

The next Step for Our Unitarian Churches.

This portion of the Conference program arose out of the considerations of a Committee on Publicity , so-called, to which Mr. Savage and I were appointed among others . As we worked over the problem, two or three ideas came to the surface as of primary importance. In such unstable times as the present, we felt that we ought to consider, in the light of our past, and in view of current trends, what our assets are and what our main purpose ought to be. Then we feel that we ought to consider ~~by~~ the ~~what~~ methods we may make use of in attempting to attain our purposes.

My share in this program, quite accidentally, is to state what our main assets are, and what our main purpose ought to be. I am not forgetting our secondary assets in the form of organizations, churches, funds, ~~followers~~ adherents, and momentum, but I

by primary assets I mean those fundamental principles, those intellectual methods, those high purposes which have created our secondary assets, and , may I add, will continue to be as they have been in the past the ^{assurance} ~~measure~~ of our success as we press on in our work.

Simple -

Althaus

It is quite the fashion at the moment to poke fun at religion; to belittle the Churches and their influence ; and especially to speak of the Puritan and of Puritan New England with a sneer. I regret to ~~say~~ record that many, ~~sometimes even ministers,~~ who enjoy , and frequently abuse the freedom won for them by sturdy ancestors, join in the chorus of ridicule. Let them hang their heads in shame as they thus betray not alone their shallowness but their ignorance.

For the moment let us remind ourselves of one or two facts and factors in that back ground out of which we have come. The migration of ~~the~~ both the Pligrim and the Puritan to the shores of this New World was not merely a change in physical environment, but, quite as much, was it the registration of a chnage in social , political, intellectual, and spiritual outlook. In that change, certainly one of the most momentous

in a thousand years, we find the leadership in the hands of men of intellectual acumen, and moral courage,- men of fibre and virility. Let it be recalled that , while our political independence from the old world regime was delayed until 1776, the Pilgrims of Plymouth severed their connection with the "Historic Episcopate" in 1606 at Scrooby; and the Puritans *at Salem* on that July day ~~in 16~~ when three or four laymen laid their hands upon Francis Higginson and Samual Skelton , and ordained them preacher and teacher respectively of the Congregationally ordered Church at Salem they were breaking with a Christian practise and ttrdition that had held sway in our western world for at least 1400 years. The Congregational Order~~was~~ was then and there started on its career. It was an evdt of the first magnitude.

But on that very day, ^{two} there was^{he} born in Salem, the two parties, later to be known as Othodox andx liberal, around whose conflicts the history of religion in New England has been written, ~~xThe conservative party~~ even to our own day. The conservative ^{othodox} party relied primarily upon the secondary assets of society, the institutions, the traditions, the conventions, the created and passing products of the spirit. They did not wish to break with the Historic Episcopate, but wanted to reform it, and remain within its pale, subject to its authority.

But also on that day in Salem there were men of the quality and spirit that would have responded to the Challenge that Emerson, two hundred years later, was to hurl at the ministers assembled under the roof of the Harvard Divinity School, * Cast behind you all conformity, and acquaint men at first hand with

with Deity. In so far as we have that quality and capacity to-day we may trace our Unitarian ~~Movement~~ primary assets back to the day when the Salem Church cut loose from "The Historic Episcopate", cast behind ^{it} all confirmity to deal at first hand with reality.

We must not forget that first century of struggle when the ~~conservatives~~ ^{orthodox party} tried to get a stangle hold on the liberties of the churches and their ministers. Nor must we forget that staunch leader of the Liberals of the 18th century, John Wise of Ipswich, who with his parishoners offered the first resistance to Gov. Andros' tax collecting efforts. His Vindication of the 1710, Government of New England Churches is as racy reading as one can ask for, and in 1772 was republished by the Revolutionary party and used ~~xxx~~ as a propaganda pamphlet for the Recolution. Read it. It breathes the very spirit of what he calls "the natural

freedom of human beings " ; and this remarkable utterance: ^{consider} ~~write~~

about 1700.

" Right Reason, that great oracle of human affairs is the soul
of man so formed and endowed by creation, with a certain sagac-
ity or acumen (in many particular examples sharpened by the
constitution of nature, by grace and study) whereby man's
intellect is enabled to take up the true idea or perception
of things agreeable with , and according to their natures."

