

ROOTS

All Souls Community Church

A Community for the Free Spirit

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This four-session adult education course introduces the ideas, history, and people that make up the All Souls Community Church and the Free Church tradition, of which Unitarianism and Universalism are a part. This is the first step towards involvement in a community dedicated to the preservation of religious freedom. This course will give a person new to this faith a basic understanding of it.

All Souls Community Church is a church dedicated to religion, but not to a creed. It is a liberal religious community of free individuals of all ages walking together in relationship to one another, to our larger community and to the transcending mystery of the universe. Our community is based on open communication, democratic process and a belief in the capacity for goodness in all people. Our spiritual health and our growth as a church community are intimately connected with the spiritual growth and development of our children. We pledge to develop our church community with this always in mind. This church aims at celebrating and cultivating community, a sense of inquiry, moral character and insight, religious freedom, and helpfulness to humanity -- that is, it aims at liberating and cultivating the human spirit.

**Declaration of Purpose
All Souls Community Church
adopted 2001**

A Community for the Free Spirit

ROOTS

FOUR SESSIONS

SESSION 1: *"The Questions of Free Religion"*

SESSION 2: *"The Ideas of Unitarianism & Universalism"*

SESSION 3: *"Where Did the Free Church Come From?"*

SESSION 4: *"The Spiritual Life of the Community"*

This class is the first step towards involvement at All Souls Community Church. It is assumed that the course itself is consistent with the nature of the free religious tradition. In other words, each opinion will be heard and valued, and each is responsible with all others for the character of the group. It is hoped that all will see this as an opportunity to share with others, learn about Unitarianism and Universalism in general and All Souls in particular, and discover something about yourself.

Please use this space below to list some things you want to get out of our time together.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

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THE FREE CHURCH TRADITION

This booklet is designed to give you a basic introduction to free religion as it has been practiced for centuries. One religion professor noted: "Learning about faith is like learning a new language." You may find that many of the words we use, like "freedom" in association with "religion" and "faith," strike you as odd. Or, that we don't seem to use words in the "same way" as you have known them used in the past. Religion and faith have meant different things to different people in different times and places. Here you will find that faith and freedom are not opposites; that doubt and thinking are prized tools in religion; and, that seeking and searching form the core of our life's religious adventure.

In sessions with a trained minister, you will learn about the difference between orthodox and liberal religion, and a brief history of the Western Church. You will learn how old the radical idea of the complete freedom and full dignity of an individual is. You will learn about our "approach" to religion, and the core ideas of Unitarianism and Universalism. You will learn about The Community Church in the Park, and about various members of the church. We will weave together information with conversation and fun. Finally, you will learn how freedom encourages all people to think reasonably, and to use all reasonable resources and means to live their lives.

The Free Church tradition is a term we use here at Community Church to describe the attempt to keep alive a noble idea: the religious freedom of men and women. We endeavor to be a community, which in the Free Church tradition, offers religion thus simple and thus free.

Brent Smith
@2002

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SESSION 1

THE QUESTIONS OF FREE RELIGION

"I call that mind free which masters the senses, and which recognizes its own reality and greatness; which passes life, not in asking what it shall eat or drink, but in hungering, thirsting, and seeking after righteousness. I call that mind free which jealously guards its intellectual rights and powers; which does not content itself with a passive or hereditary faith and opens itself to light whencesoever it may come. I call that mind free which is not passively framed by outward circumstance; which discovers everywhere the radiant signatures of the Infinite Spirit. I call that mind free which does not cower to human opinion and guards its empire over itself as nobler than the empire of the world. I call that mind free which does not mechanically copy the past, but which listens for new and higher monitions of conscience. I call that mind free which sets no bounds to its love; which recognizes in all human beings the image of God and the rights of his children. I call that mind free which no menace or peril can enthrall; which is calm in the midst of tumults, and possesses itself though all else be lost."

-William Ellery Channing (1780-1842)

Introduction

This book belongs to _____.

The two things in my house or room that best express my identity are:

1) _____

2) _____

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Pressing question(s) I must have answered NOW:

1) Q:

A:

2) Q:

A:

BASIC IDEAS TO BE COVERED IN SESSION 1

- 1) *Free Religion in the West has its origins in the Jewish/Christian tradition and experience*; from the Jews came the central theme of existence as that of the liberation of the spirit and God's purpose in history being the power that supports freedom's unfolding; and, from Christianity, the repression of the differences generated by freedom, as the Christian Church over centuries formed itself by orthodoxy, occasioned the need to look to Jesus' life and human existence, rather than Church Doctrine, for the central theme of existence, that of liberation of the spirit.
- 2) *The Free Church had its origins in the Puritan and Pilgrim experience*; in the unfolding experience of independent congregations in the 1600 and 1700's in North America came the basic organizational forms and structures that have come to maintain, strengthen, and extend religious freedom through communities to individuals

Historical Overview of Religious Freedom

- 1) From all of the stories of the tribes of Israel and the emerging identity of the Jewish people, the Exodus of the Hebrews from their enslavement by the Egyptians became central. Most scholars believe this story, celebrated every year during the occasion of Passover, actually involved just a small band of Hebrews. Yet, it became the defining story of identity. It is our interpretation that this became the central story because it portrays God's activity in history as freeing the human spirit from bondage so as to allow its free unfolding and its active creativity.

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2) For the first 300 years following the death of Jesus, various communities sprung up from Northern Africa all the way to England, composed of Jews and Gentiles following the teachings of Jesus as they were remembered. These communities bore striking differences from one another; arguments of what to believe and how to live were lively and diverse. There was not one “standardized” form of belief, but genuine difference and diversity.

3) Emperor Constantine called together a series of church councils in the 300's A.C. E. to decide what would be "right" belief. Constantine called these councils together to insure there would only be ONE version of Christianity, in order that it would be easier for him to rule a large, multi-cultural empire. The theological disputes settled by the councils became church doctrine characteristic of Christian orthodoxy.

4) The decisions of "right" belief or church doctrine were not unanimous, and arguments from scripture were given to support opinions on all sides of all questions. The first question discussed was, "Who was Jesus?" Then, as now, there were many opinions, particularly since it had been over 300 years since he had lived! The two who spoke most forcefully were Athanasius and Arius, both, interestingly enough, of African descent. Athanasius claimed Jesus was God, "of one substance with the Father." Arius claimed Jesus was not God, but was more than an average human being, "less than God but more than man."

5) Athanasius' belief was declared "right" belief, and his creed (or statement of commonly held belief), the Apostles Creed, is recited today. This is the basic expression of orthodoxy, leading to the claim that there is one commonly held belief in a religious community. Heterodoxy, or heresy or liberal religion or free religion developed in opposition to this. This began the long evolution of what comes down to us as the idea that faith is a matter of individual conscience: *An individual and God both possess the capacity to connect in an experience that is outside of Christian church doctrine.*

6) Other stories from history of the primacy of religious freedom and individual conscience include: the flight of the Jews from slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land; the struggles of the early Christians against Roman

persecution (before the Council of Nicea); the struggles of Moslems, Jews, or Christians anytime one ruled the other two!; Copernicus, Newton, Galileo and other scientists struggling with the oppression of the church; the religious reformers of the Reformation; the early European settlers sailing here to escape religious persecution; the struggle of African Americans to be freed from their American slave owners and the continuing struggle of all Americans to be free of racism.

7) The Unitarians in the United States are descended from both the Puritans and the Pilgrims. When these groups landed on this continent they were forced to develop among other things, new ways of doing church, since the challenges they faced here were unlike those in their homelands. The distance from Europe and the geographical isolation (their freedom, in a word) led them to develop new organizational structures, forms, and practices that eventually paved the way for free communities.

8) The first *new thing* was that they elected their ministers, called, *Christ's representative on earth*. Usually, ministers were appointed by church bureaucrats. For the people of the community to elect their own ministers, then, was very radical, because it meant that the common people could decide on matters of belief and faith. They did not need someone or something else, especially not church doctrine, to tell them what to believe, or whom to choose as their spiritual leader. Choosing a minister presumed a certain theological perspective on human nature not explicitly developed until nearly two centuries later: to discern who was *Christ's representative on earth* meant that each individual must possess some capacity to know what is good, moral, and true! It was the first concrete evidence of democracy, and the faith in human beings necessary to make such governance possible. The first use of the written ballot on these shores was in a church electing its minister. It was also the first concrete evidence of the free church.

9) Both the Unitarians and the Universalists (as well as other groups in our

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culture) are part of the free church tradition. You are now a part of it, too, and this class will help you realize the core ideas of a free church, and the "way" of a free church community. We believe it to be the best form for living an authentic religious life within the context of a community.

An Exercise in the Way of Free Religion

Break into groups of 3 or 4 and fill in the blanks and discuss:

- 1) People are _____
- 2) Love is _____
- 3) When I die I _____
- 4) God is _____
- 5) War is _____
- 6) Jesus is _____
- 7) Prayer is _____
- 8) Tragedy is usually the result of _____

Remember this:

In the free church where free religion is practiced, and each person stands before God with no intermediaries that the Church "controls," listening to the dictates of individual conscience, questions such as these are not answered by church doctrine. If someone asks you what All Souls Community Church "believes," you can respond that churches don't believe things, but individuals do. You can say that it is the mission of All Souls

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to institutionalize religious freedom; to help each and every person become a fully functioning, free person. As All Souls Community Church we gather together in fellowship to preserve and strengthen the capacity of an individual to discern what conscience dictates.

For homework for next week, read the two sermons included on the following pages. We will discuss them, using questions found at the beginning of Session 2 as a guide.

"Be ours a religion which, like sunshine, goes everywhere; its temple, all space; its shrine, the good heart; its creed, all truth; its ritual, works of love; its profession of faith, divine living."

-Theodore Parker (1810-1860)

SERMON ONE

WHAT A PIECE OF WORK ALL SOULS UNITARIAN CHURCH REV. SUZANNE MEYER

Whether they go to church or not, most people know at least a hand full of the most common quotations from the Bible. For example most people know: *cleanliness is next to Godliness, fools rush in where angels fear to tread, the Lord helps those who help themselves, spare the rod and spoil the child, pride goeth before a fall.* Who has not heard someone (usually a grandmother or great aunt) pronounce in a solemn voice: As it is written in the Good Book: fools rush in where angels fear to tread. There is only one problem. All of those so called common Biblical quotations are no where to be found in the Bible---people just seem to think that they are.

That quotation about fools rushing in--Alexander Pope. Cleanliness is next to Godliness--John Wesley. God helps those who help themselves--Aesops fables. But there are still folks out there who will swear up and down that those old chestnuts are to be found somewhere in the Scriptures. And FYI: Horace Greely did not say "Go west, young man," Will Rogers did not say "Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it," and hold up man Willie Sutton didn't say "I rob banks, 'cause that's

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where the money is,” although you’ll run into lots of people who will swear that they did. Just because something is commonly thought to be true, does not always make it so. Popular opinion alone does not make something a fact. The reality of the situation might be some else indeed.

Here’s another example of something that is often passed off as common knowledge when it is not the case at all. Most members of other Protestant Churches, including their ministers, as well as most Roman Catholics and many of their priests, just assume that the ways in which we Unitarians differ from them is theological---primarily in our view of God. That would seem, at least on the surface, to make sense: We are Unitarians “Uni=one” and they are Trinitarians “Trini=three.” Therefore, the major difference between us and them must have something to do with how we understand the nature of God. After all, we don’t worship in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, God in three persons, blessed Trinity. We don’t pray, “In Jesus Name, Amen.”

What makes us *us*, and not them must have something to do with how we Unitarians understand God, or to hear them tell it, how we misunderstand God. And certainly, in the past we Unitarians were burned at the stake, run out of our homes, sent to prison, banned from owning property, and soundly condemned for being religious heretics based on the assumption that we had a wrong headed idea about the nature of God. There’s only one problem with this assumption, popular though it may be--it has not been the way in which we have understood God that has made us heretics, but rather the ways in which we have understood human nature.

For Unitarians the most important question is that posed by the psalmist. For us the starting point of all theological discourse begins with the words Jeanne read to you from the Hebrew Scriptures, Psalm 8: “What are human beings that you are mindful of them, what are mortals that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than angels. You have crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the work of your hands.”

