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LIBERATING HUMOR IN THE PRESENT-DAY UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST PULPIT

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

We understand who we are and what is around us by concepts. Such concepts are "lenses" through which our being and our activity are defined. But sometimes we see ourselves and what is around us in ways which are determined by what can be called "restricting concepts." Such concepts limit life, our appreciation of it, our contribution to it, and our participation in it.

Although we may never escape all of our restricting concepts, they can be altered or transformed so life may be "lived more abundantly," and so our appreciation for and our relationships with self, others, the sacred, and life may grow and become greater. What is required is a three-fold process: the restricting concepts must be identified and dislodged, an alternative is presented through awareness of "worlds of possibility," and, finally, new concepts (hopefully concepts which lead to a greater understanding) become a part of an individual's relationship with reality. In short, there must be a liberation, a freedom, and a rebinding for growth to occur.

This is a task religion should take on, though, certainly, it is a task taken on by many secular institutions. It is the goal of every sermon which strives to give the gift of freedom over whatever tyrannies bind the human spirit, to give the gift of worlds of possibility, and to help bind a community of faith. This thesis will explore how such a transformation may occur, and, specifically, how humor may help in this transformation.

In an essay called "Preaching as a Sacramental Event," Roy Phillips describes three primary, but not wholly distinct, intentions of preaching: edification, motivation, and liberation. It is the third of these intentions which interests Phillips most because he sees preaching as an attempt "to lead persons toward an exodus from their unfreedom and toward a resurrection up from their unaliveness."[1]

Two questions arise: From what are we to be liberated? and What happens after we are liberated? Phillips answers that preaching seeks to "stir up and break open the restricting images to liberate people, to cause to be released in them energies which because of their narrowness of their image of the world had been locked up in their subconscious."[2] When one is locked up in, or bound to these "restricting images," one is trapped within a world that is, or seems to be, determined by life-negating forces. What is needed in the face of these restricting concepts and these life-negating forces is a freeing of the imagination, an opening of possible choices, and an awareness of newer, wider, and greater ways of perceiving self, others, the sacred, and life.

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[1] Roy D. Phillips, "Preaching as a Sacramental Event," from Transforming Words: Six Essays on Preaching, William F. Schulz, ed., (Boston: Skinner House, 1984), p. 24. This chapter of my thesis will use four of the six essays from this book in order to indicate some of the most recent writing concerning Unitarian Universalist preaching.

[2] Ibid., p. 30.

This essay appears in Transforming Words: Six Essays on Preaching which was edited by William Schulz. In the Introduction to this book, Schulz explains his choice of title. He chose "transforming words" for two reasons. First, the words themselves are transformed in preaching. They are the same words used in secular settings, but in the sermon they become words with sacred meanings. They are transformed from "the vernacular into the service of the holy."[3] Second, Schulz chose "transforming words" to describe the effect of the words on the preacher, the congregation, and the world.

Schulz's views are continued in his own contribution to the book. In his essay he tries to establish criteria for "great preaching." To Schulz, sermons should be authentic, true, evocative, and transforming. They should be authentic in that the preacher should know the problems he or she is addressing intimately. They must be known in the preacher's heart.[4]

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[3] William F. Schulz, Transforming Words, p. xv.

[4] William F. Schulz, "Mirrors Never Lie?", Transforming Words, p. 42.

A sermon should be true in two ways, according to Schulz. First, a sermon should be "a tapestry drawn from tradition, memory, conversations long forgotten, candor, courtesy, pain and passion, fresh insight and metaphor, but all united around some common theme, some base conviction, some urgent message, some thread of faith. . . ." Second, a sermon is true if it weaves "an elaborate web between the preacher, the congregation and profundity such that all three are caught up in a kind of whole-some pattern. . . ."[5]

The next criterion is that a sermon should be evocative of a reality beyond ordinary life:

> /The sermon is/ to kindle in the people a sense of freedom long discarded, of loves and sorrows too soon displaced. It is . . . to disclose a miracle amid the banal, to save the epiphanous from the mundane.[6]

Schulz's conception of transformation focuses mostly on the liberating part of transformation. But it seems to imply a restructuring wherein the individual gains wider perspective and greater understanding. In the transformation process, an individual may find previously held biases, presuppositions, and perceptions challenged, criticized, and discarded. There is an experience of freedom relatable to the concept of liberation of Phillips. But Schulz points out there are better ways of seeing things available through transformation:

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[5] Ibid., p. 45.

[6] Ibid., pp. 46-47.

> No sermon alone can redeem a battered life or repair a shattered world, but it can surely signal the direction. . . . The preacher's job is to awaken the people's vision of that better way to be and to make more available to them the means to get there. The people's responsibility in return is to make a decision whether to deny that vision and that power or to make them manifest in a renewal of faith or witness or integrity. A transforming sermon always offers the assurance that the margins are wider than we think; that the world, even in its agony, retains an option; that a person, even facing death can seal a triumph.[7]

Schulz's inclusion of the people's responsibility is an important addition to Phillips's concept of liberation. Eloquently, Schulz points out that there is work to be done on both sides of the pulpit. A member of the congregation is not merely a passive listener. Choices are to be made as to how the message of the sermon relates to his or her own life. Restricting concepts can create isolation and despair. Before hope can occur, these concepts must be shed. They must fall away to reveal a world of possibility.

Joyce Smith's essay, "The Wizardry of Words: Preaching and Personal Transformation," is an attempt to identify "climates" in which transformation may occur. She identifies two ways a transformation begins: new experiences and new understandings and interpretations of experiences.[8] It is the latter to which she dedicates the major part of her essay:

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[7] Ibid., p. 47.

[8] Joyce Smith, "The Wizardry of Words: Preaching and Personal Transformation," Transforming Words, p. 56.

> The major function of the sermon is to change the understanding of, or symbolized meaning of, our experience; the pictures in our head which tell us how we can interpret reality and how we should act as a result.[9]

Smith's contribution to how we might understand liberation from those "pictures in our head" is her emphasis on how the liberation will affect one's behavior as well as one's relationships to self, others, the sacred, and life. The liberation informs our actions (what we do) as well as our relations (who we are.) The definition of who an individual is is expanded beyond definition in terms of relationships so that it includes what roles we play, what actions we make, and in what political and social causes we participate.

Smith also explores the idea that the best chance for change lies in the broadening of choices. Using the work of Leslie Cameron-Bandler, Smith writes of "three kinds of abstractions which we use to form our road maps but which may become too retrictive."[10] The first abstraction is generalization. For example, generalizing the concept of God as Father limits the ability of feminists to seek out identification with divine power. The second abstraction is deletion as when our eyes and ears close up when we see suffering or hear cries of pain. The third abstraction is distortion. Some distortion is impossible to escape, but Smith claims distortion can be channelled by the use of correctives. She claims that the correct handling of these abstractions is an important task of preaching:

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[9] Ibid., pp. 56-57.

[10] Ibid., p. 62.

> Ultimately, we change people by restructuring their stories, by broadening their abstractions with new understandings and new road maps. But perhaps what people come to church to find most of all is another reality, one which is quite different from the one they think they already know. [11]

Judith Hoehler, in "The Preacher as Prophet," identifies the function of preaching as bringing about change. To her, these changes concern attitudes and behavior (as they do for Smith) and it is the purpose of preacher as prophet to transform attitudes and behavior so they conform to a vision of the future that is consistent with past tradition and present experience:

> /The/ prophet attacks present behavior because it distorts, perverts what a group holds as fundamental religious truth. The prophet attacks present practice not merely as intellectual error, not on the level of new truth supplanting old ignorance. Rather the prophet attacks present unjust practice as idolatry, as blasphemy, as perversion of the fundamental truth commonly professed by a gathered religious community. [12]

What Hoehler contributes to understanding liberation is two-fold. First, in addition to claiming the preacher's task involves motivation of behavior as well as recognition of relationships as part of liberation, she suggests the dislodging of old, unjust practices by a religious community or members of that community must lead to a reaffirmation of the "fundamental truth commonly professed" by that community. The restructuring after liberation is affirmed not only by the individual, but also by the community. This affirmation helps give the community identity.

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[11] Ibid., p. 64.

[12] Judith L. Hoehler, "The Preacher as Prophet," from Transforming Words, p. 80.

The second contribution of Hoehler's is the inclusion of what David Tracy might call a "radical qualifier." Although she stops short of calling what the preacher-prophet attacks as sin, she refers to the preacher-prophet's targets as idolatry, blasphemy and perversion of fundamental truth. Thus Hoehler suggests liberation from restricting concepts is of ultimate importance to an authentic community.

The essays mentioned above demonstrate that liberation of some sort is needed in the face of what I have been calling restricting concepts. This liberation is necessary for the growth of an individual and the sustenance of a community. The broadening of choices, the awareness of a world beyond: this is the realm of the imagination. What is liberated is the imagination. William Lynch writes:

> God didn't create an either-or world. What is needed for hope is a recovery of the imagination that envisions what cannot yet be seen . . . /and/ constantly proposes to itself that the boundaries of the possible are wider than they seem.[13]

The process involved in this liberation is more than merely freeing the imagination for there also must be a restructuring, a "de-liberation." And if a preacher is to do the job properly, that restructuring must involve an affirmation of identity and the adoption of new and wider ways of perceiving, understanding, or apprehending self, others, the sacred, and life.

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[13] This quote is found in Peter Weller, "Toward a Theology of Hope for Liberal Religion," a paper presented for discussion at UU Collegium, October, 1984, p. 8.

Members of the congregation must not be passive in this process. They have a responsibility to ask themselves how the sermon's message speaks to them, if the message is important enough to change their lives, and how the message can change their lives.

The liberating sermon can be of ultimate importance to a religious community. Through its deformation, the exercising of the imagination and its restructuring and affirmation, it can become the source of a community's sense of identity.

If this is what a sermon is to do, what are the avenues by which it may be done? Undoubtedly, there are many such avenues, but there is one which has become more and more popular among preachers of the past few decades: humor.

Henry Ward Beecher once said that the sacred mission of humor is to keep the congregation awake on Sunday mornings. In this thesis I will attempt to show that humor serves more than just this one sacred mission. Humor can open not only ears, but also minds, hearts, and souls of the community. G. K. Chesterton once went so far as to say "the religion of the future will be based, to considerable extent, on a more highly developed and differentiated, subtle form of humor."[14] While that is impossible to prove, it is possible to construct a functional definition of humor which shows how humor in the pulpit can liberate members of the congregation and "recover" the imagination which "envisions what cannot yet be seen," and how humor can lead to restructuring wider and more open understandings and perceptions of self, others, the sacred, and life. Before I construct this functional definition, however, it is important to understand what kinds of restricting concepts we may be liberated from through humor.

Restricting Concepts of Self

Restricting concepts of self, our neuroses and psychoses, can blind us to available options and possibilities. Harvey Mindess, in Laughter and Liberation, relates a situation in which he, as a psychologist, was trying to help a woman who was suffering from depression and anxiety. "My problem is simple," she said, "I'm a total mess." Mindess then explains that the laughter they shared after her remark helped her get a perspective on her life, a "god's eye view."[15]

One's view of oneself is always distorted. It is deflated or inflated, secure or tormented, assuring or doubting, free or bound. The effect of these distortions can be far-reaching and profound, or relatively unimportant. But the conglomeration of these distortions, the constellation of restricting concepts, is a lens through which one views oneself.

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[14] This quote appears in Konrad Lorenz, On Aggression, Marjorie Kerr Wilson, trans., (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), p. 293.

[15] Harvey Mindess, Laughter and Liberation, (Los Angeles: Nash Publishing Company, 1971), p. 29.

Psychoanalysis and therapy are designed to locate, dislodge, and replace destructive and unwealthy restricting concepts of self. The underlying bias of these disciplines is that such concepts are bad because they stagnate the growth of the individual. Health is measured by the amount of growth that occurs after such concepts are supplanted, overcome, or dispatched. Thus much of the work of these disciplines carries at least an implicit understanding of perfect health, that is, when one is free of all restricting concepts. Of course, many analysts and therapists recognize this bias, but always there is the task of making the patient "better," and better usually implies a best. Mindess writes:

> In the most fundamental sense, /humor/ offers us a release from our stabilizing systems, escape from our self-imposed prisons. Every instance of laughter is an instance of liberation from our controls.[16]

The liberation of humor from our restricting concepts of self does not aim for an idealized self. Rather, humor offers us the realization that as a human being, one is contingent and finite. One does not need an idealized self or infinite perfection to compare oneself with in humor. Below, in Chapter II, we shall see that many theories of humor do insist that incongruity between the finite and the infinite is the basis of profound humor. But the humor which proceeds from a liberation of restricting concepts of self needs only an awareness of the restricting concepts. It sometimes requires a distancing, but not always.

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[16] Ibid., p. 23.

What humor always needs is a love of self. I mean here not a neurotic vanity or narcissicism, but a deep love, a profound caring and affection wherein there is enough security to allow a letting go of restricting concepts. With the restructuring of concepts of self, it is hoped that the changeling is better off. The analysis of examples of pulpit humor in Chapter IV will help determine ways to make the restructuring positive.

Restricting Concepts of Others

At least one aspect of restricting concepts of others is restricting concepts in a one to one relationship. In every relationship, whether loving or hostile, intimate or distanced, each person has preconceived ideas of who and what the other is, of what they want and what they need. These preconceived ideas come from prior experience -- remembered events and lessons and dreams and hopes for the future. Gaston Bachelard, whose work will be explored in Chapter II, writes of these preconceived ideas and how important they are to the experience of love:

> The reveries of two solitary souls prepare the sweetness of loving. A realist of passion will see nothing there but evanescent formulas. But just the same it is no less true that great passions are prepared by great reveries. The reality of love is mutilated where it is detached from all its unrealness.[17]

Continuing with the example of love relationships, it is possible to say that one's preconceived ideas of what love is, of what the other is like, and of one's own responses and responsibilities are must match or connect with the preconceived ideas of the other. These ideas then can become the avenue through which intimacy can be shared on many different levels -- the more levels through which lovers are intimate, the stronger the relationship. These levels might be the levels of hopes, thoughts, dreams, joy, grief, views of life, and erotic love. But when the preconceived ideas are not matched or connected, the relationship has no psychic base.

As with restricting concepts of self, restricting concepts of others may be dislodged. After being dislodged, the reveries, as Bachelard would call them, can be re-dreamed, but re-dreaming cannot occur until the earlier restricting concepts are dislodged.

The same is true with restricting concepts between self and groups. Such restricting concepts can lead to such evils as ultra-nationalism, racism, sexism, and classism.

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[17] Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Reverie, Daniel Russell, trans., (New York: Orion Press, 1969), p. 8.

Analysis of these restricting concepts vary widely and they are analyzed from points of view determined by biases. A Marxist will view classism as the natural result of capitalistic exploitation. A teacher will blame ignorance for ultra-nationalism and offer education as the means to right the wrong. A sociologist will see racism as a result of societal mores and traditions and the society's particular dynamics. And he or she will make suggestions for changes within the societal framework to fight racism.

What would a humorist do? These problems are so serious that one is tempted not to "joke about them." But if humor can provide liberation from restricting concepts of others, it is possible that the restructuring can provide a corrective for these problems. Some humor, of course, can reinforce negative stereotypes, as is the case with ethnic humor. Other humor, however, can restructure ideas concerning ethnic groups in order to reinforce not a sense of differences, but a sense of commonality.

Arnold Toynbee writes of restricting concepts of others as the result of an innate desire of an individual to "be at the center of the universe." To Toynbee, one regards oneself as more important than anyone or anything else, and, to use Martin Buber's terminology, one conceives of everything else as in an I-it relationship. Such restricting concepts make it difficult for any I-Thou relationship to develop:

> . . . every living creature is striving to make itself into a centre of the Universe and in the act, is entering

> into a rivalry with every other living creature. . . . Self-centeredness is thus a necessity of Life, but this necessity is also a sin. Self-centeredness is an intellectual error because no living creature is in truth the centre of the Universe; and it is also a moral error because no living creature has a right to act as if he were the centre of the Universe.[18]

If Toynbee is right and the restricting concepts of the self in relation to others are based on rivalry, and if these concepts are guilty of intellectual as well as moral error, then correction is possible through liberation from these concepts, and, therefore, from the rivalry. Humor can provide this liberation and offer a restructuring that teaches the lessons of democracy and humility.

But Toynbee suggests another "set" of others of which human beings occasionally have restricting concepts. He speaks of the universe, and this suggests more than the human world. Our restricting concepts of the earth may come in the form of seeing it as an object over which we have dominion. Such restricting concepts lead to disregard for the environment and to an ecology ethic based on our fighting to control and subjugate nature. Humor may be capable of restructuring concepts which emphasize a better understanding of and regard for the earth. They may help us to see the earth not as a subjugated servant, but as a partner with whom we must cooperate if we are not to kill it and ourselves.

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[18] Arnold Toynbee, A Historian's View of Religion, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 4-5.

Another set of restricting concepts of things are the ways we see technology. Technology has been a helpful tool for humanity. While it has hurt the environment and while it has allowed us produce tools of mass destruction, it also has allowed us to make valuable and substantial achievements. But often technology is seen almost as a new Savior. Often men and women see the tools we have developed as means to answer most, if not all, of humanity's problems. I don't believe this is healthy. On the other hand, I don't believe it is healthy to reject completely our technology and its achievements. The liberation from either extreme can provide a distance from technology and a capability to work with it. This distance and capability can allow space for our wisdom to grow and then guide the directions of our technology.

Restricting Concepts of the Sacred

By the sacred I mean not only the divine but also ritual customs and practices and sacred texts. Restricting concepts of God are called commonly idolatries. Idolatry is not simply a band of Israelites fashioning a golden calf. Idolatry is something finite made infinite, something contingent made eternal and omnipotent. Idolatry exists in the Nazi conception of a super-race; it exists in the worship of money; it exists within the preacher claiming he or she knows the will of God or claiming his or her country has been given the go-ahead from the Almighty to bring the Kingdom to earth; or it exists when any individual or group claims to know the destiny of humankind.

Many Unitarian Universalists are idolatrous in their concepts of God, though this is true of any religious organization. A staunch secular humanist may claim to be an atheist because she cannot believe in the fairy tales about a white-bearded white man sitting on a throne in the sky. On the other hand, a Unitarian Universalist christian may believe God to be the father of Jesus Christ. But such a concept denies the feminine aspects of God. In a sense, every concept of God is idolatrous because the infinite cannot be encompassed by products of the human intellect. But certainly there are richer and more far-reaching concepts of God than those of our hypothetical secular humanist and UU christian.

There are also restricting concepts of ritual customs and practices. According to the work of many anthropologists, the trickster figure has been very popular among certain tribes of American Indians. Coming in any number of guises, their purpose within the ritual is to provide spontaneity.[19]

But trickster figures have been rare in Western religions, especially after the Reformation. Though Jesus and Jacob can be seen as clown or trickster figures, and though the fourteenth century French developed a custom called the "sermon joyeux,"[20] there has been little Jewish, Christian or Muslim effort to invoke this kind of spontaneity. It seems to me that the traditional religions have suffered some attrition in this century because of this lack. New practices, such as clown ministry and the hanging of colorful tapestries from stone walls, have been developed in some Christian churches. It is not always the case, but the kind of dry and formal services Ralph Waldo Emerson attacked in his famous Divinity School Address are boring. And such services, unfortunately, have been internalized by many of the unchurched in this country. Not only does the breaking of such restricting concepts add the excitement and joy of spontaneity, but also it raises the delightful possibility that somewhere in the heart of ultimate reality there is playfulness.

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[19] See, for example, Mahadev Apte, "Humor Research, Methodology, and Theory in Anthropology", from Handbook on Humor Research, Volume I, Paul E. McGhee and Jeffrey H. Goldstein, eds., (New York:Springer-Verlag, 1984).

Finally, there are restricting concepts of sacred texts. Such concepts might view the Bible as the absolute and literal word of God, and such imaginative writings as the Book of Revelation are then sometimes understood as depicting events which will actually happen. This leads to such horrifying interpretations as Israel's helpful neighbor to the West being the United States and Israel's enemy to the North being the U.S.S.R. On the other hand, there are many who view the Bible as a collection of gibberish which deserves nothing better than to gather dust on some high shelf. Humor can liberate congregants from such restricting concepts of the Bible or any other sacred text. In a restructuring of a more open concept, humor can help us to see that sacred texts contain Truth, not truths.

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[20] The sermon joyeux appeared during carnivals in Medieval France. In this custom a peasant would act as a priest giving a sermon. It is mentioned several times in Edith Kern, The Absolute Comic, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

Restricting Concepts of Life

"Life sucks, then you die and worms eat your face." This expression was told to me some weeks ago. It contains a not very optimistic view of human life. One's view of life determines what options and prospects are open and what meaning is culled from one's experience.

One's view of life might be cyclical -- a series of births and deaths. Another view might be similar to a tree -- each branch offers more and more possibilities. Perhaps one of the most popular views is linear -- we are conceived, we are born, we grow, we might reproduce, and then we die (and worms eat your face). In such a view, there is no going backwards or halting the inexorable march of time while seconds tick away unceasingly. There are many options for viewing life and the liberation of humor can help one to discover these options. Humor can release us from the march of time, it can sprout a new branch, or it can release us from unending cycles. Humor can do this because it is very much a restructuring of time itself. Almost everyone who has considered it is aware of the importance of timing to a screwball comedy or to a stand-up comic. Jack Benny was a master of such timing. In one of his routines, a robber approaches him and demands Benny's money or his life. Benny just stands there until, finally, the exasperated robber blurts out, "Well? Which is it going to be?" And Benny says, "I'm thinking, I'm thinking." In itself, the joke is not that funny. It is all in the timing.

What this routine shows is humor's ability to magnify the passage of time. What should be a snap decision is stretched way out of proportion. But humor can also shrink the passage of time. An example of this fact is a routine developed by Charlie Chaplin, Allan Funt, and Lucille Ball. In "I Love Lucy" there is an episode in which Lucy gets a job in a bakery. We are shown she has a simple job. All she has to do is sprinkle some powdered sugar on a cake which emerges on a conveyor belt, put some whipped cream and a cherry on it, and then put the cake in a box. But as Lucy begins to work unsupervised, cakes appear on the conveyor belt at a gradually increasing rate. Finally she cannot keep up and cakes fly off the belt and to the floor. Time shrinks in this routine.

William Lynch has recognized the capacity of humor to magnify or shrink the passage of time, and he believes it to be significant. It is the tragic view of life which sees time as linear and unceasing. In such a view fate is determined and no one can escape destiny. We are trapped in time in tragedy. But we can play with time in humor. Lynch writes:

> To recall /the/ incredible relationship between mud and God, is, in its own distant, adumbrating way, the function of comedy. This anamnesis is accomplished in either of two comic ways. By foreshortening between the beginning and the end or by multiplying -- far beyond the perfect logic of tragic action. [21]

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[21] William F. Lynch, Christ and Apollo, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), p. 109.

CHAPTER II

TOWARD A DEFINITION OF HUMOR

It is my thesis that humor can be instrumental in the liberation of religious liberals from restricting concepts of self, others, the sacred, and life. In order to understand how this liberation and subsequent restructuring of wider concepts occur, we must explore the nature of the human imagination and of images for it is through the imagination that the liberation and restructuring occur. Therefore, the first part of this chapter will identify important aspects of the imagination. The second part will explore several important theories of humor. The final part will determine what major emphases are to be used in the construction of my functional definition of humor.

Images and the Imagination

How are we to understand the imagination? How does it function? It is my claim that the imagination is not purely a function of intellect, emotion, intuition, or sensation. Rather, it can utilize these operations of the psyche for its own purposes. However, it is also true that these operations direct the course of the imagination.

What the imagination can do is release us from the restricting concepts discussed in Chapter I by offering the multiple meanings inherent to images. No image has but one meaning. Attaching meaning to an image transforms it into a concept; exposing the psyche to the many possible meanings of a concept transforms it into an image. If multiple interpretations are exposed to someone trapped within restricting concepts, he or she is liberated by the imagination, the concepts are freed from particular meanings, and the imagination leads him or her through worlds of possibility. Thus the imagination and the imaginer are, almost literally, creators of a new world, for the adoption of new, possibly wider and more open concepts determines a new way to perceive reality.

This liberation can be a frightening experience for it casts the psyche into an unknown and the psyche must divest itself of some comfortable, but not necessarily healthy, concepts of self, others, the sacred, and life. But this is not the case with humor and in Chapter III I will explain how humor avoids this frightening aspect of liberation.

The imagination releases the imaginer into a world of possibility, a world of multivalent images. While the imaginer experiences these images apart from other human company, there _is_ commonality in the imagination and it is not solipsistic. This is true for two reasons. First, in agreement with Carl Jung and his many students, I believe the human psyche contains certain archetypal images of the "collective unconscious." They are shared by every human being. The meanings of these archetypes will always vary from individual to individual, from culture to culture, for intellectual conception always varies. But every human being experiences the reality of these images.

Second, even though we experience imagination in solitude, we meet, in the imagination, images. Images are not objects of the imagination as concepts and ideas can be considered objects of the intellect. Instead, they are met as other subjects, as playmates, "who" act upon the imaginer as the imaginer acts upon them. We play the images as they play us. They have a past and a future apart from the imaginer. They are not confined to one psyche. Human beings never see concepts in the same way, but we do experience the imagination in the same way. And, if these images are handled well, they can build on what we share as individuals within a common humanity.

There are different kinds of the imagination. The daydreamer does not imagine in the same way a scientist imagines how a chemical process occurs. One who is meditating before a candle flame does not imagine in the same way a story-teller weaves a story from his or her imagination. Using the thought of Bachelard, I will identify three types of imagination: formal, material, and dynamic. These types can help a preacher decide what kind of imagery and what kind of emphases should be used in handling humor in the pulpit.

These views of the nature of images and of the imagination are not mine alone. The survey below contains ideas of some thinkers who helped in developing my understanding of the imagination.

Mircea Eliade

Eliade insists that the imagination is not a function of the intellect and that it is not a matter of conceptualization. We don't think images; we think ideas and concepts. And Eliade suggests that perhaps the imagination is the means to apprehend ultimate reality:

> If the mind makes use of the images to grasp the ultimate reality of things, it is just because reality manifests itself in contradictory ways and therefore cannot be expressed in concepts.[1]

Eliade attributes much of his understanding of images to the work of Carl Jung and Jung's understanding of archetypes (see, especially, Jung's Psychology and Alchemy). These archetypal images, or "Images" as Eliade would say, constitute a congruity between human beings through the "collective unconscious." In other words, although our languages, cultures, societies, religions, and up-bringings may divide humanity like the smashing of the Tower of Babel, the archetypes remain as a psychic continuity in which we all share and participate. In his Images and Symbols, Eliade writes that these Images "bring men together . . . more effectively and more genuinely than any analytic language. Indeed, if an ultimate solidarity of the whole human race does exist, it can be felt and 'activated' only at the level of Images."[2] What an opportunity of a preacher could tap that solidarity!

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[1] Mircea Eliade, "Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism, Phillip Mairet, trans., (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), p. 15.

When Eliade writes of Images, he makes another important point in warning us not to "fixate" on certain meanings of those Images. Eliade criticizes Freudian analysis on this point. Freud, he claims, takes an image which has, in reality, many meanings (that is, multivalent,) and then asserts that the image has but one meaning. The Mother Image, for example, is to be understood in terms of the Oedipus complex. Interpreting only in that way, however, robs the Image of its many other possible meanings and it is an attempt to view the world in only a conceptual and restricted way. Instead, Eliade suggests, we should view the world in many ways:

> To have imagination is to be able to see the world in its totality, for the power and the mission of the Images is to show all that remains refractory to the concept. . . .[3]

Urban T. Holmes III

In his Ministry and the Imagination, Holmes sees the imagination as a necessary creative force in the present-day church. He also sees the imagination as more than a faculty of the mind. Holmes sees "imaging" as a means of "developing the meaning of experience,"[4] and, therefore, he understands the imaginative experience as prior to conceptualization and prior to meaning. To Holmes, the imagination is a "context" for our perceiving the presence of God and, as such, it is necessary to rid the psyche of what can be an oppressive intellectualization by the conscious mind. For this, the ego must die. This viewpoint of Holmes should not be seen as anti-intellectualism. Rather, it seems to be more of a "non-intellectualism." The imagination is not up against the intellect; they are not in competition. Rather, the intellect is in a passive mode in the imaginative experience. It does not try to control; it prepares to receive from the imagination:

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[2] Ibid., p. 17.

[3] Ibid., p. 20.

> /The/ death to self -- the controlled self of the socialized, rational ego -- is necessary to know that de-structuring of the secular reality and be available to the work of God. . . . In the surrender of the self, the deautomatization of the mind, we come to know ourselves in terms of God's vision of his creation.[5]

James Hillman, I believe, makes the same point except he uses non-theistic language which might be more palatable to religious liberals. His point is that this "death of the ego" is not necessarily chaotic. Instead, it opens up the imagination to the profundity of the archetypes:

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[4] Urban T. Holmes III, Ministry and Imagination, (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), p. 88.

[5] Ibid., p. 163.

> Imaginative activity is both play and work, entering and being entered, and as the images gain in substance and independence the ego's strength and autocracy tends to dissolve. But ego dissolution does not mean disorder, since all fantasy is carried by a deeper archetypal order.[6]

Holmes seems to contradict himself at one point. He writes that the effect of the imagination is that of "seeing the deeper meaning of experience as opposed to merely looking upon the surface."[7] So, the imagination is to see the deeper meaning of experience. Doesn't that imply that meaning is prior to imagination? Then meaning is not developed by the imagination as he wrote earlier. The solution to this apparent paradox is that Holmes, as a Roman Catholic, brings a bias that meaning is not created by the human, the image, and the imagination, but by God. In my view, meaning is created by the imagination as it is developed through it. Meaning is a human experience, not a divine gift.

But the last Holmes quote raises a more important question: Does the imagination operate in such a way as to bring us to the deeper, more profound realities of existence, or are there other ways to understand the function of the imagination? It is with this question that we turn to the work of Gaston Bachelard in an effort to clarify the types of the imagination.

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[6] James Hillman, Insearch: Psychology and Religion, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), p. 40.

[7] Holmes, Ministry and Imagination, p. 109.

Gaston Bachelard

In La Terre et les rêveries de la volonté, Bachelard claims that the distinction between the symbol or the metaphor and the image lies in the idea that the symbol holds within itself an idea, a psychological meaning, a concept. The symbol is a signification. On the other hand, the image has not signification, but sense. The image engages us, it expands our being; the symbol explains, it teaches us something. According to Bachelard, it is through the intellect that symbols are recognized as valuable.

Similarly, Bachelard sees metaphor as another fixation. Here Bachelard's understanding of metaphor is limited, but his point remains clear. Bachelard accepts the Aristotelian understanding of metaphor. Aristotle referred to "Achilles is a lion in battle" as an example of metaphor. He maintained that there are three points of reference in any metaphor. In his example, the first is Achilles, the second is the lion, and the "transcendent third," shared by the first two, is the quality of courage. Bachelard believes that a metaphor is fixated on the third referent, that particular meaning. An example of an image, however, might be "Wailing Wall/Night." There is no transcendent third in this image, and there is no fixated meaning. Thus our reflection upon the image is allowed freedom. Bachelard was unfamiliar with more recent understandings of metaphor which would identify the transcendent third as the tension between the first two referents. But, as I said, his point remains clear. With that point he is in accord with the understanding of Holmes and Eliade: the imagination can liberate us from conceptualization. And, I believe, in the same way, humor can liberate us from our restricting concepts.

Bachelard attempts to construct a phenomenology of the poetic imagination and it is through some reflection on his work that we can develop a typology of imagination and answer the question raised by Holmes's statement. In his six books on the archetypes of the four elements (air, earth, fire, and water), Bachelard establishes his typology. In the first of these six, The Psychoanalysis of Fire, he writes:

> . . . it seems clear to us that there is some relation between the doctrine of the four physical elements and the doctrine of the four temperaments. In any case, the four categories of souls in whose dreams fire, water, air or earth predominate, show themselves to be markedly different. Fire and water, particularly remain enemies even in reverie, and the person who listens to the sound of the stream can scarcely comprehend the person who hears the sound of flames: they do not speak the same language.[8]

Bachelard is not speaking of empirical reality when he speaks of the four elements. They are imagic representations not only of empirical reality (in pre-modern times) but also of the nature of the imagination. No one knows the difference between Hydrogen and Helium except through delicate instruments. But the difference between fire and water is immediately apparent to everyone. We are not "dealing with matter but with orientation. It is not a question of being rooted in a particular substance, but of tendencies of poetic exaltation."[9] Northrup Frye, in his introduction to The Psychoanalysis of Fire, writes:

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[8] Gaston Bachelard, The Psychoanalysis of Fire, Alan C. M. Ross, trans., (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 89.

