

The Cults class #10 Unitarian Universalism

UNITARIAN (Webster) - 1) A person who denies the doctrine of the Trinity, believing in the teachings but rejecting the divinity of Jesus, and holding that God is a single being. 2) A person who emphasizes the importance of character and tolerance for differing religious views.

UNIVERSALISM - The theological doctrine that all souls will eventually find salvation in the grace of God.

Demographic:

The Unitarian Universalists are almost completely an American phenomenon, with Massachusetts having the largest concentration of members. Their influence far outstrips their numbers. Unitarians ranked first in the "One Nation under God" study (1990s) with regard to home ownership, level of education, and median family income. (JWs come in last at thirtieth). There has been an overrepresentation of UUs in the U.S. Supreme Court since 1970 (at least 8) and in the 101st Congress. They have had at least 5 Presidents.

A few quick facts:

- 1) The UUA espouses religious pluralism and tolerance of all faiths as a great virtue.
- 2) The Bible and other sacred books are not to be regarded as absolute or infallible.
- 3) Many Unitarians don't believe in God at all; also, a great many different views about God can be found.
- 4) The person and work of Christ are rejected-His miracles, virgin birth and bodily resurrection. Christ is not divine. Some UUs regard Christ as a great moral teacher, others reject even this.
- 5) UUs believe people are basically good. They don't accept the teaching that people need salvation from sin, but believe they save themselves by moral character.

History:

The Unitarian Universalist Association traces its history back to the radical reformation. Never considered Christian by its orthodox foes, Unitarians nevertheless saw themselves as such until recent times.

Founders-

Faustus Socinus (1539-1604) burned at the stake. He organized the movement in 1553, trying to utilize scripture to justify his position- 'Any interpretation of scripture that contradicts right reason cannot be a correct exegesis of the text.'

John Biddle (1615-1662) rejected the Trinity, eventually discovered Socinus' writings; he too rejected the Trinity based on logic. He tried to consider scripture authoritative as to the rule for Christian life. His views were considered bizarre, even in his day.

William Ellery Channing (1780-1842) preached the famous "Baltimore Sermon" in 1819, after which the AUA was founded, May, 1825. This sermon, preached at Jared Sparks' ordination, became the

most popular printed sermon since Thomas Paine's "Common Sense." He tried to defend his position by saying "There can be no real contradiction in scripture."

In the 19th century Unitarian Universalism was strongly influenced by Transcendentalism, particularly in the writings by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson's writings were somewhat pantheistic and seen as a combination of Hindu and Eastern mystical beliefs.

Intuition was the transcendentalist's guide, not the Holy Spirit and scripture. It was a shift from the authority of Jesus Christ to the sovereignty of the self.

By the 1850s Universalism meant Universal World religion, not universal salvation.

Humanism was brought in as well; half the signers of the 'Humanist Manifesto I' were UU ministers. They espoused evolution and gave reason and science supreme importance.

Some early Christian apologists called the UU's "Modernists." They were also known as Protestant Liberals.

Unitarian Beliefs:

- 1) *Freedom, Tolerance and Pluralism:* UUs tout "tolerance" of all faith positions and exclude all exclusiveness.
- 2) *Revelation:* The Bible and other sacred books are not to be regarded as absolute or infallible. In particular the Bible is believed to be a human book and therefore flawed. Reason, conscience and experience are the final test of religious truth claims.
- 3) *God:* Many UUs don't believe in God at all, and among those who do a wide array of beliefs exist. Some view God as a "higher power", or divine spark within themselves; others believe God is a word for the ordering principle in nature, some hold to neo-pagan beliefs etc. All UUs reject the Trinity.
- 4) *Christ:* Some UUs regard Christ as a great moral teacher, others reject this. Christ is not divine in the way orthodox Christians believe, and others can or have attained to the same level of spirituality he did.
- 5) *Man and Sin:* All human beings have inherent dignity and worth. At the same time however, humans came about through evolution. UUs reject the idea of "original sin" but emphasize the natural human ability to do good.
- 6) *Salvation:* UUs don't accept the biblical teaching on salvation from sin. Because people are basically good, they don't need a "savior" to deliver them. When they speak of "salvation" they mean making the world a better place.
- 7) *Heaven, Hell and the Afterlife:* Most UUs deny the afterlife, and focus their efforts on the here and now, in an attempt to create "heaven on earth" - often through political activism or social programs. UUs reject the resurrection of the body as scientifically impossible. They reject the