Such an ancient question: What are human beings? What does it mean to be a man or a woman? Who are we? Why are we here? Although we Unitarians share a common history with the Christian traditions, what has come to set us apart from the orthodox Christian churches is how we have come to answer that important question; how we have come to understand what it means to be human. That’s it in a nutshell. We Unitarians are heretics, that means we chose to differ from our orthodox brothers and sisters not in our view of God, but in how we answer the question: “Who are human beings that Thou art mindful of them?”

Remember what it was like when you saw your first-born child for the first very time? Do

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you remember how you felt when you held your first grandchild? When you looked into that baby's eyes? Are babies born in a state of sin? Are all human beings innately evil? totally depraved? unable to discern right from wrong? Is the death of the body a just natural phenomenon, or is death God's punishment for our sin?

The traditional Christian doctrine of Original Sin asserts that all people--being descended from Adam and Eve---are "fallen," that is to say inevitably evil, from the moment of conception. Sin is therefore not specific acts by individuals, but rather sin is the inherent condition of humanity. As Martin Luther said: "We sin with our best deeds as well as our worst." Human beings are helpless to do anything about this state of affairs. So all people must be saved from eternal damnation by supernatural grace, or forgiveness of sin.

Unitarians have argued that this is a destructive, overly pessimistic view of human nature. We have said that children are born neither good nor bad, but rather healthy individuals are born with a conscience--an innate sense of right and wrong--- that must be nurtured, cultivated and educated in order to develop it to its fullest potential. We don't disagree that there is evil in the world all around us, but we do disagree that we are helpless in the face of it. In fact, I think most Unitarians would define sin as passivity, indifference, or a feigned helplessness in the face of evil and injustice. Not only do we believe that are we able to make good moral choices, but we are obligated, as members of the human race, to choose and to act on those choices.

As Shakespeare wrote: "What a piece of work is man. How noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how expressed and admirable, in action how like an angel in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals!"

For those of you who are of a theological mindset, I'll explain what this means theologically. William Ellery Channing, the father of American Unitarianism and a seminal 19th century thinker appealed to the Biblical concept of the imago dei--the image of God as the original nature of human beings. "We are created in the image and likeness of our Creator." This was in contrast to the orthodox Christian notion of humanity's total depravity or "fallen state."

Channing turned to the Book of Genesis in the Jewish and Christian scriptures and concluded that human beings are finite creatures like the rest of the animals. That is to say, we live and die as part of a natural life cycle. What survives the death of our bodies is the legacy of good or ill we have created while we were alive. That we are created in the image of God, which means we are blessed not with immortality, but rather with creative freedom. That men and women are created to be equal partners, neither has the right to lord it over the other. And that God pronounced the created order good. To be human is good. Not that humans always act for the good, but life itself was meant to be good, and we were born to be co-creators with our God. "What a piece of work is man!"

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Channing taught that we are born with a conscience---that innate knowledge of good and evil, what we might term “human empathy.” That the conscience like the intellect is merely potential at birth. That through moral education and a life long process of self-development that innate empathy which leads the individual to make right choices will be strengthened and increased. Channing made spiritual freedom the central commitment of his Unitarian faith. Freedom is the ability to be a responsible, self-directing being. Today we Unitarians say that we believe that God is made manifest in freedom.

In Channing’s day, the early 19th century, it was commonly believed that children were innately wicked. A good parent, a parent who loved his child, was obligated to literally beat the devil out of his off spring, or to literally scare the hell out of children with lurid images of eternal torment at the hands of an angry and vindictive God. There was no other way. Children needed to be taught to obey without questioning, and to fear punishment in this life or the next.

Channing intuited then what we know now to be true, physical violence, fear, threats of punishment, images of a punishing God or devil do not make children into morally sensitive, compassionate individuals, but rather it tends to make them angry, bitter, violent, fearful or passively obedient to authority and unable to make self directed moral choices. We believe that the human spirit was meant to be cultivated not broken.

So that is what this all means theologically, but what does it mean pragmatically? If you believe that human beings are created in the image and likeness of their creator and that the human conscience and sense of empathy may be nurtured, cultivated and strengthened, you probably believe that we need more Head Start Programs. You probably also believe that education, not just readin’ and writin’ and ‘rithmetic, but art, music and the humanities need to be part of every child’s education, not just for those children from families with means. You probably believe that young people need sexuality education in order to help them make wise choices. If you believe that the human spirit must be cultivated by good teachers, role models and exemplars in order to develop as it was intended to, then you are probably just as worried about the quality of life for kids living in the inner city as you are worried about the quality of life for children living in the suburbs. You probably work to support those institutions and programs that build character in children. You probably believe that everybody’s child has potential and deserves a chance.

If in contrast, if you believe that we are all sinners from the moment we draw our first breath, and the only thing keeping us in line is fear of eternal damnation, then you probably would rather see your tax money spent on more prisons than Head Start Programs, on more police officers than school counselors, on school voucher programs

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than on ways of making public education more equitable. You probably believe that sex education just puts wicked thoughts into young people's heads and that there is little or no relationship between crime, drugs, unemployment, substandard housing, and poor inner city schools. You probably believe that most people get what they deserve. You probably believe that this life is a vale of woe to be endured for the sake of eternal bliss.

When I was a child growing up in a conservative Protestant church in south Texas, what filled my spirit with anxiety was not the thought that I was a sinner and probably doomed to go to hell. What made me soul sick was the thought that a loving God would create children just like me only to doom them to eternal suffering. I would put my pennies and nickels in the collection box to help send missionaries to Africa and Asia to save the souls of the children there. But I knew that there would never be enough money or enough missionaries to save all of the children who were lost---lost because they were not baptized. Either God was a sadist, who enjoyed creating children and then condemning them to the fires of hell. Or my Sunday school teachers were wrong. At a relatively tender age, without knowing that there was a word for it, I chose heresy. I chose to believe that God would not create children and then place the only means to their salvation beyond their reach. But I still can't help but wonder about those who easily accept the idea that God creates human beings only to destroy them? What kind of moral individual could take pleasure in the prospect of his or her own salvation, knowing how many others would be lost?

Well, if religion is not about the business of frightening us into good behavior or saving souls from eternal torment, what's the point? Why build churches and synagogues and mosques? Why bother to join one?

It was in response to that kind of question that theologian Bernard Loomer wrote: *Church is for the increase of stature, the enlargement of spirit, and the greater freedom of self. Freedom is not an end in itself, it exists in order to enrich our communal life. Church is for encouraging us to actualize our most creative possibilities. It is also the critic of our limitations and our pretensions. Church is for understanding and for being understood. Church is for confession, for repentance, and for the compassion of forgiveness. Church is for reminding us that we are all members of the web of life, that no man or woman is an island, and that no person is an individual outside of the context of this web.*

In short: What makes us who we are as a religious movement is that we persist in believing in the human spirit. In believing that the objective of religion is not to get more people into heaven. but to get more heaven in to people. We believe that we are to nurture, cultivate, and enlarge the soul. To aid and abet the human spirit. That we were born free in order to help each one become all that God created us to be. Amen

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SERMON TWO

STILL SEARCHING FOR THE HOLY GRAIL?

Rev. Dr. Gary Blaine

The search for the Holy Grail has been a major theme of Western European literature since the twelfth century. We know it primarily through the Legends of King Arthur's Court. The Holy Grail was the cup or shallow dish that Jesus used at the Last Supper. The legend also claims that Joseph of Arimathea used the cup to catch the blood flowing from the wounds of the crucified Jesus. Like the classical and Celtic legends of horns of plenty, it was believed that finding the Holy Grail would bring the blessings of God's perfection. The quest for the Holy Grail continues to hold a strong position as a major theme in our culture, even if it is the comedy of Monty Python and the Holy Grail, or the latest adventures of Indiana Jones in *The Last Crusade*.

The quest for the Holy Grail is a much more frequent and daily affair than is commonly recognized. People may not be looking for the cup of Christ, but we are desperately in search for some sacred object of hope. It reminds me of two men who were seriously ill. They shared a small room in a hospital, just large enough for the pair of them. The room was crowded with two beds, two bedside lockers, a door opening out to the hall, and one window looking out onto the world.

One of the men, as part of his treatment, was allowed to sit up in his bed for an hour in the afternoon. It had something to do with draining the fluid from his lungs. It was his bed that was next to the window. The other gentleman had to spend all of his time flat on his back. Both of them were required to keep quiet and still, which was the reason they were in the small room by themselves. They were grateful for their peace and privacy – none of the bustle, clatter, and prying eyes of the general ward for them.

Of course, one of the disadvantages of their condition was that they weren't allowed to do much. They had no radio or television, and it is difficult reading flat on your back. So, they spent much of their time talking. They talked for hours about their wives, their children, their homes, their jobs, their hobbies, their childhoods, what they did during the war, where they had been on vacation, and that sort of thing.

Every afternoon, when the man in the bed next to the window was propped up to the window, he would describe what he could see outside. The man next to the wall

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began to live for that hour. The window apparently overlooked a park with a lake. Ducks, geese, and swans swam there. He would report on the children throwing them bread or sailing model boats. Young lovers walked hand in hand beneath the trees. He described the flowers and stretches of grass, games of softball, people taking their ease in the sunshine. And beyond the park, behind the fringe of trees, he reported on the fine view of the city's skyline.

The man next to the wall listened to all of this, enjoying every minute. He delighted to hear about the beautiful girls in summer dresses and boys playing with their dogs. He could see in his mind the child who fell into the lake and was swooped up by her older brother.

One fine afternoon, when there was some sort of parade on the street below the thought struck him, "Why should the man next to the window have all the pleasure of seeing what was going on? Why shouldn't I get a chance?" He felt ashamed of his feelings and tried not to think such thoughts. But the more he tried the more such thoughts took root in his soul.

A few days later these emotions consumed him and he determined that he would do whatever it took to gain the bed by the window. Sleep evaded him. The disease that he was fighting progressed, much to the confusion of his doctors.

One night, as he stared at the ceiling, the man by the window suddenly woke up. He was coughing and choking, fluid congesting his lungs. His hands groped for the nurse's call button but he could not reach it. The man by the wall listened without moving. Gagging racked the darkness. Gasping soon turned to a low groan and the man by the window breathed no more. The man by the wall continued to stare into the darkness.

In the morning the nurses found the man by the window dead. They quietly took his body away. When it seemed that a decent amount of time had passed, the man by the wall asked if he could be moved to the bed by the window. The nurse agreed, moved him over and tucked him in. A moment after they had gone he propped himself up on one elbow. With great anticipation and labored pain he stretched up to look out the window. His fingers pulled at the windowsill toward the light. With shocked disbelief the man discovered that the window opened out to the brick wall of the building next door.

We all search for some sacred object of hope. The object of hope may, indeed, be a window, or money, or power, or sex, or philosophy, or the lottery. The assumption is that whatever we conceive the Holy Grail to be, it will bring us security, wholeness of body and mind, and eternal joy and peace.

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The quest for such hope is, of course, the spawn of desperation. The quest of the Holy Grail begins when we are suffering. It is only when people become aware of the inescapable reality of pain that they begin the sacred quest. Their pain may be the boredom or malaise. Some find their lives unfulfilled and are hungry for that which gives meaning. Others search because their sense of suffering is truly profound. And like the Holy Grail, suffering has many faces – the face of financial poverty, the face of broken emotions, the face of physical disease, the face of spiritual destitution, the face of bankrupt marriages or families, even the face of impoverished intelligence.

Many religious communities and many religious leaders pretend to have found the Holy Grail. It may be the Bible, or speaking in tongues, or a religious personality, or the Holy Spirit, or ritual, or doctrine and creed. If only you possessed one of these grails you would be a happy and fulfilled person. But I have found that such objects of religious hope always fail. It reminds me of a reporter who was interviewing an African safari guide. He asked the guide, “Is it true that jungle animals won’t harm you if you carry a torch?”

The guide replied, “That depends on how fast you carry it.”

I would like to suggest this morning that there is no torch out there that will protect you from the realities of the jungle we call life. It might be able to shed a little light on the subject, but it cannot save you. Sometimes survival in the jungle means that you have to run like hell!