P It would be well for us to remember as we look back upon the
past out of which we have come that there was something sub-
lime and majestic about that sturdy crowd that ~~transformed~~
left the old world behind, cut free from the Historic Episcopate,
built a new civilization out of the wilderness ; laid the founda-
tions of a new nation "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the
proposition that all men are created free and equal."

At least as we criticize their short comings, and point out their limitations we must have the grace to recognize that the very liberty that permits us to criticize them is a gift from their labor and fidelity. Just how far we, with our luxury loving softness, would be willing to follow such as they were in their time, is probably the final answer to the question that is in our minds to-day.

But out of those two centuries of pioneering ~~hand~~ ship there emerged ~~two~~, dominated by a growing passion for freedom, and, as witnessed by the schools and colleges established, a growing faith in education and enlightenment, - two important facts, - one the new government, ^{the new nation} and the other the ~~concept~~ ^{practice} of a religious fellowship based on freedom. The growing strength of the Liberal Party in 18th century, culminating in the split

in ~~Congregationalism~~ the Congregational Order in the early years of the 19th Century, brings us ~~to~~^{to} almost our immediate background. It is fair to say, I think, that the history of the 19th century in America cannot be written without including the intellectual and spiritual contribution of the Unitarian fellowship. ~~It was~~ Its followers were largely the trail blazers of the Century.

In view of that fact I want to stop for a moment to recall just what were regarded as the primary assets as viewed by the leaders of this liberal party to be known as Unitarian. Channing said "There are times when the assertion of great principles is the best service a man can render society" As he prepared the introductory remarks for his published works he emphasised the point that his writings would be marked by two main characteristics : first by the high esti-

mate which they express for human nature, its achievements, its capacities and its possibilities. The human soul "is an immortal germ , which may be said to contain now within itself what endless ages are to unfold. " Second and an outgrowth of the first,

"I proceed to another sentiment , which is expressed so habitually in these writings as to constitute one of their characteristics, and which is intimately connected with the preceeding topic.

It is reverence for liberty, for human rights--- a sentiment which has grown with my growth, which is striking deeper root in my age, which seems to me a chief element of true love for mankind, and which alone fits a man for intercourse with his fellow-creatures. I have lost no occasion for expressing my deep attachment to liberty in all its forms; civil, political, religious, to liberty of ~~the~~ thought , speech , and the press, and of giving

any abatement of the form of oppression.
utterance to all forms of oppression." -11-

Nor was this just a phrase with him. It was the working principle of his public and private life. Whatever he believed in matters of religion he believed after he had subjected them to every test of investigation and reason. "To gain truth," *he says,* which is the great object of the understanding, I must seek it disinterestedly. Here is the first and grand condition of intellectual progress. I must choose to receive the truth, no matter how it bears on myself. I must follow it, no matter where it leads, what interests it opposes, to what persecution or loss it lays me open, from what party it severs me or ~~from~~ ^{to} what party it allies." *It was his fidelity to this principle that led to the rupture of the Congregational order.*

While the Unitarians of the 19th Century were not all Channings, nor did they all embody his principles to the fullness of their possibilities, yet there were some great laymen

and some strong ministers. They left their imprint on the age in which they lived. They were men of integrity, intellectual power, strong character~~m~~, men of courage and high purpose.

They faced the crises of ~~their~~ their time with buoyant faith, and hard labor. They maintained their faith in the principle of Freedom and turned not back to the "Historic Episcopate". There was the slavery issue; there was the adjustment to the discoveries of science, ^{and what in our time, we call social questions,} the doctrine of evolution. On the whole they came through the ordeal of the 19th century ~~+~~ with honor, and passed on to us ~~the~~ lighted torch of religious freedom; ^{and} the faith that within the human soul are the possibilities that the ages are to unfold.

Brief summary of principles?

The came 1914 and what has followed since the tom-toms began to beat. Volumes have been written to explain, describe , and interpret. There is no point in rehearsing the tale, except perhaps to note that we have been on an international debauch, and that we wake up only to find that we have dissipated much of our wealth, ; we have done many foolish things that we rather forget, but cannot and we have done some things that we do not mention in public. We followed the old patterns that men have always followed when the tom-toms beat. The results also have followed old patterns. We use the words, "humanity up-rooted"; "breakdown of standards"; the crumbling of frail human nature under stress of emotion"; the new age; new moral experiments" and hundreds of others . As a whole we rather lost our nerve and while we are not yet over the jitters, we are , I believe,

beginning to see that we have been on a drunk, and must pay the price of our folly. That is hopeful.