> For the poet, the elements will always be earth, air, fire, and water. . . . The four elements are not a conception of much use to modern chemistry -- that is, they are not the elements of nature. But . . . earth, air, fire, and water are still the four elements of the imaginative experience, and always will be.[10]

Through his exploration of each of the four elements, Bachelard develops his typology of imagination. There are three types: the formal imagination, the material imagination, and the dynamic imagination. It is the formal imagination which seeks novelty, variety, and the unexpected. It is the imagination of the scientist who imagines hypotheses. It is the imagination which conceptualizes possibilities. In his L'Eau et les rêves, Bachelard distinguishes the formal and the material imaginations. He views the former as secondary to the latter:

> . . . beyond images of form, so often evoked by the psychologists of the imagination, there are . . . images of matter, direct images of matter. Sight names them. A dynamic joy handles them, kneads them, lightens them. These images of matter are dreamed in their substance, intimately, by setting aside forms, perishable forms, vain images, the development of surfaces.[11]

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[9] Ibid., p. 90.

[10] Northrup Frye, Psychoanalysis of Fire, p. vi.

[11] Gaston Bachelard, L'Eau et les rêves: essai sur l'imagination de la matière, (Paris: J. Corti, 1942), p. 2.

Empirical qualities are imagined through the formal imagination. Something that is imagined as having a certain shape and color, for example, is already conceptualized. The formal imagination plays with forms. The material imagination knows what is imagined intimately, immediately. The material imagination is "sunk in substance," not form, and so the intimacy knows an imaginal permanency. The image known through the material imagination precedes conceptualization, and so it is prior to distinctions of subject and object -- there is an immediacy between the two. The predicate is absent or broken and nothing is done to anything by anything else.

The absence of distinctions between subject and object indicates an intimate relationship between two subjects. It reminds me of what was called the "vocative case" in High School Latin class: There are six cases for nouns and adjectives in Latin. They are: nominative (or subjective), vocative, accusative (or objective), genitive (or possessive), dative (indirect object), and ablative (object of the preposition). In the intellect, as in the formal imagination, there is a well-defined relationship between the object and the subject, the accusative and the nominative. Thus there exists a level of objectivity. This objectivity is what science and rational realism tries to attain. But this objectivity is absent in the material imagination. The subject/object dichotomy is meaningless. In the material imagination, there is only the engaging of two subjects. It is an interaction between two subjects of different pasts and futures. Perhaps our culture is most familiar with the vocative in the antiquated expressions of "thee" and "thou", or perhaps in the pre-Vatican II liturgy. In the latter, we find such words as "O, Domine" which is the vocative case for "Dominus" or "Lord." It is a plea for engagement, a plea for the Buberian I-Thou relationship. In the material imagination, images are known intimately.

With the third type of imagination, the dynamic imagination, there is movement, but the image and imaginer move together. They do not move in relation to each other and the vocative relationship remains. The dynamic imagination is differentiated in L'Air et les songes. This is because air, to the imagination, is "meagre matter." "The material imagination of air is truly active only in a dynamic materialization."[12]

For Bachelard, the material imagination exists in images of air, but there is an essential dynamism in these images which indicates there is more going on than formal or material imagining. The dynamic imagination can transform or, more accurately, transmute reality. The material imagination is introverted compared to the dynamic, willful, and extroverted imagination. The material imagination is passive when compared to the active dynamic imagination.

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[12] Gaston Bachelard, L'Air et les songes: essai sur la imagination du mouvement, (Paris: J. Corti, 1943), p. 188.

Stories and narratives use the dynamic imagination. They hook us and move us along. We are intimate with the story and we become part of it as it becomes a part of us. We become part of its woven fabric. We reach out to identify with it. There are high points and low points and there are morals to be drawn out from it. These are aspects of the dynamic imagination.

With some images, the dynamic and material imaginations become integrated. It is this integration which Bachelard explores in his two books on earth imagery, La Terre et les rêveries de la volonté and La Terre et les rêveries de repos, and it is because the dynamic and material imaginations both involve vocative relationships that allows for such an integration. The dynamic imagination encounters resistance in earth images. Such images have to be kneaded, worked, and bent; earth resists the willfulness of the dynamic imagination. But in working these images, the worker is also worked. Dough kneads the kneader as the kneader kneads the dough. There is a dynamism, but because of the resistance of earth, such dynamism works within the vocative relationship and both imaginer and image are worked by the will. It is in working the substance that we recognize human qualities within the substance. Bachelard assures us that when we engage a substance, in our struggle against its resistance, we impart something to it and the substance becomes humanized.

This is where the thought of Bachelard is different from that of Sartre, and Bachelard uses this difference to help explain what a struggle imparts to a substance. Sartre is concerned with maintaining the existential freedom of the subject. The horror of Camus' Sisyphus is that the subject, the human being, is in danger of losing his freedom. To Sartre , Sisyphus becomes the rock he must push up the mountain. In becoming the rock, the man becomes bound to insentient substance.

But Bachelard disagrees. To him, the man does not become the rock; instead, the rock becomes humanized. As it takes on human qualities, it becomes, in our imaginations, human. And so there is an expansion of being rather than a death of being through the loss of existential freedom.[13] Work humanizes the world (as does play, as I will show in Chapter III). "The imagination is nothing more than the subject transported into things."[14] The material imagination strives to be one with the core of things, but it is the dynamic imagination which allows for the piercing of the surface of things. Thus, at least with earth images, the dynamic and material imaginations are well integrated.

And so, finally, back to Holmes. His understanding of the imagination as something that strives to know "the deeper meaning of our experience, as opposed to merely looking upon the surface" is, first, an attempt to distinguish between the formal and the material imaginations, and, second, an integration of the material and dynamic imaginations in an earth image (for air, fire, and water images have no core except in relation to earth). If we are to see the importance of the imagination in religious practice and if we are to see humor as a function of the imagination, we must be careful in our analyses to understand what type of imagination is at play. An analysis of that will allow for prescriptions on what type of imagination and imagery should be used in particular kinds of pulpit humor.

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[13] Gaston Bachelard, La Terre et les rêveries de la volonté, (Paris, J. Corti, 1948), p. 194 ff.

[14] Gaston Bachelard, La Terre et les reveries de repos, (Paris, J. Corti, 1948), p. 3.

Before we use these understandings of imagination to help create a functional definition of humor, it will be useful to explore briefly definitions of humor which already have been made.

A Survey of Definitions of Humor

It is possible to view the many theories of comedy, the comic, and humor in terms of emphasis on the congruous and incongruous relations between the comic stimulus and the audience (or congregation). In this part of the thesis, I will explain what I mean by congruous and incongruous and then explain how various important theories of humor fit into a congruity/incongruity spectrum. It is a spectrum because there are many theories which are mixtures of these two poles. Indeed, it should be understood that I am not analyzing these theories as either congruity or incongruity (although some theories will fit close to the extremes), instead, my attempt here is to indicate these two poles and explain how these theories fit between them. I then will attempt to provide some reasons why some theories have more emphasis on one pole than on the other. Finally, I will make a judgment as to what the emphases for my own functional definition should be. This judgment will be based on what I consider most important in ministry and on what I perceive as faith commitments of Unitarian Universalism.

Congruity and incongruity

The incongruity pole of theories about humor is identifiable by its concentration on the disjunction, contrast, and juxtaposition of ideas as the means to explain humor. In such theories, there is a tension, a dissonance, in humor which is created by comparing two or more different objects or people. Usually, there is a preconceived norm in incongruity theories which emphasizes the incongruity. Often that norm is established through the recognition of the difference between the real and the ideal. There is a perception, usually, of an upset balance or equilibrium caused by our human foibles, imperfections, and failures. Set against these failures, which indicate the way things are, is the ideal, which indicates the way things ought to be. To the incongruity theorist, it is plain why we laugh, why we experience humor: we laugh because we are rational animals and because we think. Our rationality allows us to discern incongruity. Generally, incongruity theorists tend to disagree with the observations of Freud and Bergson because these two insist we laugh at the recognition of the human in something. To paraphrase Bergson, landscapes are not funny because there is nothing human in them.[15]

On the other hand, congruity theories identify pathos as a prerequisite for humor. It is the sense that we share something with what we laugh at which is most important. According to congruity theories, we laugh at Charlie Chaplin because we identify with him as he is consumed by a man-eating machine in Modern Times.

The favorite example of humor theorists can shed some light on this polarity. When a dignified man slips on a banana peel, the incongruity theorist would say we laugh because (1) we are relieved that it was not us who slipped on the peel, (2) we feel superior to the poor slob who slipped, or (3) the idea that someone so dignified would slip on something so lowly as a banana peel is incongruous, inconsistent, or such an odd juxtaposition of ideas that we laugh at the contrast. On the other hand, the congruity theorist would claim that we laugh because we know, through our experience, imagination, or thought, what it is to put on aires of dignity only to have them deflated by an unsuccessful encounter with a banana peel.

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[15] Henri Bergson, Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic, Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell, trans., (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911), p. 3.

To illustrate further this difference between congruity and incongruity theories, we can consider Mel Brooks's distinction between tragedy and comedy: "When I cut my finger, it's a tragedy. When you get hit by a truck, fall down a manhole and die, it's a comedy." Congruity theorists would claim that the distinction is humorous because it is easy to identify with the gross selfishness Brooks is displaying. On the other hand, incongruity theorists would point to the exaggeration and the inordinate contrast between the two unfortunate events in explaining why we (might) think the distinction is funny.

John Morreall

John Morreall, a philosophy professor, works out his theory of humor from a very strong incongruity viewpoint. In his book, Taking Laughter Seriously, he does however, accept the idea that what we find incongruous is based on what we have found to be, through our experience, logical and congruous. Still he argues that humor is a function of the intellect and that it depends on a disjunction of concepts or conceptual patterns. This disjunction, he believes, gives us a measure of detachment from ourselves. Distanced through humor from our present situation, we perceive the world from a less egocentric point of view:

> [Humor] is based on a conceptual shift, a jolt to our

> picture of the way things are supposed to be. . . . /It/ is based on incongruity, . . . /and/ perhaps the most important thing to note about incongruity is that a thing or event is not incongruous *simpliciter*, but only relative to someone's conceptual scheme.[16]

Arthur Koestler

Another thinker who developed a theory of humor and comedy which is primarily concerned with incongruity is Arthur Koestler. In his *Act of Creation*, he writes of the sage, the poet, and the jester as being on the same continuum. They operate in the same way by providing different ways of seeing things.

Koestler also puts wit and humor on a continuum, but he carefully notes the distinction between the two. Wit is more concerned with intellect and acumen; it is sharp and cutting. Humor is more emotional; it is capable of "melting" what it encounters. This distinction, also recognized by Freud as we shall see below, is relatable to the etymological origins of the two words: humor is from Greek and it refers to liquid; wit comes from the German for acumen. In Chapter IV, we will find that the wit/humor continuum is related to the *bomolochus/eiron*, or clown/ironist, continuum.

But Koestler insists both wit and humor involve some form of "bisociation." In looking at five different humorous stories, he asks if there is an underlying pattern.

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[16] John Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1983), p. 60.

He believes each exhibits a mental jolt:

> . . . both the creation of a subtle joke and the re-creative act of perceiving the joke involve the delightful mental jolt of a sudden leap from one plane or associative context to another.[17]

To Koestler, then, humor is a function of the intellect as much as it involves the emotions. He sees emotions as having greater "inertia" than thought. Emotions persist in one direction longer than the fleet-footed intellect. The incongruity between where one is emotionally and where one is intellectually causes laughter:

> If man were able to change his moods as quickly as his thoughts, he would be an acrobat of emotion; but since he is not, his thoughts and his emotions frequently become dissociated. It is the emotion deserted by thought that is discharged in laughter. For emotion, owing to its greater mass momentum, is . . . unable to follow the sudden switch of ideas to a different type of logic; it tends to persist in a straight line.[18]

Again, this is similar to Freud's theory of humor; however, the difference lies in Koestler's apparent unconcern with the social aspects of humor. "How is it shared?" is a question which remains unanswered in Koestler's work.

Reinhold Niebuhr

Also toward the incongruity pole of our spectrum we find Reinhold Niebuhr's theory of humor. In an essay called "Humour and Faith," Niebuhr operates from his usual neoorthodox viewpoint and identifies humor as a jostling of ideas which do not belong together. This, he claims, is similar to faith; the difference is that "humor is concerned with the immediate incongruities of life and faith with the ultimate ones."[19] Niebuhr asks _at_ what do we laugh? And so he has already confined himself to a subject/object dichotomy in humor (and, presumably, in faith) because by so phrasing the question, he is concerned with things we laugh _at_, not _with_. At what do we laugh? Niebuhr answers:

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[17] Encyclopedia Britannica Macropedia, 15th ed., s.v. "Humor and Wit," by Arthur Koestler.

[18] Ibid.

> At the sight of the fool upon the throne of a king; or the proud man suffering from some indignity; or the child introducing its irrelevancies into the conversations of the mature. We laugh at the juxtaposition of things which do not belong together. A boy slipping on the ice is not funny. Slipping on the ice is funny only if it happens to one whose dignity is upset.[20]

Niebuhr believes that both humor and faith are expressions of the "freedom of the human spirit." But humor cannot be the response to the apprehending of ultimate incongruities because then it could be only hollow laughter and bitter cynicism:

> Laughter must be heard in the outer courts of religion; and the echoes of it should resound in the sanctuary; but there is no laughter in the holy of holies. There laughter is swallowed up in prayer and humour is fulfilled by faith.[21]

The "holy of holies" is no place for laughter and humor.

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[19] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Humour and Wit," from _Holy Laughter_, M. Conrad Hyers, ed., (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), p. 135.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

Ultimately reality is to be faced with the seriousness of faith. God is no laughing matter. Further toward the congruity pole of our spectrum, we shall come across the idea that there might well be an element of playfulness in the ultimate. Perhaps, God _is_ a laughing matter!

Harvey Cox

In his _Feast of Fools_, Harvey Cox also writes of how faith is related to humor. But in his suggestion that Christ may be seen, at least in this century, as a clownish character, there is the hint of an element of humor in the ultimate, that there is something of the comic in at least our appreciation or apprehending of the ultimate. But still, to Cox, the comic is a perception of incongruities. In his book, he finds himself agreeing with P. Lersch:

> The inner essence of humor lies, no matter how heretical this may seem, in the strength of the religious disposition; for what humor does is note how far all earthly and human things fall short of the measure of God. [22]

Søren Kierkegaard

The idea of the distance between God and humanity as being important in humor is not too different from Søren Kierkegaard's conception of humor and the comic. Kierkegaard saw the comic as a matter of contradiction. This view follows from his understanding of God as eternal and infinite against which we are mortal, contingent, and finite.

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[22] Harvey Cox, _The Feast of Fools: A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy_, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 152. The quote is from P. Lersch, _Die Philosophie des Humors_.

To Kierkegaard, living is a contradiction and there are two responses to this contradiction: tragic and comic. The responses depend on whether the contradiction is painful or not:

> The comic is present in every stage of life (only that the relative positions are different), for wherever there is life, there is contradiction, the comical is present. The tragic and the comical are the same, in so far as both are based on contradiction; but the tragic is the suffering contradiction, the comical, the painless contradiction.[23]

The contradiction, everpresent in life, is the result of the facts that truth is paradoxical and that no human being can encompass the resolution of that paradox. But for Kierkegaard there are certain stages (or "Spheres") of faith which he identifies as the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. In the earliest of these stages, the aesthetic, which is concerned primarily with moment to moment anticipations and resolutions, the comical is barely known. As one progresses toward the religious, the comical becomes more apparent: "The more thoroughly and substantially a human being exists, the more he will discover the comical."[24]

According to Kierkegaard, one never really leaves earlier stages behind; one continually returns to the aesthetic stage even though one may have entered the religious stage. But when one moves from the moment to moment anticipation and resolution concentration of the aesthetic to the comprehension and usage of universal ethical laws (the ethical) one becomes an ironist. As one moves from the ethical to the religious, one becomes a humorist. That is, when one realizes universal ethical laws are built upon a sandy base of mere tradition and when one turns inward to the relationship one has with the absolute, one discovers the humor in existence. Kierkegaard's distinction between the ironist and the humorist is that irony does not express the suffering in existence. The ironist would "abstract" the pain of human existence. On the other hand, the humorist would touch upon the pain and suffering. Kierkegaard sees humor as lesser than the religious because humor, while not abstracting suffering, abstracts the ideal/real relationship and contrast:

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[23] Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie, trans., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 459.

[24] Ibid., p. 413.

> /The humorist/ comprehends the significance of suffering as relevant to existence, but he does not comprehend the significance of suffering itself; he understands that it belongs to existence, but does not understand its significance except through the principle that suffering belongs. The first thought is the pain in the humoristic consciousness, the second is the jest, and hence it comes about that one is tempted to both weep and to laugh when the humorist speaks. He touches upon the secret of existence in the pain, but then he goes home again. [25]

To the religious individual, nothing is allowed to contaminate the relationship with the absolute, to infiltrate the inward relationship he or she has with God. The comical is still present, but, according to Kierkegaard, it will "in no single moment be allowed to disturb the earnestness in the thought that the individual is nothing before God and can do nothing. . . ."[26]

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[25] Ibid., p. 400.

There are at least four assumptions which pervade Kierkegaard's thought, and so his understanding of humor. First he sees the comical solely as a painless contradiction; thus humor is a matter of incongruity. Second, like Niebuhr, Kierkegaard writes of God as absolute and transcendent. In the face of this absolute, the human is as nothing. Third, again like Niebuhr, the absolute is to be approached with ultimate seriousness -- there is no humor or playfulness in the absolute. Fourth, there is no commonality, no community-wide experience or relationship with the absolute -- it is solely through the individual's awareness and inwardness that contact with God is made.

M. Conrad Hyers

In his essay "The Dialectic of the Sacred and the Comic," M. Conrad Hyers, a minister and professor of religion, offers a distinction between two kinds of humor: the prophetic and the promethean. The two types, to some degree, point to the differences between incongruity and congruity theories. The prophetic is descriptive of incongruity theory for it is concerned with objectivity, detachment, and an awareness of the way things ought to be as opposed to the way things are:

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[26] Ibid., p. 413.

> /Prophetic/ humor is a mechanism of withdrawal and objectivification; it is an act of separation, distancing, and detachment. . . . Through /this/ humor one steps outside his normal identity or official image, his ordinary commitment and involvement, and achieves a certain freedom of detachment in relation to himself and his circumstances.[27]

Hyers offers an alternative kind of humor, the promethean, which appears to be more concerned with congruity, at least as far as the sacred is concerned. It stresses involvement, not detachment:

> . . . in /promethean/ humor the unquestioned authority of the sacred is questioned, the superior status of the holy is bracketed, and the radical distance between the sacred and the profane is minimized. Instead of the more passive withdrawal and escape from the aweful majesty of the sacred, which at most is open to the charge of lack of involvement and commitment, this is an act that from the side of both the subject and the sacred constitutes a kind of trespass into the inner sanctum of holy things. It therefore opens itself to the charge of, not only levity and frivolity, but sacrilege and blasphemy.[28]

Hyers accepts both kinds of humor as valid, but he seems to edge more toward the latter in his later work, The Comic Vision and the Christian Faith. In this book, Hyers is concerned with much of what Cox was interested in in Feast of Fools, namely, the recognition that sacred figures carry the comic within them. And it is in this work that Hyers sees incongruity is not the stimulus of humor. Instead, he suggests that humor is the effort to resolve incongruities: "The comic tradition deals . . . with . . . incongruities, exposing them, softening them, and hopefully in some measure preventing them."[29]

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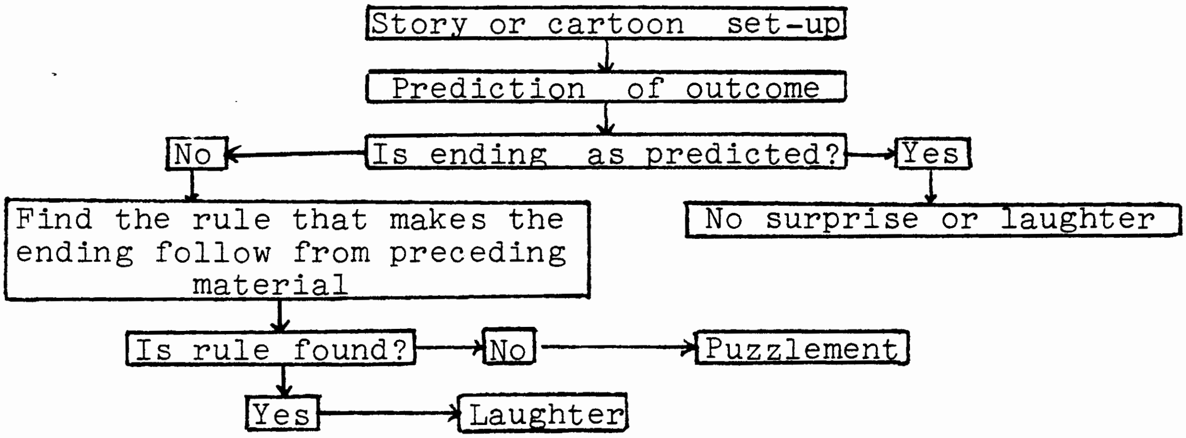
[27] M. Conrad Hyers, "The Dialectic of the Sacred and the Comic," from Holy Laughter, p. 219.

[28] Ibid., p. 220.

Jerry Suls

The resolution of incongruities is the key to humor according to Jerry Suls, a psychologist. In his "Cognitive Processes in Humor Appreciation," Suls sees humor as cognitive problem solving within a playful, non-threatening environment. Incongruity alone cannot explain humor, he believes, because incongruity leads to frustration and anxiety, not to pleasure. It is the resolution of the problem which affords pleasure. He develops his theory in accord with the flow chart below:[30]


Story or cartoon set-up
Prediction of outcome
Is ending as predicted?
No
Yes
Find the rule that makes the ending follow from preceding material
No surprise or laughter
Is rule found?
No
Puzzlement
Yes
Laughter

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[29] M. Conrad Hyers, The Comic Vision and the Christian Faith: A Celebration of Life and Laughter, (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1981), p. 10.

[30] Jerry Suls, "Cognitive Processes in Humor Appreciation," from The Handbook of Humor Research, Volume I, p. 42.

Suls presents a model which can explain many examples of humor, from, at least, a cognitive and psychological viewpoint. But there are some problems with it. First, some psychologists point out that humor, if seen as a matter of pleasure obtained through successful problem solving, should be more pleasurable if the solution provides us with a good fit. However, sometimes, more pleasure is derived from a poor fit.[31]

Second, the model is a cognitive model. It is based on the assumption that humor is a function of the intellect. While such theories are sometimes appropriate (especially with the formal imagination), they are not appropriate in all cases of humor. As Thomas Carlyle pointed out, "Wit has to do with the head, Humour with the heart."[32]

Sigmund Freud

Having touched now upon psychology and the pleasure-seeking principle of the ego, the time seems ripe for Freud. Freud makes distinction between wit, the comic, and humor. To some these distinctions have been seen as trivial. Sociologist Peter Berger, for example, tripped up on them:

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[31] Such research is found in M. K. Rothbart and D. Pien, "Elephants and marshmallows: A theoretical synthesis of incongruity resolution and arousal theories of humour," from A. J. Chapman and H. Foot, eds., It's a funny thing, humour, (London: Pergamon Press, 1977).

[32] Quoted from Bradley Gilman, A Clinic on the Comic: A New Theory on Wit and Humor, (Nice: Imprimerie Universelles, 1926), p. 39.

> The essence of the comic is discrepancy. This is well expressed in the . . . famous theories . . . of Freud and Bergson. In Freud's theory, the discrepancy is between the exorbitant demands of the super-ego as against the world of the libido underlying it. Freud places strong emphasis on what he calls the "unmasking" character of wit.[33]

That sounds like Freud. But what is Berger talking about -- the comic, wit, or what? It turns out he was writing about Freud's theory of wit. To Freud, wit is a guilt-free release of aggression. There is a desire to injure someone or something, but society and the super-ego do not allow this desire to be expressed. It is suppressed and what Freud calls "wit work" begins within the subconscious and a disguise is "draped" over the aggressive impulse.

This wit work is similar to dream work except that dream work is used to guard the psyche against pain. Wit work is used to derive pleasure for the ego.

The comic is more concerned with relatedness and congruity, though in an interesting and unique way. In explaining the comic, Freud writes that he does not see much support for incongruity theories of the comic:

> The putting of oneself in the other person's place and trying to understand him is clearly nothing other than the "comic lending" which . . . has played a part in the analysis of the comic; the "comparing" of someone else's mental processes with one's own corresponds to the "psychological contrast" which we can at last find a place for here, after not knowing what to do with it in jokes. But we differ in our explanation of comic pleasure from many authorities who regard it as arising from the oscil-

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[33] Peter Berger, "Christian Faith and the Social Comedy", from Holy Laughter, p. 123.

> lation of attention backwards and forward between contrasting ideas. A mechanism of pleasure like this would seem incomprehensible to us, but we may point out in comparison of two contrasts a difference of expenditure occurs which, if it is not used for some other purpose, becomes capable of discharge amd may thus become a source of pleasure.[34]

It is through the comparison of one's own mind and mental processes with those of another that we find the source of the comic. But within this comparison contrasts will appear. So with Freud's theory of the comic, congruity is prior to incongruity, though the latter is necessary for pleasure.

Humor, according to Freud, is different from both wit and the comic. Humor begins when painful emotions are stimulated. There is an effort to suppress them, but in humor it is discovered that the painful emotions are not necessary (echoes of Koestler). The emotions come from pity in the example Freud uses for Galgenhumor, gallows humor. One feels sympathy for the prisoner being led to the gallows. But when the doomed man makes a comment like, "The week is starting off well," we laugh because the emotion is not needed in the face of the prisoner's stoicism.

In the last paragraph of Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious, Freud notes the difference between wit, the comic, and humor by noting how the laughter is a matter of relief:

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[34] From Paul Lauter, ed., Theories of Comedy, (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1964), p. 400.

> It has seemed to us that the pleasure of wit originates from an economy of expenditure in inhibition, of the comic from an economy of expenditure in thought, and of humor from an economy of expenditure in feeling. All three modes of activity of our psychic apparatus derive pleasure from economy. All three methods strive to bring back from the psychic activity a pleasure which has really been lost in the development of this activity. For the euphoria which we are thus striving to attain is nothing but the state of a bygone time, in which we were wont to defray our psychic work with slight expenditure. It is the state of our childhood in which we did not know the comic, were incapable of wit, and did not need humor to make us happy. [35]

It seems to me that of the three, wit is most concerned with incongruity because of the strong distinction between the subject and the object, or target, of willful aggression. The comic, however, is concerned with congruity first and then incongruity. There has to be a comparison before there can be a contrast. Finally, humor is concerned most with congruity because of the strong emotional link in the pathos of the self for the other.

Henri Bergson

Henri Bergson finds what is laughable as both a matter of congruity and incongruity. He points out that one has to see something human in whatever one finds laughable:

> . . . the comic does not exist outside the pale of what is strictly human. A landscape may be beautiful, charming and sublime, or insignificant and ugly; it will never be laughable. You may laugh at an animal, but only because you have detected in it some human attitude or expression. . . . /Philosophers/ have defined man as "an animal

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[35] Sigmund Freud, Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious, A. A. Brill, trans., (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company, Ltd., 1916), pp. 383-384.

> that laughs". They might equally well have defined him as an animal which is laughed at; for if any other animal or some lifeless object produces the same effect; it is because of some resemblance to man, of the same stamp he gives it or the use he puts it to.[36]

Bergson sees laughter solely as a social phenomenon, as does Freud and as does not Koestler. Laughter to Bergson is an expression of social morality and a social corrective for those who dare to step outside society's norms. Therefore, he sees laughter as a social response. It is a response to the "mechanical encrusted upon the living."[37] Using this definition, he explores three paths: how someone or something appears ridiculous by being awkward in its attempt to "counterfeit life's suppleness;" how in a sudden movement of our attention from the nobility of the soul to the physicality of the body, we laugh; and how ridiculous someone looks in the attempt to imitate a thing.[38]

The idea that the comic results from the "mechanical encrusted upon the living" seems, at first, to be an incongruity theory. But Bergson himself discourages such theories:

> One of the reasons that must have given rise to many erroneous or unsatisfactory theories of laughter is that many things are comic de jure without being comic de facto, the continuity of custom having deadened within them the comic quality. A sudden dissolution of continuity is needed, a break with fashion for this quality to revive. Hence the impression that this dissolution of continuity is the parent of the comic, whereas all it

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[36] Laughter, pp. 3-4.

[37] Ibid., p. 37.

[38] Ibid., pp. 38, 52, and 58, respectively.

does is bring it to our notice.[39]

The impression that Bergson's theory is one of "dissolution" is a faulty one, even though the contrast between the living and the mechanical is basic. The solution to this apparent paradox is that the imagination is central to his theory and he, as Freud did with wit, relates the appreciation of the comic to dreams:

> /Some propositions/ are absurd to the reason that rationalises; but they are gospel truths to the pure imagination. So there is a logic to the imagination which is not the logic of reason, one which at times is even opposed to the latter, -- with which, however, philosophy must reckon not only in the study of the comic, but in every other investigation of the same kind. It is something like the logic of dreams, though of dreams that have not been left to the whim of individual fancy, being the dreams dreamt by the whole of society.[40]

The twentieth century's conception of the commonality of archetypal images is not far from Bergson's nineteenth century conception of "dreams dreamt by the whole of society." Thus Bergson's idea of the "mechanical encrusted upon the living" as being the crux of what is laughable is not an incongruity theory. Rather, it is the shared imagination which exposes us to images which are incongruous. The incongruity depends upon a prior commonality. This point is explored further in Bergson's analysis of the comic character before an audience:

> The comic character is often one with whom /an audi-

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[39] Ibid., pp. 39-40.

[40] Ibid., p. 41.

> ence7 . . . sympahises. By this it is meant that we put ourselves for a very short time in his place, adopt his gestures, words and actions, and, if amused by anything laughable in him, invite him, in imagination, to share his amusement with us; in fact, we treat him first as a playmate. . . .[41]

William F. Lynch

Even further toward the pole of congruity is the theory of William Lynch, a Jesuit priest. In fact, he specifically calls for an end to theories based on incongruity: "Let us not talk of incongruity as the secret clue to comedy, but of congruity, of the tie between earth and Christ, with all the logic omitted."[42]

When Lynch asks what is funny, he answers things are funny. Why are things funny? Because they call back the relationship between themselves and God. Everything is connected to God, and, through God, everything is connected to everything else. According to Lynch, God guarantees this connectionin much the same way Jung, Eliade, and Hillman believe that the archetypes guarantee commonality within the human species. But Lynch suggests humanity is tied not only to itself but also to the entire universe.

To Lynch, comedy is concerned with the concrete, the "bloody" and not with "angelism and the abstract. Comedy stays with the flesh and holds onto the congruity. The comic figure concentrates on facticity and he or she neither isolates as the tragic figure would, nor just gives up, as the absurdist would:

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[41] Ibid., pp. 194-195.

[42] Christ and Apollo, p. 109.

> The human imagination responds in various ways to the vision that is borne upon it of universal imagination. It may, like the great writers of tragedy, see the everlasting particularity of human life as an abyss; the highest dramatic moments of Oedipus and Lear are expressions of this tragic vision, when each of these characters finds himself confronting the abyss of limitation. But the imagination may, on the other hand, as in the case of writers of comedy, see human particularity in the rough and unvarnished guise of a homely, everyday reality.[43]

To Lynch (and Aristotle, for that matter), tragedy is a highly logical progression of events. Aristotle was clear in pointing out that plot is the central concern of tragedy. Comedy, as I pointed out in Chapter I, plays with time and the logical progression of events.

Summary

In observing this spectrum of incongruity/congruity, made from but a small sample of extant theories of humor, wit, the comic, and laughter, we see some conclusions which can be drawn. First, in following Freud's distinction between wit, the comic, and humor, and Hyers's distinction between prophetic and promethean humor, there seems to be some confusion in the theories of some thinkers. Morreall makes no distinction between wit, the comic, and humor; neither does Lynch. Wit is more of a function of the intellect while humor is more involved with emotions. It seems that those theories toward the incongruity pole are more intent in proving the intellect's activity in wit and that those theories toward the congruity pole are more intent on showing the emotional activity in humor.

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[43] Ibid., p. 2.