In other words, if the Holy Grail you are searching for is some object or possession, it cannot save you. It does not matter if that Grail is the Cup of Christ, the Bible, yoga, dream analysis, crystals, Gestalt psychology, mathematics, science, or macrobiotics. There is such a thing as spiritual materialism – and spiritual consumerism!

Most people mistakenly believe that the search for the Holy Grail is about finding the Holy Grail. But a careful reading of those who search for the Grail, be it the search of Sir Gawain or Sir Buddha, shows us that the reward is not the object. The treasure is the search. The quest is the sacred event, not the object of the quest. Indeed, if God has a job, it is that of hiding the Grail so that we will continue the search.

The search for the Holy Grail is fresh with each day, even each moment. Life, truth, love, joy, justice, peace, and hope are dynamic realities that shift and change with the circumstances of every new day. Unitarian Universalists have no creed or dogma, not because we do not believe in truth, but because we believe that truth is alive in the events of human and natural history. Truth must be sought out in the market place, through our relationships with friends, family, and strangers. The meaning of our existence is forged in business decisions, in the arms of our lovers, in the research laboratory, in our hobbies, in the stories we tell and the songs we sing. Every time we get out of bed the search is on

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again. What new colors, shades, hues, and tones of meaning will be found today? What variations and improvisations will truth play today? What contradictions will shatter our assumptions about life's meaning and thereby broaden and deepen our perspectives on life?

There are several characteristics of the search for the Holy Grail that we should all be aware of. The first is that each person will have to make the search for his or her self. No one can take the journey for you. There are no substitutes, no specialty team, and no pinch hitters or runners. There are guides but they cannot be your substitutes, even if their name is Jesus, Mohammed, or Lao Tzu. This is a very difficult characteristic to come to terms with. It is one of the reasons that people find Unitarian Universalism so difficult. We believe that each person is responsible for his or her own values, philosophy of life, and personal and interpersonal ethics.

As your minister I am not responsible for any one's religious journey or spiritual well being. I may be responsible to it – but not for it. Please be assured that this is not a game of semantics. If I ever become responsible for someone's religious security, it means that it is not their own and they have become dependent on me. A minister can never be an intermediary between individuals and their God, what ever that God might or might not mean to them. I am far too mortal and fallible for such a position. Every one of you is meant to have an original relationship with life, not one filtered and interpreted by someone else.

Being responsible to your religious journey means that I might serve as a guide, provide resources and instruction, and encourage you to take up your quest. But even then I have limits. I am concerned that too many UU ministers are the jack of all religious trades but the master of none. Far better for me to work from my own daily religious practice and bring to you that which is authentic to my being than to affect a variety of religious practices that have no roots in my soul. And if the truth were told, there are religious practices that I am alienated from as a matter of conscience, or culture, or experience. Likewise, be true to your own spiritual values. Be responsible for your search for the Holy Grail.

The second characteristic of the search for the Holy Grail is that the search is not out there. The very first clue that tells you the *X Files* is science fiction is the banner at the beginning of the show, which reads, "The truth is out there." The Holy Grail is not lost in Palestine or England. The search begins and ends with you. Jesus said it very simply, "The kingdom of God is within you." The Buddha said, "Be ye a lamp unto yourselves." Enlightenment is an internal reality. The search for the Holy Grail treads the highways and byways of your soul. It will traverse the remote regions of your imagination, dive deeply into the caverns of your subconscious, explore all of the myths

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that connect your beliefs, tread the maze of your experience, and climb the vistas of reason and critical analysis. The search for the Holy Grail must plumb the fears and shake the certainties of your life. It will change your habits, doubt your motives, question your beliefs, and laugh at every self-righteous presumption you ever made. The search for the Holy Grail is a relentless tour guide who loves you best when he or she shatters your illusions about reality and life.

A third characteristic of the search for the Holy Grail is that it is often found in the silence. We must learn the skills for listening to life and the many voices of truth. We must also learn to listen to the silence. Religious worship and religious education are structured on language. We have the words of the *Bible*, the *Koran*, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Dhammapada*, the *Tao te Ching*, the Principles of the UUA, and all of those committee meetings. There is a place for all of these. They bear truth. But we need to learn the language of silence. We seldom teach people to be quiet, to be still, to silence the theological jabber, and listen to the void. Yes, we ought to teach the myths, stories, legends, history, and traditions of our religious heritage. But we need also to peer into the abyss and be filled with the hush of the eternal.

Prayer for many people means to say things to or about God, or the Spirit of Life. They may be prayers of petition, confession, intercession, or thanksgiving. It seldom occurs to people that prayer is deep listening. Prayer is deep listening to the presence of life, to the presence of the Holy Other, or the presence of other persons. I am reminded of the large family that had gathered around the table for Christmas dinner. In the middle of the meal the five year old boomed out, "I said, please pass the butter!" The parents were angered by the child's loud and rude behavior and sent him to his room.

It so happened that one of the other children had received a tape recorder as a Christmas present and had recorded the Christmas dinner. Out of humorous curiosity the adults encouraged the child to play back the tape. They heard the singing of the Christmas carol, the table blessing offered by grandfather, and the general hubbub of family chatter. But as they listened a little voice said, "Please pass the butter." In fact, the little voice pleaded five times for the butter. But no one heard him until he belted out, "PLEASE PASS THE BUTTER!"

The search for the Holy Grail requires deep listening, even to the voices of little children seeking butter for their bread. If we cannot listen to one another, how can we possibly expect to hear the voice of the sacred? Like the prophet Elijah, we must learn that truth often speaks to us in the still small voice – or no voice at all.

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The search for the Holy Grail is one that will last a lifetime. There is no estimated time of arrival, no graduation date, and no delivery schedule. Because the search is in our living, it is the journey of each day. It is the journey that you must make alone. Your search for the Holy Grail will be found in ordinary experiences of your daily life. And the search is consummated in listening to the voice of truth in word and void.

I for one am not interested in a still life religion. I am not interested in a religion that gathers dust or grows moss. In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, I care not for the spiritual sepulchers of our fathers and mothers. Give me a religion that experiences everyday resurrections. Give me a religion that moves with life. Give me a religion that grows with people. Give me a religion that expands the horizons of my heart and mind every day. Give me a religion that challenges me to reach beyond the mediocre and status quo. Immerse me in journey that will find meaning in the ordinary. Launch me into the Holy Quest that finds universal value in the scandal of my particularity.

FINIS

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SESSION 2

THE IDEAS OF UNITARIANISM AND UNIVERSALISM

"Though our knowledge is incomplete, our truth partial, and our love imperfect, we believe that new light is ever waiting to break through individual hearts and minds to enlighten the ways of all; that there is mutual strength in willing co-operation, and that the bonds of love keep open the gates of freedom."

-Napoleon W. Lovely

BASIC IDEAS TO BE COVERED IN SESSION 2:

-The meaning of unitarianism is belief in one God; any instance where something or someone in existence is elevated to the place of God or is to be obeyed as if God, unitarianism (and freedom and free religion) will be threatened; examples include Pharoah and the Jews, Jesus and the Church councils, Church doctrine and Galileo

-The difference in characteristics between orthodoxy and the free church tradition

-The use of reason and the development of critical thinking skills as crucial to the strengthening of religious faith

-Five ideas that are foundations for free religious communities

Sermon Discussion: *What a Piece of Work*, Rev. Suzanne Meyer

1) Here is an additional example to the ones Rev. Meyer gives, "of something that is often passed off as common knowledge when it is not the

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case at all.” *To be a Christian has always meant to believe Jesus is the Son of God. And, that all Christian Churches have always believed the same things.* Take, for example, the Apostles Creed, recited in orthodox or creedal Christian Churches. What is it? Where did it come from?

***I believe in God the Father Almighty,
 Maker of heaven and earth,
 And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;
 Born of the Virgin Mary,
 Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
 He was crucified and buried;
 On the third day he rose again from the dead,
 And sitteth on the right hand of the Father;
 From whence he will come to judge the quick and the dead.
 I believe in the Holy Catholic Church,
 The communion of saints,
 The forgiveness of sins,
 And the life everlasting.***

"The Lord our God is One, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart ; that is a sufficient statement of Unitarian theology. Jesus said it, but no so-called Christian Church could use it."

-Dr. Clayton Bowen (1877-1934)

The original idea of unitarianism was the belief in one god. The free religious community evolved over thousands of years out of this idea. Once the ancient Hebrews understood that the Pharaoh of Egypt was not to be worshipped like a God, they were compelled to be free of their enslavement to him. Likewise, when the early European settlers realized that England's King and the Christian Church's officials were not to be obeyed as a God, they were compelled to be free, too. Freedom is never present when individuals are required to believe something about God or religion. *Freedom is present when individuals can discover and act upon the dictates of their own conscience. This is the kind of community we aspire to be.*

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What's the difference between the Apostle's Creed and what All Souls Community Church recites on Sunday mornings?

***We pledge to walk together in the ways of truth and affection,
As best we know them now,
Or may learn them in days to come;
That we and our children may be fulfilled,
And that we may speak to the world,
In words and actions of peace and goodwill.***

2) What does it mean to be a human being?

In the orthodox understanding of religion creeds, like the Apostle's Creed, define the center of the church. Theology "begins" with the nature of God because human nature is known (it is essentially depraved or sinful). The most important question is, "What is right belief?" When someone asks, "What does your church believe?" they are asking a question from an orthodox view. It looks back to a time when truth was revealed. Its emphasis is on conforming to a consistent, communal understanding of religion (God, Jesus, morality, etc.), and communal norms regarding faith. *In the free church understanding of religion, covenant is prominent. Theology "begins" with the question of human nature, because the nature of God is unknown. The most important question is, "How do I treat others?" When someone asks, "What does your church do for the world?" they are asking a question from a free religious view. It looks ahead to a future when truth will unfold. Its emphasis is on personal integrity and an individual's understanding of religion, and on the development of an individual's faith.* These are the two basic understandings of religion in our culture, though they go by many names.

"Whoso would be a man [sic] must be a nonconformist. He who

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would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind."

-Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

Our community aspires to be a place where the individual mind is respected, where a man or woman or child can unfold unto the true Individuality of each. Through the fulfillment of Individuality, In the context of community, people come to know and love one another as made In the Image of the Divine.

3) Give your own interpretation of Bernard Loomer's quote:

Church is for the increase of stature, the enlargement of spirit, and the greater freedom of self. Freedom is not an end in itself, it exists in order to enrich our communal life. Church is for encouraging us to actualize our most creative possibilities. It is also the critic of our limitations and our pretensions. Church is for understanding and for being understood. Church is for confession, for repentance, and for the compassion of forgiveness. Church is for reminding us that we are all members of the web of life, that no man or woman is an island, and that no person is an individual outside of the context of this web.

Sermon Discussion: *Still Searching for the Holy Grail?*, Rev. Dr. Gary Blaine

Questions:

1) Dr. Blaine writes, "People may not be looking for the cup of Christ (that is, the Holy Grail), but we are desperately in search of some sacred object of hope." Some look to Jesus as that object of hope, the Son of God, which redeems humankind from sin. What are the problems of looking for a "holy grail," whether a personality or an object to worship?

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"Almost every sect that has ever been makes Christianity rest on the personal authority of Jesus, and not the immutable truth of the doctrines themselves, or the authority of God, who sent him into the world. Yet it seems difficult to conceive any reason why moral and religious truths should rest for their support on the personal authority of their revealer, any more than the truths of science on that of him who makes them known first or most clearly. It is hard to see why the great truths of Christianity rest on the personal authority of Jesus, more than the axioms of geometry rest on the personal authority of Euclid or Archimedes. The authority of Jesus, as of all teachers, one would naturally think, must rest on the truth of his words, and not their truth on his authority."

-Theodore Parker (1810-1860)

We aspire to be the religion of Jesus, not a religion about Jesus. We aspire to be a religion of the lives of human beings, not a religion that worships one human being as a god.

3) What could it mean to perceive religion as a journey, or a search, or a walk with others?

All Souls Community Church is a church... of free individuals of all ages walking together in relationship to one another, to our larger community and to the transcending mystery of the universe... -- that is, it aims at liberating and cultivating the human spirit.

