

U.U's and the Democratic Process

Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship of La Crosse, WI, Kathleen Thomson, December, 2013

Candle lighting and the opening words:

"The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large." Unitarian Universalism's Seven Guiding Principles

Check In: What are your concerns or feelings today?

Focus:

Intellectual freedom and democratic action are closely linked as fundamental concepts underlying Unitarian and Universalist churches today. Michael Servetus is one of our best known heroes of conscience. In 1531, he published a scholarly book "On the Errors of the Trinity" and this raised so much controversy that he was basically condemned over the next twenty years as a "hunted heretic". As a prisoner of John Calvin in Geneva, he was burned to the stake in 1553. But his ideas survived and his witness to freedom of conscience stands as an important symbol associated with U.U. principles today.

The exercise of freedom of conscience naturally elicits a great variety of ideas, opinions and attitudes. The clash of diversity can erupt strong dissent among members of a Unitarian Universalist congregation. So what holds us together while assuring freedom of thought? According to a contemporary religious leader, Angus H. MacLean , "The method is the message".

"Our message is not facts, not a creed, not a particularly book, not a particular Messiah. It is a way and a method by which a child and the adult are helped to grow in self-understanding, and in the understanding of others and in the full relationship of his universe."

I would infer that the method for unifying Unitarian Universalist members is the recognition and application of the democratic process.

Questions for a Discussion

1. Unitarian Universalist churches do not require persons to subscribe to a creed as a qualification for membership. Would you object to extending membership to those who are hostile to persons of certain racial or ethnic origins? What about membership to persons whose religious outlook prompts them to deny the validity of evolution, climate change and other scientific findings?
2. Our denomination is organized on a regional and national level--not state by state. Considering that UU's consider the democratic process so important to achieve ends, should Unitarian Universalist churches (or their members) become more involved in state level action such as opposing picture ID requirements for voting, and restrictions on registration, voting places and hours?

3. Some people have concluded that single issues such as abortion, gay marriage, creationism, and second amendment gun rights distinguishes the current political landscape from the past. But the most important single issue ever to confront America was slavery and that propelled us into civil war. Today, as a voter, would you support and cast your vote for candidates on the basis of their stand on a particular issue (or issues)?

4. In these days of excessive negative political discourse, are you turned off from participating in political action? How do you retain a measure of equanimity in order to maintain an incentive to advance your policy choices and causes?

Closing Words

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair
And having perhaps the better claim
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that made all the difference.

Robert Frost, 1916