

(1a)

(c) Good morning. Welcome. Ride & sing #3, From all that dwell below
the skies....

I've been hurt since you saw me last, and it shows...
I would like each of you, who don't know already, to guess how I
got hurt... [What's your guess?] ... Last Tuesday night, I had
a freakish bicycle accident on the path along Lake Mendota by the
University, where I've been riding almost every night for 20 years.
A shrub branch appeared where it shouldn't have, caught in my wheel,
& threw me down.

How many of you guessed that someone else hurt me on
purpose? ... How many of you guessed that I hurt myself
by doing something I shouldn't have done? ... {And are you thinking:
was I wearing a helmet}

People tend to say that what happens to people is
caused by people.

About 2500 years ago a Greek, Aesop, told stories where
animals stand for people. One was about the ant & the grasshopper.
It could have happened here just a few weeks ago. A
community of ants worked hard all summer, storing food in the
homes under ground, where they're happily in bed for winter right now.
When it started getting cold, a grasshopper approached the ant hill
& begged to be allowed to enter. One of the ants asked him
how he had spent his time in the summer. The grasshopper said
he spent the summer drinking, singing, and dancing. If that
be the case, replied the ant, all I have to say is this: they
who drink, dance, & sing in the summer, run a great risk of
starving in the winter.

(16)

The moral is, work + save. It's true.

Another way of looking at the story is to say that people who have homes with food in them are like the ants. ~~People~~
~~who are poor~~ They worked and deserve what they have. People who are poor + homeless are like grasshoppers. They brought it on themselves. But that won't do in most cases, poor people don't cause their own poverty. Some people just have bad luck, like I had bad luck encountering a branch on the bicycle path.

People tend to say that what happens to people is caused by people. Often this is a mistake — some people suffer, like me, because of accidents in nature. But it remains true that a great deal of human suffering is caused by other people.

PRAIRIE U-U Nov. 19, 1989

U-U's and other denominations: Are we so different?

(c) *Follows*

1. ...Light the chalice for the 6 Jesuit priests, their cook, and her daughter, who were murdered last Thursday in El Salvador... I feel as if they were part of us, our fellowship, our family. *⇒ It's hard to go from this*
2. From all that dwell below the skies... #3 *to the song I had chosen earlier*
But those priests were here in El Salvador
3. Something for children....
4. Song, #3 "Morning So Fair to See" (?) *partly because they had faith in people with that they could make things better.*
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1. Erin Bosch and middle schoolers. An RQ quiz.

2. This morning I want to argue that most American religious denominations have become more like U-U's, in various ways, in the last generation or so. Much of my evidence comes from social surveys, but I'm interested in your own experiences with people of other religions with regard to each of the changes.

3. First: In the past many religious denominations ~~were highly exclusive~~ were highly exclusive, demanding loyalty and conformity of their members, and intolerant of others. People were likely to believe that only members of their own groups could attain religious salvation. Today only small minorities hold such views. Fewer than 15% of Lutherans and Baptists think that membership in their faiths are necessary for salvation, fewer than 25% of Catholics.

Official doctrines have changed in this regard. The Catholic church has ** You don't serve God any
more by converting
Lutherans & Jews... ** recognized the legitimacy of the religious beliefs of Protestants and Jews.

Similarly, parents are much less concerned that their children remain ^{question} loyal to their churches. One survey asked parents to choose the three most important emphases in child rearing from a set of alternatives. In 1924, 50% chose loyalty to church, 25% independence, and only 6% tolerance of others. In 1972, only 22% chose loyalty to church, 76% independence, and 47% tolerance.

These changes in beliefs make it easier for people to change their religious affiliations, and many Americans do. More than 25% of those

Nov. 19, 1989

brought up ~~xx~~ in such denominations as the Lutherans, Methodists, and Baptists had switched denominations or dropped out completely by the time they were ~~grown~~ interviewed in 1977; more than 14% of the Catholics had. Similarly, marriages across religious lines have become more permissible and more common. When I was growing up, I and all of my many cousins were Lutherans. ~~xxxxxx~~ They didn't seem too bothered when we became Unitarians, we were still Protestant. But when one of my cousins married a Catholic, it was a real scandal. Today it wouldn't be.

How many of you married someone of a different religious background? ...of the same religious background?

Most of you ~~were not~~ were brought up in some other denomination. How distressed were members of your families when you dropped out?