Two other explanations of why this spectrum shaped up the way it did I owe to David Miller, Professor of Religion currently at Syracuse University. First Miller points out that the spectrum reflects the detachment of the philosopher's intellectual pursuits toward the incongruity pole (Koestler, Morreall, Niebuhr, Cox, and Kierkegaard are or were primarily philosophers or theological professors) while the congruity pole seems to attract the theorizing of psychologists and ministers. Miller suggests that the primary concern of philosophers and professors is intellectual and that the primary concern of ministers and psychologists is relational. The incongruity pole seems most concerned with distinctions between self and the world, while the congruity pole seems most concerned with what ties us together and what is shared among us.

Miller's second explanation is that the incongruity pole reflects a theological bias far different than the theological bias on the congruity pole. The former is concerned with the great distance between the ultimate, God, the ideal, and the abstract, while the congruity pole is concerned with the immanence of God in the world. Miller goes further by tracing two theological lines of thought in Western religious thought.

On the one hand, we find Paul, the Protestant tradition and their concern with the great gulf separating humanity from God. This tradition clearly includes the thought of Kierkegaard and, through its American counterpart in Edwardsianism, the thought of Niebuhr. Also, it is interesting to note that Morreall, in his Taking Laughter Seriously, includes a polemic against Christianity. This polemic is noteworthy because of the emphasis he puts on a particular kind of Christianity. It reflects his understanding Christianity in a very Protestant way:

> /In Christianity/, needless to say, human life is as serious an activity as anything can be. The will of God is an absolute standard for every aspect of our lives. There is no "time out" in which we live outside the Creator-creature relationship; everything we do has theological and therefore practical consequences. To take up the Christian stance whole-heartedly, then, is to live single-mindedly -- the non-Christian might say "obsessively" -- with the purpose of fulfilling the will of God. Now few Christians may live their lives with this degree of seriousness, but that's because they fall short of a whole-hearted commitment to Christianity.[44]

Without much circumspection, Morreall seems to have adopted a strong, sectarian Protestant Christianity. Clearly this is a view which Hyers, Cox, and Lynch would have trouble appreciating.

The alternative to the Pauline tradition, according to Miller, is the Augustinian and liberal Catholic understanding of God's relationship to humanity. This tradition emphasizes the congruity and relatedness of world and God, of the real and the ideal. Pascal once observed that we may be nothing compared to God, but we are everything compared to nothing. This is the more humanistic, universalistic, works-oriented approach to soteriology and to our relationship with God.

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[44] Taking Laughter Seriously, p. 125.

Major Emphases for a Functional Definition of Pulpit Humor

What, then, is the most appropriate path to take in building a functional definition of humor to be used in analyzing examples of humor from the Unitarian Universalist pulpit? I believe the most appropriate path is one which leads more toward the congruity pole for five reasons.

First, theologically, I believe that the Augustinian/liberal Catholic understanding of the relationship between God and the world is closer to the understanding of Unitarian Universalism. Though our tradition comes from the radical left-wing of the Reformation, the understanding of most Unitarian Universalist theology throughout its history has been that salvation is present here and now. We came into existence as a denomination in this country, because of our rebellion against Edwardsian and Calvinistic theologies. If there is a God in their theologies, I believe, most Unitarian Universalists would identify God as immanent and within every individual. Also, we have tended to believe in the importance of works in soteriology. It is not a matter of faith alone. Finally, if one is to understand "Catholic" in its uncapitalized incarnation, one will understand it to mean "universal." Certainly UniverSalism has emphasized salvation as a universal gift. Unitarianism and its continual emphasis on inclusivity has been concerned with creedlessness so its doors would be open to anyone, no matter what creed he or she professes.

Second, because the congruity pole tends to emphasize the relational over and against the concern with distinction-making, it seems to indicate more of what I understand ministry to be about. Ministry is a response to need, and such a response is impossible without exploring the relations between the minister and the congregation and between members of the congregation. Humor, if used in the Unitarian Universalist pulpit, may be a valuable tool in understanding these relations as well as, perhaps, a tool to bring down defenses to discover a people's need. Humor which is concerned with distinction-making between what is mine and ours and what is not mine and ours, will not help the response to need. It would not ask "What is our need?"; only "What is my need as opposed to what is your need?" or "What is our need as opposed to what is their need?".

The third reason I believe a congruity definition of humor is appropriate in investigating examples of Unitarian Universalist pulpit humor is because of the emphasis in Unitarian Universalist churches on community and interrelatedness. Feminist theology has had a large impact on Unitarian Universalist churches and its emphasis on "weaving tapestries" as a description of a community's practice of religion is common. Congruity emphasizes the cohesiveness of community life.

Fourth, regarding the influence of the Enlightenment on the development of Unitarian Universalism, one might claim that incongruity would be more appropriate to Unitarian Universalism pulpit humor because of the Enlightenment's emphasis on rationality, intellectualism, and objective analysis. But if we understand rationality in the broader sense, that is, as the effort to discover the relations between things, we can see a faith of congruity in the thought of the Enlightenment. Specifically, I am thinking of Isaac Newton's contribution to Enlightenment understanding. Newton showed how the universe could be understood as something on which certain forces act constantly. No matter where a piece of matter is in the universe, gravity acts on it in exactly the same way it does on a piece of matter billions of light years away. In Newton's universe, light always moves in a straight line and space exists as unbending as a three-dimensional Cartesian graph. Few thinkers had many qualms about applying the absolute quality of Newtonian laws to human society. One society of humans was understood to operate in the same way as any other society. One society's universe was the same as any other society's universe.

And so it was with individuals as well. There is a faith from our Enlightenment influence that an individual's universe is the same as any other individual's universe. This faith is a faith of congruity because it assumes a common relation between every human being and the common universe. This faith is present in present-day Unitarian Universalism in its emphasis on a common humanity with a dignity afforded to every human being by right of his or her being human.

Finally, because I see humor as a function of the imagination and because imagination functions with archetypal images which we all share, a theory of humor which understands human beings as animals who imagine is more in line with congruity. Incongruity theories tend to start with the anthropology which says human beings are animals who think. Thought and intellect make distinctions not only between subject and object, but also by the fact that no two people think in exactly the same way. Imagination emphasizes our commonality.

I will not claim that humor is solely a matter of congruity. I understand humor to use incongruity in much the same way as Bergson did. Incongruity brings humor to our attention. But it is what we share that is prior and what is most important in understanding humor and appreciating it.

The next chapter will develop a functional definition of humor which will be used, in Chapter IV, to analyze examples of humor from the present-day Unitarian Universalist pulpit.

CHAPTER III

A FUNCTIONAL DEFINITION OF HUMOR

My functional definition of humor will be used in this thesis as a tool of analysis. With it I will analyze examples of humor contributed to this project by Unitarian Universalist ministers. The definition is based on the assumption that what happens before, during, and after the actual "comic moment" is important and that humor is more than the stimulus and the laugh, chuckle, knee-slap, or smile response.

Many theorists of humor have pointed out that humor is free; it is not bound to any moral purpose, stance, or intention. My functional definition will not deny the free and playful character of humor. The free and playful character will be acknowledged, however, in a larger context, that is, in the context of what is going on before and after the liberation. The definition, in order to help us to understand better how humor should be used in the pulpit, must not only point to the result of that transformation for which good preaching aims. How are restricting concepts dislodged? With what are they replaced? How are wider, more open concepts restructured?

In order to answer these questions, I have borrowed a model from the works of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner. This "liminality model" has three stages and was used by both anthropologists to explain rites of passage in certain societies. It is of some importance then to recognize that I am seeing examples of humor in the pulpit as part of some kind of rite of passage.

The three stages of this model are identified as preliminal (separation), liminal (margin), and postliminal (reaggregation). The preliminal stage occurs when various societally institutionalized attributes are stripped away from initiands. It aims toward reducing the initiands' individuality until they become anonymous in the collective. They then enter a state which Turner calls "communitas." According to Turner, communitas is an unmediated relationship between "historical, idiosyncratic individuals."[1] It is an attempt of the whole society to create sacred time and sacred space within it, and there is a detachment of the initiands from the society when they enter this time and space.

The liminal stage is the time when communitas is attained. It is the time of transition, the time when the transformation for which the rite is designed actually occurs. It is a time of ambiguity. The term "limen" is used by van Gennep because of its Latin origin: "threshold." In The Ritual Process, Turner develops a table of "binary oppositions" that indicates the difference between liminality and normal social life. An incomplete list of these oppositions is below:[2]

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[1] Victor Turner, From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play, (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), p. 45.

Properties of the Liminal Stage	Other Times
Totality	Partiality
Homogeneity	Heterogeneity
Equality	Inequality
Humility	Just pride of position
Sacredness	Secularity
No distinctions of wealth	Distinctions of wealth
Unselfishness	Selfishness

The liminal stage is a time of renewal, of death, and of re-birth, not only of the initiands, but also of the whole society for it assures the continuity of the society's existence. It is through the rite that the community affirms its identity.

The liminal stage, set apart from normal social bonds and social time, is a time of "anti-structure," and this anti-structure represents both danger and creativity. In From Ritual to Theatre, Turner writes:

> Liminality is, of course, an ambiguous state, for social structure, while it inhabits full social satisfaction, gives a measure of finiteness and security; liminality may be for many the acme of insecurity, the breakthrough of chaos into cosmos, of disorder into order. . . . Liminality is both more creative and more destructive

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[2] Victor Turner, The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), p. 106.

than the structural norm. 3

It is a destructive time because societal norms are destructured, and it is the necessary "unformed" part of the three-fold transformation process of deformation, unformation, and reformation:

> Gods and goddesses of destruction are adored /in rites of passage/ primarily because they personify an essential phase in an irreversible transformative process. All further growth requires the immolation of that which was fundamental to an earlier stage. [4]

The final stage of the liminality model is the postliminal, or reaggregation, stage. The liminal, by its nature, cannot last long -- a human being cannot be so radically free, so totally unbound, before some bonding allows both initiands and society to go about their business. This final stage is one of reincorporation. It has the function of bringing the initiands back within the socio-structural norm -- though, because of the transformative process, they are changed. When they re-enter society they have new status, new responsibilities and new powers. The society grants the status through its expectations of members of the class entered by the initiands:

> The neophyte in liminality must be a "tabula rasa", a blank slate, on which is inscribed the knowledge and the wisdom of the group. . . . The ordeal . . . to which

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[3] From Ritual to Theatre, pp. 46 and 47.

[4] Ibid., p. 84.

> the neophytes are submitted represents partly a destruction of previous status and partly a tempering of their essence in order to prepare them to cope with new responsibilities. . . .[5]

This model attempts to understand what is going on in certain societies during rites of passage. But what are the advantages of using it to help understand the use of humor in the present-day Unitarian Universalist pulpit?

I believe that first among the advantages is that by using this model to build a functional definition of humor, we have the opportunity to explore not only the brief comic moment, but also what goes on before and after that moment. The comic moment is, without doubt, necessary for humor. Without it there would be no humor. But there are other considerations, especially with pulpit humor. Racist and sexist humor may have effective comic moments, and, if used in the pulpit, may cause hearty laughter. But would that be appropriate pulpit humor?

But if we pursue an understanding of humor which sees more than the comic moment, which points to what precedes and follows the comic moment, then it is possible to get a better idea of how humor can be moral and conducive to spiritual and religious transformation. The liminality model will allow us to identify the restricting concepts, the kind of imagination being used, and the more open restructured concepts.

Another advantage to using the liminality model in the construction of a functional definition of pulpit humor is that such a definition would be sensitive to the community formation which liberal religion views as very important. James Luther Adams, possibly the most influential Unitarian Universalist thinker of this century, found community formation so important that he refers to God as the "community-forming power."[6]

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[5] The Ritual Process, p. 103.

Unitarian Universalist congregations, and the denomination as a whole, are not held together by specific and continually affirmed creeds or doctrines. However, these communities need something to hold them together; they need the recognition of and the affirmation of what Judith Hoehler refers to as "fundamental truths." Otherwise, what is common in a community is absent. A definition of humor based on the liminality model allows us to see what is recognized and affirmed; or,. at least, what the minister _wants_ to be recognized and affirmed by the congregation.

Therefore, I believe it is both possible and beneficial to develop a functional definition of pulpit humor based on the liminality model.

Humor can be understood, then, as (1) a playful deformation of restricting concepts (preliminal) which (2) allows the psyche to open up to the freeflow of the imagination

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[6] See, for example, James Luther Adams, _On Being Human Religiously: Selected Essays in Religion and Society_, Max L. Stackhouse, ed., (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1976).

(liminal) which then (3) brings the congregation to a recognition and affirmation of wider, more open, restructured concepts (postliminal). I will now explore what I mean by each of these stages, and, in the next chapter, I will apply the definition to examples of present-day Unitarian Universalist pulpit humor.

Playful Deformation

Deformation

By the term deformation I mean that restricting concepts are "dislodged" or "taken apart." The restricting concepts and the psyche are opened then to the play of the imagination.

An example of deformation comes from science and it concerns the nature of light. There have been, for many years, two schools of thought concerning light, both with ample evidence to back their claims. One school claims light is a wave and the other claims light is made of particles. Neither are wrong except in denying the claims of the other. The problem stems from the fact that both models of understanding light are deficient and it has been only in this century that light has been accepted as both. A proper understanding of light must embrace both concepts while denying neither of them in much the same way that relativity physics could embrace Newtonian physics. When restricting concepts are deformed, they are not denied as much as they are recognized as but one way to understand and perceive the world. Deformation is an attitude of conciliation more than it is an attitude of denial.[7]

But, as I pointed out in Chapter II, deformation can be a frightening experience for it requires the letting go of concepts which could be very comfortable for the psyche, but not very healthy for the growth of the psyche. It is an invitation to let the ego die and to enter the freeflow of the imagination where there are not only angels, but demons as well. But this fear is absent in humor. Humor seems to require a playful climate. I believe it is the playfulness of the deformation of restricting concepts in humor which allows us to approach and enter this unknown of the imagination without fear, but instead, with a sense of fun.

Play

One way to see how play rids deformation of its frightening aspects is to see that play changes life from a conflict into a contest. As M. Conrad Hyers writes, "the goal is not to win the war but to play at accepting the risks."[8] To enter the game of living is not to see life with deadly earnest, but to discover the playfulness that is at the heart of reality itself.

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[7] This idea is the backbone behind Gaston Bachelard, The Philosophy of No, G. C. Waterston, trans., (New York: Orion Press, 1968. See especially p. 117 passim.

[8] The Comic Vision and the Christian Faith, p. 137.

It is playfulness in humor which reduces the threatening aspects of deformation. For just as play can be considered as insignificant and self-indulgent, perhaps even "a waste of valuable time," from the point of view of the deadly earnest, so the deadly earnest may be reduced to insignificance and be laughed at for tendencies toward pomposity from the view of the playful.

Play is, in fact, more than mere silliness. Many theories of human development (Piaget and Ericson, for example) have seen play as being a necessary part of growing up, of being acculturated, and of learning about relationships with things and other people. One might go so far as to say that play is an important way of learning about God.

Often philosophers have thought of play in terms of what David Miller has called the "Coca-Cola philosophy," that is, play as "the pause that refreshes." This view has been with us since Aristotle. Perhaps the most influential view of play in this century comes from Johan Huizinga's book Homo Ludens. In that book, Huizinga lists the "formal characteristics" of play:

> /Play is/ a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious", but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by

disguise or other means.[9]

What is interesting about Huizinga's theory is his belief that human society is based, in large part, on the fact that human beings play. If it weren't for the fact that we play, society as we know it and understand it would be non-existent.

Huizinga's major critic, Roger Callois, takes issue with this view and claims Huizinga's definition of play is both too broad and too narrow. Callois contends that it is too broad because Huizinga fails to draw a distinction between a society's playful and sacred spheres. I find myself in agreement on this point especially when I consider the playfulness of humor. Even though I think everyone and everything, at some point or another, may be considered humorous (Monty Python's The Life of Brian comes to mind), there are limits and boundaries to the playground at any particular time and in any particular social group.

Callois also finds Huizinga's definition too narrow. An example which proves his point is gambling. Gambling can be considered play and yet it is based on the gain and loss of "material interest." Callois finds that Huizinga is concerned with only one kind of play, that is, competition. Callois expands the concept of play to cover not only competition (agon), but also games of chance (alea), games of simulation (mimicry), and experiences of vertigo like dancing, carnivals, and mountain climbing (ilinx).[10]

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[9] Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture, (New York: Roy Publishers, 1950), p. 13.

However, both Huizinga and Callois are still operating within the Coca-Cola philosophy: they still see play as a serious thing. Although this thesis uses Huizinga's definition with Callois's addenda to understand how humor is playful deformation, we must note a caveat: we are in danger of reductionism by placing outside criteria on play. Play is separate from the dimension of seriousness. Hugo Rahner writes of this separate dimension of play:

> To play is to yield oneself to a kind of magic, to enact in oneself the absolutely other, to preempt the future, to give lie to the inconvenient world of fact. In play, earthly realities become, all of a sudden, things of a transient moment, presently left behind, then disposed of and buried in the past; the mind is prepared to accept the unimagined and incredible, to enter a world where different laws apply, to be relieved of all the weights that bear it down, to be free, kingly, unfettered and divine.[11]

Play is a suspension of disbelief. One is allowed, through play, to add depth to an otherwise flat life. Play is one way (along with grief, joy, love, and dreaming) that life becomes something more valuable in more than a merely utilitarian sense. Eugen Fink writes that "the immanent purpose of play is not subordinate to the ultimate purpose served by all other human activity."[12] As restricting concepts are dislodged, we are capable of taking the most threatening perspective and play with it without fear.

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[10] Roger Callois, Man, Play and Games, Meyer Barash, trans., (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), p. 36.

[11] Hugo Rahner, Man at Play; or Did You Ever Practise Eutrapelia?, Brian Battershaw and Edward Quinn, trans., (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 65.

But this brings up a question: With what do we play? What is a toy? I believe it is possible to see the toy and the player as being in the same relationship as the image and the imaginer, that is, the vocative relationship.

Again, with the player and the toy, there is an invitation to play and an intimacy emerges. The toy, like the image, is another subject interacting with the player. Jacques Ehrmann writes:

> The player is at once the subject and object of the play. The prnouns I, you, he are the different modes of the play structure. The subject-object dualism is abolished because it is inoperative. [13]

Thus, in a profound way, one never really plays alone. The toy plays the player as well. Just as there is an expansion of being in play as well. And if play includes many players, the vocative provides for an even greater expansion of being through a shared intimacy. This intimacy is an expression of the community-forming power of Adams, an expression of what we share as human beings.

As far as the first, preliminal, stage of my functional definition of humor is concerned, there is a deforming of restricting concepts through the action of the imagination. This deformation is not frightening because the threatening aspects of the deformation are reduced to insignificance by the adoption of a playful attitude. This playful attitude is not a matter of mere silliness. Instead, it is best to understand it as a willful suspension of disbelief. Simply put, the deformation is not frightening because it is fun.

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[12] Eugen Fink, "The oasis of happiness: Toward an ontology of play," Yale French Studies, Number 41, Games, Play, Literature, (New Haven: Eastern Press, 1968), p. 21.

[13] Jacques Ehrmann, "Homo ludens revisited," Yale French Studies, p. 56.

The Freeflow of the Imagination

In what may be related to the liminal stage of humor, there is a freeflow of the imagination. In what was playfully deformed in the preliminal stage is let go and the comic moment is reached. We laugh. We get the joke. We slap the knee. The moment of liberation occurs. The imagination is active and we are not bound to concepts. It is a time of radical freedom. We are open to understanding and perceiving self, others, the sacred, and life in any number of ways. It is, as Peter Berger has called it, a comic catharsis:

> Comic catharsis presents us with a fleeting image of man transcending his finitude and, if only for a brief moment, gives us the exhilirating idea that perhaps it will be man after all who will be the victor in his struggle with a universe bent on crushing him.[14]

In a way, we may look at the transition from the preliminal stage to the liminal stage as the deforming of things we believe to be true. It is at the point of liberation that we become aware of the unbelievable. When we face the unbelievable, faith can begin.

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[14] Peter Berger, Holy Laughter, p. 127.

But as the liminal stage of van Gennep and Turner is short, so the radical freedom and anti-structure of the comic moment cannot last long. The comic moment is, after all, momentary. I now will examine the third part of my functional definition of humor.

Recognition and Affirmation of Restructured Concepts

In what corresponds to the postliminal stage of the liminality model, we find that the restricting concepts have been dislodged, the comic moment has occured, there has been a freeflow of the imagination, and the congregation has laughed and smiled. And now, what happens at this point as the smiles fade and the laughs die? If the liminality model is accurate and appropriate for pulpit humor, there should be a restructuring of wider and more open concepts. What is restructured is a learned manner of perceiving and understanding and perceiving self, others, the sacred, and life, and they are very much like those restricting concepts deformed in the preliminal stage. In fact, there is no reason why these restructuring concepts would not be deformed themselves in some later example of humor.

Wylie Sypher, in his essay "The Meanings of Comedy," writes of the carnival. But his observation of such a festivity seems appropriate for the liminal model of humor as well:

> Those in the thrall of the carnival come out, for a moment, from behind the facade required by their vocation. When they emerge from this facade, they gain a new perspective on their official selves and thus, when they retire behind their usual personnae they are more conscious of the duplicity of their existence.[15]

In other words, there is a lesson learned in humor and it is in this postliminal stage that the meaning of the message becomes clear. This is the outcome of the humor and, in pulpit humor, I suggest this outcome becomes as vital to humor as the comic moment.

The restructuring concepts are presented to the congregation as possibilities. They should present viable ways to perceive and understand reality. There is an invitation in the postliminal stage that is similar to the invitation from the imagination and from play. But here it is an invitation to see that the world of possibility is a world which could be true. It is an invitation to faith.

Therefore, as we proceed with the analysis of pulpit humor, let us consider not only what is playfully deformed and what kind of imagination is employed, but also what concepts are restructured.

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[15] Wylie Sypher, "The Meanings of Comedy", from Comedy, Wylie Sypher, ed., (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1956), p. 221.

CHAPTER IV

A SURVEY OF UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST PULPIT HUMOR

In the Autumn of 1984, I sent a letter to thirty-five well-known and successful Unitarian Universalist ministers. Two are serving churches in Canada, the rest in the United States. Two are black, two are female, and the rest are white males. Three are Christian or christo-centric, five are atheistic or strongly humanistic, and the rest are theistic or agnostic. The generic form of the letter is below:

> "Dear Colleague:
>
> "I am writing you in hopes you could help me with my thesis project at Meadville/Lombard. I am writing a number of experienced and successful ministers and asking if they (and you) could provide me with the following:
> "1. one to three sermons that include humor (whether the examples brought smiles or belly laughs);
> "2. any other writings or sermons that express your views on the comic perspective or humor (especially if they are concerned with humor in the pulpit); and
> "3. permission to use these materials in my thesis.
> "In this thesis I will explore the redemptive and salvific uses of humor. More specifically, how is humor used in the pulpit? How may humor be a transformative agent? I am using, as examples, sermons of ministers active in Unitarian Universalist churches today and I would appreciate your help in my endeavor.
>
> "Sincerely,
>
> "Mark Allstrom"

I received copies of sermons and letters or notes from twenty ministers. In this survey, however, I will be analyzing only the sermons of twelve of these ministers. I cut examples from the survey for three reasons: (1) analysis of the example provided no new findings; (2) the material was humor but not from a sermon; and (3) humorous sermons were contributed which were from third parties from whom I had received no permission. I believe, however, that the ministers who provided materials I will use in the analysis represent a good theological cross-section of the denomination. One serves a Canadian church and one is female. Unfortunately, there were no examples provided by black ministers. Nevertheless, I hope the reader finds this survey satisfactory.

From these twelve, I am using fourteen sermons, one with two examples of humor. Of these fourteen, four are sermons _about_ humor but which contain illustrations of humor. The remainder concern other matters but contain humor.

In the analysis of pulpit humor, I am looking for three things: (1) restricting concepts of self (or selves), others, the sacred, and life which the minister is trying to dislodge through humor; (2) the type of imagination employed and, if relevant, the kind of imagery used; and (3) instances of the restructuring of concepts. Chapter V will contain a summary of my analyses as well as prescriptions I believe are necessary for the successful use of liberating humor in the present-day Unitarian Universalist pulpit.

Tony Larsen

In "O Ye of Little Faith" (appendix A), Tony Larsen attempts to inspire the members of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Racine and Kenosha, Wisconsin, to recognize and affirm their liberal religious faith. This attempt contains much humor, two examples of which I will analyze.

The first example introduces the sermon. It concerns a time when Larsen went into a candy store and had a conversation with a young woman behind the counter:

> Several months ago I happened to go into the candy store just a few blocks from here, as is my wont on occasion, and the young woman behind the counter smiled and said, "It's been a long time since I've seen you here." It *had* been a long time, so I said, "Well, I just come in when the spirit moves me."
>
> She seemed to like my use of the word "spirit" and rejoined with "I hope it was a good spirit and not an evil one." Well, I couldn't resist making a biblical allusion to justify the religious benefits of pleasure, so I said, "Remember, even Jesus changed water into wine for a party."
>
> *Well*, she just *loved* that, and a glow came over her face as she said, "You must be a Christian."
>
> Uh-oh. Now I didn't know what to say. I thought of going into an involved explanation of my position vis-a-vis the various meanings of the word "Christian"; I thought of simply saying Yes or No and having it over with; and I also thought of a way to evade the question all together.
>
> I decided on No. 3 -- the evasion -- and said, "Well actually, I'm a minister at a church nearby."
>
> And let me tell you, if she loved what I said before, she was crazy about me now, and her face grew even brighter as she asked what church it was.
>
> And figuring hardly anybody knows about our church anyway, I felt it safe to answer her and then just leave. So I did. "Unitarian Universalist," I replied.
>
> And she said, "Oh-h-h-h-h," and suddenly there was a look on her face resembling horror, and I knew I wasn't going to get away so easily. "I've heard of your church before," she said, and it wasn't a statement of fact -- it was an accusation.

The story continues from this point but it continues in order to put a cap on the experience, to restructure the story so it becomes integrated with the point of the sermon. Indeed, it is hard to tell where the story stops and the sermon begins:

> Then she said she was a born-again Christian and she felt she had something pretty special, and I said I wasn't but I thought I had something pretty special too. Then she said if my religion was right, we would both be saved; but if her religion was right she would be saved and I would go to hell. So wouldn't it make more sense to go her way, she said, just in case? I told her I had no doubt I would be saved -- or at least I wouldn't be damned and at that moment I realized I really do have something special. With all her talk of faith, I had more faith than she did. She believed a sizable portion of humanity would go to hell.
>
> And I wouldn't call that faith -- I'd call it despair! It had never come to me as clearly before, that my faith is very large and expansive -- mine is a faith that does not divide the saved from the damned, because it's too big for that. In a way I had more faith than she did, and I had never fully realized it before.

The restructuring occurs as Larsen makes the distinction between what he calls his faith and the woman's despair. It is a reforming of concepts concerning faith. What is commonly called the Christian faith is, at least to some, a restricted concept. To Larsen, it is despair to believe some, or any, would suffer hellfire for eternity. Faith is more than that. Faith is greater if one believes in some form of universal salvation. Unitarian Universalists, insofar as they believe in any salvation, tend to believe in universal salvation. They have great faith -- not little faith.

I think most Unitarian Universalists could identify easily with the feelings Tony must have had as he sensed himself being dragged into a theological discussion with this born-again woman. It is easy for most of us to identify with him as he moves from one point to another in the story. It is this movement that indicates a dynamic quality to the imagination used. As I mentioned in Chapter II, the dynamic imagination is closely associated with story-telling and most of the examples in this survey make use of stories and the dynamic imagination. Witticisms, asides, or puns rarely make use of this imagination. But some stories will make use of other types of imagination besides the dynamic.

With humorous stories and the dynamic imagination, we get a sense of flowing with a river or gliding with a breeze. We are not completely awash because there are points being made which are lifted out and to which some importance or value is given. Ususally, such stories begin with a "Once upon a time. . ." or a "I remember when. . . ," but these specific beginnings are not necessary. All that is needed is the recognition and awareness by the congregation that a story or fable is about to begin. This is the portal into the imagination which will open to us its dynamism.

Later in the sermon, after Larsen has made his first point -- that Unitarian Universalists are not faithless -- he approaches the question of what kind of faith we have. Whereas the first story concerns not only restricting concepts of Unitarian Universalist self-identity, but also restricting concepts of faith (and, therefore, of the sacred), the second story is concerned with restricting concepts of faith and of God. This story, an old story, concerns the difference, at least to Larsen, between faith and works:

> Take the case of old Farmer Jones. The new minister in town tried to get him to come to church. For several Sunday afternoons in a row, she drove up to the farm to have a chat with the old man. She praised the crop, admired the cattle, marveled at the chicken coop; but Farmer Jones didn't say much. On her third or fourth visit the young minister delivered her message: "Don't you feel that the Lord has blessed you, Farmer Jones?" she said. "Don't you want to go to church and worship and give thanks?" Whereupon the old farmer answered: "Reverend, everything you have admired around here is the result of thirty years of hard work. Before I came here, the Lord had had the place all to himself for thousands of years, and you should have seen the mess it was in when I took over."

On the surface, it looks like a restricting concept of God -- God is a sloppy farmer. But Larsen is using it to illustrate his point that we all have faith, but some people have a different faith than others. The restricting concept is that faith is only real faith when it is directed at God in worship services. But the restructuring concept teaches us that what faith Farmer Jones "lacked in God's intervention, the farmer made up for in his faith in human effort. . . ." This quote appears after the tale, and it accurately reflects the restructuring concept Larsen is aiming for; however, there seems to be a kind of "reverse echo," a "restructuring hint" which this concept before the tale begins: "If you have less faith in something than your neighbor, it's only because you have more faith in something else that your neighbor does not believe in." There doesn't seem to be anything wrong with using restructuring hints -- it works -- but if it is a matter of restructuring, it seems to me that its effect must be felt after the humor is to carry a point. It also seems to me that this can be done in two ways. First, the restructuring hint is echoed by a statement of the restructuring concept, as is the case here; or, second, the story, joke, witticism, or pun is of short enough length that the point is remembered easily. We will see an example of the latter case in Robert Schaibly's "Self-Doubt and Self-Confidence," below.

The Farmer Jones tale, like the previous example, is a humorous story, and, therefore, it is the dynamic imagination which is at play. However, it is interesting to note the earth imagery present: not only is the farmer a man of the soil who has shaped and molded the earth so it is capable of bringing forth its fruits, but also the minister demonstrates a desire to pierce the man's faith, to understand what lies at the core of it. In each visit she makes, she seems to be searching the surface of the man for some means to enter his soul. Finally, she blurts out her question. The earth imagery here suggests not only the dynamic imagination, but also the material imagination. We identify with the minister as she tries to penetrate the stubbornness of the old farmer and become intimate with his faith. And we are rewarded with laughter.

Judith Hoehler

"A Faith for Uncertain Times" is a sermon whose concern is the difficulty we face in actually living the faith we profess. She wrote in her cover letter to me that when she uses humor, "always it is integral to a point /she is/ trying to make in the sermon."

The problem she addresses in the sermon is teen-alcoholism. She notes that it is hard to face such a problem, especially for parents who do not want to threaten an already tenuous relationship with their children. She puts this in the context of the Israelites in the wilderness. These times and those times were hard times for people of faith. For parents and concerned others in the community, however, there is a need to be prophetic, to be serious about "lofty ideals" which we continually speak of in church.

The restricting concept which Hoehler is speaking to in the example below is the concept of religion as merely a matter of attending church regularly, of outward show and shouts of "Hallelujah!" Religion is a matter of deeds as well as a mere profession of faith.

In this example we find another restructuring hint. Immediately before her humorous story, she says:

> How bland and innocuous so many of the statements we in the mainline churches make about our faith. We believe in brotherhood; we believe in freedom; we believe in a reasoned approach to religion. These are all lofty sentiments . . . but they really are empty of content until we spell out specifically what these statements mean in our daily lives.
>
> Being particular about our faith is not an easy matter. We risk alot of things, not the least of which is ridicule by our sophisticated, secular friends.

The story itself begins with a "Once upon a time. . ." signal for the congregation. Hoehler says:

> I am reminded of a story which was much told in seminary when I was a student. It concerns an itinerant preacher in the backwoods of Tennessee. He arrived at a rural village one week for a series of revival meetings. The first evening he preached on the topic, "Thou shalt not." He was received with great enthusiasm by the local farmers -- many "Amens" and "Hallelujahs" and "Right on, Reverend!" The second night he preached to the same foot-stomping enthusiasm. This time his topic was, "Thou shalt not steal." But the third night, he had barely gotten through a quarter of his sermon when he had to flee for his life. His topic that night: "Thou shalt not steal thy neighbor's chickens!"

Immediately, Hoehler adds the restructured concept: "The more specific we become, the more dangerous our faith."