-All Souls Community Church, Declaration of Purpose

4) Why do we choose which Holy Grails are and are not worthy of pursuit?

"Our leading principle in interpreting Scripture is this, that the Bible is a book written for men, in the language of men, and that its meaning is to be sought in the same manner as that of other books. With these views of the Bible, we feel it our bounden duty to exercise our reason upon it perpetually; to compare, to infer, to look beyond the letter to the spirit, to seek in the nature of the subject, and the aim of the writer, his true meaning; and, in general, to make use of what

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is known for explaining what is difficult, and for discovering new truths.

-William Ellery Channing ((1780-1842)

We aspire to use reason religiously as one of our most prized tools for living. We aspire to use all reasonable resources as ways to uncover the true and the good. If, in reasonable deliberations, something is discovered to be false, it is discarded, instead of saying it is beyond our understanding how it could be so.

The Basic Ideas of a Free Religious Community

- 1) Strong belief that freedom yields truth; without freedom, truth will be crushed. ***God (the power that sustains life and infuses meaning to it) is revealed in freedom.***
- 2) Believing in freedom's relationship to truth means that each individual will believe a bit differently than any others, and that this is the natural outcome of a community whose faith is free. Love does not mean all believing alike, but respecting each as a unique expression of life. ***Life's diversity is its power.***
- 3) The other natural outcome of a faith in freedom is the recognition of the worth of individuals and of human beings themselves. ***Human beings bear a likeness to God.***
- 4) Freedom means we will not and cannot simply replay the past. The future is free and open, too, and we look to new discoveries of truth tomorrow. ***Hope is not found in a return to a past which is gone, but in the prospect of a future which can fulfill the full potentialities of life.***
- 5) Finally, the mission of our church is not to "bring souls to Christ," or to "depopulate hell," or to preserve some ancient form of living against the inroads of modern life. ***The mission of our church is to institutionalize religious freedom. The mission of our community is to help each one become a fully functioning, free person. The mission of All Souls is to***

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provide a community where each person can determine the dictates of individual conscience when making moral decisions.

Closing Words are from the Constitution of the All Souls Unitarian Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1929, a church which shares our name and religious tradition:

Freedom our Method in Religion

Reason our Guide in Religion

Fellowship our Spirit in Religion

Service our Aim in Religion

Character the Test of our Religion

Homework for Session 3 will be the following sermon.

Sermon:

OUR ROOTS

Rev. Harry Scholefield

Reprinted from the Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide

The Unitarian Universalist Association is of recent origin. It came into being in Boston, Massachusetts in 1961 with the merger of the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America. But the Unitarians and the Universalists each have their own separate histories. So it is that the Association and the approximately 1,000 churches and fellowships, which form its constituency, have roots that run to the distant past.

The term Universalism has taken on different meanings at different times. This accounts for the important element of truth in the comment by a Universalist Minister: “Universalist are often asked to tell where they stand. The only true answer to give to

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this question is that we do not stand at all, we move.” In 1791, the Universalist Benjamin Rush described Universalism as “A belief in God’s universal love to all his creatures.” He went on to say that God “will finally restore all of them who are miserable to happiness.” Taken by itself this was a remarkable statement in an age when belief in eternal hellfire and damnation was so common. But Rush, a physician and a signer of the Declaration of Independence, went further and declared that the belief in God’s universal love “leads to truths upon all subjects, more especially upon the subject of government. It establishes the equality of mankind – it abolishes the punishment of death for any crime – and converts jails into houses of repentance and reformation.” The fact that the early American Universalists saw social action growing inevitably out of theological belief should not be lost upon us. Scholars trace Universalism all the way back to the Alexandrian Christian School and the early church fathers Clement of Alexandria and Origen. The Universalist belief that the whole human race will be “saved,” was condemned as a heresy by a Church Council in 544.

Unitarianism is similarly ancient and heretical. The first official use of the term occurred in 1638 in Transylvania, a province of Hungary which became part of Romania after WW I. It referred to those who believed in the unity of God, but not in the dogma of the Trinity. Again, some meanings of the word go back to theological controversies in the church which were settled – more or less – in the decisions of the famous Council of Nicaea in 325. It has been central to our tradition to understand truth as evolving, growing reality, and to understand that no one person, church, science, or generation can grasp the whole of truth, or define it once and for all.

Our churches have existed and our beliefs have been foreshadowed in one land or another for a long time. Michael Servetus was perhaps the earliest of the Reformation anti-Trinitarians. He had the unique distinction of being burned in effigy by the Roman Catholics and in actuality by the Protestants. He was burned at the stake in Geneva in 1553. Roland Bainton in his book, *Hunted Heretic*, writes that Servetus “brought together in a single person the Renaissance and the left wing of the Reformation... the scope of his interests and accomplishments exhibits the type of the ‘universal man’ of the Renaissance, for Servetus was proficient in medicine, geography, Biblical Scholarship, and theology. In him the most diverse tendencies of the Renaissance and the Reformation were blended.”

[Wrote] Unitarian Universalist historian Arnold Crompton, “Under the still powerful influence of the Renaissance, scholar preachers in the university towns of Florence and Padua practiced complete freedom of inquiry. They appeal to conscience and reason as they searched the scriptures. Some of these scholar preachers, such as Bernadino Ochino, reached a position not unlike that of the American Universalist Hosea Ballou in the early 19th century.”

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In 1565, Giogio Biandrata, a refugee from Italy, founded the first anti-Trinitarian church in Poland. Faustus Socinus, like Biandrata an Italian, became the leader of the Polish anti-Trinitarians who were known as Socinians. Francis David, who moved from Catholicism through Lutheranism and Calvinism to Unitarianism, became the great leader of the Transylvanian Unitarians. He was martyred in 1579. But the Unitarians churches which he founded are vital and strong to this day.

In England, the beginnings of Unitarianism are associated with John Biddle who was often persecuted and imprisoned for his Unitarian beliefs. He died in prison in 1662. Joseph Priestly, the discoverer of oxygen, was a major figure in 18th century English Unitarianism. He was both a Unitarian minister and a scientist. He was radical both in his theology and in his politics, sympathizing with the aims of both the American and French revolutions. In 1791 his meetinghouse and his laboratory were destroyed by a mob outraged by his radical views. A few years later he immigrated to America and gave a series of lectures in Philadelphia at the time when it was serving as the capital of the United States. These lectures were attended by a number of the leaders of the new nation, including his friend Thomas Jefferson. They led to the founding of the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia, the first permanently established church in the country to take the Unitarian name.

Priestly emigrated to Pennsylvania in 1794. Forty-three years earlier, in 1751, George de Benneville, a most important figure in early American Universalism, had come to the same state. De Benneville was a lay preacher and a physician. In his boyhood he had become convinced of the truth of Universalism. Because of this conviction, when he was fourteen, he was ostracized by the French Protestant Church in England. Prior to coming to American he preached Universal Salvation in Germany, England, Holland, and France. He was imprisoned in France and was saved from being beheaded by the intervention of King Louis XV. When he came to American he was warmly welcomed by and very much at home with the Pennsylvania pietist groups, such as the Dunkers, the Universal Baptists, and the Quakers. In the opinion of the Unitarian Universalist minister and historian, Clinton Lee Scott, George de Benneville is as entitled as any one person to be called the founder of American Universalism. Scott reminds us that “When Universalist today emphasize individual freedom of belief, the unrestricted use of reason, religion as a way of living, human being and their welfare as central in organized life, truth as the only authority, the nurture of the inner spirit, and the Bible as one of many forms of revelation, they are stressing principles which were central to the faith of the Spiritual Reformers. To leave this heritage out of consideration is to render difficult the understanding of the Universalism of the present day.” Of course, these words apply to Unitarian Universalism as a whole. The past and the present have an organic, dynamic, living relationship to each other.

In 1759, “Union,” an important statement on Universalism by James Relly, was

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published in England. It became a target of the ministers of the period who were out looking for heresies. A young man, John Murray, heard Methodist ministers attacking Rely, and resolved to go in person and bring the light to his presumably wicked heretic. But when he got to Rely, the tables were turned. James Rely proved to be a man of good conscience and strong persuasive powers. He convinced Murray of the soundness of the Universalist position. Murray became a Universalist. Debts, time spent in debtors' prison, the death of his wife and baby motivated Murray to come to America. It was his intention not to preach Universalism in his new country, but circumstances as well as the depth of his beliefs decreed otherwise. In 1770, under dramatic circumstances, he landed at Good Luck Point on Barnegat Bay, New Jersey and was given hospitality by a Universalist, Thomas Potter. At Potter's urging Murray began to preach again. Nine years later he organized the First Universalist Church in American at Gloucester, Massachusetts. And in Gloucester, he and his followers won several important battles for religious freedom. Universalism was present in American before Murray's arrival. Indeed, he was invited to Gloucester by a group which was studying James Rely's "Union." But Murray was its catalyst and organizer. His energy and his courage were limitless. He brought the Universalists together and laid the foundation of the denomination. He made its doctrines known to the general public and was a most important part of its original dynamic.

An important number of our American roots can be traced to events which took place in Pennsylvania in the second part of the 18th century. This is especially true of Universalism. However, the major events leading to the establishment of the American Unitarian and Universalist denominations took place in New England. Early in the 18th century there were ministers in the Congregational churches who sowed the seeds of a more rational and liberal interpretation of the Christian faith. These men were characterized by great breadth of mind and spirit. Among them was Ebenezer Gay who took a liberal stand on the doctrine of the Trinity as early as 1740. There was also Charles Chauncy and Jonathan Mayhew. Clinton Lee Scott characterizes Chauncy as "a pronounced Universalist with Unitarian convictions" and Mayhew as "a pronounced Unitarian with Universalist convictions." These men remained within the Congregational church. But over the years the Congregationalists proved unwilling to tolerate the liberals. William Elley Channing, minister of the Federal Street Church in Boston, Massachusetts, one of the greatest figures in American Unitarian history, emerged as the leader of the liberal Congregationalists. A sermon, which he delivered in 1819 in Baltimore, Maryland, became the rallying point for a new liberal religious movement and led to the organization of the American Unitarian Association in Boston in May 1825. The controversy affected many of the oldest churches in New England; out of the 25 oldest churches in New England, 20 soon took the Unitarian position. In all, approximately 125 churches became Unitarians and either withdrew or were forced from the Congregational denomination. These churches were led by men and women very much at home in the scientific and literary currents of the day. Their ministers were for

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the most part Harvard-educated.

With the Universalists it was not a question of large numbers of strong, established churches banding together to form a new denomination. Ministers like John Murray, Elhanan Winchester, Hosea Ballou, and others drew into new congregations men and women who like the Unitarians within Congregationalism, sought a more liberal interpretation of Christianity. They came from different denominations. A very large number came from the Baptists. They were for the most part self-educated, less affluent, and more representative of the people at large than the Unitarians of the period. The Unitarians stressed free will. The Universalists put more stress on God as love. This led to the humorous but pertinent remark of Thomas Starr King (1824-1864), son of a Universalist minister, who during his brief but brilliant ministry had served both Universalist and Unitarian churches: “The one thinks God is too good to damn them forever, and the other thinks they are too good to be damned forever.” The Universalists came together to create a denomination in Oxford, Massachusetts in 1785, and again in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1790. In 1894 they made the Universalist General Convention their national governing body, and in 1942 they adopted the name, The Universalist Church of America. As noted earlier, the American Unitarian Association was organized in 1825.

It is important to remember that we were born during a revolutionary period, and that the humanistic values of the period saturated the lives of our late 18th and early 19th century forebears. The links we had with the American Revolution are very numerous. Suffice it to say that most of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were what we today would call “religious liberals.”

One of our most precious inheritances is our congregational polity, which came to us from the congregational churches and other churches of the free spirit. From the beginning it was accepted that ultimate decision-making power rests in the hands of the individual, autonomous churches. Local congregations select and ordain their ministers, determine their forms of worship or celebration, set their own requirements – or lack of requirements – for membership, and are responsible for all aspects of church government.

