentals" of the threatened tradition, an attempt to preserve values and qualities that would seem to be missing from the new world- and life-view.

Armstrong makes the point that, though there have always been those who have resisted the modernity of their day, fundamentalism is a uniquely modern phenomenon that could have appeared at no other time in history than this, a phenomenon that attempts to fight the new scientific and rational approach of modernity on its own ground, out-literalizing and out-rationalizing the hard sciences and using the technologies of the scientific and rational modern world against itself.

The "Axial Age"

One of the things I didn't get a chance to mention in that sermon was Karen Armstrong's comparison of our age with what historians call "the Axial Age." The Axial Age are the years from around 700 – 200 BCE (before the Christian era), which are viewed by historians as the pivotal years in the development of the "great confessional faiths" that continue to guide us into the present time: Buddhism and Hinduism in India, Confucianism and Taoism in the Far East, and monotheism in the Middle East.

Prior to this Axial Age humans had achieved the ability to produce agricultural surplus. This so altered the human situation that the old paganistic polytheisms that had served human spiritual needs so well for so long no longer seemed adequate. And in its place during this “Axial Age,” throughout the world, there evolved new approaches to the life of the spirit characterized, according to Karen Armstrong, in the following way:

They all built on the old traditions to evolve the idea of a single, universal transcendence; they cultivated an internalized spirituality, and stressed the importance of practical compassion.”

(The Battle for God, pp. xii-xiii)

These were new approaches in religion world-wide that occurred during the “Axial Age.”

It’s Armstrong’s opinion that today we are in the midst of a similar transitional time in terms of the life of the spirit and religious understandings and beliefs. This spiritual transition is related to a different kind of society that, as I said, is based on new technologies that originated in Western Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries and which have led, says Armstrong, to an entirely different concept of the nature of truth, now scientific and rational in its character.

(The Battle for God, p. xiii)

Thus, like the Axial Age, the inherited forms of faith no longer provide spiritual sustenance in the way they once did. And now, too, humans all over the globe are struggling with the new conditions, reassessing their religious traditions, and, as Armstrong puts it, “...attempting to build upon the insights of the past in a way that will take human beings forward into the new world they have created for themselves.”

(The Battle for God, p. xiii)

The origin of fundamentalism

One of the modern attempts to deal with the new situation is fundamentalism, which, as I said, is a radically innovative development in religion, though, ironically, it sees itself as restoring the old.

This fundamentalism began in the United States, which shouldn’t be surprising because this country in many ways has been at the forefront of the development of this new reality. It began in American Protestantism around the beginning of the 20th century and has now become a world-wide phenomenon in a variety of different ways depending on the given tradition.

The term “fundamentalism” itself first came into use around 1910. It developed as a response to a lecture by a professor emeritus of Harvard University who delivered an address titled, “The Future of Religion.” In that lecture he said that the future religion would have only one *fundamental* commandment, namely, love of God expressed in practical service to others.

Everything else, he said, could go: the churches, the scriptures, the doctrines, the need for worship. Christians would have no monopoly on faith and the ideas of scientists, secularists, or those who belonged to a different faith would be as valid. There was only one fundamental, namely, love of God and neighbor, similar to the greatest of the commandments of which Jesus spoke. (The Battle for God, p. 170)

The person who delivered that lecture was one Charles William Eliot, President of Harvard University from 1869 to 1909, and a member of the First Unitarian Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts at Harvard Square.

In response to this lecture by Charles Eliot the Presbyterians at Princeton formulated a set of five fundamentals that they, in turn, deemed essential: 1) the inerrancy of the scriptures, 2) the Virgin Birth of Christ, 3) Christ's atonement for our sins on the cross, 4) his bodily resurrection, 5) the objective reality of miracles.

(The Battle for God, p. 171)

Following this formulation oil industry millionaires, Lyman and Milton Stewart, financed a project to educate the faithful in these central tenants of the faith, and between 1910-15 a series of twelve paperback pamphlets were issued titled, The Fundamentals, which were sent free of charge to every pastor, professor, and theology student in America.