4. Second: the Judaeo-Christian religions have been unusual among the world religions in making strong cognitive claims. Their God was a creator god and an actor in history, giving laws to nature and to human beings both. This has historically led to strife between science and religion in Christianity, ~~that were~~ ^{in conflict that were} much less salient in other religions. In most denominations, this has changed. ~~&xxxxxxxxx~~ Most Christians can accept the theory of evolution. The Pope himself has convened meetings of physicists to discuss the big bang theory of the origin of the universe.

There has been a real and significant decline in the importance of religious creeds, statements and professions of specific beliefs.

Clergypeople might know the subtle theological positions that historically distinguished their denominations from others, but they don't often discuss them in sermons. As a result, there is considerable variation of beliefs in the major denominations. Variation of beliefs within denominations is large compared to variations across denominations.

The flip side of this is that most Americans are really quite ignorant about religion. I'm quite certain that most of us could do better on tests of knowledge about the Bible and Christian stories than most Christians.

We U-U's really do have quite different beliefs than most Christians. But the declining significance of creeds for most Christians means that these differences aren't likely to be salient in everyday life. What's the last time you have had an argument with someone outside Prairie about a matter of religious belief?

5. Third, the authority of the clergy has greatly declined.

This goes way back to the Reformation for the Protestant clergy, when the rites that only the clergy could practice ceased to be essential for salvation. But as long as the Protestant denominations stressed creeds so much, the superior knowledge of ministers gave them authority. But not now.

The decline in the authority of Roman Catholic priests has been much more recent, only the last 30 years or so, and much more dramatic.

30 years ago Catholics would confess their sins to the priest, who would assign penance, & could give or withhold ^{absolution & signs of} sacraments. The proximal cause for the decline of priestly authority has been the church's teachings about sexual behavior and sex roles.

American Catholics simply flout the church's rules about contraception; Catholics are no less likely than Protestants to use them.

Even the priests disagree with the official position of the church.

More than 90% of the younger priests disagree about contraceptives, and they don't give parishioners a 2nd time about it in the confessional. Similarly, lay people, and many priests, disagree with the church's positions on divorce, the celibacy of the clergy, & the ordination of women. Most priests think priests should be allowed to marry; ~~most~~ priests are evenly split on the issue of the ordination of women.

I think the very meaning of the confession must have changed because of this, but I don't have ~~any~~ real knowledge about it. But many priests feel that the only real basis of their authority is their personality.

They went to create Christian communities, and to do that the sacraments & knowledge of dogma aren't much help.

The problems in the Catholic church are exacerbated by the shortage of priests. The same issues that lead to a reduction in the authority of priests led to the resignation of large numbers of them and a sharp decline in the number of seminarians.

In that situation, lay people simply have to do many of the things that need to be done. Lay people and women. Most of the professionals in this patriarchal church are women, the nuns.

6. Most people recognize that churches & denominations are voluntary associations. They aren't ~~the~~ groups one is born into, like families. They aren't parts of the state, that one supports with taxes, whether one likes it or not. They are associations that depend on the voluntary support of their members.

→ In this country, they are competing voluntary associations, and they sometimes are very much aware of their need to satisfy potential members if they are to thrive

The Pope doesn't seem to be aware of it. He seems to think that he appoints bishops, who assign priests, who give or withhold absolution depending on the moral conformity of parishioners

7. I think most other groups are like us in valuing the sense of community as the most important thing churches provide. For many of them, like us, the coffee hour is the most important part of Sunday services, & something like circle suppers are more important than Sunday services.

This is even true for groups that don't fit most of my generalizations, like the Mormons. The Mormons are very good at creating strong communities where people help one another, & I think that accounts for their rapid growth. The Mormons are also highly exclusive and dogmatic. But the leaders of the church have to be careful in how they use authority & discipline members. Many Mormons are rather indifferent about the teachings of Joseph Smith, or even if he was a kind of fraud. If the use of authority threatens the sense of community, they'll just quit.

8. I could go on:

(a) Ecumenism (reversal of sectarian schisms)

(b) Feminism (ordination of women, high % of women in rights many seminaries) (not the irony)

(c) Recent history — UU's & other mainline denominations affected in the same way by changes in recent decades:
— Growth from the baby boom to the early 1960's
— Loss of membership from early 1960's through early 1980's.
Partly a reaction to the great activism of the 1960's
— More recent growth.

(6)

11/19/89

9. Closing song #53 Land of the Dance