doctrine of hell and a time of future judgment. UUs believe people experience “hell” right here on earth as the consequence of deeds they do.

Recent Developments:

Humanism is diminishing in importance since the 1990s, and ‘spiritual concern’ is becoming more prominent. It is supposed “baby boomers” are the reason, as they seek ‘the spirit from whatever source.’ Earlier the UUs voted themselves out of Christendom and declared they were no longer a Christian denomination, but an inter-faith association.

Influences within the UUA:

Neo-paganism- includes the study and practice of contemporary pagan, earth and nature centered spirituality.

Radical feminism-that would include Goddess religions, matriarchy and the idea that the earth is a goddess.

Wicca- some priestesses have been accepted into UU seminaries.

Some UUs are using the terms “good news” or “saving message” in reference to their message. Their message is “a safe place to wage our heresy, whatever tradition we may have come from.”

UUs are actively courting the ‘baby boomers’, as their ‘openness to different family forms, deep antiauthoritarianism and egalitarian sex roles’ fit the boomers well.

A few quotes of interest:

“Unitarianism is a system of denials, and under its teaching the foundation of Christianity has fallen away.” Dr. Lyman Beecher

“The mass of people in Boston are more unsettled in their religious convictions than any other place I have labored in; they are a very intelligent people on all questions but that of religion. They deny almost everything and affirm almost nothing.” Charles Finney

“John Calvin is to blame for the idea of an authoritative Bible. He was originally a lawyer, and interpreted the Bible as if it were a book of law, infallibly and equally authoritative in all its parts. Luther considered not the Bible but Christ as the Word of God.” Charles Clayton Morrison

“As preached in our Protestant churches the Trinity has often been little more than a mathematical formula about three being one and one three. Let it be said to the credit of the early fathers who introduced the church to the philosophical treatment of the Trinity, that they did not deal in such arithmetical absurdity as has characterized our modern pulpits. The trinity that matters is the Trinity of experience.” H.E. Fosdick

“God is the work of human nature, imagination and will.” John Dewey

“Christ is essentially no more divine than we are or nature is.” A.C. McGiffert

“In vain we lift our eyes to the distant Heavens; in vain we turn to the printed page: for us no revelation from above, no revelation from beyond. And then, turning back in our unveiling search we turn within and there we find the light that lighteth every man that cometh onto the earth. Finding truth in our minds and justice in our hearts we have found our lights following their leadings, we are in the way of Eternal Life.” F.S.C. Wicks

“I do not believe in the physical return of Jesus.” H.D. Fosdick

UUs target Evangelism: Rev Scott Alexander, minister of a 2000 member church in Boston, published *Salted with Fire: Unitarian Universalist Strategies for Sharing Faith and Growing Congregations* in 1995- it is a guide presenting militant expansion through evangelism. Fueling their outreach is vigorous opposition to ‘the religious right.’ They apply evangelical church growth techniques with little adaptation.

UUs also use the mainstream press to get their message across, since both are supportive of left wing causes.

Why bother With the Unitarians?

They pose a greater societal danger than former UUs who held to a vestige of Judeo-Christian heritage. (Why is this dangerous?)

Multicultural pluralism further weakens the country’s moral base. (So what?)

The lack of common ground makes witnessing to a UU difficult, since nothing is given.

Sources:

Kingdom of the Cults, by Dr. Walter Martin

Chaos of the Cults, by Rev. J.K. Van Baalen