This, says Karen Armstrong, was the germ of a new religious approach and, when during the World War I, an element of terror was added to mix of theological concern, the conservative Protestant movement became fundamentalist – the teachings of the compassionate Christ give way to the righteous and fearsome Judge of heaven and earth who would come soon to reclaim his Kingdom. That's the addition of the apocalyptic element to American fundamentalism, which I spoke of earlier in my reading.

I don't have the time to trace the history of Christian fundamentalism from that time in the United States. I recommend Karen Armstrong's book, The Battle for God, for that. But let me at least try to define and distinguish a couple of the terms related to Christian fundamentalism, distinguishing first between the terms "evangelicalism" and fundamentalism."

Some distinctions

"Evangelical" is the broader term of which "fundamentalism" is a subset. Indeed, you find many who call themselves evangelicals who are socially and politically progressive and who care deeply about our earth as a precious creation of God to be tenderly cared for. Evangelicals, of whatever social or political persuasion, may be characterized by the following four beliefs:

- 1) a very strong belief in the Bible as the primary religious authority;
- 2) a commitment to the practice of conversion, so that people need to be changed in a Christian direction as a basis for participation in the life of God.
- 3) a willingness to tell other people about the message of salvation in Jesus Christ.

- 4) a special assessment of the work of Christ on the cross, the death and resurrection of Jesus being at the heart of the Christian faith.

(These characteristics are from British historian, David Bebbington)

According to one source I read, as of a couple of year ago, it was estimated that there were about 98 million Americans who identify themselves as “evangelical Christians.”

Before I speak of fundamentalism as a subset of evangelicalism, let me ask you this question: “How many of you here have generally thought of Billy Graham as a fundamentalist?”

Alan Jacobs, a professor of English at Wheaton College in Illinois, says you can identify an “evangelical” this way: “You know you're an evangelical if the fundamentalists think you're a liberal and the liberals think you're a fundamentalist.”

Traditional Christian fundamentalism

For a number of fundamentalists Billy Graham would not be considered a fundamentalist. In the website of the Biblical Discernment Ministries I found a summary of thirteen differences between what they call “neo-evangelicals,” of which Billy Graham is one, and a true fundamentalist.

I want to quote these differences from this website because I think it will give you a feel for what I would call “traditional Christian fundamentalism.” The chief feature, the foundational principle and the assertion that cannot be compromised, is the belief that the Bible is the direct, literal, factual revelation of God and *the* sure guide for all understanding and living.

The website defines a “neo-evangelical” in the following way:

In general, a neo-evangelical would be defined as one who has taken a "lower view" of Scripture, has developed a more open, inclusivistic spirit toward liberalism, and has become ecumenical in evangelism efforts. The movement was one born of compromise, nurtured on pride of intellect, growing on appeasement of evil, and doomed by the judgment of God's Word. In general, the neo-evangelicals "are radical -- theologically, politically, and socially." One of the chief spokesmen of neo-evangelicalism would be Billy Graham; ... major neo-evangelical organizations would be the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), The World Evangelical Fellowship, ... Campus Crusade for Christ, and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship; and major neo-evangelical periodicals would be Christianity Today and Moody Monthly.

Here are those thirteen characteristics and positions by which this organization would distinguish what they are calling “neo-evangelicalism” from a proper fundamentalist position. All of this is quoted material:

1) Espousal of, or toleration toward, **questionable views of Scripture**; e.g., most neo-evangelicals, to one degree or another, have scuttled the doctrine of total, complete **inerrancy** of the Bible (regardless of the lip-service given to it);... The neo-evangelical hesitates to accept the total verbal inspiration of the Bible. The issue becomes: "Is the Bible inerrant in all its pronouncements, or is it merely an inerrant record of some inspired truth?"

2) The **sufficiency** of Scripture is effectively denied as evidenced by neo-evangelical attempts to "Christianize" pagan ideas and systems founded upon unbelief (i.e., psychology/psychiatry, numerology, astrology, personality theory, etc.) In effect, the Bible is deemed NOT sufficient for all matters pertaining to life and godliness (cf. 2 Pe. 1:3,4). Emphasis has been shifted from the authority of Bible doctrine to the realm of human experience, thereby causing churches to move toward a seminar type of ministry rather than an authoritative and dogmatic preaching ministry.