We have already seen that our beliefs change over the generations, and that the beliefs of individuals differ within the same generation and the same congregation. One way to catch a glimpse of the ways in which our beliefs have changed – also to catch a glimpse of the spirit and attitudes, which unite us – is to go directly to the words of those who set us on our way... Michael Servetus, Faustus Socinus, George de Benneville, Joseph Priestley, Benjamin Rush, Thomas Jefferson, Hosea Ballou, William Ellery Channing, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Abner Kneeland, Adin Ballou, Augusta J. Chapin, Horace Greeley, Henry Whitney Bellows, Olympia Brown, and others. Olympia Brown,

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suffragist, pioneer in municipal reform, was ordained by the Northern (New York) Universalist Association in 1863. She was thus the first denominationally ordained woman minister in the United States. In his bicentennial historical essay on American Universalism George Huntston Williams writes: “Perhaps the most conspicuous feature of the Centennial Convention (The Universalist Centennial Convention held in Gloucester, Massachusetts, in 1870) was the prominence of women in the Universalist cause.” Among the names which should be added to those mentioned above are those of the Universalist Judith Sargent Murray and the Unitarian Margaret Fuller...

In the United States, in the years preceding the Civil War, much of the energy of the Unitarians and Universalists was taken up with such great issues as the preservation of the Union and the abolition of slavery. The years of the bloody war made their own extraordinary demands. In the years following the war it became clear that the preservation and extension of the denominations depended on their capacity to pull together and to achieve a stronger sense of the important of the church as an institution. Twelve thousand Universalists gathered in a General Convention in Gloucester, Massachusetts, in 1870 to celebrate the centennial of John Murray’s arrival in America...

It has been a chronic problem for both Unitarians and Universalists to reconcile their love of individual freedom and autonomy with effectively functioning church structures. The bias against any kind of organizational, particularly denominational structure, or consensus on belief, has been strong. In 1884, at a meeting of the National Conference of Unitarians, an event of great importance took place. The Unitarians transformed the American Unitarian Association from an association of individuals who paid annual dues of one dollar for voting privileges into an association of autonomous churches. This was done through the leadership of Henry Whitney Bellows, minister of the First Unitarian Church of New York City (now All Souls). Bellows was an organizing genius. During the Civil War he had organized the United States Sanitary commission to serve the war-wounded. A comment on Bellows made by one of his ministerial colleagues exaggerates a bit, but will bear repetition: “Dr. Bellows is the only leader the Unitarian body ever had.”

Our history teaches us that institutions, ideas, and beliefs are very important. For us their importance is measured by the kind of lives they help us to live. Traditionally we have demanded that our institutions and beliefs produce people who live both for themselves and for others. On this point our Unitarian Universalist record in the mid-nineteenth century is good. Here are some of our activists chosen from many who lived their liberal, religious convictions: Susan B. Anthony, pioneer in the struggle for women’s rights, anti-slavery leader; Adin Ballou, radical pacifist, sever critic of the injustices of capitalism, commune leader, founder of Hopedale; Henry Bergh, one of the founders of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children; Clara Barton, organizer of the United States Branch of the Red Cross, first president of the American

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Red Cross; Dorothea Dix, crusader for the reform of institutions for the mentally ill; Samuel Gridley Howe, pioneer in work with the blind; William Lloyd Garrison, abolitionist, editor of the *Liberator*; Horace Greeley, crusading newspaper editor, champion of labor unions and cooperatives; Abner Kneeland, advocate of land reform, public education, birth control, pioneer in the Commune movement, founder of Salubria; Judith Sargent Murray and Margaret Fuller, intellectuals, essayists, pioneer feminists; and Joseph Tuckerman, pioneer social worker. There was probably no denomination in nineteenth century American which had more humanitarian leverage on society than the Unitarians and the Universalists. This is not to say that the road was easy, or that there was unanimity. Our strong point has never been unanimity. But the reformers represented the cutting edge. They demonstrated to their contemporaries and to us that liberal religion is a powerful motivating force for both personal growth and involvement in social change...

It has not been our custom to think much or reflect often on our history. We tend to be in a hurry to get things done. We look forward rather than backward. This, too, is one of our traditions. But a look at our past is reassuring and thrilling. Ours is an adventurous and positive story. Knowing the length and strength of our roots is a nutritive experience. It gives us some of the inspiration and stamina needed to cross today's frontiers and horizons. Lines by Archibald MacLeish, which are part of the liturgy of some of our churches, are to the point:

What is required of us, Companions, is the recognition of
 The frontiers across this history, and to take heart and cross over.
 To persist and cross over and survive.
 But to survive
 To cross over.

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SESSION 3

WHERE DID THE FREE CHURCH COME FROM?

"We desire to live together in such affection as will not allow us to feel threatened by our differences-happy in the liberty which encourages each to make his words correspond with his thought, her acts with her conscience. Ours is a non-creedal church-not because we have no beliefs, but because we will not be restrained in our beliefs. Ours is a church of conscience-not because we hold that conscience is infallible, but because it is the meeting place of humanity and God. Ours is a church of reason-not because the mind of human beings is free of errors, but because the dialogue of mind with mind, and mind with itself, refines religious thought. We dare not fence the spirit, nor close off the sincerity of conversation with which souls must meet in religious association. As others have their ways of religion, so we have this faith; and, in honest difference, we order our lives together."

-Wallace W. Robbins

BASIC IDEAS TO BE COVERED:

-Review the meaning of unitarianism as belief in one God

-Congregational polity arose as the form of church governance which best complimented the fierce independence of the Puritan and Pilgrim churches, exemplified by local congregations choosing their own ministers; the commentary on human nature implicit in individuals of a community voting to choose a religious leader, led to a theological controversy

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-The “Unitarian Controversy” was the yield of nearly 150 years of congregational practice; in order for an individual, who was a member of a religious community which practiced congregational polity, to vote on a minister (literally known as “Christ’s representative on earth”!), that individual had to possess some capacity to discern the good; if an individual possessed that capacity, then it is possible that an individual might live his or her life almost entirely choosing the good; if that be the case, then the orthodox Christian doctrine of humanity’s essentially sinful nature must be wrong; the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ must have been for some other reason than to atone for our essentially sinful nature; and, since over the centuries, that had become the reason for justifying Christ’s divinity as church doctrine, then Jesus must not be God; orthodox doctrine is overturned and, hence, yields theological unitarianism!

-The origin of Universalism is in the idea of universal salvation

-The free church represents a particular view of human nature (includes the capacity both for good and evil), view of God (manifested in this world in the form of freedom), and view of the reason for human fellowship (the free mind is nurtured, toleration is practiced, and respect for the individual is cultivated)

HISTORY OF UNITARIANISM AND UNIVERSALISM [with particular emphasis on America]

1) Unitarianism, as a religious position [belief in the unity of God, or one God], is an ancient expression of faith. Theologically, the ancient Hebrews were unitarian [believing in one God], as was Jesus [who, of course, never declared that he was God], as were many of the early Christians up to the time of the Church Councils in 325-400's [see first session history]. Unitarianism, as an organized group, began in Eastern Europe during the Reformation, as did the descendants of the Lutherans, the Presbyterians, the Baptists, and other "Protestant" groups. Unitarian Churches are still operating today in parts of Eastern Europe, as well as in other parts of the world.

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2) Unitarian ideas spread from Eastern Europe to England and Holland, and then over to the New World. Sometimes, as in England and Wales, churches which identified themselves as "Unitarian" were founded. In the States, though, the word was not a favorable thing to call someone! Thus, there were no specifically named "Unitarian" Churches until the late 1700's!

3) However, Unitarian theology did arise, and in this way. Many of the early churches on these shores were very independent types. Many avoided the church bureaucracies of their European forebears, opting instead for local congregational control over the affairs of a congregation. These would include choosing the minister, the policies for membership, and other matters pertaining to an individual congregation's business. They were known in our history books as the Puritans (the Non-Separatists) and the Pilgrims (the Separatists), among others. All Souls, and other communities like it, is a "descendent" of the Puritans and the Pilgrims. In the late 1700's there appeared a theological controversy in these congregational churches, which led to the appearance of a specifically Unitarian theology in America.

4) The controversy concerned the question of human nature. "What is man," wrote the Psalmist in Psalm 8 in the Old Testament, "that thou, O God, art mindful of him?" The Puritans or Calvinists in these congregational churches believed this about men and women: They are essentially sinful, born into depravity, and can be released from this only by the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is called the "vicarious atonement," and it was this kind of thinking which had, centuries before, led to the pronouncement that Jesus was also God and part of a triune God. But, there were others in these congregational churches who disagreed with all of that. These people recognized in human beings the capacity to do good; indeed, to do wonderful and noble things. It did not mean that people were

good all the time or that we weren't capable of perpetrating untold horrors upon one another. But, these men and women acknowledged that human nature had a goodness about it instead of being essentially depraved. Thus, it was conceivable that a man or woman could live an almost completely virtuous life and not be in need of the "vicarious atonement" the church had been claiming for centuries was the meaning of Jesus Christ. Thus, it was also conceivable that Jesus was not a God; even it diminished his revealing of the glories of human nature to think that he was! Thus, these men and women became Unitarians, believers in one God, and followers of the human Jesus as the supreme example of the humility, compassion, mercy, and justice which marks humanity at its best.

5) Many of the men and women who founded and formed this country were either Unitarian or Universalist. They believed in the goodness of which human nature is capable, not its essential depravity; they believed that God is a God of love, not a God of inhumane and eternal punishment, nor vicious retribution; and, that there was no basis in the New Testament to assert that Jesus was a God and, in fact, that it diminished the powerful meaning of his life to suggest that he was! Universalists believed much the same, although they approached these beliefs not from a controversy over human nature, but an assertion of God's nature. Simply put, Universalists believed God was a loving God and would, therefore, welcome all into heaven in the same way the father welcomed back the Prodigal Son in Jesus' parable of the same name. This was called universal salvation; hence, the name Universalists.

6) The free church today has its origin in these thoughts and ideas: Human nature is created with a capacity for good; God, or the Holy, or that which commands our supreme and ultimate allegiance, is a good, creative, supporting power, that works through human beings

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in this world, and is especially visible in acts of compassion and forgiveness towards those unlike ourselves; it is good for human beings to be in fellowship with one another, establishing communities where the free mind is nurtured and uplifted, toleration is practiced, and respect is cultivated for the varieties of religious experience.

JEOPARDY GAME WITH FAMOUS UNITARIANS AND UNIVERSALISTS, AND HISTORICAL DATES, ETC.:

LITERATURE

- 1) Vacationed out near Walden Pond in the mid-1800's.
- 2) Was a big talent, but one of the little women.
- 3) Was the Ware Lecturer in 1886, from Indianapolis, author of such books as *Cat' Cradle*, *Slaughterhouse Five*, and *Welcome to the Monkey House*.
- 4) Wrote the great American novel, though perhaps he "preferred not to."
- 5) Deceased, former editor of the *Saturday Review*, known for laughing himself to health.

POLITICS

- 1) Former Presidential candidate from Illinois, once remarked to a woman who said he had the vote of every thinking person in the U.S., "Madam, I need more than that. I need a majority."
- 2) His father is a deceased, famous, former Democratic Senator from Idaho, with a name like his it's no wonder he became a minister.
- 3) The name of one Unitarian President.
- 4) The name of another Unitarian President.
- 5) Was the only Unitarian king in history.

SCIENCE AND MEDICINE

- 1) Doctor Vitamin C.
- 2) Founder of the American Red Cross.
- 3) Unitarian minister credited with discovering oxygen.
- 4) American, Universalist, signer of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, considered the father of modern psychiatry.
- 5) Site of the first family clinic in the U.S.

ARTS, AESTHETICS, AND ARCHITECTURE

- 1) Famous Wisconsin architect whose uncle was a famous Unitarian minister and cousin helped found All Souls.
- 2) Peter Rabbit was her most famous creation.
- 3) Was Professor Gradgrind's superior and Tiny Tim's real father.
- 4) Wrote *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*.
- 5) Known as a folk singer/songwriter, she authored such classics as *Little Boxes*, *Where Are You Going My Little One?*, among others.