Again, because of the format of the humorous story, we enter within its world by means of the dynamic imagination. But there seems to be another, added dimension of the dynamism: the build-up. As the itinerant preacher becomes more specific, he becomes more prophetic. Both Hoehler and the preacher are preaching as prophets calling to the people of the world to act upon their faith. As opposed to the sapiential and priestly dimensions of ministry, the prophetic call to action is dynamic; it incites. In Hoehler's story, it incited, but, it seems, in a negative way. But the message of the story as well as the narrative quality of this example of humor exemplify the dynamic imagination.

Max Coots

When I wrote Mark and Donna Morrison-Reed, of the First Universalist Society in Rochester, New York, asking if they could send sermons with examples of humor in them, Donna wrote back saying they usually do not use humor in their sermons, or, if they do, it is extemporaneous. However, she added, I should write Max Coots of the Unitarian Universalist Church in Canton, New York, because "he is a master at using humor."

Coots sent me a sermon called "The Deluge, The Ark, and the Noah Counts." The playfulness of this sermon is apparent immediately through the title. But if one happened to miss the play on words in the title, we find the same kind of playfulness in the first paragraph:

> It is an old, old story. We heard it first in the city of Sumer -- the Sumer of 1980 -- B. C. The Sumerian story tells how the high god, Enlil, irritated at the noise of the human race, decided to destroy it in a great flood. Horrified, the god Ea, alerted the good king Ut-Na-Pish-Tim, and Ut-Na-Pish-Tim built a ship 120 cubits by 120 cubits by 120 cubits, which, I suppose, made him the first Cubist.

With these puns, it is possible to assume that Coots is very well-liked in his congregation. Otherwise, he would most certainly be lynched.

Puns are a different kind of humor from the humorous story. They are made through a different kind of imagination. As I discussed in Chapter II, a humorous story makes use of the dynamic imagination. In the case of puns, the imagination is formal. It requires a playful approach to concepts -- they are juggled and twisted around. This kind of humor is of the type sometimes used by incongruity theorists to support their opinions.

Puns can be understood in the same way as the Aristotelian metaphor. First we find one referent (the city of Sumer), then another (the "Sumer of 1980"), and finally the intellect picks up on a relatedness, the transcendent third (the similarity of the words "Sumer" and "summer").

The formal imagination is intellectually oriented and its use is closer to wit than to humor. The humor in this sermon requires people who are able to think alike; the juggling of ideas would make little sense to children because it is too sophisticated.

Coots continues the sermon by pointing out that in 1980 A. D., we are "caught in a rising flood of troubled waters." Perhaps the most clever use of humor in this sermon is his identifying Unitarian Universalists as animals on the ark. Again, it is a series of witty puns and it is the formal imagination which is dominant here. But the dynamic imagination is also at play. It is present not because he is telling a story (he isn't), but because of the imagery he uses. There is "a rising flood of troubled waters," gushing and turbulent waters lifting us upward as we are buoyed up within the ark. Although no one knows "where we're going," we are, Coots says, "going to weather the storm." In other words, we may not know where we are going, but we are going somewhere.

The restricting concepts Coots attempts to dislodge in the example below concern self and others within not only the Canton congregation, but also the denomination as a whole. Unitarian Universalism is the new ark and we are the animals in it:

> And what a menagerie we've got! We've got: crows that fly after every new caws . . . Inquiring owls, who never ask "who," but always ask "why?" . . . Crabs franticly crawling backwards from where they came from and what they don't believe . . . Ostriches, who think that getting down to the nitty-gritty means sticking their heads in the social sands of the nineteen-sixties . . . Sloths, who just hang around . . . Horses of every creedal color . . . Several different breeds of catechist . . . And some odd birds, who when faced with a theological question, duck . . . And I have loved the whole motley batch of them. If I have to be all at sea, I can not think of a more meaningful menagerie with whom to weather the storm.

The use of these puns is prophetic. Coots points to the members of the congregation and says "You! You are one of these silly creatures." As I mentioned in the analysis of Hoehler's example of humor, propheticism is dynamic because is is a call to action, a call for us to respond.

How does he get away with this propheticism? Some Unitarians even have trouble with refering to themselves as "creatures." Certainly many do not like being called silly creatures! He gets away with it because the propheticism is tempered by his declaration of love for each and every one of those silly animals. In effect, he is saying, "We are all pretty silly, but that's O. K. because I love you anyway." But this declaration also indicates the direction which he will take the congregation in his restructuring concept: love and prophecy.

Love leads the congregation to the restructuring concept that our churches must do more than merely recognize the fact that we are in a deluge and that troubled waters are rising. Members of the congregation must be aware of the dangers of hypocrisy and complacency, of just waiting out the storm. There is more to do: ". . . if we are going to do more than simply survive the deluge, we must become locally sensitive, lovingly critical, and personally involved in the quality of our particular church or fellowship."

Erwin A. Gaede

"The Sense in Humor" is a sermon about humor rather than a sermon which uses humor. I use this example because there is, in it, an example of humor which is not only fairly common in sermons given by Unitarian Universalist preachers, but also integral to the main point of the sermon. What this sermon is saying is that life is not a matter to be taken with utmost seriousness all of the time. The example he uses to illustrate this point is a story of an old, dying rabbi and his students:

> A wise, old rabbi lay dying, so his disciples lined up next to his deathbed to catch his final words. They arranged themselves in order, from the most brilliant pupil to the most obtuse. The brilliant one bent over the prostrate form and whispered, "Rabbi, rabbi, what are your final words?"
>
> "My final words," murmured the ancient, "are . . . life is a river."
>
> The disciple passed it on to the fellow next to him, and the phrase traveled like wildfire down the line. "The rabbi says that life is a river. The rabbi says life is a river. The rabbi says life is a river." When it reached the oaf at the end, however, he scratched his head in perplexity. "What does the rabbi mean that life is a river?" he asked. That question, of course, traveled back up the line. "What does the rabbi mean that life is a river?"
>
> When the star pupil heard it, he leaned over again. "Rabbi, what do you mean that life is a river?"
>
> And the rabbi, shrugging, croaked, "So it's not a river."

The imagination at play in this example of pulpit humor is dynamic not only because it is a story, but also because the statement and question flow up and down the line from rabbi to oaf and from oaf to rabbi.

The back and forth movement along this line indicates another manifestation of the dynamic imagination. There is a continuum between what has been known since pre-Socratic Greece as the _bomolochus_ and the _eiron_, the clown and the wit. Essentially, the _bomolochus_ is a bumbling, oafish peasant most interested in satisfying creaturely desires such as gluttony and sexual appetite. In contrast, the _eiron_ is an ironic and urbane wit. It is the interaction of these polar opposites, which as a unit is called, sometimes, a "doppelganger," which leads to some forms of comedy. We still see it, in this century, in such comic teams as Abbott and Costello, Martin and Lewis, Rowan and Martin, the Smothers Brothers, and Franken and Davis. The tension between these opposites is a tension often present in the play of the dynamic imagination.

The restricting concepts in this story concern life. Life is a very serious thing, isn't it? The story is similar to Freud's example of _Galgenhumor_. Though we know it is a story, we _are_ given the signal, we still feel pity. But, we discover, this emotion is not necessary: the rabbi is well aware of the limitations of the mortal being.

In this story, there is another example of the restructuring hint. Gaede speaks of a certain kind of humor which, among other things, gives us a sense of humility. This is picked up after the story when Gaede tells the congregation:

> It is quite all right to laugh, if you wish, indeed, I think you must laugh, because the old story reveals so dramatically the insufficiency of what we might call ultimate wisdom. Who has it anyway? It also reveals the absurdity and folly of any man thinking that another has ultimate wisdom -- especially when he is on his deathbed.

We need humility in the face of what life throws at us. We are nothing more than finite mortals. Each will die and we must learn to accept that as a part of life and of wisdom.

Anthony R. Perrino

Tony Perrino gave this sermon at the Rockford Unitarian Church in 1971. "The Holiness of Humor" is another sermon _about_ humor, but I draw an example from it because the story's point is well integrated with the sermon's main point and because the example is a personal story. Personal stories in sermons about humor seem to be rare. Perhaps sermons about humor would be more convincing and would give more to the congregation if humorous stories were personal.

In this sermon, Perrino defines humor as "a kindly contemplation of life's incongruities." He parenthetically adds that "kindliness is essential for there must be not only a perception of the peculiarities and paradoxes of life, but a tolerance and acceptance of them." There has to an "owning" of the incongruities. They must become a part of the person experiencing them. Therefore, while Perrino identifies humor as a contemplation of incongruities, congruity between the individual and the paradoxes must be established for it to be humor.

In fact, Perrino disagrees with Bergson at one point. Bergson wrote that "humor and emotion are incompatible." Perrino responds:

> I would agree if he had said "laughter and feeling are incompatible", but the fact is that feeling produces the sublimest form of humorous conception: pathos. Such humor has an expression of protest in it, and yet retains its character as "kindly contemplation" because it lacks bitterness as it appeals to the basic goodness in human character while pointing out our folly.

The example I use for analysis is a story which Perrino finds "poignant:"

> I called in the hospital on a man who was dying. He knew he was dying and so did I, and when I entered his room he began to talk about the funeral arrangements. I tried to change the subject and said, "We don't have to talk about it now." But he interrupted me to say, "But I want to talk about it now. I want you to do this for me Tony, and if you'll do it for me this once, I'll never ask you to do it again!"

There are at least two restricting concepts which Perrino dislodges in the story. The first is that a man (or woman) who is dying should not want to think about funerals. Perhaps we think there are better things to do in one's final days, or perhaps we think that a man in such a delicate position and state of health might be overtaxed by the strain of thinking about his own demise. Or perhaps the real restriction did not come from a concept but from a feeling. It is uncomfortable talking about funerals with someone who is actually dying. The second restricting concept is that humor exists only in frivolous circumstances; life and death, as with the dying rabbi, seem too serious to be joked about. It is in response to the dislodging of this second restricting concept that Perrino directs the congregation toward a restructured concept:

> Well, it was funny, but more than that -- tremendously significant, for you see this man was saying, in effect, "I have a sense of identity greater than this event. Death is something I can look at and laugh at because it doesn't threaten my essential sense of being!" Humor reflects a sense of wholeness of personality.

The imagination used in this example of humor is dynamic not only because it is a story, but also because of the intellectual, willful, and emotional tension between the two men.

David E. Bumbaugh

David Bumbaugh contributed two pieces used in this survey. "Ye Shall Be As Gods" is one of the most unique sermons in the survey and it was given at the First Universalist Society of Syracuse, New York. It is most concerned with restricting concepts of the Bible (as an immutable source with fixed interpretation) and of God (as omnipotent, omnipresent, and always out after our welfare). These concepts are dislodged in the unique way Bumbaugh begins his sermon:

> In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Why God created the heavens and the earth he neglected to tell us, so we are unlikely ever to know -- perhaps he needed something to do on a rainy Sunday afternoon; perhaps the NFL was on strike and he was bored.

The whole sermon is a re-telling of the Genesis myth in this same style; however, he expands it to include history up to the present time. In this story, the imagination, being dynamic, tends to rise and fall. An interesting point concerning this rising and falling is that the story is very playful up to the point of "The Fall" when the story becomes increasingly serious. It is as though Bumbaugh is emphasizing the spread of evil through the world in order to point to greater and greater possibilities of ultimate tragedy. When he reaches very recent times, Bumbaugh speaks to the threat of the arms race:

> Man shrugged his shoulders and said, "It is too dangerous in this world to be without such weapons; we can only pray that we never have to use them." Woman knew that there was no one to pray to any longer. God would not intervene, could not intervene in this world, for this was no longer a world of his devising. MAN AND WOMAN HAD MADE THIS WORLD. Now they had truly become as Gods.

But the story does not fall all the way into despair. Instead, it turns to a sign of hope in ourselves and to a prophetic call to action. This sign and this call serve to restructure concepts of what we are to do in the face of despair:

> If only they had not eaten the fruit; if only they had not become as Gods; if only the snake had minded his own business. But even Gods cannot bring back the past. The most Gods can do is redeem the past and preserve the future. That is the task Man and Woman cannot evade, the task which their own history imposes upon them -- to redeem the past and preserve the future, to rid themselves of weapons capable of foreclosing the future, to renounce war as an instrument of national policy, to make of the United Nations a vehicle by which law may go out from Zion and peace become the order of nations.

The sermon ends with a question. Having been transformed, into Gods, or having made ourselves into Gods, the conclusion of the restructuring asks, "Man, Woman, we have become the masters of the earth. WHAT SHAPE SHALL WE GIVE THE FUTURE?"

The imagination used in this sermon is dynamic because it is a story, because of "the fall into seriousness," and because of the transformation of not only the world, but also of humanity into Gods. Lastly, the prophetic call at the end of the sermon is a call to action.

The restructured concepts correspond to the two restricting concepts dislodged at the beginning of the story. The sacred text is not just the Bible, for we are writing the will of Gods in our actions today. And God is no longer the creator of the heavens and earth who was so bored he _had_ to do something. Our restructured Gods are Man and Woman.

In the second of Bumbaugh's contributions to this survey, "The Bible Jerry Falwell Doesn't Preach," Bumbaugh attacks fundamentalist and literalist interpretations of the Bible while, at the same time, affirming the value of the Bible in our tradition and our culture. What the Bible is "really" about, according to Bumbaugh, is a warning against idolatries, forms of "idolatry implicit in our assumption that we know the nature of ultimate reality and the purpose and destiny of existence." According to Bumbaugh, _that_ is Bible which Falwell, as an example of fundamentalists, doe not preach. However, and this is the point Bumbaugh is trying to make in the sermon as a whole, the "real" message of the

Bible is not only confused by the evangelical right, but also by religious liberals. From the closing paragraph:

> Maybe it is time for us to reclaim the source of our religious faith and begin, just a little, preaching the Bible that the evangelical right dares not preach -- beginning with that verse from Micah which could well be inscribed over the door of every Unitarian Universalist church in the land: "He has shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

In this sermon, Bumbaugh uses two jokes back-to-back and the second actually becomes the point of the first, though the first could stand well alone. However, the first could not stand alone and remain integral to the point of the sermon. The second, in a sense, "justifies" the first. I will analyze the first as it stands alone and then analyze the second and how it justifies the first.

> According to the story, there came a day in the eternity of heaven, when St. Peter found the boredom of serving as celestial gate-keeper more than he could tolerate. Calling the main office, he talked to the Boss, pleading for a day off so he could go fishing. The Boss, being in an agreeable mood, thought he could find someone to serve as temporary replacement for the faithful Saint. In a few moments, St. Peter looked up to see Jesus of Nazareth jogging down the golden lane toward the pearly gate. In no time at all (since there is no time in eternity) St. Peter was angling for a few angel fish, while Jesus was twiddling his thumbs, waiting for some business at the entrance to heaven. It was a very long wait. The road to heaven is not well-travelled even in the best of times.
>
> Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, Jesus saw an old man trudging up the hill toward the gate. Jesus greeted him effusively and, feeling the need for companionship, tried to engage the new-comer in friendly conversation. The old man explained that in life he had been a carpenter and wood-worker, that he had tried to live a good life, but that his existence had been shadowed by one great sorrow. He had had an only son, whom he loved dearly. Unfortunately, that son had been taken

> from him and he had never seen him again.
>
> Jesus looked at the old man, looked at him again, and throwing out his arms in welcome, cried, "Father!"
>
> The old man squinted back through rheumy eyes, and replied, "Pinocchio?"

In this joke, the restricting concepts are the similarities between the story the old man relates and the story of Joseph. We become convinced, as does Jesus, that this man is Joseph. But then the comic moment appears with the last word of the story and we realize we were fooled by our restricting concepts. This is Gepeto, not Joseph. Because it is a story we can assume that the imagination used is dynamic, but it is also a conceptual joke which involves the formal imagination, for we not only must recognize that Joseph's story is similar to Gepeto's (at least as far as the information we are given is concerned), but also must recognize the incongruity of mistaking Jesus as a puppet who lies. Consequently, this exercise of the formal imagination requires an audience which sees the connections.

And this is the point of the second story. Immediately after the comic moment of the first joke, Bumbaugh directs our attention to another story of a time when he told the first story to a Unitarian Universalist friend:

> /She/ thought it wildly funny and commented that she couldn't wait to get home and share it with her children. As she said that, a look of surprise came over her face. "Oh," she said, "it won't do any good to tell my kids that one. They won't understand it. They're very up on their Pinocchio, but I'm afraid they don't know much about Jesus."

Again, as a story, it is an exercise of the dynamic imagination; however, the formal imagination appears again as well, for one assumes everyone would get the joke and slap the knee, just as Bumbaugh's friend had assumed. But no, these children are being brought up as Unitarian Universalists and their religious education consists of not only Bible reading and Bible stories, but Buddhist, Hindu, Native American, and Shinto stories as well. One would have to understand that before the second story could justify the first story. The restructuring of the two stories follows:

> In short, we consider ourselves, and not without reason, a highly literate people. And yet, when it comes to the central document in the development of western culture, the document which melds the civilizations of the ancient near-east with the philosophical and mythic traditions of classical Greece and provides the basis for the civilization which has dominated the western world for nearly two millenia, most of us plead ignorance. We are well up on our Pinocchio, but we know little about the Bible. We have trouble recognizing its pervasive symbolism in the literature we do read, or the degree to which its assumptions color the manner in which we view our everyday world.

The restricting concept is that we think we know a lot about the Bible, but the restructured concept is the realization that, in fact, most of us do not. This sermon then expands this realization to include Bumbaugh's opinion that most "Bible-thumpers" don't know much about the Bible either.

Robert Lloyd Schaibly

Bob Schaibly delivered "Self-Doubt and Self-Confidence" soon after he arrived as the new minister at the First Unitarian Church of Houston. Being concerned with self-doubt and self-confidence, the example of humor in it concerns restricting concepts of self. As it appears near the beginning it has to do with self-doubt. But this example concerns not only restricting concepts of self, but also some restricting concepts that members of the congregation might have about their new minister. The former is explicitly stated in the first paragraph:

> In intimate moments, I often hear people say how inadequate they feel for some role in which life has cast them. A father or a mother says, "I wish I knew how to be a good parent." A man says, "I wish I knew how to be a man." Or someone says, "I don't know how I ever got myself into this, and I don't know how I'm ever going to get out of it."

Schaibly follows this with his declaration of his own self-doubt, and especially his doubt about being the minister of the First Unitarian Church. Thus, members of the congregation are told that he, too, a minister of their church, has self-doubt. Then comes the joke:

> A friend said, "Boy, I don't envy you preaching on self-doubt." "Oh, you don't think I know anything about self-doubt?" "No, it's just that the place is going to be packed with experts!"

This humor employs the formal imagination. The concepts are twisted around and we see, as with the Aristotelian metaphor, that the circumstance of Bob's friend not envying him is connected to not only the circumstance wherein his friend does not think Bob knows much about self-doubt, but also the circumstance wherein everybody at the First Unitarian Church knows as much about self-doubt as Schaibly, if not more. But it is not so much the incongruity that tickles the members of the congregation as it is the recognition that everyone in the sanctuary knows about self-doubt -- even the minister. Thus, while it is conceptual humor, its point is to emphasize commonality.

An interesting point about this example of humor is that there does not seem to be an effort of restructuring. Restructuring seems to be left to the members of the congregation. But there is a restructuring hint: after Schaibly mentions his own feelings of self-doubt and before the joke, he says, "Maybe you know something about this!" When I first mentioned restructuring hints in connection with Tony Larsen's second example, I mentioned the possibility that the effort to restructure concepts could appear before the actual story or joke if (1) the restructuring hint was echoed after the humor, or (2) the example was brief enough to allow the congregation to remember clearly and easily what the point of the humorous story or joke was supposed to be. It appears that it is the latter case with Schaibly's example.

Rolfe Gerhardt

Rolfe Gerhardt delivered "The Seven Sins and the Seven Virtues" at the First Unitarian Church of San Antonio in May 1982. The frequency of humor in it is matched only by Coots' contribution to the survey. There are twenty-eight paragraphs in the text and eighteen of them have at least one joke or pun.

But it is not until the middle of this sermon that it offers something unique through humor. What Gerhardt does is identify the seven deadly sins (pride, envy, covetousness, lust, gluttony, sloth, and anger -- in case the reader has forgotten) and cast them all in a different light, a light that represents them as virtues. The restricting concepts are clear: each of these sins is a sin, right? But playfully, almost precociously, Gerhardt dislodges the sinful quality from each "sin" and they become admirable qualities. For example:

> Pride means to have a high opinion of one's own dignity, and I have to confess I do. I have a very high opinion of my own dignity and your dignity and the essential dignity of every human being. To me, the greatest tragedy of life is for a person to lose his or her dignity, and I'm not talking about just some embarrassing moment but a deeper, more permeating perhaps permanent loss of dignity. Anyone can temporarily lose his or her dignity -- that's part of life -- and the people I envy most are those who can gracefully recapture their sense of dignity. I did say envy, didn't I?
>
> Well, yes, I do envy certain things in certain people; the sin of envy just comes naturally sometimes. There are those people I just mentioned who have that natural grace which I envy, and I have always envied those with a smooth, polished style of doing things, those who just naturally organize their their thoughts and always pick the right words. There are some ministers like that, and after hearing them I find myself saying, Why didn't I think of that? Why didn't I pick those words? And then there are some who never even use notes but just stand up there and rattle on about whatever topic they choose, always well presented and well said, well thought out. Now I envy that, and I don't mind the envy at all because it keeps reminding me of what excellence can be. That's probably pride again, but Aquinas felt that pride is one of the best sins -- that's what turned Satan from an angel to a devil -- and if we are going to be sinners, then we ought to be our best.

This twisting around of our ideas so as to show that even sins have another side to them is a clever trick of the formal imagination. Gerhardt plays with our restricting concepts and shows that we admire certain aspects of these sins as virtues.

He holds off on a complete restructuring of our concepts until all seven deadly sins are dealt with in like manner. Then, after mentioning the seven virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance, faith, hope, and love -- again, in case you have forgotten), he restructures our understanding by saying that what is sacred and what is profane is in equal measure in everyone, and as that is the way we are, as that is the way we relate to what is good as well as what is evil, it is good and natural -- for what else could we be?

> So sinners that we are, virtuous people too, we Unitarian Universalists are just human beings, complex, contradictory, good and bad, saints and sinners all. I wouldn't want it any other way, for in all our complexity and contradiction, we are very properly human and very much alive, and above all, it is life that we believe in.

Khoren Arisian

Khoren Arisian's "Humor and Faith: The Therapy of Laughter" is the third sermon in this survey about humor. To Arisian, humor is a matter of incongruity, it is the perceiving of the difference between the real and the ideal: "Humor is the perception of the measure between what is and what could be; that discrepancy is incongruity, grappling with which can lead to a tragic or a comic vision. . . ." This is very much like Kierkegaard's view; only God is missing.

In the sermon (or "address"), Arisian speaks about the humor of Monty Python, Charlie Chaplain, Groucho Marx, Woody Allen, Russell Baker and Will Rogers. Most examples of humor in this address come from these humorists -- very little originates with Arisian. As far as I can tell in my reading, Arisian uses his own humor only once. (Although it is possible that the statement about the Minneapolis elections is also humorous.)

The one clear example of his own humor occurs when Arisian makes a comparison between himself and Groucho Marx:

> Groucho has a special attraction for me: his father was an unsuccessful tailor so Groucho went into the theater. My father was a successful tailor, so I went into the ministry.

The humor here is confusing. Are the theater and the ministry two sides of the same tailor coin? As confusion is often part of incongruity theories, one might look at this example through Jerry Suls' incongruity resolution model of humor. But the incongruity is not resolved into a good fit here. Perhaps it is an example of enjoyment of the "poor fit" mentioned in connection with Suls' model in Chapter II. But it still remains confusing and perhaps it can be enjoyed only in its original setting.

The facts that the joke is confusing, that it may be enjoyable only in its own setting, and that it is created through incongruity theory make it difficult to analyze through the liminality model. Essentially, however, it seems the joke is a paradox comparing Marx and Arisian. The imagination here is formal. But unlike other examples which use the formal imagination, we are not carefully led through the conceptual pattern or framework. Like the Aristotelian metaphor, we have three referents: the preacher, the theatrical clown, and the transcendent third: fathers who are tailors. However, unlike Coots' puns, it is not a simple triad because we are told Marx's father was unsuccessful and Arisian's father was successful. Therefore too many additional factors remain unexplained and seem unrelated to the original comparison: what does a father's success have to do with ministry as opposed to theater?

Because the humor is hard to resolve, restructuring is incomplete. In effect, we are left hanging while Arisian moves on to explore Marx Brothers' humor.

But we might understand the original restricting concept as the idea that preachers are not like clowns and that there is a big difference between the two occupations. The former is involved in "sacred work" while the latter is involved in "profane play." This restricting concept is similar to that of Schaibly's. Both preachers are concerned with the perception of members of the congregations who might view the preacher as someone special and removed from the congregation. Such a restricting concept does not view the preacher as having self-doubt or as somewhat clownish. Working through Arisian's humor from this restricting concept, we may see that the comparison, while confusing, still manages to be successful pulpit humor. The members of the congregation are led then to understand that the preacher is not that much different from a clown anyway. Then this example indicates what Arisian calls the democratic and humanizing effect of humor.

F. Forrester Church

In his letter enclosed with the two sermons for my survey, Forrester Church wrote that "all the humor I use is personal and anecdotal. I avoid canned sermon illustrations."

In the first, "Does God Have Good Manners?", Church is concerned with the problem of evil: If God is good and omnipotent, why is there evil in the world? Church approaches this question by relating a discussion between his five-year-old son, Twig, and himself. As is so often the case, a child's question opens the mind to profundities.

The restricting concept Church tries to dislodge in this sermon is that God is good -- always. It is Twig who manages to dislodge this concept:

> [My] son said to me . . . "Daddy, you don't always have good manners."
>
> "That's true, Twig."
>
> "And Mommy doesn't always have good manners."
>
> "You're right, she doesn't."
>
> "Even God doesn't have good manners," he proclaimed with triumphant finality. I must admit this left me at a complete loss.
>
> "What do you mean God doesn't have good manners?" I asked.
>
> "Daddy," Twig explained to me somewhat impatiently, "If God is inside of us then God makes us not say 'Please' and 'Thank you.'"
>
> How do you figure it? After six years of exposure to the free spirit of Unitarianism, my son turns out to be a Calvinist! In my attempt to counter this heresy, I quickly discovered what I should already have known. It

> is impossible to have a meaningful discussion concerning the freedom of the will with a five-year-old. As I thought about it, however, I realized that once again I had learned something unexpected from an off-the-wall conversation with my son. If Jesus is right, God in a sense does have bad manners. He rewards the last laborer to arrive in the vineyard equally with him who had worked the day long. He insults the prudent, pious son, by receiving back the prodigal son with open arms. He gives precedence in the Kingdom to prostitutes and tax-collectors. No, the one with good manners is not God. It is the devil whose manners are impeccable.

The last two sentences of the portion above are not sufficient as a restructuring concept. The devil has good manners, but still, what about God? Church goes on from this point to speak about the Biblical stories of Abraham and Sarah in Egypt and Isaac's blessing Jacob instead of Esau. The question "But what about God?" is then opened up by Church's quoting a colleague: "If God exists, he is a bastard." After that, a second restructuring attempt is made which points out that human beings cannot judge the actions and will of God:

> . . . throughout the Bible, one theme is sounded again and again. God's law and human law are not the same. . . /and/ perhaps one of the reasons God has such bad manners is that we humans so readily succumb to our own presumptions.

Church continues and examines the religion and politics debate which was raging toward the end of 1984, and he accuses those who claim that God is on their side. Those who do so are prideful and he warns the congregation not to expect God to act according to the laws of human civility. What about God? God acts opposite to the laws of human civility:

When we walk into church, God doesn't say, "Hello,

> how are you?" When we leave, God doesn't say, "Thank you and Goodbye." If God says anything at all it is, "What in the world do you think you are doing here, and who in the world do you think you are? Isn't it about time you took a hard, honest look at yourself? Stop re-arranging the deck chairs in your life. Man the boats and sail. And don't ask me where you are going. You will find out along the way, and even then, not where you are going but where you have been. Above all else, do what you would rather not do. Go where you would rather not go. Look for truth in places you have never looked before."
>
> If anything, when we enter church, God says, "Thank you and Goodbye." When we leave, God says, "Hello, how are you?" . . . it may take something a bit more bracing than an act of politeness to knock us off our pins. Which is perhaps the main reason that, if there is a God, God's manners are not particularly good.

The imagination used in the story about Twig's question is dynamic because it is a story. But there also is a delightful kind of flow within the story's own dynamism. The flow follows Twig's points. Church fights a losing battle against Twig's reasoning. He is stymied by Twig's declaration that God doesn't have good manners. Almost in the manner of a spoilsport, Church asks Twig, who is impatient with his father's obstinancy and ignorance, to press his point. Church realizes his son is operating with a Calvinistic bias. He attempts to counter it, again as a spoilsport, and yet fails against Twig's immutable child's nature. Finally, what this action shows is the losing battle of the adult's world against that of the child, of the world of logic against the world of illogic. It is as though Church tries to put barriers against the flow of the story itself, but to no avail. And we are delighted when the child's world wins out. In terms of the liminality model, these attempts by Church can be understood as attempts to battle the flow with secondary restricting concepts -- that is, restricting concepts which have little to do with the main point of the humorous story, but that add to our delight of the drama. They help the story build to the "ultimate" victory of the youthful. As Church says at the beginning of the sermon, "Verily I say unto you, unless ye become as little children ye shall not enter the kingdom of God."

The second sermon that Church contributed to this survey, "The Politics of God," also uses the dynamic imagination. The sermon is concerned with the role of religion in politics. Church claims, tongue-in-cheek, that the members of the congregation need him, just as Jerry Falwell's congregation needs Falwell, to interpret the divine will "properly." So Church decides to go right to "the source" and he informs the congregation of the Unitarian Church of All Souls in New York City about a recent conversation held in heaven:

> It was a conversation between God and an angel named Sam. Sam is one of God's lesser angels, the one assigned to keep her up-to-date on what is happening on the planet earth.
>
> "I've got the latest report on the U. S. Presidential election, God. Would you like a direct report, or should I simply spell it out for Gabriel in an interdepartmental memo?"
>
> "Oh, well," sighed God. "Nothing oarticularly momentous is pressing right now. So tell me, what is going on in the U. S. Presidential election?"

Sam goes on to explain an angel's-eye-view of the situation of late 1984 in the political scene. He includes the "religious connections" the main contenders have (for example, Mondale is "the son of a Methodist minister whose half brother, Lester, is a minister in some outfit I have never I heard of called the Unitarian Church," the fundamentalist support for Reagan, and the bickering between Ferraro and Archbishop O'Connor of New York.) Finally, God says,

> "That's enough for now."
>
> "Don't you want to hear about the Bishop's position on abortion, or the debate over prayer in the public schools, or the question of whether or not the President has ever seen his granddaughter?"
>
> "No," God said, "I think I have heard quite enough upon which to base my decision."
>
> "Well, what do you think, God?"
>
> "I think," God sighed, "that perhaps the time has come to flood those silly people again."

The restricting concepts with which Church is dealing in this sermon are not only the idea that God cares about the election, much less that she cares if the Republican platform is "God's platform," but also that anyone, Jerry Falwell and Forrester Church included, has a direct link with what is going on inside the mind of God.

The center of his concern in this sermon, however, is his attempt to inspire people to vote on Election Day: "Freedom is a gift which entails an obligation. We must never take it for granted." The restructuring concept is that it may matter very little to God -- who is to know? -- but it matters, it must matter, a great deal to us.

Another interesting aspect of this particular example of a humorous story is its strange ending: God's decision to "flood those silly people again." This story is the only story in the survey which ends with such an aweful decision. To destroy four billion lives? Where is the hope in that?

Church's decision to leave the story with such a decision may serve the purpose of (1) keeping us interested in the rest of the sermon, and/or (2) directing a sense of urgency into us as we face the approaching 1984 Presidential election. It is Church's opinion that the 1984 election "could be the most important election of our time" because it "could /have changed/ the course of disarmament negotiations" with a Mondale victory. The end, Church suggests, could be very near.

John Gilbert

At the time of this writing, John Gilbert serves the Unitarian Church of Winnipeg. The sermon he contributed was untitled.