3) The neo-evangelical's weak view of the **inerrancy of Scripture** has inevitability led to the toleration of a wide diversity of theological viewpoints.

4) Expresses a dangerous **subservience to science**; the desire to gain intellectual acceptability has led to a friendly attitude toward science, almost to the point of placing scholarship and science in the seat of authority. This is evidenced in a friendliness toward, or acceptance of, evolutionary theories (e.g., progressive creation and/or theistic evolution), with particularly broad concessions to organic evolutionism and uniformitarianism at the expense of a consistent and normal interpretation of the first eleven chapters of Genesis.

5) Emphasis upon the implications of the **social gospel**; neo-evangelicals view the gospel as being two-pronged in nature -- individual and social, thereby neglecting New Testament priorities. As a result, rather than making the gospel *applicable* to the world, the gospel tends to get watered down to make it *acceptable* to the world. "The societal impact which the neo-evangelical proposes to make fosters the connotation of a 'Christianization' of society ..." which frequently speaks of a "'Christian culture,' a 'new society,' and a 'new social order,' ...

6) Enthusiasm over **cooperative evangelism**, even to the extent of aligning with groups that have been traditionally subversive of Bible truth (e.g., Roman Catholicism). Billy Graham, more than any other, has epitomized this inclusivistic approach to evangelism (as opposed to the Biblical separatistic approach).

7) Strong **criticism of traditional fundamentalism**, particularly criticism of its doctrinal emphasis, which is said to have caused neglect of the social application of Christianity to the world; this criticism usually includes the call for preaching only a "positive message," as often expressed by the statement, "God called me to win souls, not to criticize others."

8) The **ways of the world** are readily accepted by the neo-evangelical; there is a tendency toward finding justifiable reasons condoning and using that which evolves from a carnality, sensuality, secularism, and worldliness (especially in regards to music, theatrics, emotionalistic and psychological manipulations, promotionalism, and general appearance).

9) Pleas for more **political involvement** and "**Christian**" **Activism**.

10) Unbiblical views regarding **God's role for women**.

11) Based upon a generally weak view of Scripture, there has been a natural shift from objective Biblical doctrine to **subjective experience** -- allowance for the possible validity of apostolic sign-gifts for our own day (prophecy, tongues, miracles of healing through special persons, etc.)

12) Shift away from dispensational premillennialism to some form of "historic premillennialism" (even postmillennialism views are becoming widespread), together with a minimizing of the importance of Biblical **eschatology** in general, not from doctrinal conviction, but **for ecumenical opportunity**.

13) Emphasis upon the **unity of the church** in preference to its purity. "Neo-evangelicals either tone down or completely neglect ecclesiastical separation from apostasy and personal separation from the world until these are virtually denied."

This is "traditional Christian fundamentalism." And would that this is the fundamentalism we are dealing with today, because this traditional fundamentalism is fully against what they call "Christian activism." Their fundamentalism is one that wants to maintain a separation from this evil world so that they are critical of those who neglect the saving of souls for the attempt to Christianize society. Again I quote from this website:

Increasing numbers of professing Christians are engaging in social and political "activism" for the astonishing purpose of attempting to coerce an ungodly society into adopting Christian standards of conduct. "After all," they say, "in this way we can begin to reclaim our Christian nation."...

There are *no Biblical examples* to support today's "Christian activism"... If "Christian activism" is God's will, Paul would have been the first to pursue it fearlessly at whatever cost. Yet Romans 13 tells us to obey rulers, and 1 Timothy 2:1-4 to pray for them -- not to attempt to change them by coercion. **It is not only foolish but counter-productive to attempt to persuade the unsaved to live like Christians. They can't do it -- and if they could it would only blind them the more to their sin and need of a Savior.**

"**Christian activism**" involves today the well-meaning but foolish attempt to force "**Christian principles**" upon a godless society through more effective

lobbying, larger demonstrations, and greater "social upheaval" than the homosexuals, abortionists, or pornographers can produce. But rather than pressure the ungodly to live like saints, we must win them to Christ that they might live wholly for God. As Christians, our *personal lives* must also be lived in obedience to God even if that brings us into conflict with civil laws. In addition to avoiding idolatry and immorality, Christians must *preach the gospel* to everyone everywhere, regardless of government edicts to the contrary.