One other thing is hopeful. Amid all the social and political shiftings from right to left, and left to right and back again, we must not overlook the fact that the little old method of investigation and discovery~~max~~, the method of the scientist, the method of freedom of thought, the method which we have been trying to apply to the problems of religion ^{for these 300 years} has been slowly, but irresistably finding its way into the very fore-front of all the great political, industrial, and social problems with which we are faced. The great two volume survey under President Hoover's administration, Social Trends is witness to what I have said. The so-called Brain Trust of the present administration is but a continuation of that very idea. That is the one constructive idea

that has found and will continue more and more to find its way into the political and social thought and practise. There may be spasms for and of dictators little and big, right, left, or in the middle. but the method of freedom, investigation, and discovery is to have its day.

So, too, in the field of religion. There will be hoards for various and sundry reasons, mostly because of the jitters, ~~who~~ ^{into} will turn their face back towards the historic episcopate; there will be, as there have been, plenty of wild and untutored ~~mystics~~ persons who will follow strange and new religious leaders, Amee Simple Macpherson; The Buchmanites, or whatever they are called are current illustrations.

But the fact remains that however hungry people may be for spiritual satisfaction we must conclude that all the

literature as well as the practical boycott of institutional religion by hoards of people indicate that the old pastures are no longer acceptable feeding grounds. VanWyke Brooks says that one day while returning from Church with his father after having listened to a powerful Calvinistic sermon by Dr. Hopkins, a boy named Channing suddenly began to whistle. That Whistle spelled the end of Calvinism, says Brooks, if people had only known it. Thumbs down said the youthful Channing. Thumbs down, we are saying in our time, upon the whole of system of Revelation-Authority- and obedience. That has had its day. ~~It belonged to the Divine right of kings and~~. Freedom, fellow-ship and integrity, that system and method, in the world of religion is to have its day. It has been a faithful and reliable guide in our journey from the strong walled city of the middle ages.

That method of freedom and fellowship , and integrity now faces the test as to whether we can all our kind the world over can develop a constructive religious life in the soil of the modern world.

The task is not~~x~~ easy. There are hazards, pifalls and dangers. But the age seems to say to our time,- Cast behind you all conformity, and acquaint men at first hand with deity.

But here is the story. Where does it land us ? I said a while ago that the scientist, as he sits in his labratory, takes it for granted that the world he is studying behaves according tp some process that he can discover, and that he himself has some ability to make that discovery, to learn what is going on about him. Everything that~~x~~ he does seems to tell him that he is right.

His reults and labors cpnfirm

sults confirm the wisdom of that attitude. The returns are not all in. We have learned something by our method of discovery, - enough to indicate that that is the kind of a world that we live in, and that we are made to discover its secrets. We are on the right road. "Ask and ye shall receive ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." So the great quest is on. Prove all things, Hold fast to that which is proved.

But here is the rub. Some things seem to me proved, to be true ; others seem probable ; and still others just possibilities. Just how far each one of us , or ~~an~~ generation , may go in accepting some things as proved, and other things as possibilities depends on ^{many} ~~xxxxx~~ factors. But from the point of view of religion it is right here in this process of discovery that we come upon the quest for God, and the story of the evolution of beliefs about God. Always they are our attempts to answer the

question that comes pounding in upon our ~~in~~quiring minds from all parts of time and space. The universe seems to be saying to us all the time, "Tell me, O man, have you discovered completely my secret ? Do you know my inmost character ? Do you know how I behave and why ? Do you find the reason for my being and yours ? Do you detect the presense of purpose in me ? Can you tell me, O Man, ~~who~~ that strange feeling of awe and reverence steals over when you look forth from quiet corner upon the night of circleing planets singing on their way ? Can you tell me why the shivers run through your nervous system, and you life your voice to cheer as one ~~may~~ man lays down his life for another ? "

When the world has asked me these questions I am not disturbed if I meet someone who is too cautious to carry his certainties as far as I do, or who questions the ~~possibilities~~ that

possible answers that I think may be forthcoming from our great adventure of living. Nor am I disturbed if I cannot go as far as my neighbor. Our differences are not the occasion for a quarrel, the breaking of fellowship, but the occasion for a closer and more painstaking quest together. I stake my life on these two things, that we live in a world of integrity, that there is an answer to the questions that the world asks us, and that we ask of the world ; and second that in freedom and fellowship we make our way in the great adventure. They are the root and foundation of all faith and living.

