

READING FOR THE NEXT SESSION

We have been on a long and arduous pilgrimage through the jungles of theology. We have suggested that theology is the reflection on religion—that core of meanings, values, and convictions out of which we live our lives. We have considered the proposition that religious education is that life-span process of growing those meanings, values, and convictions.

We have reviewed Unitarian Universalist theology at three levels:

- Operational principles—the methods by which we do theology in religious community—our purposes and principles
- The menu of diverse theologies that tempts our palates
- Credo making—that we are obliged as free souls to build our own theology out of these meanings, values, and convictions

This three-part understanding of Unitarian Universalism constitutes a framework for life-span religious education. It is open-ended, grows out of our own experience, and provides choices; it involves the serious study of today's religious options; and it requires the ongoing work of building one's own theology. James Luther Adams, noted Unitarian Universalist minister and scholar, speaks of the "pragmatic theory of meaning." By this he means that beliefs have meaning only insofar as they are embodied in life, particularly in the life of institutions. What, then, are the imperatives of our theology?

Some possibilities are as follows:

- To develop a disciplined program of meditation or devotional exercises in keeping with our theological position
- To teach religion to our children in both a formal and informal sense
- To increase involvement with the local congregation in ways that deepen its religious meaning for ourselves and for others
- To inaugurate involvement in at least one voluntary association devoted to the quest for social justice

The question is can we Unitarian Universalists, with our vaunted and cherished freedom, experience the enthusiasm of fundamentalists, who so dominate our world, while preserving the rationality of liberal religion? Do we have the vision and the will and the stamina to take our free faith into the next millennium?

In a church newsletter about their fortieth celebration, the Unitarian Universalists of San Mateo, California, had an amusing confusion of syntax. The newsletter asked its members to "turn toward the future as we pack time capsules with our current church children." That is not what we want to do, as much as they might be eager to go. But we do need to realize that we are always one generation from extinction. That is a thought to greatly concentrate the mind. We need a convictional theology for ourselves and to pass on our passions to those who follow.