

HOW I FOUND LIBERAL RELIGION
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I suppose that maybe 5% of our congregation were brought up in the UU tradition, and all the rest of us have discovered this way of religion, and made a deliberate choice. Each of us have a story of this discovery.

I encountered the liberal religious tradition during my sophomore year in college, in 1949. I happened to attend Tufts College in Medford, Mass., where I met some theological students. That was my downfall.

At that time many of the Universalist churches used a statement of beliefs which had been developed in 1935. It went this way:

We avow our faith
In God as eternal and all-conquering love,
In the spiritual leadership of Jesus,
In the supreme worth of every human personality,
In the authority of truth known or to be known,
And in the power of men of good will and sacrificial spirit
to overcome all evil, and progressively establish the
kingdom of God.

There were some things in this statement which grabbed me, and there were some of less interest to me.

The beginning went **We avow our faith: In God** .. I have never been a big fan of God. Nowadays I can use the word God as a poetic metaphor, but as a conscious knowing and directing power in the universe I am still not yet convinced.

but the rest of the sentence was more positive:
God as eternal and all-conquering love,
though I am not so sure about "eternity", "all-conquering love" is a wonderful concept, and has been a strong theme in my studies of Martin Luther King and Gandhi.

The next statement was **We avow our faith In the spiritual leadership of Jesus,**
I liked that Jesus was not being presented as a savior, or the everlasting Christ, but a human being, who made a lot of mistakes like all of us, and his power did not come from unique divine perfection; his leadership was grounded in his human character and human wisdom.

The third clause was **We avow our faith In the supreme worth of every human personality.** I liked that. The worth of all of us, every human.

These three clauses regarding God and Jesus and human nature were not the creeds I had heard in the Episcopal Church of my childhood, the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. In those

creeds God is the holy Trinity, Jesus is the everlasting Christ, and all humans are tainted by original sin.

But the clause which really captured me was the fourth one: We avow our faith **In the authority of truth known or to be known, Truth.** Truth from whatever source: experience, research, study. The authority of truth, and the capstone for me was the phrase "known or to be known". The human race will be learning as long as we can exist as a species. Science and religion can shake hands. Truth is greater than the scriptures, which cannot be infallible. Yes, I said, that's the religion I'd like to have, if I had a religion.

And I did go into the theological program, much to the astonishment of my family, and I preached for a number of years, even sometimes teaching in theological schools, one of them being at Shaw University.

Then the last clause, We avow our faith **in the power of men of good will and sacrificial spirit to overcome all evil, and progressively establish the kingdom of God.**

the power of men of good will and sacrificial spirit
(of course, this was before women had been invented)
to establish the Kingdom of God

(which ought to be a democracy of all living beings).
The phrase Kingdom of God was a replacement for a heaven of everlasting life. Everlasting? No thanks.

But "to overcome all evil" -- I don't expect we will accomplish this in the next few years, but we do have to direct our energies to "overcome all evil" and that is what a church should be about.

So that's how I got here, and I haven't changed very much since then.

August 2, 1998