But all that is too vague, you say. It is not concrete a definite enough for this age. What are you going to do about those concrete things that you call secondary assets : the concrete beliefs, the traditions, the customs, the individual

churches, the associations , the funds ? My answer is that they are just the concrete and definite finite realities in which this faith, attitude, and method that I have spoken of above must work, and must express itself. I these days of up-rooted persons, and ~~challenging~~ uprooted institutions, ~~I know no greater~~ of casualness and looseness of conduct, of uncertainty , I know of no greater asset than the presense of a person who takes life on a high plane, who, even though he may never make public declaration, displays by his life that he ~~has secretly~~ has secretly pledged his life to the highest goal of love and honor and truth. one who moves among his fellows , neither slave nor domineering master , whose word is as good as his bond, and whose bond is backed by real assets. How we look for such in troubled times ? How inquiring youth seeks among us in search of just those

qualities,- self-respect, respect for another, and integrity.

When such people join themselves together in Churches there the spirit of the living God broods ; there man meets man at his best ; there is life and inspirations ; there is vitality, purpose, Fortunate is the community that nurtures within its confines just such a fellowship, that may and does hold high the standard of freedom, fellowship, and integrity. Fortunate the nation that has ~~xxx~~ has such groups scattered ~~through~~ ~~ixixix~~ its extent. Fortunate the youth that grows up in such a midst. That we may have in our midst such persons, that we may maintain that high standard in our churches and societies, and carry its spirit through the life and activities of our organizations, into the pulsating restless life of to-day, and the into the to-morrow and the day after to-morrow , that is our reasonable

service. Fidelity to those high standards in the concrete realities of living is a reasonable attempt on our part to pay a small portion of the debt which we owe to the past, and the obligation that we owe to the future.

Thus far this principle has brought us out of the strange and tumultuous past, creating, modifying, and discarding, leaving behind those things that are transitory, and holding to the elements that are permanent. To its faithful operation in our hands let us commend ourselves. The task is not easy; the dangers of liberty are not to be overlooked. The current tendency towards dictatorship and authority both in government and religion are in part a reaction against the abuses of freedom. It has been so easy to take all the immediate advantages that freedom offers, and forget all the obliga-

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tions that are involved. It is not an irresponsible freedom from authority to which we are called; far from it ; It is a freedom for truth, for investigation , for discovery, and above all for unfailing integrity.

One of the astonishing facts concerning the events of the past few years has been the lack of knowledge, the lack of wisdom , the lack of insight displayed by men in high places, as well as men in ordinary pursuits. How dismayed we have been to discover men in positions of trust acting with a duplicity and a lack of integrity that has amounted to moral turpitude. Abigail Adams charged her husband, John Adams as he was carrying the heavy burden of the Revolutionary days , - "Take as good care of yourself as is consistent with your public duties." That was true freedom. Its a wise and disinterested, responsible freedom that the age

demands of men . This is not a hundred yard dash that we are facing in our present day, speedy though we may think ourselves. Its a long journey, a century long . Wisdom , knowledge, and patience.

But ~~me~~ more Quality, Oh, above all else ? Integrity. Channing could ~~not~~ whistle at Samuel Hopkins doctrines, and turn thumbs down on ~~a~~ Calvinism, but out of the absolute honesty, courage, and integrity that he ~~deceit~~ed in the person of Hopkins he reconstructed ~~the~~ thought of an age, and brought forth principles that are timeless.

This then as I see it, is the next step for our Unitarian Churches. As the puritans at Salem left behind them the Historic Episcopate, and trusted to the new Order, ~~s~~ Channing and his day left behind them Calvinism, and followed truth in the fellowship

of freedom, so may we leave behind the last vantage of that
system; revelation, authority, and obedience, and trust the light
of the torch ~~handed down~~ held out for us to grasp and carry forward?
Investigation, discovery, and integrity. Would that we/might become
as individuals
so saturated with the spirit of discovery, investigation and
integrity, that every last one of our Churches, our institutions
our organizations might glow with the light and power that shall
discover the answers that a disillusioned age is asking. That is
not alone our next step, It is our long journey.

" I would rather work in stubborn rock

All the years of my life;

And make one strong thing

And set it in a high clean place,

To recall the granite strength of my desire.

Jean Untermeyer.