In the note enclosed with the sermon, Gilbert indicated that he had received "the good laugh" with the "tea-bag story." It is as follows:

> Living is so costly that we hate to think about it: we know that, but we try not to know it, because the cost of living is dying.
>
> You know that chill that comes over you when you realize that time is running through your fingers? -- Minutes and hours and days, just poof! gone! squandered away, spent, spent, spent -- toward that moment when you are going to die. . .
>
> I was milling about during a coffee break at the University the other evening with a few hundred others when I was approached by a person carrying a paper cup of hot water with a tea-bag in it. Now what do tea-bags do when you first put them in the water? -- they float,

> right?
>
> Well, this person accosting me with his tea-cup was marvelling and exulting about it. He was really excited. He was making a game of approaching people to show them and ask them about it. It was all good-natured and well received. He comes up to me and says, "Does it *mean* something if your tea-bag immediately sinks?"
>
> Somewhere in the depths of my ministerial sensibility I heard beneath the frivolous play, the deep, human denial of death -- a lust for an omen -- a simple answer, anxiety and wonderment at human mortal existence. I looked at his sunken tea-bag, I looked him deliberately and seriously in the eye, and I said, "*Yes!* of course it does. That means you are going *to die!*"
>
> We worry about that, and it is the humanest thing in the world to do. Avoid the thought as we will, living is costly and its price is dying. And we will pay it. My point is simply real (as real as life insurance) . . . not morbid; simply human truth.

There are two restricting concepts in this story. The first is that tea-bags, or anything else of such a nature, have much to do with the shaping or the discovery of one's destiny. This concept, although it is one which has not much to do with the point of the story and the sermon, is used as Church uses secondary restricting concepts: it helps build the suspense of the story as Gilbert -- with his "ministerial sensibility" heard denial, lust, power, fear, and yearning -- builds to the explosive comic moment.

The second restricting concept, which is more in line with the point of the story and the sermon, is that life has little to do with dying. The restructured concept says the opposite: life and death are inseparable. Again, with this example, there is a restructuring hint before the story begins. Gilbert is careful to tell us what we will hear after the story: "the cost of living is dying" and "living is costly and its price is dying." The point of this restructured concept is not to despair over these facts, but to accept them as "simply human truth."

The imagination used in this story is dynamic not only because of the narrative format, but also because of the floating and sinking imagery of the tea-bag in hot water. This floating and sinking is strenuously affirmed as meaning something.

What makes this example of pulpit humor unique in this survey is that it is an example of an extremely aggressive humor. According to Freud, it would be classified as wit because of its aggressivity. But another unique attribute of this example helps temper the aggressive tone, that is, the absurdity of Gilbert's comment to the man with the tea-bag. We know that it does not matter whether the tea-bag floats or sinks because everyone is going to die anyway. If we can accept that, we can accept Gilbert's suggestion to accept the limitations on our lives. Nevertheless, this is clearly the closest example of Freudian wit in the survey.

William Metzger

Another unique example of pulpit humor is from Bill Metzger, minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Elgin, Illinois. "On Balancing and Unbalancing: an april foolishness" was preached on April 10, 1983. Because of April Fool's Day being so near to that date and because Metzger has been trying to make April Fool's Day into an annual Feast of Fools at the Elgin church, the sermon concerns an on-stage transformation of the Reverend Metzger into Clown Metzger. This transformation occurs in accord with the story (which was read by a laywoman):

> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and stars and trees and skunks and skunk cabbage and men and women and then God went away for the weekend.
>
> And when God came back it was Monday evening and we all know what Monday evening is like!
>
> So God decided to go and visit Adam while Adam was taking a break from work; and God went in to where Adam was sitting, his feet propped up on a stool, a can of beer in his hand and a football game on TV.
>
> Then God started putting some white stuff all over Adam's face, and Adam, since he was still pretty new and didn't know any better, said, "Why are you putting this snow on my face? I'm going to catch my death of cold!" And God said, "Now, Adam, pay attention. Does it feel cold?" And Adam thought and said, "No." Then Adam said "God, I am dead, and you've come to make me look like a ghost?" And God laughed, saying, "Adam, do you feel like you are dead?" And God tickled Adam until he laughed and said, "No. . . . Then why are you putting this white stuff on my face?"
>
> "Don't be scared, Adam. It's a mask, and after a while everyone will be wearing masks. They'll wear masks to pretend they are someone else, or to hide who they really are." "Why is it white, God?" "That's because white reflects every other color. This is the kind of mask people will look in and see themselves reflected."

This kind of humorous story continues as God applies red make-up and draws lines on Adam's face in the story, while, in "reality," Metzger applies red make-up and draws lines on his own face.

The restricting concept which is dislodged in this example is the idea that we must not act like fools. Being a fool is embarrassing and we put much effort into the task of avoiding the label of "fool." The self does not want to be a fool. But here Metzger is asking, "Why not be a fool?" Human beings, even (or especially) ministers, are sometimes foolish just as sometimes we are serious and "in control." The restricting concept says that church services are supposed to be serious. And Metzger does not deny this; he simply adds the idea that we might celebrate our playfulness, silliness, and humorous sides in church services as well. The restricting concepts, therefore, concern both the self and the sacred. But another restricting concept concerns life. Life is a serious affair, is it not? Metzger says sometimes yes, sometimes no. It depends. But certainly a life that is only serious is as inane as a life that is only foolish:

> Introducing The Feast of Fools to the church calendar as a regular event, along with Christmas and Easter, both of which are rather solemn, as well as joyous occasions and along with the crucifixion and the like, and all the church holidays which remind us of a history, we need at least this one holiday which reminds us of who we are, here and now, with our inhibitions lowered.

It is one of Metzger's major points in this sermon of foolish festivity that the fool relieves us of the overly burdensome consciousness of history. The fool reminds us who we are is not only past promises and hopes for the future, but also a verticality of the here and now. We are beings who are capable of living beyond linear time:

> The fool permits us to stop for a moment, to be startled, to laugh, for when we are laughing we are most in the here and now . . . and the laughter breaks the historical sensibility if only for a few moments, enabling us to experience ourselves in time, to experience our souls just in the nick of time, to experience our

> own divinity, which is a mundane thing, not something to get inflated about, for we all share in that divinity of the human soul.

Not only does the narrative quality of the humor suggest the dynamic imagination, but the actual *transformation* of the Reverend Metzger into the Clown Metzger indicates it as well. However, there are some suggestion of the material imagination through earth imagery. As stated in the restructuring concept, our historical sensibility is *broken* by laughter. Fire, water, and air images do not break. More substantially, however, the clown, or *bomolochus*, is a very earthy character. The concerns of the clown are in the here and now. The clown wants its creaturely needs and desires satisfied immediately and he or she is not concerned with the "proper" ways of satisfying them. In contrast, the ironist, or *eiron*, is not earthy. Wit and irony require a consciousness of the contrast between the here and now and the past and future.

The combination of the material and the dynamic imagination brings members of the congregation not only into the story, but also, because the transformation on-stage and the transformation in the story are simultaneous, into the clown as well. This, ideally, would effect a degree of intimacy which could transform the congregation into fools as well. Thus, Clown Metzger could direct the congregation, as a master of a ship of fools, toward a restructuring concept, and at that point he could disengage and "get serious" in order to make his point. Again, this would be the ideal case and its success would depend on a number of variables. But perhaps this control over the transformative process is why clown ministry has become so popular in recent years.

CHAPTER V

PRESCRIPTIONS FOR PRESENT-DAY UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST PULPIT HUMOR

Before I make suggestions for the use of humor in the present-day Unitarian Universalist pulpit, It is important to summarize the data gathered through the analyses of examples in Chapter IV. By using my definition of humor as a playful deformation of restricting concepts which allows the psyche to open to the freeflow of the imagination which brings the congregation to a recognition and affirmation of restructured concepts, I have been able to analyze each of the fifteen examples by asking what is deformed, which type of imagination is being used, and what is being recognized and affirmed by the congregation.

In the analysis, I have shown there are four examples of humor which dislodge restricting concepts of self. Each time, however, the restricting concepts of self were associated with some other kind of restricting concept which also was dislodged.

Bill Metzger's sermon example dislodged restricting concepts of self of having to be serious all the time. But this concept was dislodged along with restricting concepts of the minister of the church who is "supposed" to deliver profundity after profundity. We are taught in the restructuring concept that the minister is also a fool -- in this case, literally. The other restricting concept dislodged in this example was one of life, that life is a very serious business. Metzger illustrates that we humans have need for the carnival. Life is not, we learn, merely a task performed while one travels from cradle to grave.

Another example from our survey which deals with restricting concepts of self was Coots' description of the animals aboard the ark. Certainly every Unitarian Universalist could identify with at least one of those silly animals. While we may take our presence aboard the ark of Unitarian Universalism very seriously, Coots allows us to see ourselves as silly crows chasing after lost cawses, or some odd bird who always ducks theological questions. But our being able to laugh at ourselves is connected to our being able to laugh at others in the menagerie. We all laugh together because we are all in the same boat.

The third example which concerns itself with restricting concepts of self is David Bumbaugh's "The Bible Jerry Falwell Doesn't Preach." Here the restricting concept of self is in the second of the two back-to-back stories and it is tied to a restricting concept of the Bible (that is, a sacred text). While we view ourselves as highly literate, we tend to view the Bible as something which offers little and, so, we ignore it too much.

The last example which aims at deforming restricting concepts of self is Schaibly's "Self-Doubt and Self-Confidence." Again, however, it is tied to other restricting concepts. In this case, the other restricting concepts are of the minister (one who performs sacred tasks) and of others in the congregation. No one knows no doubt, Schaibly informs us. We all experience self-doubt.

The fact there are few examples of dislodging restricting concepts of self does not imply that such humor should not be used. These examples manage to use it very effectively. However, there may be an implication or warning in the fact that such humor tends to dislodge other restricting concepts as well. I can't imagine it always being the case, but dislodging concepts of self may cause a defensive reaction among members of the congregation. It may even cause someone to feel that he or she is being singled out and laughed at by the rest of the congregation, though that may be far from the actual case. As this is a possibility, however, preachers should be aware of it and if he or she uses humor to dislodge concepts of self, the preacher should be sure that possible defensive reactions would not occur.

Restricting concepts of others are also rare. Only two examples attempt such concepts: those of Coots and Schaibly. In both cases, as mentioned above, the humor attempts to dislodge more than restricting concepts of others. The fact that these concepts are rare might be because of the danger of being perceived as using disparaging humor or wit. This might very well be the case as far as relations between self or selves and other groups are concerned. I remember a colleague telling a story to a congregation, and, for added effect, he poured on his native southern accent. Unfortunately, people reacted negatively and the humor of the story did not succeed. But humor concerning other groups does work sometimes. I draw the reader's attention to Gerhardt's "The Seven Sins and Seven Virtues" (Appendix I) if examples are necessary to demonstrate this. (One reason these gags were not used in Chapter IV is that they are closer to wit than humor; but they are good for a laugh.)

As far as restricting concepts of others as in one-to-one are concerned, we find touches of them in Larsen's first example (the candy saleswoman), Perrino's encounter with the dying patient, Church's discussion with Twig, and Gilbert's reaction to the man with the tea-bag. But these examples do not use the restricting concepts of others as the target of the humor. Instead, the one-to-one encounters are used to develop the stories or promote the congregation's recognition of the real targets to be dislodged. The reason why restricting concepts of others as in one-to-one relationships are rare might be that the relationships are, by nature, very complicated. They involve "reveries," as Bachelard would say, which once dislodged would have to be re-dreamed. That is a task which would take much time. This is not to say that restricting concepts of self, the sacred, and life do not involve subconscious ties, but it is to say the latter concepts seem easier to dislodge and restructure because much of their relatedness to self is open to more conscious circumspection.

It is interesting to note that restricting concepts of others as far as ecology and technology are non-existent in our survey. Such concepts are mentioned often in Unitarian Universalist sermons, but my survey revealed no sermon which used restricting concepts of the earth or of technology in its humor. The only possible exception is "Ye Shall Be As Gods" in which Bumbaugh speaks of our responsibility to preserve the earth and to realize how dangerous our technology has become. But restricting concepts of ecology and of technology are not the concepts playfully deformed. They are not played with at all and Bumbaugh speaks of our responsibility only as a statement of fact.

The fact that no humor in this survey involves restricting concepts of the earth and of technology does not suggest that such humor is impossible in the pulpit. I heard the story below two years ago and I think it could be used in a sermon on the obsession of American culture with its technology.

> An American, a Frenchman, and a German were to be executed by guillotine. When the German was brought up to the place of execution, he was asked if he had any last words. He stood straight and declared, "Deutsch-

> land über alles!" They put him in the machine and the executioner released the trigger. Down came the deadly blade and within three inches of the German's neck, it screeched to a halt. The executioner, scratching his hood, said, "Well, it must be a sign from heaven. You are free to go."
>
> Then they brought out the Frenchman. "Do you have any last words?"
>
> "Oui," he answered, "Vive la Françe!" They put him in place and again the executioner released the trigger, and again, this time within two inches of the man's neck, the blade screeched to a hlat. Again, concluding it was another act of God, the executioner set the prisoner free. Finally they brought out the American.
>
> "Do you have any last words?"
>
> "Yes," answered the American. "If you put a little oil on the pulley up there, this machine would work alot better!"

The fact that restricting concepts of technology and ecology are rare does not prove they should not be used. Rather I think they are topics for humor which preachers have not utilized as well as they could.

By far the most common restricting concepts in our examples are those concerning one's relationship to the sacred. Seven examples dealt with the sacred alone and four dealt with it in connection to other kinds of restricting concepts. Of these eleven, three concerned themselves with restricting concepts of the minister: Schaibly, Arisian and Metzger. Of the eleven, Hoehler, Larsen (both times), Gerhardt, and Bumbaugh (in the first example) dealt with one's living a religious life. Bumbaugh's second example concerned the relationship of the self to the Bible. Church's two examples concern restricting concepts of God -- the first with God as one who is always good and the second with God as somehow concerned with the Presidential election.

Why are restricting concepts of the sacred popular targets for deformation in the present-day Unitarian Universalist pulpit? One reason might be that, as a denomination, we are made up of some ninety percent "come-outers," that is, people who were brought up in one denomination or religion that, eventually, they found somehow unsatisfactory and who found Unitarian Universalism able to answer more of their needs. Such people might require a fair amount of liberation from the restricting concepts which they grew up with, some re-education, and perhaps some assurance concerning their relationship with the sacred. Humor always has been very successful at tearing down idols, and, as I have tried to show in this thesis, it is also capable of restructuring new, wider and more open concepts of the sacred.

Finally, there are four sermons in our survey which deal with restricting concepts of life. The first, Gaede's story of the dying rabbi, says that life is a river as well as it says that life is not a river. The second, Perrino's story of the dying parishoner, deals more personally with the reality of death. A dying man certainly has better things to think about than his own funeral arrangements, right? It turns out that there may be no better thing to be concerned with once the bitter fact of imminent death has been accepted. The departure from loved ones becomes very important. The third, Gilbert's tale of the man with the tea-bag, also deals with life in terms of death, for "cost of living is dying." Finally, Metzger deals with restricting concepts of life which view it as something which is always very serious. Yes, it _is_ serious, but we are also in need of carnivals and feasts which reflect the playful, foolish side of life.

Turning now to the kinds of imagination used by the examples in our survey, we find that the material imagination is very rare in pulpit humor. The reasons for this seem obvious: material imagination doesn't _do_ anything, it is passive, and its main concern is intimacy. By itself, there is no way it can bring about a liberation and restructuring through the spoken word. I believe it has a place in "humor" in a service, but only if "humor" is allowed a very broad definition. We may find it at play alone through the experiencing of or meditating on colorful wall-hangings, objects or symbols upon or near the altar, or a flame in a chalice, for example. At most, such "humor" brings small smiles as the past is remembered in reverie and the present falls from its temporal guise and eternity comes forth.

The material imagination _does_ exist in our survey in two examples of pulpit humor, but it appears in conjunction with the dynamic imagination. It exists in both cases through through the use of earth imagery. In Larsen's second story, we yearn, with the young minister, to be at one with the faith of that ancient man of the soil. But it is the dynamism of the narrative and the willfulness of the yearning which makes this use of material imagination possible. The second example is in the clown, the bomolochus, into which the Reverend Metzger transforms. In this example, we become one with the clown, but this is only possible through the dynamism of the narrative and through the dynamism of the witnessed transformation.

The formal imagination, playing as it does with concepts, is fairly common: twice it appears in conjunction with the dynamic imagination. This is the case with Coots' "The Deluge, The Ark and the Noah Counts." We see the formal imagination at play through the use of metaphorical humor and concepts are played as we follow Coots' conceptual leaps. The dynamic imagination appears, in this example, in the imagery of rising troubled waters and through the sense that the ark is going somewhere, Also there is dynamism in Coots' prophetic call.

The other example which uses a combination of dynamic and formal imaginations is the back-to-back stories in Bumbaugh's "The Bible Jerry Falwell Doesn't Preach." The formal imagination exists in the first story because the humor requires a comprehension of the similarity of the stories of Gepeto and of Joseph. It exists in the follow-up story because our assumption -- which proves to be inaccurate -- that everyone should be able to get the first joke, at least if they know the story of Pinocchio. But this is not the case because we discover that everyone does not know the story of Jesus, at least as much as we might expect them to know it. The dynamic imagination exists in the back-to-back stories not only because they are stories, but because of the connection between the two stories. We move with Bumbaugh as the second story flows from the first and then, upon reflection backwards, we see the second story is the justification of the first.

By far the most common type of imagination in the survey is the dynamic. It exists in every example except the those three which use only the formal imagination: Schaibly's quick turning of tables as he points out that everyone knows self-doubt; Gerhardt's semantic twists as he shows the virtue in every deadly sin (if understood correctly); and in Arisian's comparison between himself and Groucho Marx.

But the dynamic imagination exists in eleven of our fourteen sermons. Mostly this is because of the predominance of humorous stories. With Larsen (his first story), Hoehler, Gaede, Perrino, Church (both stories), and Gilbert, it is the dynamic imagination alone that carries the humor. Below, in discussing which directions the imagination takes us, I will discuss why the dynamic imagination appears when restructuring concepts concern limitations of life.

In Chapter II, I suggested that humor used in the Unitarian Universalist pulpit would be most easily recognized through a congruity theory of humor, Though a little incongruity adds spice to humor, Unitarian Universalist pulpit humor, I wrote, would emphasize congruity because of its concern with the immanence of the divine, the nature of ministry in the liberal church, the importance of community and cohesiveness, the Enlightenment's emphasis on the common universe and the effect of this idea on present-day Unitarian Universalist thinking, and the desire to imagine worlds of possibility.

In the survey, there were examples of humor which do not fit into congruity theory as well as others. But they all fit to some degree because I have shown how they all fit into the liminality model which is, in itself, built upon congruity theory. The four sermons about humor were used in the survey not only because they include humor in them, but also because they are representative of views held by Unitarian Universalist ministers about humor.

The first of these is Gaede's "The Sense in Humor." In this sermon, Gaede says humor is important because it gives an awareness and comprehension of the irony of living and a better perspective and deeper insight on life and ourselves: "So a true sense of humor does basically two things: first it gives a deeper appreciation of the irony of life, or the ironies in which our lives are built, and, second, I think it may give us a wider perspective of ourselves."

This view of humor and of what it does is based on Harvey Mindess' views in Laughter and Liberation. Mindess and Gaede believe humor may liberate us from present situations which bind us to a too serious view of living. As this stands, it is similar to what I have been using as the liminal model: there are restricting concepts to be playfully deformed and wider, more open concepts to be recognized and affirmed. But there is a problem in that both men believe that humor gives us a distance on the situations of our lives. This detachment, as well as the detachment necessary for the appreciation of irony is a characteristic of incongruity theories. But both men are concerned with the intrapsychic reaction and not the communal reaction to humor. If humor is to be used in the pulpit, it should concern both the internal and the external. The absence of the consideration of the commonality of the group leads them to emphasize only the therapeutic effect on the individual of humor which, while important to consider, is not the end-all and be-all. Also, the story I used from Gaede's sermon is similar to the example Freud uses to demonstrate *Galgenhumor*. There is a commonality of emotion within the audience as they identify with the dying rabbi *before* the incongruity is uncovered.

The second sermon about humor is Perrino's "The Holiness in Humor." As I pointed out in Chapter IV, Perrino understands humor as a "kindly contemplation of life's incongruities." There's that word again! But Perrino's conception of kindliness indicates that a pathos and identification is necessary. The question is: Which comes first, the tolerance and acceptance of life or the incongruities of life. Perrino suggests the egg; I suggest the chicken. While it is true that the incongruity, as the Kierkegaardian contrast inherent to life, is prior to the human experience of it (in that it existed before our awareness of it), I believe that there must be a willingness or ability, of the individual or of the community, to accept this incongruity before the contemplation of it leads us to a painful or painless experience of it. Otherwise, there is no willingness or ability to appreciate e comical or the tragic. A spirit of fun and playfulness must be adopted before our concepts are deformed and the incongruities become known.

The third sermon about humor is Arisian's "Humor and Faith." As I mentioned in Chapter IV, Arisian's understanding of humor is similar to Kierkegaard's -- except that God is missing: "Humor is the perception of the measure between what is and what could be, that discrepancy, grappling with which can lead to a tragic or comic vision. . . ." I have mentioned also the problems with Arisian's example of humor and how they are, in a sense, related with Arisian's incongruity theory. There are too many incongruent factors and there is no "good fit." Also, Arisian's definition of humor is subject to the same criticisms levelled against Kierkegaard's theory: there is no humor in the absolute or the ideal. Humor only comes from the discrepancy between the real and the ideal. So both men recognize no playroom in the highest realms which we can apprehend.

Finally, Bill Metzger's contribution is the last and fourth sermon about humor. Metzger does not bother with a conceptual definition of humor -- his definition is by example. Of the four sermons about humor, however, his understanding of humor is most accepting of congruity theory. In effect, he says that humor exists because we are fools. We are not fools because of the contrast between ourselves and the absolute. We are just plain foolish. And that is just fine. We should enjoy this fact of our human nature instead of avoiding it. It is a commonality which we all share, and we can use it to acquire verticality within what can be the crushing confines of history.

In what directions do the restructuring concepts of pulpit humor take congregations? I suggest that we look to our Judeo-Christian tradition to understand these directions clearly. In the Hebrew Scriptures, there are three basic types of religious literature: the Priestly (Leviticus is clearest example), the Prophetic (for example, Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah), and the Sapiential (Eccelesiastes, Proverbs, and Job, for example). I believe categories constructed through these traditions can help identify the directions of restructured concepts.

The Priestly category is concerned with the recognition and affirmation of one's relation to religious tradition, religious life, and the sacred. Not surprisingly, most examples of humor which begin with restricting concepts of the sacred end up in this category.

Some examples which begin with restricting concepts of the sacred, however, end in what I call the Prophetic category of restructured concepts. This category is concerned with recognizing and affirming our responsibilities to our communities and to future generations.

The third category, the Sapiential, is concerned with accepting the dark as well as the light side of life. Restructured soncepts of this category recognize and affirm the limitations of life. Most of these examples begin with restricting concepts of life.

Chart V.1 presents each example in terms of restructured concept category, type of imagination, and restricting concept category.

Chart V.1

Example	Restricting concept	Imagination	Restructured concept
Larsen (1)	Sacred	Dynamic	Priestly
Larsen (2)	Sacred	Dynamic/Material	Priestly
Bumbaugh (1)*	Sacred	Dynamic	Priestly/Prophetic
Schaibly	Sacred/Self/Others	Formal	Priestly
Gerhardt**	Sacred	Formal	Priestly/Sapiential
Arisian	Sacred	Formal	Priestly
Church (1)	Sacred	Dynamic	Priestly
Bumbaugh (2)	Sacred/Self	Dynamic/Formal	Priestly
Coots	Self/Others	Dynamic/Formal	Prophetic
Hoehler	Sacred	Dynamic	Prophetic
Bumbaugh (1)*	Sacred	Dynamic	Priestly/Prophetic
Church (2)	Sacred	Dynamic	Prophetic
Gaede	Life	Dynamic	Sapiential
Perrino	Life	Dynamic	Sapiential
Gilbert	Life	Dynamic	Sapiential
Metzger	Self/Sacred/Life	Dynamic/Material	Sapiential
Gerhardt**	Sacred	Formal	Priestly/Sapiential

Of the examples, there are two sermons which each fit into two restructured categories. Bumbaugh's "Ye Shall Be As Gods" not only restructures our concepts in relation to a sacred text (and, therefore, is Priestly) but also restructures our concepts to ask how are we to redeem the past and preserve the future (and, therefore is Prophetic). "The Seven Sins and the Seven Virtues" by Rolfe Gerhardt is both Priestly (as it helps to redefine our relation to sin and virtue and, therefore, helps us live a more religious life) and Sapiential (as it points out that, like it or not, we are both saints and sinners).

From the chart above, we can discern certain patterns. Each example that is restructured toward the Priestly begins dislodging restricting concepts of the sacred. Also, the Prophetic category always makes use of the dynamic imagination because the call to accept our responsibilities is always a call to action as well. There is always a tension in propheticism, the incongruity theorist would say, between the way things are and the way they could be.

Another pattern is that most examples which end in the Sapiential category make use of the dynamic imagination. Gaede, Perrino, and Gilbert use the dynamic imagination to help the congregation recognize and affirm the limitations of life by the reality of death. Perhaps this recognition and affirmation are easier to do through a story format. It is not easy to be told flat out that you are going to die. But it is easier to accept that fact if, as in Gilbert's story, someone else is told "flat out" that he or she is going to die, and then, by indirect inference, we realize this is the case for each of us as well.

In Metzger's example, we are not concerned with death's limitations on life, but with the limitation which the seriousness of historical sensibilities can put on us. The dynamic imagination is necessary here in order to hook and pull the congregation into the clown character. Something must pull the overly serious being, almost against his or her will, into the foolish side of living.

The only example in the Sapiential category which does not use the dynamic imagination is Gerhardt's "The Seven Sins and Seven Virtues." Here we are told that there is no avoiding being both saint and sinner in life. This example points to an important contrast between the formal and the dynamic imaginations: the dynamic transforms; the formal teaches. We already know we can be foolish sometimes and we already know we are going to die. But in pulpit humor, these fact are transformed from mud into gold to show that limitations make life more valuable. On the other hand, the restricting concept of sin is not "transformed" in Gerhardt's sermon, it does not become a virtue. Instead, we are taught that sin, like any human being, has two sides to it and that if looked at in a certain way, a playful way, sin also has a virtuous side.

Turning to the unforeseen existence of restructuring hints, we find nine out of fifteen (both stories of Larsen are included) examples of pulpit humor use this technique. Only one of these, Schaibly's example, uses the hint through a clear statement before the joke itself and no apparent restructuring afterwards It works in this example because of the brevity of the joke. Chart V.2 shows which examples use restructuring hints and which do not.

Chart V.2

Restructuring hints	No restructuring hints
Larsen (1)	Coots
Larsen (2)	Bumbaugh (1)
Hoehler	Bumbaugh (2)
Gaede	Arisian
Perrino	Church (1)
Schaibly	Church (2)
Gerhardt	
Gilbert	
Metzger	

Two interesting points emerge from study of this chart. First, in comparing it to Chart V.1, we find that all Sapiential humor uses restructuring hints. The point of the humor is laid out carefully before the humor itself. Perhaps this is so in order to assure the congregation of where the preacher intends to go with the humor. Sapiential humor, dealing with the limitations of life could frighten even sophisticated members of the congregation if this assurance were not provided. (Imagine your own reaction to Gilbert's story if you had no idea where he was going with it!)

The second interesting point raised by Chart V.2 is that the only example of humor which does not use restructuring hints and which uses only formal imagination is

Arisian's. This is the one example which appears confusing in the liminality model. This makes sense if we consider the possibility that _if_ Arisian had used a restructuring hint, as Schaibly did, the point of the humor would have been clearer. It could then point to the restructuring concept in a less confusing way for we would have been led through the humor with a greater sense of direction. This suggests that humor which uses the formal imagination alone needs a clear statement of where the preacher intends to go.

Prescriptions

What are the responsibilities of the preacher when he or she uses pulpit humor? First, I believe that the humor should be fresh. Originality helps in this, but Larsen (his second story), Hoehler, and Gaede, at least, show that humor need not be original. Of course, humor that has been heard many times by many members of the congregation will not be fresh and will not be successful. If the humor is stale, the congregation will not join in the playfulness and they will wait impatiently for the story or joke to end so, if the preacher is lucky, they can resume listening. Or, if the preacher is less fortunate, they may stop listening altogether. Another, less obvious, reason why freshness is necessary is that if the humor has been heard by a member of the congregation, then he or she already will have recognized and affirmed restructured concepts from the humor. And _those_ restructured concepts may not be the ones that the preacher wants him or her to recognize and affirm. Thus, a lack of freshness limits whatever transformation the preacher is trying to promote.

Waleed Anthony Salameh, a psychiatrist, is helpful by offering a chart which identifies the differences between appropriate and inappropriate humor in counselling.[1] His differentiation may well provide suggestions for using humor in the pastoral setting as well as in the pulpit.

Chart V.3

Therapeutic humor	Harmful humor
Concerned with impact of humorous feedback on others.	Unconcerned with impact of comments on others.
Has an educational corrective message.	May exacerbate existing problems.
Promotes the onset of a cognitive-emotional equilibrium.	Prevents the onset of a cognitive-emotional equilibrium.
May question or amplify specific maladaptive behaviors but does not question the essential worth of all human beings.	Questions sense of personal worth, such as in racist jokes.
Implies self- and other-awareness.	Implies self- and other-blindness.
Has a gentle, healing, constructive quality.	Has a callous, "bitter aftertaste," detrimental quality.
Acts as an interpersonal lubricant; constitutes an interpersonal asset.	Tends to retard and confound interpersonal communication; constitutes an interpersonal liability.
Based on acceptance.	Based on rejection.
Centers around clients' needs and their welfare.	Reflects the perpetuation of personal dysfunctional patterns.
Strengthens, brightens, and alleviates.	Restricts, stigmatizes, and retaliates.
Aims to reveal and unblock alternatives.	Aims to obscure and block alternatives.

There are inappropriate kinds of pulpit humor. They can be identified in terms of the four kinds of restricting concepts. Basically, inappropriate humor can be understood as that humor which reinforces restricting concepts or which restricts our concepts of reality even more. In terms of rerestricting concepts of self, the inappropriate humor is basically ridicule. Coots comes close to this in his identifying members of the congregation as silly animals. But he redeems this through his declaration of love for each animal aboard the Unitarian Universalist ark. It is a thin line, and the absence of humor which dislodges only restricting concepts of self, in this survey, reflects the danger of that thin line. Pulpit humor must challenge and dislodge restricting concepts of self while avoiding the abrogation of trust. A great deal of care must go into such deformation so that feelings of alienation and isolation do not displace feelings of commonality and love.

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[1] Waleed Anthony Salameh, "Humor in Psychotherapy," from Handbook on Humor Research, pg. 84.

I mentioned in Chapter I how humor concerning restricting concepts of others could be racist, sexist, or ethnic and thus reinforce stereotypes. To reinforce these stereotypes through humor is inappropriate in the pulpit because it decreases commonality or increases radical sectarianism. It is a constriction, rather than an expansion, of being. Pulpit humor should build on what we share. I quoted Eliade in Chapter I: "Indeed, if an ultimate solidarity of the whole human race does exist, it can be felt and activated only at the level of Images." I repeat what I wrote then: What an opportunity if a preacher could tap the solidarity! Perhaps it is possible to rebuild the Tower of Babel.

Inappropriate use of humor concerning restricting concepts of the sacred is a ridiculing of texts, customs, or Gods of other denominations or religions, or, even, of one's own religious tradition. Metzger flirts with this by calling himself, a minister, as well as the congregation fools, and by calling for a special time each year when the church would become a ship of fools. But his restructured concept recognizes foolishness not as something detrimental, but as something which reflects the nature of reality and of humanity. In his essay "The Humanity of Comedy," Lynch writes:

> The one offense . . . which comedy cannot endure is that a man should forget that he is a man, or should substitute a phoney faith for faith in the power of the vulgar and limited finite. . . . The comic hates all the forms of man who cannot stand the sight of himself.[2]

When I first wrote of restricting concepts of life, I mentioned the expression, "Life sucks, then you die and worms eat your face." This would be a fine example of inappropriate pulpit humor if it led to a restructured concept which reinforces this restricting concept. Pulpit humor regarding restricting concepts of life should point to the openness of life, life as a multitude od possibilities . . . ideally. But, of course, life is not like that. We do die, as Gaede, Perrino, and Gilbert point out. Life, simply, is a matter of a series of rebirths and deaths; life is, simply, a matter of being conceived, being born, growing and dying. Life is bound by existential realities of birth, suffering, and death. These realities should not be avoided in pulpit humor. They should be recognized and affirmed. It is only then that humor may indicate and celebrate the value of living. Within the limits, pulpit humor should discover and disclose the limitless, the eternal within the moment. Humor should point to the tears of the clown as well as the joy of the dying person. In The Clown Ministry Handbook, Janet Litherland writes of the difference between the stage comic and the clown. The same difference exists between the humor of the entertainer and the humor of the minister:

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[2] William F. Lynch, "The Humanity of Comedy," from Holy Laughter, p. 29.