There is a danger of being so caught up in the social aspect of good causes that one forgets that the soul must be placed before the body. The Great Commission does not involve exerting a Christian influence upon society. We are not to "change society," but to "convert individuals." There is much talk today about "changing the world for Christ." In fact, there is no Biblical teaching or example to support that popular slogan. Rather than persuading sinners to live like saints, we must call them to "repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21).

Significant changes in society have been effected by preaching and example. Unfortunately, changes such as the abolition of slavery and the enactment of child labor laws, while improvements to be thankful for, have not made society any more godly. Nor is it any more likely under these better conditions that a higher percentage of mankind will end up in heaven than before. Even if such changes could be construed as "worth working for," many who call themselves Christians have become so absorbed in good causes that they have lost their fervor for saving souls. They have ended up joining forces with non-Christians who also espouse "traditional values," and promoting a compromised "social gospel" that cannot save.

We must denounce sin, call for repentance, and preach the gospel in convicting power. Yes, Christians should call for repentance from homosexuality, child abuse, pornography, and abortion, but we should primarily be calling for repentance for rebellion against God and rejection of Christ. Rather than indicting churches for their lack of "social concern," they should be held accountable for heresies and failure to preach the truth. We must denounce the destructive false teachings that abound, particularly psychology, which is the major vehicle of so much of this evil, and root it out of our churches, seminaries, Bible colleges, and universities. It is hypocritical for a church to protest the world's sins while tolerating and honoring those who preach a false gospel and are the enemies of the cross of Christ....

Today we are also seeing more and more professing Christians who want to become part of the ruling class -- they run for political office so they can then "influence government for Christ." They use the Old Testament examples of Joseph, Nehemiah, and Daniel, all of whom were placed by God in prominent positions in civil government, as justification for political activism today. But what they fail to recognize is that Joseph, Nehemiah, and Daniel did not *run* for

elective political office, but were given offices either reserved or created for trustworthy slaves. Moreover, it is not the calling of God's people in this dispensation to get involved in the political process nor the functions of civil government. We have a higher calling; our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). We are strangers and pilgrims (1 Pe. 2:11), sojourners, not settlers (1 Pe. 1:17). **"Christian activism" is not Christian, and represents a detour from the straight path churches are to walk before the world. It can confuse the real issues, lead to compromise and unholy alliances, and divert time and effort that would better be used in proclaiming the Gospel of repentance of sin unto salvation. Weigh the demands upon your time and set priorities. Be fully engaged in rescuing souls for eternity.**

(Biblical Discernment Ministries - 6/98)

That's the core message of traditional Christian fundamentalism, and would that fundamentalists would heed this "traditional" fundamentalist message because this is a fundamentalism that in its way allows pluralism to exist in our society and doesn't attempt to take society over or restore its version of a "Christian nation." There's room for co-existence.

Other kinds of Christian fundamentalism

Unfortunately, however, as this criticism indicates, in the last couple of decades, beginning especially with Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, Christian fundamentalism has chosen to enter the social and political field and has increasingly become a political force in our country in ways with which I expect most of us are at least somewhat familiar.

In my reading, for example, I mentioned Bill Moyers' article in which he speaks of certain fundamentalists trying to help God's plan along with their support of Israel, because in dispensational pre-millennialism the fate of Israel is key to the return of Jesus to the world.

More frightening and threatening are those with a "Dominionist" theology – as in the book of Genesis where God gives "dominion" to humans to subdue the earth. There are those called "Christian Reconstructionists," like Pat Robertson, who believe it is up to them to create the reign of God through the creation of an exclusively Christian society, as they understand it. They believe "that Christians alone are Biblically mandated to occupy all secular institutions until Christ returns -- and there is no consensus on when that might be."

