

1. Prelude, “Ein Feste Burg,” Michael Briggs
2. Welcome, Erin Bosch

3. Chalice Lighting, WOH, from the first verses of the Gospel According to John:
“In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was God. And the word was with God.”
Minute of Silence

4. Hymn, “Jesus Loves Me,” Doleta Chapru
5. Joys and Sorrows

6. Introduction to readings:

We’ll start today with some Bible readings. This is a biased approach to looking at Christianity, a Protestant bias, especially since we’re using the King James version. I think most Christians, including such well read people as you, get exposed to the religion in other ways. But I’m a bookish man, so I chose to start off with the stuff about the Word from St. John.

Rosemary Dorney will be Jesus today, with much of the

7. **“Sermon on the Mount,”** Rosemary

8. In contrast, Christians have Holy Wars, as exemplified by the next hymn. We only have time for the first verse, but please read the next three.

9. Hymn, “The Son of God Goes Forth to War,” Doleta

10. Our next Bible reader is Al Nettleton, with a different aspect of Christianity:

11. **“The Lamb of God,”** Al

12. This is the language of Salvation through Blood Sacrifice, and the next Hymn played by Michael Briggs makes it more dramatic. Mike may have something to say about it.

“There is a Fountain Filled with Blood,” Mike

13. A third theme in the Gospels is the performance of miracles, and our treatment of the Gospels wouldn’t be complete without them. Many concern health, so I’ve asked a medical person, Barb Park, to read a little bit from Matthew:

“Miracles,” Barb

Comments

14. So here we have 3 different aspects of Christianity from the Gospels. The first, the Sermon on the Mount, might be called the ethical. The second, the Lamb of God, is about sacrifice and salvation. [This core aspect of Christianity strikes me as the most bizarre. We start with an all powerful and an all knowing creator God, who nevertheless has to sacrifice his Son, hence

himself, to atone for sin. There seems to be a higher law in the universe: The wages of sin is death. So God dies as the sins of the believers are atoned for. Then, without sin, they don't die. QED. I don't get it. Last Sunday I confessed to stealing from my Mother's purse when I was four. I atoned for that. I have sinned since then, and will never atone for some of those sins, but I don't think that will be the cause of my death.] Our the third Bible reading was about helping suffering in the world in which we live. Let me say a very little about my encounters with some of this.

15. My parents sent me to a Lutheran Sunday School until I was about 13. [They were immigrants, and also nonbelievers. I think they thought that being a member of the church was part of being part of the nation, just the way it was in Scandinavia.] I don't remember much: what I remember persuaded me later that Christianity was a religion for children, nicely exemplified by our first hymn, "Jesus Loves me." It was Paul, I think, who said, "when I was a man, I put aside childish things."

When I was about 14 my Mother discovered the Unitarian church, and I went to Church School there, and the transition was thrilling. One year, "Jesus Loves Me," and the next, the theory of evolution and me looking through a microscope at Paramecium. [It was the only biology course I ever had in school or college, and I think it was taught by a University professor.]

About the same time, I uncovered and read my Father's copy of Thomas Paine's **The Age of Reason**, a great anti-Bible book. [My Dad never talked to me about religion. I also encountered and read, in my attic, his collection to the periodical **The Debunker**

And about the same time I discovered that my two best friends were fundamentalists. It was a shock. For well over a year we would spend our half hour walking to and from school in the morning arguing about the bible and evolution. I would give them the contradictions in the Bible pointed out by Paine and others, and they explained them away. I would point out the impossible ethical demands in the Sermon on the Mount, and they would explain them away. (Ask me about the rich man and the camel going through a needle's eye.) I'm confident that I'm a better expert about Biblical apologetics than any of you. And they confronted me with all the problems of the theory of evolution. If one treats Darwin as sacred scripture, those are real problems. It was some years before I learned that all scientific theories have anomalies, that science is a process. My friends and I remained friends, but we gave up on conversion attempts.

And about the same time, I became a high school socialist. That became my serious flirtation with Christianity. For me, the essence of Christianity was the Sermon on the Mount. I read a 1908 book by Karl Kautsky, the eminent German Marxist, about **The Foundations of Christianity**. Christianity, he argued, was a proletarian religion, with this carpenter, fishermen, etc. Mine was a flirtation with Christianity. Not much: the Sermon, it seems to me, scarcely requires one to believe in God. [In high school and college there was never any group to join. Some student must have given me the reference and other book references; no teacher ever did.]

And about the same time, I was influenced by a good friend, a year ahead, who was a pacifist and an anarchist. [Myron Anderson, with a beautiful bass voice, later professor of philosophy at the University of Minnesota, St. Cloud...and my TA in an undergraduate philosophy course at the U...only a B!] My friend persuaded me to read the later works of Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy came to take the Sermon on the Mount seriously. It says, "Be thou perfect," and Tolstoy became a pacifist and started to give away his possessions, much to the distress of

his wife and children. I flirted with it, with the help of a couple of my professors at the University of Minnesota. But it was only a flirtation. The Sermon on the Mount isn't very realistic. I became more attracted to Socialism, and then, after a bit more of realistic scholarship, Sociology. So now I am an atheist who remembers his earlier flirtations.

So now I invited you to describe your encounters. I've talked to some of you, who I know could take to whole service. My first advice is to be brief, the second is to talk to the Program Committee.

16. Barbara Chatterton

17. Ruth Calden

18. Hymn, "Just As I Am," Doleta
With comments by Doleta

19. Open discussion

20. Hymn: "Holy, Holy, Holy, " Mike Briggs

21. Concluding Comments

There are so many expressions of Christianity, so where's the real one? My answer is, all of them. One of my favorite early Christianity historians, Elaine Pagels, wrote that she started in the field hoping to find the early pure Christianity, uncorrupted by the state and the economy. But the further she went back, the more diversity she found. Back there around 250 AD, there were not only pacifists and militarists, people believing the end of the world was at hand and more reasonably people, trinitarians and unitarians, but mystics and ascetics and others. Pagels' first important book was about the Gnostic Gospels, discovered in a cave after WWII, work suppressed by the early Church, but more mystical, and more feminist, than orthodox Christianity. It was repressed, as also unitarianism only much more so. Then came orthodoxy: An heirarchical church first, then linked with a state, the Byzantine Empire. The link lasted until the 18th and 19th centuries. But today, we're much closer to the early Christians. Not heirarchy, despite the Pope and the Southern Baptist Conference, can tell Christians what to believe and do. There is a great diversity of Christian thought today.

22. Introduction of Guests and Visitors
Prairie Announcements

23. Hymn: "Sunshine in the Soul," —Doleta