> The stage comic puts his audience down and leaves them there. The clown puts down, too, but he always picks back up, usually to a higher or better level of existence. "Because life is so hard, we have to lift up humanity instead of putting humanity down," says Marcel Marceau. . . . A good clown clowns with his audience, not at or to them, and because he always feels good about being a clown, he leaves his audience feeling GOOD, or at least, HOPEFUL, about some aspect of their lives. He is a creature of redemption.[3]

In addition to avoiding inappropriate humor, the preacher should be capable of using humor in order to respond to the needs of the congregation. Therefore, a preacher who uses pulpit humor should be able to understand and, to some extent, identify with the restricting concepts of members of the community. Perhaps the clearest example of this is from Schaibly's sermon on self-doubt, but it is impossible in this study to tell which of our preachers were responding most appropriately to congregational needs. The preacher should be able to identify the restricting concepts as merely particular ways of perceiving and understanding reality in order to be able to dislodge them in a playful way. This implies not a distancing as much as a self-awareness and an awareness of how restricting concepts can distort reality.

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[3] Janet Litherland, The Clown Ministry Handbook, (Colorado Springs: Meriwether Publishing, Ltd., 1982), p. 15.

In the liminal stage, the preacher must choose a kind of imagination which can lead the congregation to wider and more open concepts of reality. Humorous stories may not be appropriate. Witticisms may not be appropriate. Is the dynamic imagination useful? Is the preacher trying to transform? Or perhaps a lesson needs to be taught and the formal imagination is more appropriate.

In the postliminal stage, the responsibility of the Unitarian Universalist preacher is to lay out and indicate what possibilities are available and which are most in accord with a richer and wider Unitarian Universalist outlook. The new concepts should be presented as viable ways of perceiving and understanding reality. There is an invitation in the postliminal stage which is an invitation to faith, an invitation to see what is possible but not yet actual, an invitation to see what could be. This, of course, requires an awareness of which restructured concepts are important to such a faith as well as whether the members of the congregation are capable of recognizing and affirming the restructured concepts at that time.

Simply put, the responsibilities of the preacher are to know where the congregation is, where they need to be, and how to get them there.

I have attempted to show, in this thesis, that humor is a viable way, sometimes, of addressing ultimate concerns. That humor can be found in every aspect of who we are and of what we do, suggests to me that there is an element of play in the core or flow of existence. Whatever ultimate reality is, it plays us as we play it. Play is one form of communion with God, as is prayer and community-wide social action or ritual acts. But a religion such as Kierkegaard's sees God solely as an inward experience to be approached with ultimate seriousness -- the contingent and finite up against the awesome and infinite. A religion which concentrates solely on outward acts ignores the inward experience. But a religion which is playful and which is open enough that its adherents can play it, is an open, expanding, and inclusive religion. Such a religion should be preached from the Unitarian Universalist pulpit.

APPENDIX A: "O YE OF LITTLE FAITH"
by Tony Larsen

"O ye of little faith." How often that epithet has been directed at Unitarians. I say that's wrong. And here's why.

Several months ago I happened to go into the candy store just a few blocks from here, as is my wont on ocasion, and the young woman behind the counter smiled and said, "It's been a long time since I've seen you here." It had been a long time, so I said, "Well I just come in when the spirit moves me."

She seemed to like my use of the word "spirit" and rejoined with "I hope it was a good spirit and not an evil one." Well, I couldn't resist making a biblical allusion to justify the religious benefits of pleasure, so I said, "Remember, even Jesus turned water into wine for a party."

Well, she just loved that, and a glow came over her face as she said, "You must be a Christian."

Uh-oh. Now I didn't know what to say. I thought of going into an involved explanation of my position vis-a-vis the various meanings of the word "Christian;" I thought of simply saying Yes or No and having it over with; and I also thought of a way to evade the question all together.

I decided on No. 3 -- the evasion -- and said, "Well, actually, I'm a minister at a church nearby."

And let me tell you, if she loved what I said before, she was crazy about me now, and her face grew even brighter as she asked what church it was.

And figuring hardly anybody knows about our church anyway, I felt it was safe to answer her and then just leave. So I did. "Unitarian Universalist," I replied.

And she said, Oh-h-h-h-h," and suddenly there was a look on her face resembling horror, and I knew I wasn't going to get away so easily. "I've heard of your church before," she said, and it wasn't a statement of fact -- it was an accusation.

Then she said she was a born-again Christian and she felt she had something very special, and I said I wasn't but I thought I was pretty special too. Then she said that if my religion was right, we would both be saved; but if her religion was right, she would be saved and I would go to hell. So wouldn't it make more sense to go her way, she said, just in case? I told her, indeed, that I had no doubt I would be saved -- or at least I wouldn't be damned. And at that point I realized I really do have something special. With all her talk of faith, I had more faith than she did. She believed that a sizable portion of humanity would go to hell.

And I wouldn't call that faith -- I'd call it despair! It had never come to me as clearly before, that my faith is very large and expansive -- mine is a faith that does not divide the saved from the damned, because it's too big for that. In a way I had more faith than she did, and I had never fully realized it before.

But I also realized that faith is a very strange thing. It can be positive; it can be negative. Depends on what it's in. I realized that, in and of itself, faith is neither good nor bad. And lest anyone start thinking of it in only positive terms, may I remind you that it was faith -- faith in Jim Jones and his People's Church -- that led hundred of people in Guyana to kill themselves and their children. A suicide pact for the glory of God. It was faith -- faith in Charles Manson -- that led his followers to brutally torture and murder innocent people . . . and feel no remorse for it whatsoever. It was faith -- faith in the purity of the Aryan race and in Nazi idealism -- that allowed 6 million Jews to be gassed. So you're going to tell me about faith and how good it is? It is faith that their cause is right and just, which allows Catholics to kill Protestants and Protestants to kill Catholics in Ireland. And we've seen what faith can do in Iran. Faith led the Christian crusades and the Muslim holy wars. And it was faith in a God who sends heretics to hell -- that justified their torture and murder during the Inquisition. Think about it. If you really have faith in a God that will send people to hell for believing the wrong things, to see the error of their ways and convert -- even if it means twisting their arm a little . . . or a lot . . . or even torturing them? If you don't understand how Catholics and Protestants could torture each other for their religious differences during the Middle Ages, and even today, then you don't understand the nature of true belief. If you really believed you could save someone from eternal pain that way, you might be willing to do it too.

So please don't tell me people don't have enough faith today. Because I don't have much faith in faith.

But, you may say, there's good faith and there's bad faith. Exactly. And everybody believes their faith is a good faith. You see, people don't usually choose a wicked faith. They believe what they believe because they believe it is right and good and true. They have faith in their faith. It's only other people who have problems with it. (Like me.)

And I mention all this not to condemn faith, for I wish neither to condemn it nor to praise it. I can't do that until I know what it's in, and even then I'd only be giving you my point of view -- that is, ideas and reasoning based on my faith.

So I prefer to tackle something else instead. I want to show you this morning that everyone has faith. And I think that no one has any more of it than anyone else. It's just the objects of our faith that differs. If you have less faith in something than your neighbor, it's only because you have more faith in something else that your neighbor does not believe in.

Take the case of old Farmer Jones. The new minister in town tried to get him to come to church. For several Sunday afternoons in a row she drove up to the farm to have a chat with the old man. She praised the crop, admired the cattle, marveled at the chicken houses; but Farmer Jones didn't say much. On her third or fourth visit the young minister delivered her message: "Don't you believe that the Lord has blessed you Farmer Jones?" she said. "Don't you want to go to church and worship and give thanks?" Whereupon the old farmer answered: "Reverend, everything you have admired around here is the result of thirty years of hard work. Before I came here, the Lord had had the place to himself for thousands of years, and you should have seen the mess it was in when I took over."

Now, both the minister and the farmer had faith, and they had both witnessed the fruits of its power. What faith he lacked in God's intervention, the farmer had made up for in his faith in human effort -- for he had exercised that faith in producing the fruits of his labor.

Or, as another example, compare the monotheist with the polytheist: that is, compare the person who believes in one God with the person who believes in many. Which one has more faith?

You might be tempted to say the believer in many gods has more faith, just because of the quantity of gods. But in truth, although the monotheist has less faith in the gods than the polytheist has, he or she has more faith than the polytheist in one of them. So I'd say it is a toss-up as to who has more.

Incidentally, if you ever meet someone who says they have greater faith than the heathens in India because they believe in only one god rather than many -- then using the logic of less-equals-better, you can argue that an atheist has the most faith of all.

You may interested to know, by the way, that the early Christians and Ancient Jews were called atheists in their time. And, compared to the pagans around them, they were atheists. The pagans believed in many deities; the Jews and Christians didn't have enough faith for that -- one god was all that they could manage. So they had less faith in many, but more faith in the one -- while pagans had more faith in the many, but less faith in the one.

The same could be said of the difference between those who believe in the trinity and those who do not. The believer of 3 persons in one God -- is a disbeliever in the simple unity of God; while the one who professes faith in God's unity is a doubter of the trinity. Amount of faith is equal. Content of faith differs.

Even those of you who believe in no God at all have no less faith than anyone else. That's because many of you who believe in no deity have more faith in natural laws, more faith in humans, and more faith in your own power to do it for yourselves. Pearl Buck pretty much expressed this faith position when she wrote in 1939: "I feel no need for any other faith than my faith in human beings."

A rather humorous example of the difference between faith in human ability and faith only in God -- was a conversation many years ago between a bishop and a college president. They were arguing over the question of whether humans would ever fly. The bishop -- Bishop Wright -- said, "Flight is preserved for the angels. It is blasphemy to say that man will fly."

And meanwhile, back at home, the bishop's two sons, Orville and Wilbur, were planning an airplane.

I ask you, who had greater faith?

On balance it takes just as much faith -- in something -- to get along in this world . . . no matter what your theology happens to be; and it also takes doubt. As Lillian Smith once wrote: "Faith and doubt are both needed -- not as antagonists but working side by side -- to take us around the unknown curve." I would only add that faith and doubt are merely two sides of the same coin, for each presupposes the other. To believe in one thing is to doubt whatever contradicts it. To believe we are all born in sin, for example, is to disbelieve in our natural potential for goodness; to believe more in our natural goodness is to believe less in original sin. But both are positions of faith and positions of doubt.

Another: To have great faith that one way is the only way . . . is to have less faith in the manifold revelations of divinity -- just as to have manifold faith . . . means to doubt the absoluteness of any one path. All the people, you see, and all the door-to-door evangelists you meet -- have both faith and doubt. Do they believe in a God who sends people to hell? Then they believe in a God of severe judgment and they doubt a God of mercy. And if you have faith in a God of great mercy, then you have doubt in a God of great punishment. On the balance, you get the same amount of faith and doubt in everyone. The difference is content only.

To turn to an issue that's currently raging in some of our classrooms: To doubt the Biblical account of creation is to have faith that a more scientific explanation is true. In this context I'd like to share something about the composer Ralph Vaughn Williams. Williams was the nephew of Charles Darwin, proponent of evolution . . . and a Unitarian to boot. When Ralph was a boy he heard a lot of fuss over his Uncle Charles and asked his mother why Charles Darwin had gained such notoriety. His mother gave him this explanation: "The Bible says that God made the world in six days, while your Uncle Charles thinks it took longer. But we need not worry about it, for it is equally wonderful either way."

Equally wonderful, equally mysterious, equally awe-inspiring.

If you really understand the relativity of faith and doubt, I think you'll appreciate the following dialogue, which illustrates the faith there can be . . . in doubting. A minister from a conservative church asked his U.U. colleague: "How can you fail to teach heaven and hell in your church? With no restrictions on belief, wouldn't people just do what they wanted -- steal, rape and kill?" And the U.U. minister replied, "Is that that you want to do -- steal, rape and kill?"

Where's the faith . . . in that?

You know, as I ponder these questions, I think back to an incident that occurred 6 or 7 years ago. I was with a youth group from the Rockford, Illinois Unitarian Church singing at a nursing home, and another church youth group came to the home just as we were leaving. They were Seventh Day Adventists, from the church just down the road from our church, and they asked who we were. I said, "We're from the Unitarian Church -- we're the ones who don't believe anything." They laughed and we laughed, but it was almost a hollow laugh. One of those tried-but-true jokes. Like, "Oh, we're not religious -- we're Unitarian ha-ha-ha."

I don't know about you, but I'm tired of thinking of my religious point of view only as a lack of faith. I'm tired of talking only about what I don't believe in. For I realize that every doubt I have implies belief, and every belief I hold implies doubt. And I think I should be able to speak of my spirituality in terms of faith just as easily as I can talk about it in terms of disbelief.

And so I say to you (and to me): Don't let anyone tell you you don't have faith. You have just as much of it as everyone else. Only you may put your faith in different things from someone else. In fact, there's probably no one in the world who puts theirs in exactly the same things you do. That's fine. More power to you. Just don't worry about quantity. You've got plenty, believe me. You probably just haven't looked at it in quite that light before.

I urge you to do so now. If someone tells you that they have faith in the Bible as the literal word of God, you can answer them in positive terms. You can answer in terms of faith rather than doubt. Instead of saying "I don't believe" -- you can say, "I have too much faith in the boundlessness of divinity, to believe its chiseled in one set of writings for all eternity. I have faith that the word of God is being written every day and can be found in many places -- including my own mind. In fact, I have so much faith in the holiness of the human vessel -- that I believe divinity is first and foremost within me and within you." And before they get out their books to quote you into a comatose state, you can quote from the U.U. hymnbook, which has a beautiful selection from Walt Whitman. "We consider Bibles and Religions divine," he said, "I do not say they are not divine; I say they have grown out of you, and they may grow out of you still; it is not they who give the life -- it is you who give the life." And if they say, "You'll go to hell if you believe that way" -- you can counter, "I have too much faith to deal with such things; I have no doubt but that, whatever may be after this life, I'll be singing too."

And if they respond, "But God punishes unbelievers," you can answer, "Oh yes, I believe in justice -- and that's why I know no deity could possibly cast people into eternal punishment for doing and believing what they thought was right; for that would not be justice, but cruelty . . . and sorry, but I have too much faith to believe in that."

And if they're still unconvinced, tell them you'll pray for them. You'll pray that their faith be increased.

I say some of this tongue-in-cheek, because I know you may not want to bother discussing all this, especially to people who aren't really interested in your point of view.

But I do say, realize that you are a person of faith. For every doubt you hold there's an article of faith in you too. For everything you don't believe in, there may be a wider expanse of things you do believe in, which is made possible by your disbelief in the first thing. You don't need to be tongue-tied about religion. You don't need to be apologetic about your religious perspective. You have got faith just like anybody else. The fact that yours is different from anybody else's doesn't make it wrong. It just makes you unique. And that's not a bad thing to be at all!

APPENDIX B: "A FAITH FOR UNCERTAIN TIMES"

by Judith Hoehler

Somewhere around 1250 B.C.E., the Exodus took place. Under the leadership of Moses, a large group of Israelite slaves escaped from Egypt. These Israelites looked upon their deliverence from bondage as directly attributable to the activity of God. It was God who, through some remarkable events -- the calling of Moses, the plagues, the crossing of the Reed Sea -- it was God who saved them.

Historically the wilderness period follows the Exodus. It is that period of about forty years during which Moses and the Israelites wandered in the desert area between Egypt and the Jordan River. On the other side of the Jordan lay Canaan -- the Promised Land -- the land of their destination.

Why didn't Moses go directly to Canaan? Why did he spend years wandering back and forth across the Negev and Sinai peninsula? According to the Biblical narrative, a whole new generation had grown to adulthood before the Israelites entered the Promised Land. Of the original band who escaped from Egypt, only two were alive at the time of the crossing of the Jordan. Yet the distance between Egypt and Canaan was not so great . . . only about 130 miles if one went directly across the top of the Sinai peninsula. Why had Moses delayed in the Wilderness so long?

One reason was the strength of the peoples who lived along the borders of Canaan. There were fortified cities such as Jericho, dating from the early Bronze Age. There also were well-organized and sophisticated city states which resisted any incursion by outsiders. But perhaps the most important reason of the delay was the need to build some cohesion into the raggle-taggle group of ex-slaves, serfs and former tradesmen who made up the Israelite camp. It was the mark of Moses' genius as a statesman that he was able to do this. From a people schooled in slavery for 400 years, there emerged a nation which saw itself bound in high moral covenant to the God whom they believed had delivered them from bondage. It was in the Wilderness that this sense of peoplehood was forged.

The stories coming out of this period are often brutal. It was a time of great discouragement. The elation born of freedom soon paled in the face of scant food supplies. Numerous stories deal with the lack of water for people and flocks. The people often berated Moses. "At least in Egypt," they wailed, "although we were slaves, we had food to fill our stomachs." The fainthearted urged Moses to turn back. Better to stay in oppressive ruts that were familiar than to strike out into the unknown!

Those early Israelites faced the same dilemmas that many of us face today. The old foundations had crumbled.

The mores by which they lived in Egypt no longer functioned in the Wilderness. The generally accepted way of behavior that had governed their own youth and that of their parents could not serve as reliable guides for bringing up their chidren. The times, they were a-changing.

We too seem to be foundering in a sea of change. A little over a week ago, the Weston clergy met with the police chief and the youth officer to discuss police concern over the increase of drinking at a younger and younger age in Weston. The same topic was a focus of parents at the high school earlier this week, when psychologist Michael Furstenburg elaborated on results of his research on drug use among Weston High students. His study revealed that alcohol was by far the most commonly used drug, which I think comes as no surprise. What is surprising is that the study suggests alcohol use may be almost as high among freshmen as among seniors. Similar danger signals are surfacing in the press. A front page article in the Boston Globe on Friday reviewed the current issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association devoted to alcohol related medical research. Calling alcohol the "Number 1 drug of abuse in our society," the Journal cited a study that "concluded that serious alcoholism . . . may be far more common among teen-agers than many people believe."

But this increase in consumption at a much younger age is not the only societal change in alcohol abuse. If the stories which have surfaced in townwide discussions are any indication, there is much confused thinking about adult responsibility in teen-age drinking. Some parents, fearful of losing an already tenuous communication with their children, break the law and serve alcohol to their children's friends. Other parents go off for a weekend or a few days' business trip, leaving unchaperoned children at home. Yet others, in the belief that kids will drink anyway so it is better if they drink at home, offer alcohol to minors.

Like the Israelites in the Wilderness, we, too, are living in uncertain times, times when the old moral consensus has broken down and no new community consensus has emerged. How does our faith -- yours and mine -- speak to uncertain times?

Perhaps the most famous story to come out of the Wilderness period is the tale of the golden calf. You recall that after the Exodus, Moses led the Israelites south, to the base of Mount Sinai, where they camped. It was during this time, according to the Biblical account, that God, speaking in thunder and lightening from the cloud-covered top of Mount Sinai set forth the ten commandments among the people of Israel. Foremost among these commandments were:

1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me; and
2. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.

Shortly after this momentous event, Moses decides to go up to Mount Sinai to commune with God. He is gone for about forty days, a kind of retreat for prayer and meditation.

During this time, the Israelites back at the camp became restive. Moses had left his brother Aaron in command. And how does Aaron do in this role? He does what many of us do when faced with the uncomfortable burden of leadership. He knuckles under. He gives into those for whom he is responsible. "Hey," the people say, "Moses has been gone for a long time. Who knows if he'll be back. Make us a god we can see, one like the other tribes have. Everybody else is doing it."

So Aaron collects the gold earings from all the men, women and children, melts them down and molds a golden calf. The Bible is quite detailed in describing Aaron's part. It says, "Aaron received the gold at their hands, and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made a molten calf."

When the people see the golden calf, they shout, "These are your gods, O Israel," they offer burnt offerings before the idol, and then sit down to eat, drink and be merry. The merriness, in fact, develops into an orgy similar to the orgies of the Canaanite fertility cults.

The Bible then describes Moses' return with these words: "As soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot. He took the calf which they had made, and burned it, and ground it to powder and scattered it upon the water, and made the people of Israel drink it." Then Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought a great sin upon them?"

What did Aaron respond? His answer shows the pervasiveness of cowardice. He had been unable to stand up against the pressure of the crowd at the beginning of the story. Now, at the end, he is unable to take proper responsibility for his acts. Not only does he blame the people by saying to Moses: "You know people; they are set on evil." He also fudges his role in making the idol. "They gave me their gold," he says, "and I threw it into the fire, and there came out this calf." Some politicians haven't changed much in 3000 years.

The golden calf is a potent image. It stands for the human need to worship. If we don't worship the true God, we will find some golden calf to worship. We will turn to some idol that is less than the ultimate. What was wrong with the golden calf in this tale?

First of all, it was in direct violation of the first two commandments: "Thou shalt have no other God before me; Thou shalt not make any graven image." The people broke the covenant they had made with God who had liberated them. They no longer stood apart as a chosen people; they became like everybody else, as loose in their behavior as those around them.

The second thing wrong with the golden calf is that it domesticates deity. The God of Moses is mysterious . . . shrouded in clouds. The God of Moses is powerful . . . and uncomfortable . . . speaking in thunder, making demands that are painful to fulfill!! Do not steal, do not cheat, do not commit adultery, do not covet. How much more pleasant to give allegiance to a god we have created, a god who demands what we want it to demand. How much easier to worship a god fashioned in our own image than to worship the God who calls us to be fashioned after the divine image.

I suggest that, like the Israelites in the Wilderness, we are in an age of golden calf worshippers. The idol goes under varying names -- success, power, the good life -- but they all bring us to the same spot that the golden calf brought the Israelites: to the bitter waters created by the dust from the gods made with our own hands.

If we look at the Wilderness period of the Bible, does such a look also help us with how to overcome these difficulties we face today? I think it does. The answer to the golden calf is the answer which Moses gave. It is to call us back from absorption in false idols to the worship of the true God, the God who liberates, the God in whose service is perfect freedom.

To call people back to God has never been as easy task, and mainline Protestantism has not been very adept at it. Dean Kelley points out that one reason conservative churches are growing at such a rapid rate is that, while many religious groups have become fuzzy and secular in their theology, "the conservatives have been careful sharply to differentiate the sacred from the profane world around them." In addition to this zealous attention to matters of the spirit, the conservative churches place strenuous demands upon their adherents. I suggest that we, in the mainline churches, take a leaf out of their book and become more specific about what we believe.

Moses was certainly specific in the passage above. There was no question about what service to God demanded for Moses. "Say to all the congregations of the people of Israel, you shall be holy, for your God is holy. . . ." "You shall revere your mother and father. . . ." "When you harvest, you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes . . . you shall leave them for the poor." "You shall not steal nor lie to one another . . . for I, the Lord your God, am holy."

How bland and innocuous seem so many of the statements we in the mainline churches make about our faith. We believe in brotherhood; we believe in freedom; we believe in a reasoned approach to religion. These are all lofty sentiments . . . but they really are empty of content until we spell out specifically what these statements mean in our daily lives.

Being particular about our faith is not an easy matter. We risk a lot of things, not the least of which is ridicule by our sophisticated, secular friends. I am reminded of a story which was much told when I was a student in seminary.

It concerns an itinerant preacher in the backwoods of Tennessee. He arrived at a rural village one week for a series of revival meetings. The first evening he preached on the topic, "Thou shalt not." He was received with great enthusiasm by the local farmers -- many "Amens" and "halleluiahs" and "Right on, Reverend!" The second night he preached to the same foot-stomping enthusiasm. This time his topic was "Thou shalt not steal." But the third night, he had barely gotten through a quarter of his sermon when he had to flee for his life. His topic that night: "Thou shalt not steal thy neighbor's chickens!"

The more specific we become, the more dangerous our faith.

The more specific we become, the more clearly we see the discrepancy between what we profess to believe and how we act. Yet, I suggest that it is this kind of particularity that is demanded of us when times are uncertain. To return to the example of teen-age drinking: as residents concerned about the welfare of the town's children, we need to speak out clearly that we are a law-abiding community. We need to support open discussion so that we break the conspiracy of silence that surrounds alcohol abuse. We need to support our policy of bringing charges against those who sell and those who serve alcohol to minors. We need to network with one another and exercise our responsibility as adults in affirming that our children will neither give nor attend unchaperoned parties. But we in the churches have another responsibility as well. That is to articulate and model our faith in clear terms so that our children come to delight -- in the words of Paul -- in whatever is _true_, whatever is _just_, whatever is _pure_, whatever is _gracious_. But they cannot do this unless we are clear about what we stand for -- about what we mean by "just," "pure," "true." Paul becomes very specific: "What have you learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, _do_." Becoming particular about what we believe and how we act is not a task for a few "religious leaders." It is the task of the whole church. It is the task of all of us who yearn to worship, not a safe and manageable golden calf, but who yearn to worship the one true God.

APPENDIX C: "THE DELUGE, THE ARK AND THE NOAH COUNTS"

by Max A. Coots

It is an old, old story. We heard it first in the city of Sumer -- the Sumer of 1980 -- B.C. The Sumerian story tells how the high god, Enlil, irritated at the noise of the human race, decided to destroy it in a great flood. Horrified, the god Ea alerted the good king Ut-Na-Pish-Tim, and Ut-Na-Pish-Tim built a ship 120 cubits by 120 cubits by 120 cubits, which, I suppose, made him the first Cubist.

The Old Testament plagerized the Sumerian plot, monotheized the theology, Hebradized the characters, vastly improved the design of the ship by making it 300 by fifty by thirty cubits, and gave Jahweh a motivation more moral than old Enlil's yen for silence. But like Ut-Na-Pish-Tim, Noah finally lands on a mountain top; like Enlil, Yahweh ultimately admits that the punishment hardly fit the crime and promises never again to wash away the sins of the world.

But that was several thousand years ago, and old gods forget old promises. So, here we are in 1980 A.D. caught in a rising flood of troubled waters. Here we are up to our aspirations in agitators. A cloud of evangelical witnesses is gathering in the west. In the east fundamentalist Moslems and orthodox Jews, socialists, and capitalists are pouring water on troubled oil. New torrents of intolerance are seeping into Ottawa and Washington. Storms of protest against liberal policies threaten to wash an array of political flotsam into public office. A tide of reaction is rising and claiming that the world is its oyster and that this November will be a month with an R in it. And it looks as though the ultra-conservatives will reign, not for forty days and forty nights, but for a decade at least.

As always, survival is the first order of business, and so, like old Noah and his ilk in the ark, we Unitarian Universalists have battened down the thermostats, weighed our budgets, and issued a bill of lading (called "The Media Feasibility Study"), which assures us that we have at least two of every kind aboard, though none of them know where we are going.

And what a menagerie we've got! We've got: crows that fly after every lost caws . . . Inquiring owls, who never say "who," but always ask "why?" . . . Crabs frantically crawling backwards away from where they came and what they don't believe . . . Ostriches, who think that getting down to the nitty-gritty means sticking their heads in the social sands of the nineteen sixties . . . Sloths, who just hang around . . . Horses of every creedal color . . . Several different breeds of catechist . . . and some odd birds, who when faced with a theological question, duck . . . And I have loved the whole motley bunch of them. If I have to be all at sea, I cannot think of a more meaningful menagerie with whom to weather the storm.

But if we are to do more than simply survive the deluge, we must become locally sensitive, lovingly critical, and personally involved in the quality of our particular church or fellowship. I am not as much impressed with the proclamations that come from the heights of Beacon Hill or the semi-annual inspirations of the Canadian Unitarian Council or the St. Lawrence Unitarian Universalist District, as I am with the content and the atmosphere of each of our local congregations, which are the major manifestations of Unitarian Universalism.

When the times were more "liberal," when the mood was more tolerant, when the going was easier we could afford to be less than our best. Then we could afford to confuse sophomoric nihilism with philosophic sophistication. Then we could mistake a shallow humanism for theological maturity and substitute trendy pop-psychology for intellectual relevance, but not now.

As I work in this church and as I visit others, I am sometimes amused and bemused and confused. Sometimes I get the impression that we think if we call our choir a chorus, sing songs instead of hymns, rename the sermon "an address" and applaud it, we are more "liberal" than our ecclesiastical neighbors. I wonder about those of us who serve wine and cheese as if they were elements in a holy communion with that dubious deity, suburbia invictus. I think about those people who are attracted to this church because they figure we are the nearest thing to no church at all, and who, once on our rolls, assiduously avoid attending on the grounds that that makes them more "liberal" than those of us who do, and then there are those of us who do attend, like me, who assiduously avoid challenging their assumption on the grounds that we can't afford to lose them. How about those in our groups who have philosophical fits over Christmas Carols, but who open their mouths wide to sing and swallow the fundamentalism of "Amazing Grace" and the orthodoxy of "Morning Has Broken" without a twinge of emotional indigestion, and, worse, without any knowledge of what they've done. I have even visited congregations that ask visitors to take a different colored cup for coffee hour, so, apparently, everyone can recognize whom to ignore. Then there is the common assumption that three exhausting nights of discussion on the Canadian constitution or the American election is social action, that a church-sponsored encounter group is love, that inviting a rabbi to speak is ecumenicity, and that digging up pre-historic references to the mother-goddess is theological progress, as well as those of us who proudly genuflect at the mention of Emerson, Channing, Thoreau and Susan B. Anthony without the slightest ideas of their philosophies. I don't say these things unkindly.

Oh, I guess there is nothing so terribly wrong with some of these tendencies, but there is nothing significantly right with them either. At worst they signify a superficiality that belies our heritage and a juvenality that is unseemly for our years. At best, and if we are to count for much in these times, these can serve as signs of a challenge to a new depth and new breadth that will assure us that when the flood subsides and the tiny ark of our covenant rests on solid ground again, it will be at the top of a mountain and not a molehill.

I have nothing more to say, except, "Bon Voyage!"

APPENDIX D: "THE SENSE IN HUMOR"

by Erwin A. Gaede

Somewhere -- I could not locate the source this week -- Ralph Waldo Emerson remarked on the dreariness of church services, indeed, their coldness and austerity. He went on to say that if a minister were in the process of preaching and it were snowing outside, he was sure that the minister would not see the gentleness of the snow falling on the windowpane. Nor would he deem it proper to comment on the beauty of the world outside.

Emerson was, I suspect, turned off by church services for that reason, but also for others. He sensed, as I am sure many people did, that going to church was a rather somber affair, in fact, overly somber. Why could there not be some joy in it? Why not some expression of delight in the goodness of living, delight in human beings and in nature?

I think we have come a long way since Emerson's time in livening up church services but not in the direction that I believe the sage of Concord would welcome. The Protestant churches of America have shed much of their somberness and gloom but instead of being more real and human, they have become increasingly sentimental and happy in the sense of "all things by all men." The churches have, by and large, accomodated themselves to the prevailing ethos of our society which has, to all intents and purposes, converted the church into another support for the status quo. So just because ministers of today tell funny stories and crack jokes in their sermons does not mean that they have achieved a new vision or understanding of human nature -- its joys and its follies. It could mean quite the opposite: that they are afraid to plumb the depths of human misery and joy. I recall so well when I was a minister in a church in Los Angeles and we were installing a new minister in an area church, when the minister who gave the main address cracked one joke after another until I began to wonder if he really believed that one of the principle functions of a sermon was to entertain people. I grew tired of the jokes and stories and when several years later I heard that this man had left the ministry, I was sort of haunted -- and, I hope not unfairly -- with my reactions to that sermon that evening several years ago. I thought to myself: perhaps he thought that the main purposes of sermons was to entertain people plus sprinkling in bits of insight here and there. I cannot be sure of course what happened, but to give him the benefit of the doubt, let me say that I think there is a place in sermons for the kind of humor he used, and I have used it and will continue to do so from time to time -- as the stories come to me -- but I trust I do not disappoint any of you when I say that this morning's sermon will not be a humorous one in the conventional sense of the word. The kind of humor I want to talk about this morning I hope, will help us to explore -- or deplore -- our wisdom as well as our folly.