(From sociologist Sara Diamond in an article titled, "Dominion Theology")

I have this quote from George Grant, a leading dominionist writer:

Christians have an obligation, a mandate, a commission, a holy responsibility to reclaim the land for Jesus Christ -- to have dominion in civil structures, just as in every other aspect of life and godliness.

But it is dominion we are after. Not just a voice.

It is dominion we are after. Not just influence.

It is dominion we are after. Not just equal time.

It is dominion we are after.

World conquest. That's what Christ has commissioned us to accomplish. We must win the world with the power of the Gospel. And we must never settle for anything less... Thus, Christian politics has as its primary intent the conquest of the land -- of men, families, institutions, bureaucracies, courts, and governments for the Kingdom of Christ.

(This quote comes from Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse by Thomas Ice, published in 1988 by H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice, p. 412)

Gary North, a prolific Christian Reconstruction writer and founder of the Institute for Christian Economics, says:

So let us be blunt about it: we must use the doctrine of religious liberty to gain independence for Christian schools until we train up a generation of people who know that there is no religious neutrality, no neutral law, no neutral education, and no neutral civil government. Then they will get busy in constructing a Bible-based social, political and religious order which finally denies the religious liberty of the enemies of God.

(“Christianity and Civilization,” Spring, 1982)

Beyond this is a scattering and smattering of so called “Christian Identity” groups. Most fundamentalists would want nothing to do with them, but they are out and out racist and fascist. Timothy McVeigh, who blew up the Federal Building in Oklahoma City, was related to them.

I don't mean to make this sermon too much of a downer, but these groups are out there.

How do we live in the face of this?

And so, briefly, how do we live with all of this? How do we live with positions that may not only feel worlds apart but also in some cases may be literally threatening to own values, religious sensibilities, and ways of life.

I think the first thing is not to get thrown off our course, to start with a recognition that we are all in a dangerous place, that it is hard to be human, and that we don't know what to do or how to bridge very different world-views.

And, secondly, to try not to add fuel to the fire ... which means to me to try to be respectful of the persons who hold fundamentalist ideas, not to try to change their beliefs or convert them to one's own ideas, and not to demonize, minimize, diminish, dismiss, patronize, or pity them; but rather to embrace them as fellow humans in love and care, and to learn with them and from them what we can of common human quest for meaning, the common human search to know what is true, and the common human desire to have a solid place to stand in the universe.

This is what I initially mean by not getting thrown off your own course.

But I think there must also be a second approach, namely, a willingness not just to try to understand and empathize with others, but a willingness to stand up ourselves, a willingness to speak our truth – in all humility – but to speak it nonetheless. And to be willing to sacrifice for the principles of religious freedom and toleration should that become necessary.

Forrest Church, senior minister at All Souls Unitarian Church in New York City, speaks of the image of a “world cathedral” in which there are many, many windows. The light that shines through the various windows of that cathedral is one light – that’s the unitarian aspect of the image. But the light does indeed shine through each window – that’s the universalist aspect of the image – not exclusively, we say, but it does shine through each window.

There’s one rule that must be obeyed in this world cathedral, says Forrest Church, namely, no stone-throwing in the cathedral – no throwing of stones through other people’s windows. That is the one rule that must not be violated.

Thus, there is a time to stand up, to be counted, and to speak for the principles of religious freedom and toleration. And if it not us, then who?

Again, I invite you this coming Thursday, March 3, to a discussion of this topic here in our sanctuary at 7:00 p.m.

Benediction

Now may peace be in our hearts,
and understanding in our minds,
may courage steel our wills,
and the love of truth forever guide us. Amen.

Extinguishing of Chalice

We extinguish this chalice
But not the light of truth,
The warmth of community,
Or the fire of commitment.

These we carry in our hearts
Until we are together again.

(NOTE: This is a manuscript version of the sermon given by The Reverend Bruce A. Bode at the Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship on February 27, 2005. This manuscript contains extended quotations not present in the spoken sermon. The spoken sermon is available on audio cassette at the Fellowship.)