HISTORY

- 1) His work with the deaf led him to invent something that now allows us to reach out and touch anyone, anywhere.
- 2) Her work as a suffragist was worth at least a dollar.
- 3) He was martyred for the cause of Civil Rights.
- 4) First woman in the U.S. to be ordained by a denominating body, she was minister in Southeast Wisconsin in the late 1800's.
- 5) He was a well-known President of the Urban League, then President Nixon delivered the eulogy at his funeral (and the tape of that has been lost, too!).

FINAL JEOPARDY ANSWER:

The year the Unitarians and the Universalists merged.

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"Let the horizon of our minds include all men and women: The great family here on earth with us; those who have gone before and left us the heritage of their memory and of their work; and those whose lives will be shaped by what we do or leave undone."

-Samuel McChord Crothers
(1857-1927)

SERMON ONE

THE OPEN SOCIETY AT THE OPENING OF THE YEAR

The first sermon delivered at The All Souls Community Church on January 6, 2002 by
The Reverend Doctor Brent A. Smith

READINGS

Deuteronomy 34:1-6, 9: *And Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land, Gilead as far as the Dan, all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the Negeb, and the Plain, that is, the valley of Jericho the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. And the Lord said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there." So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord, and he buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Bethpeor; but no man knows the place of his burial to this day... And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him, so the people of Israel obeyed him, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses.*

The Open Society and Its Enemies, p 120-121, Karl Popper (1943): *If we approach political theory from a different angle, then we find that far from solving any fundamental problems, we have merely skipped over them, by assuming that the question 'Who should rule?' is fundamental. [Instead] we should ask whether political thought should not face from the beginning the possibility of bad government; whether we should not prepare for the worst leaders, and hope for the best. But this leads to a new approach to the problem of politics, for it forces us to replace the question, 'Who should rule?' by the new question: "How can we so organize political institutions that bad or incompetent rulers can be prevented from doing too much damage?"*

Those who believe that the older question is fundamental, tacitly assume that

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political power is 'essentially' unchecked... If this assumption is made, then, indeed, the question 'Who is to be the sovereign?' is the only important question left.

[However, those who hold the second question as fundamental (How can political institutions be organized to survive bad or incompetent rulers?), place the stress of politics not on the mode of electing a government but upon the possibility of removing it.]

SERMON

Pat and I took time between Christmas and New Years to take our 13 year-old son to the Gerald Ford Museum. If you have never been, go. It's a good experience. We went to see the exhibit because, for me, Lincoln represented the transition from individual autonomy to a sense of this nation as a community. This country was founded as an experiment that continues to this day. It was not a community when it was founded, and did not have a sense of who it was; but, more, what it did not want to be. It did not want to be like the old monarchies. But, its identity developed as individuals became invested in it as a community, as a nation. And Lincoln's time was pivotal to that unfolding. It was what religionists call, Kairos, that is, right and ripe time, a time that is not ordinary and mundane and profane, but a time of great importance, signaling a shift from one kind of understanding to the possibility of a deeper one. Like the beginning of a new year. Like the beginning of a new church, and a new group of people desiring to walk together in the ways of faith. Kairos.

Some called September 11th a tear in the fabric of time, a signpost, a signal that the 21st century would not be like the 20th. I do not believe that history is shaped predominantly by catastrophic and large events like September 11th, but that history moves in minute shifts that accumulate over time to shift human beings understandings of who they are and what their future holds. September 11th was like the year 2001. It overtly marked a change that was a culmination of thousands of minute shifts over the years that marked the beginning, middle, and end of the 20th century. This morning, at the close of the first year of the 21st century, I would like to suggest that the future of this new era and its outline will best be understood by looking at it through a lens fabricated out of the past, but aimed at the future. And as religious liberals, I would suggest that we represent something that was integral to a past that has shaped the present, but that we have self-marginalized so that unless we change our current path, we will become increasingly irrelevant to the unfolding future.

I had a interesting and disturbing conversation with a good friend of mine, John Bolt, who is Professor of Systematic Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, the bastion of conservative, evangelical thought in this country. He made a haunting proclamation that in the three weeks since I believe to be utter truth: "Evangelicals in the

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United States are the largest identifiable group that still believes in the American experiment in ordered liberty.” (“*The ‘Culture War’ in Perspective: Lessons from Abraham Kuyper*,” John Bolt, *The Witherspoon Lectures*, 2001) That is haunting to me, and should be for all of us, too, because it is our spiritual lineage which gave birth to the idea of religious freedom and the Free Church, which itself bore in its womb the political idea of democracy and the reality of a democratic Republic. The Founding Fathers of this country were in many cases, children of the Enlightenment, heirs of the marriage of Reason and Revelation, progeny of the religious origin of political freedom. This American experiment in ordered liberty is the child of liberal religion in general and Unitarianism in particular, whether we claim it or not; whether we continue to parent it, or become like so many fathers in our culture, and leave the raising of children to others. If we forget where we came from and what we stand for, do not pursue who we are, then political freedom in this country will look more and more like those in religious orthodoxy who claim to be free in Christ.

In other words, he was stating as simple fact what the evangelical community has known for some time now. Religious liberalism is dead. It’s only political liberals who are refugees from the 1960’s and deny the death of that decade, and who prop up old icons of the old liberalism, that don’t know it’s dead. Died of obesity, blindness, immobility, dementia, old age. Died because it did not know itself, where it came from, who it was and is, and whom destiny calls it to become, to fulfill. Religious liberalism is dead because it violated its own self and became like orthodox religion, more enamored with past revelations than future promise. And it died because it did not understand its own religiosity, but, at its deepest levels, confused religion with politics. Religious liberalism became a political manifestation of liberalism, rather than a distinctive form of the disciplined religious life. It has become liberal political policies and social theories believed in religiously. And it has become its own worst enemy, an ideology. So, religious liberalism is dead.

Its death is signaled at the Ford Museum. There were only two things distinguishable about Gerald Ford’s presidency. First, how he became President; that it was thrust upon him, which he acknowledged through his own words (“You have not elected me as your President by your ballots, so I ask you to confirm me as your President with your prayers.”) and his own actions, by pardoning Richard Nixon. That signaled the end of the second half of the 20th century, as an answer to Karl Popper’s question, “Can this democracy survive a bad ruler?” It can. The second distinguishable thing about Ford’s presidency was the rise of the religious right as the Moral Majority, in Ford’s electoral defeat to Jimmy Carter. And that rise signaled the death of religious liberalism because it also signaled the gradual replacement of religion with politics and social theories among those who identified themselves as liberal, as wanting to be “free.”

Religious freedom did not come from politics. Instead, political ideas of freedom

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have their genesis in religious ideas. Look at the Declaration of Independence. Political equality and the civil rights with which all men and women are born, are not endowed by political entities - governments or churches or armies or dictators or popes - but by “their Creator.” And ideas of how to order a society around political liberty had its genesis in ideas of how to order a religious community around the incarnation of religious freedom. In other words, however well or poorly you intentionally practice an open society called the Free Church, to that extent the open society of a democratic Republic will strengthen or fall.

As Unitarians we do not understand this or take this seriously as our religious enterprise within the bonds of a covenanted religious community. The origin of free speech isn't political. It is in the free pulpit. Historians have noted that the free pulpit was one of the largest contributing factors in the creation of the American Republic. It is the one place today, maybe the only place today, where it is possible hear a religious proclamation NOT directed by doctrine, political persuasion, demographics, or what people need. To the extent that this religious community guards the free pulpit against abuses and strengthens it through your practice as a Free Church, to that extent and that extent only, does free speech have a chance anywhere else in our world.

The origin of political self-determination of a people is in the free pew. That you are challenged to square your deepest beliefs with your experiences is to say that your relationship to God, your connection to the deepest mysteries of existence, is ultimately YOURS. To the extent that this religious community guards the free pew against abuses and strengthens it through your practice as a Free Church, to that extent and that extent only, does political self-determination have a chance anywhere else in our world.

The origin of inherent and inalienable civil rights is in the religious proclamation that humanity has been created in the likeness of God. If rights are given by governments, they can be removed by governments. If rights are granted by churches or religious doctrines, they can be removed by churches or religious doctrines. If rights are granted by human beings, they can be justifiably denied by human beings. But if there are parts of us no government, no church, nor anyone else has created, then that is permanent and sacred. This is the political extension of a theological proclamation. Its origin is in religion, liberal religion, religion whose hermeneutic is one of “freedom,” a “generous” God, a “broad” interpretation of the created order, and other synonyms for liberal as the lens through which to see what is religious. To the extent that you deepen your understanding of Unitarian and Universalist theology, and its deeper origins in liberal religion, strengthen it through your practice as a Free Church, and proclaim it to the world, welcoming all into the fellowship of this community, to that extent and that extent only, do civil rights of all sorts have a chance anywhere else in our world.

Karl Popper wrote *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, about the time when

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Tolkien wrote the trilogy, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, which has become so popular a movie at this time. Both were written at a time in the world's history when the darkness of Fascism was threatening an evil that seemed insurmountable. And because Hitler was elected to his position in Germany, Popper and Tolkien rightly surmised that the central question of human community was, "Who should rule?", the children of light or the children of darkness. But when that evil was defeated, "Who should rule?" became an old question, and was supplanted by an even deeper one: "Can a government, most specifically a democracy, survive a bad, evil, or incompetent ruler?" With this country's survival of Watergate, that, too, became an old question, although many kept holding it up as the central question of human community. Especially have religious liberals held this up as the central question of human community, as we continue to question whether our Republic will survive leaders we didn't vote for and social and political policies we do not hold. While the religious right, of all people, have come to support and defend this experiment in ordered liberty called a free society!

The central question today is this: Can liberals become religious again and develop communities, Free Churches, which embody in communal, institutional forms, the ideas that have their origin historically as essentially religious ideas? The central question today does not involve whether we are a community for the religiously oppressed, or a conglomeration of religious interest groups, or a place to question the existence of God. Times have changed, Kairos is upon us, and this culture will not and cannot survive when we hold to a narrow view of our task. Our contribution to the 21st century needs be this: To develop free *religious* communities, as a *religious* enterprise, witnessing to relationships that ennoble because they witness to ideas that speak of the divine. The very existence of political liberty and the continuation of the American experiment in ordered liberty, depends upon whether we do this.

In the ancient Hebrew tradition the elder Moses could carry his people only as far as a point overlooking the Promised Land. He could not go into that land with his people, any more than our religious forbears can lead us into the 21st century. We are the Joshua's of the new age, and the bearers of an ancient revelation. That freedom and faith belong in the same sentence together. That religion and reason and modern science and modern political ideas, are compatible things, and are all derived from a religious feeling of the unity of all things. We are overlooking this new and wonderful precipice of time, the beginning of the 21st century. May we enter its portals seeking who we are by seeking to fulfill what has been placed in our care.

And Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land... all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea... And the Lord said to him, "This is the land of which I

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swore... I [would] give to your descendants.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there." So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab.. buried in the valley [of which] no man knows the place to this day... And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him... [to lead the people of Israel.]

AMEN.

SERMON TWO

THE CREATION OF THE COSMOS IN GRAND RAPIDS

The second sermon delivered at All Souls Community Church on January 20, 2002 by
The Reverend Doctor Brent A. Smith

READINGS

Genesis 1 (various): *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness...*

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds; cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so... And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness ... So God created human being in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion ... over every living thing that moves upon the earth." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work ... which he had done in creation.

The Power of Non-violence, Martin Luther King, Jr.: *Modern psychology has a word that is probably used more than another other word. It is the word "maladjusted." Now we all should seek to live a well-adjusted life in order to avoid neurotic and schizophrenic personalities. But there are some things within our social order to which I am proud to be maladjusted and to which I call upon you to be maladjusted. I never intend to adjust myself to segregation and discrimination. I never intend to adjust myself to mob rule. I never intend to adjust myself to the tragic effects of the methods of physical violence and*

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to tragic militarism. I call upon you to be maladjusted to such things. I call upon you to be as maladjusted as Amos who in the midst of the injustices of his day cried out in words that echo across the generation, "Let justice run down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." As maladjusted as Abraham Lincoln who had the vision to see that this nation could not exist half slave and half free. As maladjusted as Jefferson, who in the midst of an age amazingly adjusted to slavery could cry out, "All men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights and that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." As maladjusted as Jesus of Nazareth who dreamed a dream of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. God grant that we will be so maladjusted that we will be able to go out and change our world and our civilization. And then we will be able to move from the bleak and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man to the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice.

