

PRAIRIE SOCIETY Sep. 17, 1989

'CAN A U-U BE A CHRISTIAN?'

I'll light the chalice today for Jesus Christ....and later we'll discuss whether I was justified in doing so...

Let us begin by standing and reading our Bond of Union in the front of the song-book and on the wall, and remain standing as we sing the Doxology, # 3 . (Aileen accompanying)

This melody is sung in a great many Christian churches; perhaps millions of people are singing it today. But the words are our own Unitarian-Universalist words. Can anyone remember the usual Christian words? (.....Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.)

Memorize, will
be regular p2 of
svc this psal

There is an engaging simplicity in much of the text of the four Gospels in the New Testament. It is caught in the following verses, Matt. 6:19, 25-30. (Maybe Mary Mullens)

It seems a bit unrealistic, though. Karl Marx treated it sarcastically in one of his books. (any volunteer)

I think Marx misses the point, in a way. It's not that we don't have to work, or shouldn't want to work, but that we shouldn't CARE about toil, or worry about it, shouldn't let such cares distract us from more important things.

Christians have, from time to time, ~~xxxxxxxx~~ achieved such simplicity in their lives and in their communities. In America, the Shakers did, in their sharing communities. The Shakers worked, and were excellent craftspeople. But they aimed for and achieved a degree of simplicity. It comes out in their music. Let's sing #41, Simple Gifts. Let's sing it like I think the Shakers did, without accompaniment. The Shakers, like some other Christians, thought ~~xxxxxxxx~~ pianos and organs bad things in churches, because it detracted from simplicity.

(Aileen will lead. Maybe girls and women alone for 1st verse?)
Children can leave for their classes during the last verse.

1. Our reading today will be from the Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 5:1-16, 38-48.

2. Can a Unitarian-Universalist be a Christian? Some of us ~~xx~~ think we're Christians, but the number is small enough so that, according to Cinda, they're forming ~~xxxxxxxx~~ group in the UUA to give one another support, ~~xxx~~ like the U-U Gays and Lesbians, or the U-U Pagans.

I was somewhat surprised by Cinda's report about the General Assembly, and the discussion during her program, when Rachel asked why any Unitarian-Universalist would WANT to be a Christian, or vice versa.

When I first started attending a Unitarian church, some 45 years ago, I thought most Unitarians regarded themselves as Christians. Maybe this was because I was at the rather Humanist Society in Minneapolis, where we Humanist Unitarians regarded ourselves as something of a minority in the denomination.

There clearly isn't any right or wrong answer to the question of whether a U-U can be a Christian. It depends on what you consider to be really important ~~xxxxxxx~~ about being a Christian and about being a Unitarian-Universalist. That's what I would like us to discuss today.

3. So let's discuss it, first in some small groups, with others who might share our views.

~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ Let's take a preliminary poll. I'll ask you, regarding the question of whether a U-U can be a Christian, whether your answer is
definitely yes

perhaps yes

perhaps no

or definitely no

(Sort into 5-6 groups, leader to take notes.)

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4. Reports

5. If I can express some of my own views. . . about why I'm not a Christian.

(a) In terms of the history of religion, and the comparative study of religion, I think the crucifixion of Jesus and his role as a savior is central. Part of the belief system I can understand, even if I don't agree with it. But there is one central part that is so strange to me that I find it difficult to empathize with in any way.

I can understand the idea of sinful humanity, and even sympathize with it, even if that's not all that Universalist. "All men have sinned, and fallen short of the Glory of God," the Gospel says. Maybe so, although one might not want to use the word "sinned." But anti-Christians have expressed similar ideas, like Friedrich Nietzsche, with his phrase about humanity---"Human --- All Too Human."

And I can understand why one might want to have a Redeemer who will forgive one's sins. I can sing the hymn "Amazing Grace" with real spirit.

But I can't understand at all what the crucifixion has to do with it. At the core of Christianity there seems to be the notion that sin MUST be repaid with death. "The wages of sin is death," if not our own, then that of Jesus Christ. It seems to be a law of the Universe that even God must follow. And I can't come close to understanding it.

(b) Many liberal Christians place the Sermon on the Mount at the core of Christianity, and some feel one can take that ethical message as the essence of the Bible and throw away the rest of the book: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

But I'm dubious about that ethical message. It came from a man who, with his followers, believed that the world was coming to an end. If you can believe that, it makes many ethical concerns more simple. But it can also lead to an abdication of moral responsibility for our communities, societies, humanity.

Besides, the ethic of universal love is just too simple. It is an ethic of what can be called promiscuous altruism, one that makes no distinctions in our ethical responsibilities to those close to us and those much more distant.

In orthodox Christianity, the recognition of the impossibility of us ordinary humans to follow the ethic of universal love is evidence of universal sinfulness. Since we don't follow it, we are sinners in need of redemption.

. . . .

6. After the announcements, we'll close with #37, "I'll Fly Away."