What I am interested in exploring this morning is the kind of humor that is essentially therapeutic and not necessarily the kind we experience on the television screen, although much of that is quite all right and helpful as well as needful to get us through some of our more difficult days. But there is another kind of humor which serves to tear the masks off people, or oneself, and tells us who we really are. It is the kind of humor which reveals the ridiculousness of our vanity, of our pretensions, and sort of puts us in our place. But it is also the kind of humor that helps us to maintain our sanity in a world that seems mad with hate, pettiness and violence. Professor Harvey Mindess of the University of California writes that this kind of humor, going beyond laughter and wit, must "constitute a frame of mind, a point of view, a deep-reaching attitude of life." He goes on to suggest that a cluster of qualities characterizes this peculiar set of mind: flexibility, in this case and the individual's willingness to examine every side of every issue and every side of every side; spontaneity, his ability to leap from one mood or mode of thought to another; unconventionality, his freedom from values of his time and his place and his profession; shrewdness, his refusal to believe that anyone -- least of all himself -- is what he seems to be; playfulness, his grasp of life as a game, a tragic-comic game that nobody wins but that does not have to be won to be enjoyed; and humility, that elusive quality exemplified by the rabbi in this traditional story:

> A wise old rabbi lay dying, so his disciples lined up next to his deathbed to catch his final words. They arranged themselves in order, from the most brilliant pupil to the most obtuse. The brilliant one bent over the prostrate form and whispered, "Rabbi, rabbi, what are your final words?"
>
> "My final words," murmured the ancient, "are . . . life is a river."
>
> The disciple passed it on to the fellow next to him, and the phrase traveled like wildfire down the line. "The rabbi says life is a river. The rabbi says life is a river. The rabbi says life is a river." When it reached the oaf at the end, however, he scratched his head in perplexity. "What does he mean that life is a river?" he asked. That question, of course, traveled back up the line. "What does the rabbi mean that life is a river?"
>
> When the star pupil heard it, he leaned over again. "Rabbi," he implored, for the old man was breathing his last, "What do you mean that life is a river?"
>
> And the rabbi, shrugging, croaked, "So it's not a river."

It is quite all right to laugh, if you wish, indeed, I think you must laugh, because the old story reveals so dramatically the insufficiency of what we might call ultimate wisdom. Who has it anyway? It also reveals the absurdity and folly of any man thinking that another person has ultimate wisdom -- especially when he is on his deathbed. Why should it be assumed that wisdom suddenly comes to a person when he is dying -- I don't know -- perhaps it does, and that may be part of what makes dying the unique experience it must be, -- providing one is conscious when he dies.

So where are we? As Dr. Mindess writes: "A man who can shrug off the insufficiency of his ultimate wisdom, the meaninglessness of his profoundest thoughts, is a man who is in touch with the very soul of humor." There is something deeply ironic about this old rabbi who lay dying and who tried to express the ultimate in wisdom but then, in his last breath, realized how ridiculous he was, as well as his pretensions toward wisdom.

So a true sense of humor does basically two things: first, it gives us a deeper appreciation of the irony of life, or the ironies in which our lives are built, and, second, I think it may give us a widened perspective of ourselves. I have already told the story of the dying rabbi to illustrate the first. Now let me relate a cartoon strip by Jules Feiffer which illustrates this ambiguous, widened, if not crazy side of human nature. Feiffer's cartoon strip shows a housewife musing:

> By the time George told me he was leaving on a business trip for a month I had lost all feeling for him. Each dinner when he'd come home I'd try to rekindle the flame, but all I could think of as he gobbled up my chicken was: "All I am is a servant to you, George." So when he announced he had to go away I was delighted. While George was away I could find myself again! I could make plans! The first week George was away I went out seven times. The telephone never stopped ringing. I had a marvellous time! The second week George was away I got tired of the same old faces, same old lines. I remembered what drove me to marry George in the first place. The third week George was away I felt closer to him than I had in years. I stayed home, read Jane Austen, and slept on George's side of the bed. The fourth week George was away I fell madly in love with him. The fifth week George came home. The minute he walked in and said, "I'm home, darling!" I withdrew. I can hardly wait for his next business trip so I can love George again."

As with the previous story, you may laugh at this one also, indeed, you should laugh because it reveals in a devastating way the weakness and foolishness rather than the strengths of human nature and how one's emotions and feelings play a pivotal role in one's life. So we should be able to laugh at ourselves now and then because if we can we will be able to surmount a bit easier some of the crises of life. There is a sense in humor, and that sense lies in a widened perspective of life, and of ourselves. We must come to see that while our lives are important, the world can and will go on without us. The world does not revolve around us, much as we may think it does.

I have been reflecting on the major religions of the world, and I find it difficult to recall instances of humor in them. They are all so serious about life. There is light and darkness, good and evil. People are admonished to be good, to act nobly, to sacrifice their lives if necessary. Life is taken so seriously. It is a matter of heaven and hell. Where will you spend eternity? Remember the signs you see along the highway?

Then there are the existentialists of our time who have enjoyed considerable attention and acclaim. But their message is also a somber one, reflecting, of course, the kind of despair and hopelessness that set in during World War II and after. Those of you who have read Camus' trilogy, The Stranger, The Plague, and The Fall, cannot help being impressed with the sense of meaninglessness which they convey. And not only does the sense of meaninglessness dominate Camus' writings, but there is also a very real absence of joy, even of humor in its most profound sense. Of course Camus is rejecting the conventional Christian outlook which proclaims that life has a real purpose and meaning and a destiny -- all wrapped up together. He says there is no meaning, no intrinsic meaning, except what we put into it. One is sort of obliged to fight the plague, and the fight is long, tedious, costly, painful and there are many casualties along the way. The plague finally wears itself out, but there are more to come. There are two instances of laughter in The Fall, but in each case they are associated not with joy, but with suicide, and with the sense of paralysis that came over Clamence the judge-penitent. The absurdity of life lies in its refusal to give joy, perhaps momentary contentedness, but no joy, no humor. Man lives between despair and hope, that is the essential message of The Fall.

I should like to think that during the past decade or two we have moved farther from despair and closer to hope. The aftermath of World War II, with its shock and horror, has receded somewhat and perhaps we can look at ourselves in a more wholesome manner again. We need a sense of humor -- there is a sense in humor -- because it is therapeutic, it is healing. We might even say that humor is liberating -- it is liberating of oneself and of others. Life does have its ironies and we must see them with some sense of humor, and then we have a deeper insight into our own lives.

Exactly how one is to cultivate a sense of humor is another thing. It comes pretty hard for some people and easier for others. We may not be able to teach others to cultivate it, but perhaps we can cultivate it ourselves. But if we have had a bad day, or made a terrible mistake, we can look at ourselves for a moment and say, well, so it was a bad day, perhaps it will be a better one tomorrow. Or, we can think about what happened last week or last year, something funny happened, and our perspective begins to change. But like trying to instill love or faith or hope in people, it's pretty difficult to instill humor. Sometimes it's pretty difficult to find something to laugh about.

Dr. Mindess tells about a time when he responded to a patient's announcement that he intended to jump off the roof of the hospital and commit suicide. "Oh," said the doctor, "that's exciting. How do you plan to do it? A swan dive? A double-flip? In your pajamas or in the raw? After all it is a one in a life time experience, so you'll want to make the most of it." Well, it worked, fortunately because the patient could see he was habitually trying to get attention and that he wasn't really serious, and now he could laugh at himself. But, of course, Dr. Mindess comments, "making light of someone else's anguish, even with the best of intentions, is a very delicate operation. You can never be sure your humor won't be interpreted as derision, or callous indifference, if not as calculated cruelty. In fact, you can be sure it will -- unless, and this is the crux of the matter, the person you are trying to help unequivocally perceives you as his true ally. If he knows that you basically respect him and wish him well, he may get the point that what you are trying to do is to encourage him to train his own sense of humor upon himself.

What I have been saying about people and how, through humor, they can perceive themselves as they really are, can also be said about a nation. One of the problems with our nation today is that we are taking ourselves far too seriously. I mean we have such grandiose notions of our goodness, our rightness, and our power, that we are being very cruel to a lot of people, here and abroad. Some of the pretensions of our government are as vain as those of many an individual. President Nixon does not want to be the first president to lose a war, but the historian Henry Steele Commager, in a recent article, states that in the eyes of the world we have already lost it. And he tries to understand why it is that we have carried on this war with a vengeance and a fury like nothing we have ever done before. We need to come down from our high places and take our place as equals with the other nations of the world. We are not a happy and joyful people meeting each day with enthusiasm and vision. No, we are a people in deep, deep trouble. Could we, as a people, develop a sense of humor? Are there any humorists alive today? Yes, I am sure there are, but they are not carrying the day.

The value in humor -- the sense in humor -- is that it brings us down a notch, especially when the joke is on us. It strips us of our pretensions and reveals who we really are. It can be painful, but unlike irony, usually is not, because it releases pent-up anxieties, fears, and hates. It can help us to relax so that we can start all over again with a greater measure of common sense.

I must add, though, before closing, that there are some things in which it is simply impossible to find humor. There is such a thing as sheer tragedy and that's that. We had a memorial service here Friday afternoon for John Trinkaus, son of Professor and Mrs. Trinkaus, who with his colleague died in a mountain climbing expedition in Colorado. He died on his twenty-first birthday. He was most energetic, a lively, personable and promising young man. There is humor and comedy in life, but there is also unmitigated tragedy. Tragedy, too, like humor, brings us down and puts us in our place. It tells us who we really are. In this sense tragedy and comedy are not so far apart and that is why Shakespeare could write comedy as well as tragedy. Both try to get down to the essence, the kernel of human nature, and to show it for what it is: its nobility and its lowliness.

In this age of "the disordered will," so many people feel empty and lonely because they have not come to know themselves. If there is anything a sense of humor can do, it is to help us to know ourselves -- as we really are. Humility, the opposite of pride, prejudice and pretension, is a good virtue to cultivate. Let us as individuals and as a nation be our true selves and take our rightful place in the community of mankind.

APPENDIX E: "THE HOLINESS OF HUMOR"
by Anthony R. Perrino

Long before anybody ever heard of psychosomatic medicine, the Book of Proverbs suggested that, "A merry heart doeth like a good medicine."

This fact -- that a sense of humor is a healthy thing -- has become a commonplace assumption in our time. But a careful analysis will, I think, reveal that just as the words, "healthy," "whole," and "holy" have a common etymological origin, humor has a religious as well as a physical and emotional significance.

Let us begin by defining humor as "a kindly contemplation of life's incongruities." (The kindliness is necessary for there must be not only a perception of the peculiarities and paradoxes of life, but a tolerance and acceptance of them.)

Humor and Health:

Now, at the first level, I would suggest that humor is a healthy thing, which "doeth like a good medicine" because it relieves tension, punctures pretensions, enables us to see our circumstance more clearly and deal with life and its problems more creatively.

There's a story of a missionary preacher who went to speak at a local church. Long before his arrival, there was a good deal of antagonism toward his visit because people anticipated that he would ask for money to carry on his work and they "needed all the money they could raise for their own program." (That's a familiar phrase!) At any rate he came and gave his talk, and, just as the people feared, when he concluded said, "Now brethren, we'll all stand and sing a hymn while my hat is passed among you." Well, the hat was passed up and down rows of people, but before long, everyone realized that no one was going to put any money in it! And when the hat was finally returned to the preacher -- empty, the tension was thick enough to cut with a knife as he bowed for an offertory prayer: "O Lord, we give thanks that these good and generous people, in their dire poverty, have seen fit to gimme my hat back!" Now I submit that if the preacher had passed the hat again, he probably would've gotten some money. For antagonism cannot stand up to the onslaught of appropriate humor.

Sometimes the same use of humor is achieved inadvertantly. A dean of women one day began to admonish a hostile student convocation regarding a flagrant public display of affection on the campus. She launched into her intended reprimand by saying, "The dean of men and I are determined to stop kissing on the campus." When amid the uproar of student laughter she realized what she had said, the very proper Miss compounded her humorous felony by quickly adding, "That is, there's entirely too much of it going on under our noses."

Well, my guess is that the student hostility dissipated about then, and if the woman had any sense of humor at all, she probably calmed down a bit too. Appropriate humor restores perspective.

At the risk of over doing it, there is one more story I must tell to further illustrate this point. It has to do with a young boy who came home one day with a terrible report card. His father launched into a tirade of verbal abuse toward the youngster, and just as his anger was about to reach the level of physical expression the boy asked, "What do you think my trouble is, Dad, heredity or environment?

Humor is healthy because it relieves tension and restores perspective. (Let me make clear that I'm not suggesting that a sense of humor will solve your problems, but it does have a remarkable capacity to wash some of the sand out of the gears so the machinery of your mind can function more effectively.)

As Henry Ward Beecher put it, "A man without a sense of humor is like a wagon without springs: he is jolted about by every pebble in the road." i.e., Humorlessness is an unhealthy condition.

Humor and Wholeness

A more significant aspect of humor is the fact that if you can laugh at yourself in a ludicrous circumstance you are reflecting and establishing your sense of identity apart from the event. You are saying, in effect, "What happens to me is not 'me'; I am more than what I experience, and if what happens to me is funny, I can laugh at it without threatening my sense of identity." -- my sense of well-being.

An unstable or insecure person is incapable of this capacity to laugh at himself. He is "swallowed up" by the event and unable to separate his experience from his identity as a person.

A sense of humor is thus an index of maturity and emotional stability. To meet the disappointments and frustrations of life, the ironies and irrationalities which we encounter, with laughter, is a high form of wisdom that does not strive to obscure or defy the irrationality, but merely yields to it without too much friction and integrates it into a sense of wholeness which transcends the immediate event. The perspective of humor is therefore possible only because a person possesses a full-bodied confidence in the larger worth-whileness of life which enables us to regard its incongruities with "kindly (rather than anxious or angry) contemplation."

A person who has this capacity can even recognize the humorous aspects of an unpleasant or dangerous circumstance, like the man Abraham Lincoln described as responding to the prospect of being tarred and feathered and run out of town on a rail with the comment, "If it wasn't for the honor of the thing, I'd just as soon walk."

Oscar Wilde displayed the same sense of humor when, being forced to stand in the pouring rain while being taken to jail, he commented, "If this is how Her Majesty treats her prisoners, she doesn't deserve to have any!"

But the most poignant example of this capacity is a story from my own personal experience; I called in the hospital on a man who was dying. He knew he was dying and so did I, and when I entered his room he began to talk about funeral arrangements. I tried to change the subject and said, "we don't have to talk about it now." But he interrupted me to say, "But I want to talk about it now. I want you to do this for me, Tony, and if you'll do it for me this once, I'll never ask you to do it again!"

Well, it was funny, but more than that -- tremendously significant, for you see this man was saying, in effect, "I have a sense of identity greater than this event. Death is something I can look at and laugh at because it doesn't threaten my essential sense of being!"

Humor reflects a sense of wholeness of personality. Laughter is a way of establishing and preserving your sense of identity apart from the vicissitudes of the world around you.

Humor and Holiness (Exit Laughter):

When, however, we move toward the deeper incongruities of life, humor changes as the element of feeling enters in.

Henri Bergson once contended that, "Humor and feeling are incompatible. . . ." I would agree if he had said, "Laughter and feeling are incompatible," but the fact is that feeling produces the sublimest form of humorous conception: pathos. Such humor has an expression of protest in it, and yet retains its character as "kindly contemplation" because it lacks bitterness as it appeals to the basic goodness in human character while pointing out our folly.

Herblock, the Washington Post cartoonist, is particularly adept at this kind of humor. He has one drawing which depicts a group of obviously well-fed people gathered around a dining room table heavily laden with a sumptuous feast. In the background are the shadowy faces of hundreds of hungry refugee children. The hostess is speaking to a portly preacher as the caption has her asking "Shall we say grace?"!

No angry diatribe here; just the artful and compassionate revelation of incongruity. There is an element of judgment implied, but all humor contains an element of judgment. (That's why we laugh at a pompous man falling on the ice -- and not when a boy does. We enjoy the rebuke of his pompous pretension as long as he's not hurt except for his denied dignity.) The poetic justice is what our laughter applauds. But our judgment is not harsh -- or angry, or cruel.

When our laughter (and the judgment implied) ceases to be kindly, the humorous conception is lost in angry indignation. Humor then denigrates into "sarcasm" which literally means "scratching with a hoe," and the wit becomes as someone described him, "an angry man in search of a victim."

Even at the deeper levels, humor must reflect a tolerance and acceptance of human folly or surrender to cynicism and bitterness.

But the fact is that when we are confronted with the deepest dilemmas, the tragic aspects of human existence, tolerance becomes more and more difficult, laughter less and less healthy.

There are many jokes which border on poor taste and some which have accurately been described as morbid or sick jokes because they make light of tragic situations.

Just on this side of a thin border line which separates healthy from sick jokes are many jokes regarding drunkeness, divorce, and death. An example is the story of a man who called the Montreal Police Department to report the steering wheel, gear shift, and pedals had been stolen from his car. An officer promised to send someone right out, but before he dispatched the patrol car the same voice called again and said, this time with an audible hiccough, "Never mind, officer, I got into the backseat by mistake!"

Now that is not offensive to me, and quite funny, I think. But a few years ago when the "morbid jokes" were so popular with teenagers, one of them told me the very sick story about the children who called on a neighborhood boy and asked if he could come out and play baseball. When his mother said, "Why children, you know that Johnnie had his arms and legs amputated," and the youngsters replied, "Yeah, we know; we wanted him to be secondbase!" Now there's an incongruity there, but it's not funny! To laugh at the tragic aspects of human experience is to scorn life and render it meaningless. There is derision in that laughter and despair in that derision.

This, I think, is why Ecclesiastes said, "Sorrow is better than laughter." At least it takes seriously the ultimate dilemmas of human existence, even though it cannot resolve them. Whereas laughter, at this level, makes a mockery of life!

Enter Holiness:

But Ecclesiastes, you must remember, was the cynic who said, "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity and a striving after the wind." He lacked belief in the basic worth-whileness of life that would have enabled him to retain his sense of humor as he contemplated life's deepest dilemmas, for, you see, a sense of humor at the deeper levels of life -- where laughter is driven out by feeling -- evolves into what we call faith!

The same full-bodied confidence in the fundamental worth-whileness of life (or the determination to make it so) that enables someone to laugh at the superficial incongruities expresses itself as a faith capable of integrating (if not resolving) the deepest dilemmas of human existence.

The fact is that our whole being is based upon a vast incongruity that stems from the creature versus the creative capacity, the temporal and the timeless, the demonic and the divine which exist in us. And, either we have the faith from the standpoint of which we are not able to say, in traditional phrasing, "I am persuaded that nothing -- shall be able to separate us from the Love of God. . ." (i.e., the fundamental goodness of life), or we are overwhelmed by the incongruity of it all -- and we are forced to say, with Ecclesiastes, ". . . that which befalleth the sons of men, befalleth the beast: as one dieth, so dieth the other; so that a man hath no preeminence above the beast; for all is vanity."

Either we affirm some measure of faith in the goodness or potential goodness of life, or we must surrender to the cynicism of Ecclesiastes.

From Whence Comes Such Faith?:

A woman was once told by an admirer, "I wish I had your faith." To which she replied, "If you had something to put it in, I'd give you some now." Well, of course, that's what we all need: a container that will hold intact our conviction that life is fundamentally good, a context for our effort to make life meaningful and just.

What is it that enabled Anne Frank, in the midst of Nazi persecution to write in her diary: "I still believe -- in spite of everything -- that people are really good at heart?" What enabled an American black man to sing "We shall overcome . . . " and believe it? What, down through the ages, has led men to believe in the final triumph of righteousness? And thus be sustained in spite of misfortune.

Historically and traditionally, the container of such conviction has been the belief in a benevolent deity, a fatherly God whose nature is love and whose purposes are good: who will insure the ultimate victory and justice over evil.

But there are those of us who hold no concept of benevolent deity: humanists whose faith begins and ends with the divine in man. Have we forfeited the basis for a belief that life is, or can be, good and just?

I think not: the substance of that belief in "the love of God" is available in human fellowship. Indeed, this, I think, is its actual source for all men. To say that God is love to someone who has never experienced human love is like telling a blind man that grass is green! The concept has no meaning for him. But the experience of love (from another person) puts content into concept. It gives substance to what is otherwise meaningless, a theological abstraction. And it is that substance which sustains us in times of discouragement and despair.

Archibald MacLeish has said this very well in a poetic-play entitled "J.B." which is a modern adaptation of The Book of Job. In the drama the hero, like his Biblical counterpart, is visited by all sorts of inexplicable misfortune: his business fails, his children are taken away, his health suffers, and his wife, who had urged him to "curse God and die," finally in despair leaves him. Thus, in the last scene, she returns and he meets her on the porch of their home.

J.B.: "Why did you leave me alone?"
Sarah: "I loved you. I couldn't help you anymore. You wanted justice and there was none. Only love."
J.B.: "He does not love. He is."
Sarah: "But we do. That's the wonder."
J.B.: "Yet you left me."
Sarah: "Yes, I left you. I thought there was a way away. Water under bridges opens, Closes and the companion starts, Still float there afterwards. I thought the door, Opened into closing waters."
J.B.: "It's too dark to see."
Sarah: "Then blow on the coal of my heart, my darling."
J.B.: "The coal of the heart . . . ?"
Sarah: "It's all the light now. Blow on the coal of the heart. The candles in the church are out. The lights have gone out of the sky. Blow on the coal of the heart, And we'll see by and by. . . ."
J.B.: "We'll see where we are, The wit won't burn and the wet soul smolders, Blow on the coal of the heart and we'll know. We'll know. . . ."

All of which is to say that, in the last analysis, the context of our conviction that life is good and worth living (or may be made so whatever tragedy and misfortune it may contain) is our awareness of love -- relationship.

When our world comes crashing down and we sit amid the shattered ruins of yesterday's hopes and dreams and blithe assumptions, it is *love alone* that *can give us the strength to face another day*: the fact is that this fragile fabric we call humanity is held together by the gossamer threads of human affection. The vast incongruity inherent in human nature can be borne by those who've experienced the sustaining power of love.

It is *this* that nourishes our belief that life is good, and enables us to know the healthiness, the wholeness, the "Holiness of Humor."

And now, a post-script commercial: The primary function of a religious insititution -- such as this -- is to create a community in which such experience of love is available to all who enter into the life.

APPENDIX F: "YE SHALL BE AS GODS"

by David Bumbaugh

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Why God created the heavens and the earth he neglected to tell us, so we are unlikely ever to know -- perhaps he was lonely; perhaps he needed something to do on a rainy Sunday afternoon; perhaps the NFL was on strike and he was bored.

In any case, God created the heavens and the earth. He installed the stars as temporary working lights and liked their appearance so well he decided to keep them permanently. From the position of the stars God discovered that it was Spring, the right time for planting. He covered the earth with green and growing things.

The oceans he filled with fish and great whales and octàpi. He dropped a monster into Loch Ness (it would be good for the tourist trade). Then he got a good look at the garden he planted. It was growing like crazy -- weeds all over the place, zukini and pumpkins trying to take over the planet, kudzu covering half of North America, trees needing pruning and poison ivy everywhere.

God was no fool; he knew at once he had over-planted; he knew at once he was in deep trouble. Unless he acted quickly he'd never find time again for a quiet Sunday afternoon nap. So God scooped up a handful of mud; shaped it and molded it, breathed upon it, and it became a living man. Now God had someone to whom he could delegate.

"Man," said God, "you are a gardener. I want you to take care of this place, weed the garden, get rid of the poison ivy -- it was a big mistake -- and in exchange you can have all the food it produces -- except for the fruit of the tree there in the middle, that is something special, my favorite fruit. I reserve it for me. There has to be some advantage to being God."

It seemed a reasonable deal: Man would sharecrop the world for God; all God asked in return was the exclusive use of one little tree. But it didn't work out as God had hoped. No sooner was Man created than he started to whine about how lonely he was. God, in a half-abstract manner, heard the complaint and wanting to think of himself as merciful, decided to respond. He created a puppy for Man so he wouldn't be lonely. But it was a mistake to create puppy before there were newspapers and firehydrants. Puppies are a lot of work, and Man wasn't satisfied. God tried kittens and spiders, dinosaurs and koala bears, aardvaarks and platypuses and still Man whined and complained.

In exasperation, God created Woman and set the two of them to housekeeping, muttering to himself that Man still wouldn't be satisfied, but they could whine and complain to each other and maybe he could get some sleep.

God was enjoying the first real sleep he had known since deciding to create the world. Man and Woman who, for perverse reasons of their own, called each other Adam and Eve, were exploring the plantation. Adam seeking to impress was busy explaining the importance of his work, and how involved he was naming all the animals, and why he may be late coming home some evenings, and why he needed to be able to rest on weekends, and why he should not be asked to fix the roof, or carry out the garbage, or do the dishes, and why she should always have a warm meal ready whenever he was hungry. Eve nodded in agreement and made a mental note to herself to check up on him the first time he came home late.

They sauntered by the special tree and Eve wondered if that fruit might be ripe enough for one of her world-famous pies. Adam explained with a sense of immense importance that this tree belonged to the Boss, that he was allowed to trim it and care for it but only the Boss could eat the fruit of it. Eve was immediately drawn to the tree. She examined it closely and decided she must have the fruit. She knew that it took the best to make the best. Before she could voice her thoughts there was a rustling in the tree above her.

Adam and Eve looked up to see a small green head looking down. The grass snake -- which has no business in a tree -- smiled as best as a snake can.

"You know why God keeps this fruit for himself, don't you? This is a very special fruit, those who eat it become like God himself, knowing the difference between right and wrong, able to create worlds patterned on their dreams. God doesn't want any competition; he keeps the fruit of the tree for himself. Go on, have a bite, he'll never know. I nip away at it now and then -- that's why I'm so smart and speak such good English without a hiss or a lisp.

Eve took the fruit and bit into it; Adam, not wanting to be called a sissy, ate also. And when God came by for his evening stroll, his mouth watering for a good Stayman Winesap, there was not anything left of the fruit of his tree except a few discarded cores. God cursed and swore and fumed but even God cannot restore a broken trust. All he could do was evict Man and Woman from his garden and hope that maybe next season he could get some of his favorite fruit.

God reserved his special anger for the snake (who was really God in another disguise, but that's a different story). God forbade the snake to ever climb trees, ordered him to crawl in the dust on his belly, and gave him a horrible speech impediment and a nervous habit of constantly flicking his tongue. The snake crawled off hissing softly to himself, and God withdrew in a towering rage to sulk for a millenium or two and write psalms and proverbs all about how ungrateful and unreliable Man and Woman had proven to be.

As it turned out, the snake was right. Having eaten from the tree, God's special tree, Adam and Eve found themselves transformed. At first they were disappointed. They thought to "be like God" meant knowing everything, able to do anything, never knowing frustration or failure or death. In truth, to "be like God" meant being confronted by innumerable possibilities and having to choose not knowing the outcome; to "be like God" meant having to wrestle with moral issues, choosing between the lesser of many evils, and living with regret at not having chosen more wisely; to "be like God" meant knowing all things, including Gods, have a beginning and an end.

Adam and Eve, Man and Woman, found themselves transformed. Everything was now contingent. Adam discovered that he did not need to be a gardener. He could be a shepherd, or a tailor, or a bricklayer. In a moment of desparation he could even be a theologian. Eve discovered the secret of sexuality and the strange power she had to give birth to life. She discovered that while Adam may have been created first, he really wasn't all that smart. She understood the inner workings of things and she possessed the sorrow which accompanies that knowledge, and grew deep and wise and compassionate from the hurt it inflicted. And she knew that she, too, could be whatever she wanted to be.

Adam and Eve set about to create themselves a world they could inhabit gladly. Their first commercial venture, manufacturing clothing from fig-leaves, was a failure: the fabric tended to color and wilt. But after a while they got the hang of being like God. They produced children who disobeyed them and frustrated them and grieved them and murdered each other. (And God, who was watching it all from a great distance, smiled and commented to herself, "Now they know how a mother feels.") They built cities and created political structures to govern them. Beginning to feel the hand of death upon them, they invented religions and alphabets, monuments and libraries, to preserve what they had learned and experienced from dark oblivion. And in the process they transformed the heavens and the earth.

Upon the starry vault they projected myths and legends; the deserts of the earth they transformed into gardens; the forests of the earth became grasslands, and new deserts, and vast wastes. God, looking up from his self-contemplation, scarcely recognized the place. He would not concede that it was improved, but it certainly was changed.

Humans increased in power until there was nothing they could not do -- except live forever, and they were working on that. They divided themselves into nations, to increase the competitions and make things more interesting and provide room for variety. And soon the children of Man and Woman, believing the divisions between them more real than the unity of family ties, were at each others' throats, struggling for mastery of the planet, murdering and pillaging. Nation after nation, "for defensive purposes only," developed vast armies with increasingly sophisticated weapons, able to lay waste all the neighborhood, and kill off brothers and sisters who might have been planning something mean.

Man and Woman grew in power and as they grew God withdrew more deeply into his reverie, until the only testament to his presence was an occasional rumor, and a more frequent prayer of anguish from the lips of those done to death by their brothers and sisters. And the time came when God abandoned the world. Man and Woman found themselves completely in charge, proprietors of a world now hinged upon their decisions, upon their choices, upon their wisdom, upon their compassion.

Thw world went its riotous course, careening from crisis to crisis, buffeted by war and famine and plague, and Man and Woman found themselves always one step behind -- trying to prevent last year's famine, trying to prevent last year's war, trying to prevent last winter's virus. In their inventiveness Man and Woman created new strains of plants, new vaccines, and new weapons -- each weapon more powerful than the last and intended to make war so horrible no one would dare to war again. And always someone dared. At last the day came when Man and Woman, fragmented in nations all over the globe, had weapons so powerful they could, in a matter of minutes, undo all it had taken God six days to create.

God watched in abstract fascination.. Man and Woman had become as Gods; they had the power to create a world; they had the power to destroy a world. The question was whether they had the wisdom to manage the power. God doubted it. He didn't remember giving them all that much wisdom, but they had a history of surprising him.

Man and Woman had become as Gods; they had created a world which had defied them. They knew how great was the danger; they knew that if they could not discover a unity strong enough to over-ride differences, the world must soon destroy itself, carrying all human accomplishments into eternal darkness. Knowing what must be done and convincing autonomous beings they can risk doing what must be done are two quite different things.

With the fate of the world hanging in the balance, they called together the nations of the earth, fresh from the most recent slaughter, to create an organization, an institution, an instrument to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war," to save the earth from destruction. Together they created a world organization, and God, from his distant perch, saw, and said, "How creative, how remarkable, how imaginative! I wonder why I didn't think of that -- or perhaps I did and don't remember, it was all so very long ago."

Man and Woman invested all their hopes in the new structure and soon found themselves in despair. The nations wrangled and threatened, walked out or were expelled. Factions were formed and dissolved, betrayed and restructured, and all the while the weapons grew larger and more numerous, and more dangerous.

Man shrugged his shoulders and said, "It is too dangerous in this world to be without such weapons; we can only pray we never have to use them." Woman knew that there was no one to pray to any longer. God would not intervene, could not intervene in this world, for this was no longer a world of his devising. MAN AND WOMAN HAD MADE THIS WORLD. Now they had truly become as Gods. All the accomplishments of the generations past rested and waited upon their choices. Once God had held past and future secure in his memory, but God had forgotten, had given the world into the keeping of Man and Woman. They held in their mortal hands all that the past had ever been. They held in their mortal hands all that the future will ever be. Those same hands with a tiny flick a twitch of a muscle, could cast into oblivion all past generations, all future generations forever and ever and ever, world without end ENDED!

Man and Woman were weary of the terrible burden, the terrible responsibility. They wished God would come back from his extended leave of absence, extricate them from the mess they had created, set the world on the right path again, save it from the destruction that threatened it. If only they had not eaten the fruit; if only they had not wanted to be as Gods; if only the snake had minded its own business. But even Gods can not bring back the past. The most Gods can do is redeem the past and preserve the future, to rid themselves of weapons capable of foreclosing the future, to renounce war as an instrument of national policy, to make of the United Nations a vehicle by which law may go out from Zion and peace become the order of nations.

Man and Woman, who began as gardeners and tailors -- a tiny mom and pop operation -- now hold the destiny of the world in their hands. Behold we have eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and we have become as Gods. Whether we shall be Gods of creation or of destruction is not yet determined. What we believe about ourselves, what we believe we are capable of doing -- that may determine the fate of the earth. WHAT SHAPE SHALL WE GIVE THE FUTURE?

APPENDIX G: "THE BIBLE JERRY FALWELL DOESN'T PREACH"
by David Bumbaugh

Recently a good friend of mine, a life-long Unitarian Universalist, told me a marvellous joke, which I want to share with you. According to the story, there came a day in the eternity of heaven, when St. Peter found the boredom of serving as celestial gate-keeper more than he could tolerate. Calling the main office, he talked to the Boss, pleading for a day off so he could go fishing. The Boss, being in an amiable mood, thought he could find someone to serve as temporary replacement for the faithful Saint. In a few moments, St. Peter looked up to see Jesus of Nazareth jogging down the golden lane toward the pearly gate. In no time at all (since there is no time in eternity) St. Pete was angling for a few angel fish, while Jesus was twiddling his thumbs, waiting for some business at the entrance to heaven. It was a very long wait. The road to heaven is not well-traveled even in the best of times.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, Jesus saw an old man trudging up the hill toward the gate. Jesus greeted him effusively and, feeling the need for some companionship, tried to engage the newcomer in conversation. The old man explained he had been a carpenter and wood-worker, that he had tried to live a good life, but that his existence had been shadowed by one great sorrow. He had had an only son, whom he had loved dearly. Unfortunately, that son had been taken from him and he had never seen him again.