SERMON

If you go to Plymouth, Massachusetts you will see a remarkable thing. Plymouth Rock, which wasn't there when the Pilgrims landed! There never was such a thing, until many years later when a rock was put there to mark the place. That's what we human beings do. We mark time. We mark places. We create something with the time we're given and we mark the place of new beginnings.

The Pilgrims thought they were creating something new, and succeeding generations agreed so much that they put a rock in the Bay to mark the place. The Pilgrims thought they were creating the world anew, and in many ways they were. They saw this land as a New Eden, a place where all of creation would begin again. All of the tyrannies of religion would be past. All of the tyrannies of government would be past. All of the inhumanities man wields upon man would fall away. They saw themselves as the new Adams. This was the new earth, presaging a new heaven. "In the beginning," wrote 17th century philosopher John Locke, "all the world was America."

Yet, the image of the new garden was not the only primordial view of this continent by its earliest European explorers. There also was the image, equally Biblical, of a vast, untamed wilderness of "*scorching deserts, uncrossable mountains, hurricanes and floods, tropical heat and arctic cold.*" (*The Broken Covenant*, Robert Bellah) These two images, of garden and wilderness, of promise and trial and struggle, have woven their way through the history of this land such that it has become the story of many who have sought the freedom this land has also symbolized.

If you go to Plymouth, Massachusetts, you will see an exact replica of the Mayflower sitting in Plymouth Bay, and for a few bucks you can board the ship and see

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what it was like for those brave souls who ventured across the Atlantic in possession of all that they owned and a faith, however practical and grounded and however illusory, that maybe what they were about to do might succeed. The ship itself is not much bigger than this room. The ship contained both the Pilgrims, who called themselves the Saints, and the ship hands, employees of the company who sponsored the Pilgrims for the money they would make the company in the new world. The ship hands the Pilgrims called, Strangers. Their destination was Virginia, and they landed in Massachusetts, after a perilous voyage that threatened life and limb. And because they were outside the jurisdiction of English held lands they had to decide on how the Saints and the Strangers would treat each other in the New Eden. Thus came about the Mayflower Compact, a document of appropriate manners for the new world adopted by mutual consent! This sealed the venture of coming to this garden and wilderness as a creation story.

Of course, not all would come to the shores of this New Eden in this way. Some would come fearful for their lives, the journey being one of a tearing asunder of the fabric of human relationships, the horrific destruction of familial bonds and the bonds of tribe, and the establishment of human slavery in a land circumscribed by liberty. Others would come because of the prospect of a new and better life and found they had sold themselves into indentured servitude. Some came because there were no other choices in life and this was their last chance. Others came to wreck havoc upon the lands and peoples they found in this New Eden. But the prospect, the hope, of a new community, a new form of fellowship was and is real, and all souls are pilgrims, religious in their life's intent, who seek to establish the bonds of true fellowship and would open up that fellowship to all who seek comfort, aid, and strength in love. This yearning penetrated many influenced by the creation story in which we exist, as testified by poet Langston Hughes:

*O, let America be America again –
The land that never has been yet –
And yet must be – the land where every man is free...*

*O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath –
America will be!*

-Langston Hughes

There have been many attempts at this kind of fellowship before the Pilgrims and since, and none was a failure, although all have fallen short of the Kingdom of God.

The contribution to religious scholarship unique to the previous century is the cross cultural and cross-historical study of religions, a school largely founded at the

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University of Chicago. Joseph Campbell popularized this approach to religion, but Mircea Eliade created it into an academic discipline. Scholars in this area point out that creation stories from the world's various religions can be categorized as exhibiting one of more of these six characteristics: creation 1) from nothing, 2) from chaos, 3) from a cosmic egg, 4) from world parents, 5) through a process of gradual emergence, and, 6) through the agency of an earth diver. Creation stories are foundational stories because contained within them are the principles of existence that they represent as having come into being. They are myths in the deepest sense of the word; not untruths, but stories cosmic in scope, which seek to "transfigure reality so that it provides moral and spiritual meaning to individuals or societies." (IBID) Creation stories, myths, tell what a people see as so ultimate and foundational to existence that it was there in the beginning. The creation of Unitarian Churches typically parallels the paradigm of creation in Genesis: it involves a combination of creation from nothing, creation from chaos, creation through a process of gradual emergence, and creation from world parents, which you who are the founding members are! The creation of Unitarian Churches also typically parallels the paradigm of the Pilgrims: a wandering, involving the leaving of an old way behind, under the stress of great trials and under the possibilities of great and divine rewards, a wandering that ends in an establishing of a city upon a hill, a social community whose aim is for all humanity to live free as endowed by our Creator. Not a return to a garden, but the attempt to create a new garden in an old wilderness, with all the failures and tragedies and triumphs that mark the endeavor.

There is not this kind of community in West Michigan, one that is one based in faith not fear. There is one right now! That is why the creation of this kind of community will entail great trial and is as risky an endeavor as intentionally traveling across the Atlantic to establish a settlement, or as risky as being cast into the belly of a ship to endure the Middle Passage and hope that sometime you and your descendents would be free. The culture of Old West Michigan is based partly in fear, and that permeates every religious community regardless of what it says about itself. No religious community is immune to the destructive capacities of this fear any more than anyone who came to this continent to seek freedom could be an unwitting accomplice to the tyrannies and injustices that have been bred in this land. But, the fellowship bonds in the tradition of liberal religion are charged with heeding the call of a certain reading of Old Testament religion: we are called to be maladjusted to the fear contained in existence, in all of its manifestations, so that we can become adjusted to the continuous creation that living entails. We are called not to fear but to faith. We are not called to fear for fear breeds suspicion. We are called to be maladjusted to fear and be liberated by faith. We are not called to fear for fear breeds contempt. We are called to be maladjusted to fear and be liberated by faith. We are not called to fear for fear breeds hatred. We are called to be maladjusted to fear and be liberated by faith. We are called to have faith in one another and in that abiding, sustaining, community forming power in all cultures and generations

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that is the basis of love. Forming and maintaining religious community is a way of asking an ultimate question: In the Hebrew creation story, did God create the cosmos as an act of fear, or because God had become maladjusted to the void and the darkness upon the face of the deep? Did God, like us, create the world anew out of a longing and a yearning for companionship and faith fulfilled?

All creation stories are stories of maladjustments; the new, beloved community Dr. King spoke so eloquently about and lived so fiercely and courageously toward; the New Eden, which so many have sought on these shores, some at the expense of their own lives. God was maladjusted to darkness, so he said let there be light. The Hebrews were maladjusted to Egyptian servitude and sought release in their flight to the Promised Land. And in this room there are people who have formed a new community and initiated a new Creation Story. It is true. The Cosmos is being created anew this day, here in Grand Rapids.

So let's start from the beginning the story of the journey of this community of great faith:

In the beginning the heavens and the earth had already been created, but the deeper darkness of fear abided upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved across the river waters and in that darkness, out of the center of a city, there appeared a small but great light. And that light gathered unto itself other lights seeking the freedom to shine unfettered in the deeper, surrounding darkness of fear; a fear that had consumed even the best of men and women. And from the growing luminosity there was created the possibility of a love that came not from limitation but liberation. And from that community there was created Adam, all souls, created from the gathering of the light in the midst of the darkness, and to this creation, born of the liberation of the human spirit, there was given dominion over every living thing that moves upon the earth. And God saw that it was good. And cultivated it into Love.

God grant that we will be so maladjusted that we will be able to go out and change our world and our civilization. And then we will be able to move from the bleak and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man to the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice.

AMEN.

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SESSION 4

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY

All Souls Community Church is a church dedicated to religion, but not to a creed. It is a liberal religious community of free individuals of all ages walking together in relationship to one another, to our larger community and to the transcending mystery of the universe. Our community is based on open communication, democratic process and a belief in the capacity for goodness in all people. Our spiritual health and our growth as a church community are intimately connected with the spiritual growth and development of our children. We pledge to develop our church community with this always in mind. This church aims at celebrating and cultivating community, a sense of inquiry, moral character and insight, religious freedom, and helpfulness to humanity -- that is, it aims at liberating and cultivating the human spirit.

*Declaration of Purpose
All Souls Community Church
adopted 2001*

There is an old children's rhyme that is spoken while demonstrating with the hands: "Here's the church, here's the steeple, open the door and see the people." It is the contention of the Free Church, as evidenced in the traditions of Unitarianism and Universalism, that this children's rhyme is how church and religious community should be understood. A church doesn't "believe" things. Individuals do. And it is the purpose of religious fellowship not to demand a conformity in theological belief, but to support and sustain individuals as they try to understand the experiences of their

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lives. This is the aim of a church like All Souls Community Church: individuals creating religious fellowship by covenanting with one another, that is, agreeing together, that we will “walk” together with each another through all that life deals us, with a mind open to the spirit and a heart open to all the diversity and depth of human religious experience. We will endeavor to live our lives with a free mind and a loving heart. And we will endeavor to do this together in a community of others who have promised us their companionship regardless of what religious beliefs form about our experiences. We are creating a community for the free spirit!

To close off our ROOTS class, here are some personal expressions, shared by some of the original founders of All Souls, during the *Vision Quest* process that led to its formation in the fall of 2001. What Ralph Waldo Emerson said of the great individuals of history could be said of those who gathered to try a lively experiment with a new form of religious fellowship that would become All Souls Community Church: "It takes enthusiastic doers - there is properly no history; only biography."

VISION QUEST INDIVIDUAL EXPRESSION ONE:

Written and delivered by Ms. Sherry Batzer on Sunday, November 18, 2001, and responding to Forrest Church's sermon, *Deeds Not Creeds*.

Early last spring I finally got the chance to be converted.

The effort was made by a fellow lawyer I work with regularly. He knew of my situation, and sometimes, during our phone conversations, we talked about my difficulties. He obviously had genuine compassion for me. He asked me during one conversation if I had a church family. As time passed he began to speak of the saving and healing power of Jesus Christ.

When you can feel your very soul going all black and gangrenous, like I did, you tend to want to be enveloped by something huge and powerful and mystical. Curious as to whether my desperation was stronger than whatever was left of my beliefs, I decided to accept his invitation to lunch and hear what he had to say. Toward the end of our lunch, my colleague described with awe the jailhouse conversion of David Berkowitz, the Son of Sam. And then with even greater awe, he said, “Isn't it remarkable that the saved David Berkowitz, after all the heinous things he did, will go to Heaven, while some other man, who did only good works his whole life but never accepted Christ as his Savior, won't?” Remarkable, indeed!

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Are our lives valued by the deeds we do, or by the faith we propound? And if we do not derive our definitions of good or evil from a creed, where do they come from?

Universalism demolished Hell, and Unitarianism axed original sin. In the absence of all that intrinsic badness, Forrest Church sees us running the risk of accepting a pabulum version of goodness that exists without discernment or scrutiny, and being unable to recognize what he calls “the awesome human capacity for evil.”

Focusing on deeds, as we do, comes with its own unique stumbling blocks. Deeds can be evil or good, and we have no golden tablets to tell us what good really is, or what evil really is. We have to make decisions. And I think we have to consider motivation.

James Luther Adams, in his 1953 essay, “Our Responsibility in Society”, takes Church’s views a bit further. Even back then, he called his time an “age of anxiety”, a “time of troubles”, and bemoaned the reluctance of religious liberals to accept personal responsibility for the world in which they lived. He saw them becoming victims of misguided energy and devotion, focusing on personal success and “getting ahead”, afraid to take potentially unpopular positions for fear of jeopardizing their financial interests or their standing in the community. He, like Church, saw the liberal’s failure to assume personal responsibility as a sin, and said, “The Hitlers of any age or community are always grateful for, indeed they rely on, the sins of omission committed by...retreating, uncreative eunuchs.”

As a noted psychiatrist recently pointed out, history’s collective acts of great evil required the complicity of men and women who showed up at work, processed the papers that sent people to the crematoriums or the gulag, even participated directly in ethnic cleansing and gang rape – and who in their spare time played with their children and had a soft spot for animals.

Adams is passionate – even prophetic – about the need for religious liberals to accept the mantle of social responsibility and take an affirmative stand against the evils of the day. He says it is the liberal’s peculiar responsibility to offer a church in which there is explicit faith in the community-forming power of God, a practice of the disciplines of liberty, and the encouragement of creative fellowship for all members. He sees such a church as enabling members to meet their social responsibilities in all areas of life. He says, “It is our social responsibility to maintain and extend [the] movement in face of human needs for health and shelter and for a world in which...all may enjoy their God-given dignity and responsibility – for a world in which everyone can make a contribution. If we do not participate in groups that work deliberately for these ends, we are ourselves irresponsible; we are dominated underlings – mass people in compact with Satan. To

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cringe in despair of ourselves is to despair of the divine promise. It is to forget that responsibility is response to a Spirit that is given to us – to the light that has shone and that still shines in the darkness.”

It seems to me that Adams is saying that our support of each other as a community enables us to reach out together into the greater community, and perhaps overcome some of the impotence, the complacency we feel as individuals in a world that has, as Church says, enormous problems.

We’ve all cringed at the use of the word “missionary”, because of the fundamentalist specter it raises. We prefer to serve our thin soup without comment, being generally reluctant to inspire someone with one or the other or perhaps an amalgam of our many beliefs. I lived for a time in a heavily Mormon community, and I can still envision the Saints marching two by two in their matching suits and shoes, all over the globe, very successfully seeking converts to a premise I found incomprehensible. Huge amounts of money and personal sacrifice have gone into making the Mormons the preeminent example of successful mission work. Good works are just as important to Mormons as they are to religious liberals. Good works have the potential to bring Mormons to Godhead.

The liberal’s reason for doing good works may be vastly different. When liberals embrace Adams’ and Church’s views of social responsibility, they do what they do because they believe it’s the right thing to do. But a liberal who aspires to do good deeds has a lot of questions to answer. How do we choose what we will do? From which part of our lives do we borrow the time to do it? Do we simply succumb to Church’s “sin of sophisticated resignation,” or do we agree to take the risk of getting stained, and changed, by the world’s enormous problems?

I think those are all things we’ll need to consider, as we work to weave a commitment to social responsibility through this new community.

Returning to work after lunch with my colleague, decidedly unconverted, I couldn’t get his David Berkowitz reference out of my mind. How, I wondered, could a good man who does good works, condemn another good man who does good works, and in the same breath bestow redemption on David Berkowitz? How could he possibly believe that Jesus intended to – that Jesus did – relieve him of the endless struggle of the human mind to discern good from evil, and the vital humility of the human spirit that comes from recognizing that in this life, one can never presume to know for sure?

We, as religious liberals, aren’t privy to the easy answers that soothed my colleague. We don’t claim to know where the good men go, where the bad men go. We never see good and evil in black and white. However desperate our circumstances, with luck, they will not be desperate enough to accept a divisive and exclusionary cosmos no matter how much it might comfort us to embrace a packaged creed carefully labeled *The Answer*.

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It is ever clearer to me now, after being offered the solace of a creed, that whatever lies beyond this life – be it another life, a celestial reward, or plain old Michigan dirt – is the destiny of all of us. I am sure that all we can do, what we must do in the meantime, is strive always to understand what is good, to do what is good, and to help others, wherever and whenever we can, to know and do good.

VISION QUEST INDIVIDUAL EXPRESSION TWO:

Written and delivered by Ms. Lisa Kemmis on November 11, 2001, and responding to A. Powell Davies' sermon, *What Must We Do to Be Saved?*

As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a Den, and I laid me down in that place to sleep; and as I slept, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and behold, I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back. I looked, and saw him open the book, and read therein, and as he read, he wept and trembled; and, not being able longer to contain, he brake out with a lamentable cry, saying, "What shall I do?"
 - John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*

When I first moved to Grand Rapids, about 12 years ago, I wanted only to create a better life for myself. At the time, all that meant was making enough money to live on. I didn't really think in terms of "bettering" myself, mainly because I really didn't think I *could* be "saved", didn't think I was *worth* saving. I couldn't even drive my own car; I was so full of fear and despair. I only knew I had two choices--either just keep plugging along or die. What else was there? I knew for certain there would be no "Divine Intervention", and frankly I wasn't at all hopeful that any *earthly* assistance was forthcoming either.

But it did happen that I met a friend, shortly before my son was born, a woman who taught me all about the ideas in this reading, years before I would actually read it myself. I asked her the other day if she'd ever read this work, and even though she was raised in the Unitarian Universalist church, she hadn't. She just lives it. And with her influence and encouragement, I began to understand some of it for myself.

Davies writes, "Without a spiritual liberation to a higher level, we shall not be such people as deserve to be saved, and we shall know it. So that no matter how much we beat the air in pretense, we shall *let* ourselves be lost. We must have *within ourselves* faith in our own promise, confidence in our own worth; and they must be *real*." And I would add that for many people in this world, learning this could only start by seeing it

through the lens of someone else's eyes. We don't spring into this world knowing that we are of value, we have to be taught it. For a great many people, this just doesn't happen. If we believe, as he says here, that "our neighbor is anyone who needs us, anywhere at any time, everywhere at every time, and near and far, throughout the world," then it seems clear to me that our greatest task as individuals and as a church, is to be that lens, for each other and for the larger community.

When we come together here each week, when we sit together in a common search for meaning and freedom, we are creating our own salvation. As we involve ourselves in this, I hope to see us looking for ways to intentionally expand this liberation to others. If there is one failing of liberal religion, in my opinion, it is the reluctance to engage in anything that seems like "missionary" work; we avoid what might appear to be coercion of another's beliefs. But if we are unwilling to actively and enthusiastically share what we know, to "become by actual, deliberate decision, the people of the new age, the citizens of the changed world," then what we do here will last no longer than our own lives. I believe we have the ability to change the world, with every act we make. I was shown the tools for doing that within my own life by one person, and now I have joined with all of you in doing that for each other. I hope that as a church we can do that for even more people for a very long time to come.

Do we see any hope of these things? Let me return to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* from which I quoted at the beginning. When the Pilgrim had made up his mind to be saved, if it were possible, he met an Evangelist who offered to show him the way. *And pointing with his finger over a very wide field, the latter inquired, "Do you see yonder wicket-gate?" "No, " said the Pilgrim. Then said the other, "Do you see yon shining light?" And after the Pilgrim had looked intensely and for a long while, he said, "I think I do." Then said the Evangelist: "Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto; so shalt thou see the gate; at which, when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do."*

VISION QUEST INDIVIDUAL EXPRESSION THREE:

Written and delivered by Dr. Roger Gilles in the fall of 2001, on the topic of
"Democracy"

Democracy, of course, has its roots in ancient Greece, and two of the most notable ancient philosophers of democracy were Socrates and Aristotle. They and others held that concepts like goodness, wisdom, and justice find meaning not in ideal forms but in day-to-day reality. The terms have meaning as *verbs*, not as *nouns*. Goodness, wisdom, and justice exist, in other words, only in human actions, policies, and decisions. They are situational rather than absolute. But these philosophers conceded that in human affairs,

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determining which of all possible actions, for example, is “just,” is very difficult. No rulebook can cover every situation, and no perfect ruler or group of rulers—or God or gods—is available to tell us. So, somehow, we have to figure these things out for ourselves. Democracy is history’s primary method for doing this.

Socrates and Aristotle believed that people naturally tend toward the good, but they need some help. And since no absolute rules or rulers exist, people must turn to each other for guidance. So, in a nutshell, people work toward the good by checking with others—by talking, and studying, and learning together. That’s democracy.

There are several necessary conditions of democracy: well-informed, educated citizens; free and open discussion or debate; and a general open-mindedness—a willingness to change. The first two of these conditions are very familiar to Americans. We consider education and free speech to be basic rights of our society. But all the education and free speech in the world won’t amount to anything without open-minded people ready and willing to change. *Persuasion* is the blood of democracy. Democratic people enjoy persuading others, but just as importantly, *democratic people enjoy being persuaded*. It is a sign that they are getting closer to truth.

Aristotle identified three characteristics of persuasive people—and of persuasive speech. The first is *ethos*, or good character. The second is *logos*, or sound thinking. And the third is *pathos*, or right emotions. We tend to believe people who seem trustworthy, who seem logical, and who seem to feel things as we do.

Socrates valued *ethos* above all. He believed that if we build a reputable life (in order to be persuasive) and appeal to the shared values of others (in order to be persuasive), we become both effective *and* moral. Persuasion thus becomes a moral force as well as a social and political one. Good people are persuasive people, and persuasive people are good people. We can also say that democratic *decisions* are by nature most likely to be good, wise, and just—because persuasive people tend to be good, wise, and just. It’s a great system!

It’s easy to talk about democracy in this abstract way, but there is of course no single form of democracy. Every group has to decide what kind of democracy best suits its size and needs. I’d like to identify two key aspects of democracy that will factor in to the democratic evolution of our church:

1) *Some decisions require the whole group, while others do not.* As any particular issue arises, we have to decide if we need a congregational discussion, a committee discussion that leads to a recommendation to the congregation, a committee discussion that leads directly to a decision, or a decision made by a single person—such as a minister or staff person. All of these are democratic processes, but

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it's not always clear which process is best at which time. Obviously, if we discuss every decision as an entire congregation, very little will ever get done. But if we allow a single person or committee to make all the decisions, we will eventually feel disenfranchised—and we will lose out on the goodness, wisdom, and justice of the majority. As members of this church, we must design a democratic structure that allows for all kinds of decision-making. And as democratic participants, we must grow to trust ourselves in the roles we take on—and learn when we are empowered to make a decision and when we should bring the discussion before others.

2) *Some decisions require consensus, while others require majority vote.* Most of us think of democracy as being synonymous with “majority rule,” but there are times when majority rule can be very divisive and damaging, especially in smaller groups. On a national level, clearly, any kind of consensus model would be absurd. But in a group like ours, properly managed consensus building can be very effective. The idea is to carve out a decision that all can agree on—or, sometimes, simply abide by. It requires articulate discussion, and it requires compromise. But consensus building builds solidarity, and compromise builds community. I believe that our church can work on a consensus model much of the time, especially within committees, but also when important defining issues are before the congregation as a whole.

Let me summarize, then, if I may, some guidelines for democratic living. First, believe in the human tendency toward the good. Without this foundational belief, democracy is not possible. Insist on shared, open information, and take seriously the responsibility to educate ourselves on all important issues. Encourage free and open debate, even when it involves disagreement. Remember, disagreements are signs of democracy in action. Keep an open mind: seek out a change of opinion. Opinion without change is prejudice. And democracy without change is not democracy. Finally, pay attention to *ethos*—your own and others’. Ethos is about character, and values—very human qualities—and in the end, democracy works so well because it is a very *human* form of government.

The Closing Words for ROOTS are those we use frequently on Sunday morning:

*Be of good courage;
Search all things and hold fast to that which is good.
Render unto no one evil for evil.
Strengthen the faint-hearted, support the weak, help the afflicted,
Love all men and women and children,
Serving the Most High,
Rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.
Amen.*

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*The Next Step:***NETWORKING WITH
ALL SOULS COMMUNITY CHURCH**

"What do we do now? What should we read next?" These are questions frequently asked by those who have completed the ROOTS class. The next step is to decide what kind of relationship you wish with All Souls Community Church. If you wish to continue "seeking" with us, that is fine. If you want to deepen your relationship with this congregation, then becoming a member is the next step. The expectations of members are:

- ROOTS class completed**
- Financial Pledge of Support made**
- Serving at All Souls for one year commitment**

You have just completed the first step in becoming a part of All Souls Community Church. If you would like to continue along the path of becoming a member, would you please sign the membership card below, make a financial pledge of support, and indicate your wishes in terms of community involvement. We encourage ROOTS graduates to serve at ALL SOULS by checking the BRANCHES box, although the choice is yours.

NAME _____ DATE _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ ZIP _____ PHONE _____ EMAIL _____

DATE OF BIRTH _____ SINGLE PARTNERED

OCCUPATION _____ PARTNER'S NAME _____

CHILDREN (under 18, first, last names, and birthday)

Would you like to join BRANCHES? YES NOT YET