Jesus looked at the old man, looked at him again, and, throwing out his arms in welcome, cried, "Father!"

The old man squinted back through rheumy eyes, and replied, "Pinocchio?"

Now I tell you that story in order to tell you another one. I was repeating this joke to an old friend, a member of another Unitarian Universalist church, who thought it wildly funny and commented that she couldn't wait to get home and share it with her children. As she said that, a look of surprise came over her face. "Oh," she said, "it won't do any good to tell my kids that one. They won't understand it. They're very up on their Pinocchio, but I'm afraid they don't know much about Jesus."

It occured to me that my friend's comment serves as something of a paradigm of attitudes in the contemporary world -- attitudes which are particularly true of many Unitarian Universalists. The fact is that most of us are well up on our Pinocchio. Many, if not most of us, live in houses which are well-furnished with books. In most communities we are among the most faithful patrons of libraries and bookstores. I would bet that a survey of almost any Unitarian Universalist congregation would reveal a high proportion of people who owned the full set of the Great Books of the Western World, and even a modest proportion of people who have read one or more of them. We read newspapers and magazines compulsively; our basement store-rooms are stuffed full of back issues of National Geographic. In short, we consider ourselves, and not without reason, a highly literate people. And yet, when it comes to the central document in the development of western culture, that document which melds the civilizations of the ancient near-east with the philosophical and mythic traditions of classical Greece and provides the basis for the civilization which has dominated the western world for nearly two millenia, most of us plead ignorance. We are well up on our Pinocchio, but we know so little about the Bible that we have trouble recognizing its pervasive symbolism in the literature we do read, or the degree to which its assumptions color the manner in which we view our every-day world.

There are reasons of course for our inability to really own the Biblical tradition or make effective use of it in our religious, cultural or intellectual life. To begin with, we now live in a post-Christian, secular world in which the Bible functions to evoke nostalgic memories of the past, in which the Bible is used to legitimize various questionable attitudes and pronouncements, but in which the Bible is not really studied or understood or truly respected. What is more, many of us are come-outers. That is, we grew up in the traditions of some other religious community. For whatever reason, we found ourselves rejecting the faith in which we were nurtured, and our adherence to Unitarian Universalism was in some way tied up with that primordial rejection. As part of the process, we divested ourselves of the symbolism of the religious communities of our upbringing. In many cases, the Bible was part of the baggage of our past which we chose to unload.

More serious, however, is the fact that many of us tend to be literalists. That is, we prefer a view of the world and of reality which is one-dimensional, a world in which things are either true or false, right or wrong, so or not so. It is this characteristic which led a friend of mine to comment some years ago that the Unitarian Universalists and the fundamentalists might be the last people in the country to deal with the Bible as fact. The fundamentalists, of course, insist that every word, every syllable of the Bible was dictated by God and therefore provides the standard by which truth is to be determined. Unitarian Universalists, on the other hand, finding that the world-view of the Bible does not square with the world-view of the nineteenth century sciences accepted science as normative and often discarded the Bible. Ironically, both groups, though miles apart in the religious spectrum, share very similar assumptions about how the Bible is to be approached.

If we approach this document with the question, "Is it true?" rather than the broader question, "What human experience does this reflect and what relevance does that experience have for my own life and times in which I live?" we fail to understand the importance of the Bible. We tend to regard the Bible as an historical curiosity, or as a repository of out-of-date concepts and inaccurate observations, or as a compendium of outmoded and somewhat dangerous social and political attitudes which have no relevance to the contemporary world, but for which unjustified claims are frequently made by unsophisticated people and those who pander to them. We, too, tend to be literalists regarding the Bible, only our literalism often leads to rejection rather than affirmation.

Even worse, there is a trivializing emphasis among some of us, who recognize that the Bible has some cultural significance, who regard some passing knowledge of the Bible as a symbol of a well-grounded education, and who would use it as a veneer to demonstrate cultural literacy. The purpose is not to understand the source of the document, or even to evaluate its various messages, but to be able to recognize a quote when we encounter it, and to sprinkle a quote here and there when appropriate.

These attitudes leave us somewhat handicapped in the religious and cultural dialogue of our time. The rise of the evangelical right has demonstrated beyond any question that despite the widespread Biblical illiteracy which characterizes our age (or perhaps because of it) the cadences of the King James Bible still resonates deeply in the soul of western culture. Using its majestic language to clothe their own mean-mindedness, the preachers of the evangelical right manage to foist upon a gullible public their time-bound, evanescent opinions as if they were the eternal word of God. And we who are up on our Pinocchio but not on our Bible, are left to sputter and fume because we simply cannot anchor our disagreement in the subsoil of western culture. Having abandoned the Bible, we have allowed philosophical and theological know-nothings to capture the central document of western civilization.

The fact is that despite their protestations about preaching the Bible, and about their faith being a Bible-based religion, the preachers of the fundamentalist, evangelical right are very selective about the portions of the Bible they preach, carefully choosing those elements in the Bible which support their own social, political and philosophical prejudices. What this means in practice is that they tend to focus our attention on what I believe to be the meanest, most primitive, repressive and vindictive aspects of that ancient and complex document, while ignoring or dancing lightly over its greatest moral insights and its most profound teachings.

On the occasions when I have heard Jerry Falwell and various other electronic preachers, I have come away from the experience with the feeling that the Bible is dedicated to a consistent and narrow moral code which leaves no room for the ambiguities of real life. The impression they leave is that Biblical religion must be opposed to the rights of women and committed to making women chattels of their husbands or fathers, tied to domestic service all their lives. The impression they leave is that the Bible is implaccably opposed to homosexuality, abortion and welfare programs. The impression they leave is that the Bible enjoins us to vote for and support officials and policies which are conservative as they define that term and to denounce any liberal program as a pact with the devil.

The fact is, of course, that it requires a tortured logic to make the Bible say all that. It requires that vast sections of the Bible be ignored, particularly those portions which set the Bible apart from other examples of great religious writings as morally and ethically and theologically unique. But because we do not understand the Bible, we fail to see in that great document a resource which can support a far more liberal approach to religion.

Thus, for example, the effort to use the Bible to justify chaining women to the kitchen stove ignores the complex of women throughout the Bible itself. To begin with, the Spirit of God, who moved over the face of the deep, and created the world out of primordial chaos was the Shekinah, the feminine aspect of God. What the masculine aspect of God was doing at the time, Genesis does not say. It is clear that Miriam, Moses' sister, played a crucial role in the drama of Exodus. She was a priestess, not a housewife. It was Rebecca who secured the blessing for Jacob and his descendents. Deborah was a prophet, a judge, a ruler over Israel in a trying and desparate time. Jael left her housekeeping to kill Sisera, the general of the army who was threatening to destroy Israel. Esther saved her people from destruction. The whole drama of Jesus traces to and begins with the faithfulness of Ruth. The pronouncement of the birth of Jesus came first to a woman. Women were clearly part of his band of disciples. Jesus himself asserts that Mary had chosen better than Martha when she abandoned housewifely duties to sit with the men and engage in talk of religious matters. The Book of Acts and even the Letters of St. Paul clearly indicate that had it not been for women, the nascent Christian movement would have died in the dust of Palestine. Where is this part of the Bible in the preaching of the evangelical right?

Nor is this the only example. The Bible warns that "those who live by the sword shall die by the sword." How does that square with the demand for ever greater armaments?

The Bible warns, "judge not, that ye be not judged," and "let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone." How does that square with the crusade against the rights of homosexuals? The Bible says, "'Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord!" How does that square with the repeated demand for the death penalty?! The Bible urges that when you pray, "do not pray in public . . . but go into your closet and pray in secret. . . ." How does that square with the demands for prayers in the public schools? The Bible defines service to

God as service to those who are in need. How does that square with the insistence that government has no responsibility for the poor and the demand that we eliminate welfare programs?

Beyond this, the entire thrust of the Bible is to warn us against the idolatry implicit in our assumption that we know the nature of ultimate reality and the purpose and destiny of the universe. In that vast document, the nature of God is not so much declared as it is hidden in metaphor and simile. Remember that Moses sees God, but only his back side, for to look full in God's face is to die. Moses asks God's name and is told that God is Jahweh, cryptically translated as "I am that I am," or "I am that which shall be." The entire book of Job is dedicated to teaching us that there is no connection which we can sort out between our actions and the rewards and punishments that come our way. God is essentially unfathomable. The book of Jonah is dedicated to teaching us that God is the God not only of the faithful but of disbelievers as well, and that one dare not use religious faith as a weapon against those who disagree. Over and over again we are warned that "God's ways are not our ways." How does that square with the insistence of the evangelical right that they know God's nature and God's will and God's purpose and that if their social program is followed God will prosper the nation and the individual? To my mind that is not Biblical religion; it is sacrilege and idolatry.

At the very best, the religion of the evangelical right is one of the many religious alternatives which can be derived from the Bible, and in my judgment it is narrow and limited and mean-spirited. Liberal religion is equally based upon the Bible, whether we recognize it or not, and has the potential of reconnecting the needs of our times with the broadest and deepest insights which have informed our culture. We forget that historically, whenever people have been biblically literate and free to read the Bible, Unitarianism and Universalism have arisen spontaneously, whether it be in Poland or in Transylvania, in Holland or Germany, in England or North America, or the Phillipine Islands. And this is not only because of the negative reason that a free reading of the Bible offers no scriptural support for arcane doctrines like the doctrine of eternal hell, but also because a free reading of the Bible offers a vision of a different kind of religion than that which is devoted to pandering to the worst in human beings.

Perhaps the best example of what I mean is to be found in the words of the prophet Micah. In the sixth chapter of the book that bears his name we find these words: "He sheweth thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." This is a far cry from the fundamentalist insistence that religion has to do with opposing abortion, homosexuality, women's rights, supporting the death penalty, militarism and prayer in public schools. Micah insists that religion is a far more difficult matter than any code of simple do's and don't's might suggest. Micah insists that religion is centered primarily upon the quality of human relationships, and the tension under which they place us. The truth is that justice and mercy are not the same thing; often they are antithetical. What justice demands is frequently unmerciful; what mercy requires is frequently unjust. The religious life is defined by constantly wrestling with these kinds of opposed values and it is legitimized in terms of its impact upon our relations with one another. What is more, the Prophet knows that when caught in the dilemmas of life, too often we seek a short-cut by an appeal to God, asserting that our choice between options is right because God validated it. Micah enjoins that we walk humbly with our God knowing that God is always more than we understand, and that the great sin is to identify our choices with divine will.

This is no cookie-cutter approach to theology or morality. This is an invitation to wrestle deeply and constantly with the most profound of religious issues. This is a challenge to recognize that the true test of any religion is how it impacts upon those with whom we share the planet. Nor is this an isolated aberration which the evangelical right is justified in ignoring. It runs throughout the entire document. It is echoed by Amos, who insisted that God is not interested in sacrifices and worship, but in righteousness. It is echoed by Hosea insisting that God is defined by love and acceptance not vengeance. It is at the heart of the message of second Isaiah who offers us a vision of God as co-sufferer with humanity. You will remember that when Jesus of Nazareth was asked which is the greatest of the commandments, he said there were two: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy soul and all thy mind and all thy strength. . . . And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Jesus went on elsewhere to define love of God as service to the least of those in need: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned; and to define the neighbor as that individual whom you confront who is in need of your assistance. Ultimately, the message attributed to Jesus focused religion on this world, and on caring concern for our fellow human being. The author of the First Epistle of St. John drives the point home with deadly accuracy, when he asks, "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

This is a far cry from the religion of legalistic rules and specific moralisms. This is a religion which forever resists the attempt to align God with some particular political or social program. It is a religion which presumes constant struggling with ambiguous virtues, a religion that knows no formulation is ever final or ultimate, a religion which can only be tested in terms of whether it results in more loving human relationships, a religion which requires we hold our convictions about the nature of ultimate reality lightly, and use them to increase understanding, not to compel the consciences of others, a religion which insists that we take this world seriously, that we function to preserve it, and that we not barter it on the spurious promise that there is a better world awaiting in the sky, a better home beyond the holocaust.

This is not the religion of the evangelical right. This is not the gospel that Jerry Falwell preaches. It is, however, a Biblically based religion, resting solidly on the progressively developed moral sense and ethical sensitivity which the Bible as a whole witnesses and which continues to challenge western culture and individual men and women to this day. I would submit to you that it provides a pretty good description of liberal religion which the evangelical right denounces, and particularly of Unitarian Universalism. We, more than many, have been concerned for this world, for making it a home adequate to the human spirit. We, more than many, have defined religion in terms of how we live with our brothers and sisters next door and across the planet. We, more than many, have seen the words of the prophet Micah as our constant challenge and as the sternest judgment upon our failures.

The really sad thing is that we have often failed to recognize that we have a legitimate claim on that ancient book, the Bible. We have settled instead for trying to appropriate its insights second-hand. Well, Pinocchio is a fine story, but it does not begin to touch the moral or spiritual depths of the tale of Jonah. Maybe it is time for us to reclaim the source of our religious faith, and begin, just a little, preaching the Bible that the evangelical right dares not preach -- beginning with that verse from Micah, which could well be inscribed over the door of every Unitarian Universalist church in the land: "He has shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

APPENDIX H: "SELF-DOUBT AND SELF-CONFIDENCE"

by Robert Lloyd Schaibly

In intimate moments I often hear people say how inadequate they feel for some role in which life has cast them. A father or a mother says, "I wish I knew how to be a good parent." A man says, "I wish I knew how to be a man." Or someone says, "I don't know how I ever got myself into this, and I don't know how I am ever going to get out of it."

Often I am surprised because what I see, looking at them, has no bearing on how they say they feel, and yet I recognize they are in touch with their feelings.

And I know I surprised some people when I told them my feelings upon becoming minister of First Church. I wanted to be a minister of an inner-city church with a high level of activity. (Some joker said, "The only thing worse than not getting what you want is getting it." Now I don't think that's true at all, but it did come to mind!) I was so busy and so tired and so disoriented by my totally new surroundings that -- and this is confidential, don't repeat it -- I went to a committee meeting at the end of August and suddenly realized that I had forgotten what this committee's function was! Talk about self-doubt! (I COULD NOT BELIEVE IT!) Fortunately, the committee members sent out some clues very quickly! The new kid on the block, trying to appear competent and confident, what a hell of a thing to happen.

Maybe you know something about this! A friend said, "Boy I don't envy you preaching on self-doubt." "Oh, you think I don't know anything about self-doubt?" "No, it's just that the place is going to be packed with experts!"

Over the years I've become aware of the ways we move through the process, from self-doubt to self-confidence, from crisis to decision and resolution. When we do not decide to confront our self-doubt we live paralyzed and spiritually we atrophy. The world needs you with the self-confidence to reach out.

I choose to share my experience with you today, yet I know well that one person's rational answers will not give you your own answers, for though we share fears about ourselves, the nature of our fears differs and needs to be discovered. Freud spoke profoundly about each person's situation: "The voice of intelligence is soft and weak; it is drowned out by the roar of fear."

In the unabridged Webster's self-doubt is a lack of faith in oneself; a feeling of uncertainty as to the value of one's actions or way of life; and they use the word in a sentence which captures its essence, "All my yearning to live a creative life rushed up and all my characteristic self-doubt also."

When self-doubt characterizes you it is my wish that these thoughts might speak to your condition.

First the bad news. I learned I was wrong in imagining in my youth that self-doubt could be outgrown.

Self-doubt is an experience that one does not outgrow although the attacks may lessen. May Sarton, the distinguished and honored Unitarian poet and author, is 66 years old. Yet she was devastated by an unfavorable review of a recent novel. Shortly thereafter she discovered that she had breast cancer and though she had hopes that her surgery would be a catharsis, and that, "I would emerge like a phoenix from the fire, reborn, with all things made new, especially the pain in my heart. Not so; it all had to begin again -- the long journey through pain and rejection, through anger and understanding, toward some regained sense of myself." For here there were no handy formulae for overcoming despair, though she knew enough never to deny the reality of her feelings. She always carried on her normal routines in time of trouble.

In my most serious times of self-doubt I have managed to do the same. I had been a minister three months, with my freshly printed diploma at the frameshop waiting for its owner to become rich enough to retrieve it and my robe was so fresh and black I didn't dare to wear it. You too have seen the symbols in their place -- there is a new wedding ring on your finger and you know you don't know a damn thing about marriage. There is a bedroom full of gifts for the new baby you are carrying and you realize you don't know what the hell you are truly in for; you are wearing your first business suit to work and how you wish it would help you do the job. The props are in place, but still the actor and the actress feel the heart pound, the knees shake.

In those months I found myself very much appreciated, but internally I was in crisis. I asked from the depth of considerable distress by what right I was the minister. Within my own little congregation Mr. X was more mature, Dr. Y was more sensitive, Mrs. Z had a greater capacity to show loving responses under adverse conditions. All the things I thought I ought to be, others were in greater measure. I felt the temptation to conceal myself, while every sermon revealed more of me, and what was worse, I was painting myself into a corner by preaching a message of openness! I wondered how I had ever imagined I might accomplish anything in ministry. Such misery!

I first resolved it by sharing the dilemma with my colleagues who could identify with it. Doing that brought a great deal of relief, and I want it to mean a lot to you if you presently live with much self-doubt, for in sharing the questions of doubt you may be able to hear this -- You are not alone. You are not alone. Sometimes I think the terrain of self-doubt is the most exquisitely mapped, carefully dilineated piece of territory there is. And other people who are friendly provide a reality check to tell us how things are really going.

The second way I worked on resolution was through therapy with a skilled therapist. I recommend therapy to you if you can have reasonable expectations, such as learning or discovering the half dozen most self-defeating patterns of behavior you have. For me this means coming in contact with my paranoia -- we all have some -- and then seeing in what perverse way the fears help me, what they do for me. Why do we let self-doubt commandeer our lives? For me this use of fear was a whip (a stick) which was driving me to accomplishments.

In the course of therapy I said that I was the minister because I had chosen to be, because I had been chosen by a congregation to be, because I was paid to discover and to remember significant truths, and to tell them to people who came to be reminded, because I wanted to spend my life this way, and because I have a strong faith in the life process based on my particular experiences. That's the carrot. And I'm telling you, vegetables are healthier than whips!

Some self-doubt concerns the worthwhileness of our concerns. Again I say what is most striking about the way out of self-doubt is talking to others. And I did not always believe that. We lived in Chicago in a white neighborhood in a highly segregated city. Three sides of the neighborhood were black neighborhoods and it was like waiting for the other shoe to drop before de-segregation began. Peaceful integration was a vision some few of us shared, and we formed our organizations: The Urban League moved into the neighborhood; the Neighborhood Association worked to keep peace in the high schools. An interracial group mediated conflicts and held an annual banquet. But still there were racial incidents; violence was feared, and the fear was debilitating. I often left meetings frustrated about what to do. I often questioned the value of going to meetings. I was reading Martin Buber when I came across a statement that made me laugh. Martin Buber had written: All real living is meeting. Buber means many things by this, the best one of them is that even the meeting that happens when members of a committee gather has the significance of real living when there is a contactful exchange of feeling. And once I was watching for real living, either what I picked up increased, or what I was able to give at meetings increased, because it did seem that simply to gather and exchange information, to reinforce the vision of love and justice, to be assured that someone else in the world cared about the issues, is significant. In a state of self-doubt it is possible to project that questioning doubt onto all institutions one touches -- be it the institution of marriage or the church -- and question their value. Or it is possible to confess the condition of not knowing answers to very big problems, and in so doing touch reality and feel union with others. You are not alone.

Images provided by sources outside ourselves are a fundamental cause of self-doubt. The images we see in the media, especially in advertising tell us what clothes we might better wear, what our homes should look like, what cars we should drive, what products to use, what foods are "in" to serve -- in short, how inadequate our lives presently are and how through consumerism they might be better. This can not be avoided (I think) but simple awareness can keep it under control. You are being sold an unreal image of beauty and to the degree you buy into it, to that degree it begins to destroy you.

Images deceive us -- bodies without blood vessels or scars or marks. How often our doubts about ourselves as personally inadequate stem from an image which is macho or from high fashion, and those images should be treated the way we treat fairy tales -- our interest in them is in what they tell us about our dream world in which we need to be strong, rich and powerful, and alternately rescued by a prince or a princess, an animal or a technological marvel dropped accidentally by James Bond. That can be fun, fantasy has an important place -- just keep it in its place and make sure it doesn't mess up your reality! Sometimes the young seem so vulnerable to advertising and to feelings of genrally not being OK, but I was heartened by a young mother saying her eleven year old had seen an ad and said, "Mommy, she doesn't even have pores -- she's not real!" But you are real and you ought to be free from pretending you're not.

Some guidelines I have found helpful for putting self-doubt in its place are to remember your personal history. Recount your story to your journal, if no one else, and gain a sense of yourself as an achiever and more important, a survivor. Best if you can recount your achievements; if not remember the crises you've survived.

Never deny the realities of your uncertainty, the pain of your anger or your depression. Don't wish it away; your mind is trying to tell you something about yourself. If your doubts are grave you may be saying you need some fundamental change in your life.

Life is a process in which self-doubt comes and goes. I take heart from May Sarton's Journal in which it becomes clear that though we all wish, in the words of a book reviewer "that years of experience bring some wisdom in dealing with problems of love, work, and money, May Sarton offers no comfort on that score, but there is something wonderfully encouraging about the spectacle of passions that endure as long as one has a mind and heart and will."

Finally, if ever you deal with a self-doubt which seems genuinely paralyzing, I would encourage you to enter deeper territory, the very dark places of our personalities. Go deeper because in some of us, at some times, on some issues, there is a need to hate oneself and suffer punishment. Perhaps at some level this is because someone else did and they no longer do and now you imagine you must take up the burden; perhaps it happens because you feel that putting yourself down is the only way to keep yourself on your mettle or to prevent egocentricity; perhaps it is to keep you from ever being a winner out of fear that you couldn't enjoy success, and complaining about failure is so familiar; perhaps you fear that being a winner would lose you friends. For many of us, if not all, parental figures live on in our heads and when we hate them or feel deeply about them (regardless of whether they are alive) we may behave on the basis of how they are affected instead of how we are affected. Your success might make your parents proud and you know they have no right to that so keep yourself from success. All this is well documented in a little paperback which remains a classic, Self Realization and Self Defeat, by Samuel J. Warner.

Dr. Warner goes on to indicate, though he does not use the term self-doubt, that holding perfectionistic ideals which can never be attained is a basis for self-doubt. "Perfectionism is always self-defeating and tends to coexist with unproductiveness."

And productivity, or creativity, to use the word I prefer, is what it's all about. The debilitating quality of self-doubt keeps us from coming to life, taking risks, and creating ourselves fully.

The young minister of three months who had not detected any particular change among his congregation, his community, or himself, who wondered what he had ever hoped to accomplish as a minister changed his vision: he perceived ministry as something which maintains a holding action in the world sustaining before people a vision of a world of love and justice, which won't happen but must be hoped for and deserves to be sought. Most emphatically, there are causes which are worthy of our energy though the goal is far off.

And what became of the committees formed to achieve peaceful integration in Chicago? What finally happened to the dream that blacks and whites might live together? By a fortuitous combination of circumstances it gained credibility. Housing prices shot up and homeowners knew they could never afford to duplicate the quality homes they were living in; mortgage rates shot up. People pretty much stayed put, and decided to learn to get along, and the interracial organizations were looked to for guidance and came into their own. A line from a hymn, "We move in faith toward unseen goals."

May Sarton does not have a PhD in clinical psychology yet she speaks of the same process of becoming acquainted with the painful self-doubt and transforming pain into love in a poem which captures our human condition:

Return to the deep sources, nothing less
Will nourish the torn spirit, the bewildered heart,
The angry mind: and from the ultimate duress
Pierced with the breath of anguish, speak for love.

Return, return to the deep sources, nothing less
Will teach the still hands a new way to serve,
To carve into our lives the forms of tenderness
And still that ancient, necessary pain preserve.

We must go down into the dungeons of the heart.
To the dark places where modern mind imprisons
All that is not defined and thought apart:
We must let out the creative visions.

Return to the most human, nothing less
Will teach the angry spirit, the bewildered heart,
The torn mind to accept the whole of its duress
And, pierced with anguish, at last act for love.

APPENDIX I: "THE SEVEN SINS AND SEVEN VIRTUES"

by Rolfe Gerhardt

There is an old story about a small town Baptist minister who observed, "People are all the time telling me how Satan is pursuing them, trying to tempt them into sin. But the truth is, that so many people are pulling at his coattails that he hasn't got the time to chase anyone."

Unitarian Universalists long ago decided that the devil was just a myth, a bit of confused theology that even the more enlightened Christians do not believe. But the matter of sin is something else. We are still working very hard on sin so that you will be reassured that we are truly involved in the kinds of things you would want us to be. It is also a matter of reputation; any other church in town would tell you that if you are interested in sin you belong over in the Unitarian church, so it is only appropriate that we give this topic our most serious attention.

I guess we have to begin with original sin, one of the fundamental concepts of Christianity. I won't spend much time on original sin because both Unitarians and Universalists historically have not cared for the idea of original sin. They felt that human beings did very well developing their own sins without having to be born with any, and my own experience has been that there is no such thing as original sin, just the same old sins over and over, no originality at all.

I once had a member of the District Attorney's staff who investigated pornography tell me about some movies that he said I would not believe, but I had no trouble believing what he told me, nor did it all seem that original to me. It could have happened at any Roman orgy or in any Oklahoma barnyard, so the matter of originality has not proven itself. With that I will leave original sin to your imagination and move on to sin in its more popular forms.

We have to pause a moment to recognize the absolute importance of sin in orthodox religions. If there were no such thing as original sin, there would be, for instance, no Christianity. Christianity is predicated upon sin, or upon the existence of sin -- as they would prefer me to say -- so this is not at all a peripheral matter. If you have a religion predicated upon sin, then you had very well better know what sin is, and there were volumes of writings in early Christianity on sin. I don't know what research was done for the writings, but in reading them I get the impression that the early Christian writers knew what they were talking about.

Everyone had a list of what he or she thought the best sins were. In the year 200, Tertullian listed the seven deadly sins as: idolatry, blasphemy, murder, adultery, fornication, false-witness and fraud. His list was not fully accepted because by the time of St. Thomas Aquinas, a thousand years later, the list became: vainglory, envy, anger, covetousness, sadness, gluttony, and lust. I don't know if this reflects a change in the style of sinning or the emphasis or what. I notice that the sexual terms in the first list become less specific in the second and perhaps that reflects a certain new modesty, that the church decided that when it taught people about the seven deadly sins, it didn't want to put specific ideas in their minds.

Then there's something like selfishness, which didn't even make the list. Dante was one who considered selfishness the worst of the sins, so bad in fact that the selfish were not even allowed into Hell. They went into a kind of nothingness. I suppose that for some people nothingness could be a worse punishment than hell, because at least in hell one had hope of a change in the administration or policy or something. I personally would prefer a nothingness to anything that has been imagined in the religions of the world to date for heaven or hell or anything like that. But let's put that aside and get back to sin.

Before we take a closer look at the list of sins and their counterpoint virtues, we need to understand a little more about sinning. Of course, you may already know more about this than I do, but it needs to be pointed out that there is sinning and there is sinning; there are big sins and little sins, which they call mortal sins and venial sins. The mortal sin denies the soul its sanctifying grace, which means that it brings death to the body and damnation to the soul, not necessarily immediately, but a mortal sin will get you there eventually. A venial sin may mean only a stint in purgatory.

A religious primer notes that "Mortal sin is grievous offense against the law of God and requires three things: serious matter, sufficient reflection, and full consent of the will. Thus stealing is a sin; but if one steals merely a newspaper, it does not involve serious or grievous matter, and hence would be only a venial sin. If one were to steal a hundred dollars, however, the matter would be serious and the sin would be a mortal one." We can date that primer by the reference to a hundred dollars, obviously from the days when a hundred dollars would buy something. I would also add that it depends on whose newspaper is stolen and when. If you steal my newspaper on Saturday morning when I like to read it slowly with two cups of coffee, I guarantee that it would be a mortal sin, resulting in your death and damnation. Now you begin to understand how ethics became relative.

The important point is that there are mortal sins and venial sins, major offenses and minor offenses. I suggest that you do your best in this matter, but if you can accomplish only the minor offenses, you may wish to know that the minor offenses may be offset by whatever credit you have accumulated by your good deeds or if you don't do any good deeds, you can work the venial sins off by repenting and perhaps serving a term or two in purgatory. The Protestant re-former Martin Luther looked at his own sins and decided that the credit and debit system didn't work, that you can't work off your sins one by one; you have to go all the way at once. I've read some of Luther's sins, and he was right, at least for his situation. So Luther felt that there had to be a total repentance instead of piecemeal accountability, and ever since, that has been a major difference between Protestant and Catholic.

When he was in Rome, Luther visited all the sacred shrines that he could. He followed the usual repentance program by climbing on his knees to the top of the sacred stairs of Pilate's judgment hall, believed to have been shipped intact to Rome. He climbed on his knees, kissing each stair on the way up, but he got to the top and said, "I wonder if it is so!" Apparently he felt that stair-kissing hadn't balanced the books.

And being a priest, Luther knew well the practice of selling indulgences, of selling credit to those who had no time or inclination to kiss stairs or otherwise work off their own sins. The Church maintained that the Saints had built up such a treasury of credit that the Church could offer to sell some. A contemporary of Luther's, Albert of Hohenzollern, had routinely purchased his position as bishop in two different places and was interested in adding a third and he asked the Pope how much it would take to cover the sin of being bishop of Mainz without being qualified. The Pope said that 12,000 ducats for the 12 apostles would cover it; Albert offered 7,000 for the seven deadly sins. I understand that they settled on 10,000, possibly for the Ten Commandments. Such was the trading in credits against one's sins. It almost makes one sorry there was a Protestant Reformation.

Well, there were mortal sins which could not be bought off -- they are more interesting ones anyway -- and there were venial sins which either could be bought off or covered by good deeds or by repentance and public confession. The public confessions added considerable color to daily life, for they involved weeping and groaning and all kinds of public outcries and were probably the best theater of the day, the precursors of soap opera. At least the pentacostal Protestants have kept that style alive. But let's get back to the seven deadly sins.

Pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth comprise the most up-to-date list that I could find. For all my life Christianity has been trying to convince me that I am a sinner, and now, having studied this matter, I have to agree. And for all the years I have been a Unitarian Universalist I know how the other churches have pointed at us as a bunch of sinners. Don't get me wrong. I am not complaining about being labeled a sinner. After all, Christianity's business is sin and salvation. You can't have salvation without sin, so they need sin very badly.

Which means that they need us very badly if we are the sinners they say we are. So I'm not complaining about that label; I'm just glad that we are needed.

Their business is sin and salvation, and our business is living the best possible life and making sense of life, which leads right away into the sin of pride. Pride means to have a high opinion of one's own dignity, and I have to confess that I do. I have a very high opinion of my dignity and your dignity and the essential dignity of every human being. To me the greatest tragedy of life is for a person to lose his or her dignity, and I'm not talking about just some embarrassing moment but about a deeper, more permeating perhaps permanent loss of dignity. Anyone can temporarily lose his or her sense of dignity -- that's part of life -- and the people I envy the most are those who can gracefully recapture their sense of dignity. I did say envy, didn't I?

Well, yes, I do envy certain things in certain people; the sin of envy just comes naturally sometimes. There are those people I just mentioned who have that natural grace which I envy, and I have always envied those with a smooth, polished style of doing things, those who just naturally organize their thoughts and always pick the right words. There are some ministers like that, and after hearing them I find myself saying Why didn't I think of that? Why didn't I pick those words? And then there are some who never even use notes but just stand up there and rattle on about any topic they choose, always well presented and well said, well thought out. Now I envy that, and I don't mind the envy at all because it keeps reminding me of what excellence can be. That's probably pride again, but Aquinas felt that pride is one of the best sins -- that's what turned Satan from an angel to a devil -- and if we are going to be sinners, then we ought to be our best.

Covetousness to me is not a long step from envy; I sort of slide from one to the other. The sin of covetousness is supposed to involve a desire, an eager desire, to have something you do not deserve, such as the property of another person. And I guess it must be pride that causes me to ask, Who says I don't deserve whatever it is? The traditional theological answer is, If you deserved it, you would have it. That's just not theology, that's conservative economics; the poor are poor and the rich are rich because they are supposed to be. But the other side of that same economics says: You will get what you deserve if you go after it. That may be the sin of pride again, but behind it lurks at least a partial truth. To me human dignity is at least somewhat involved with a regard and desire for excellence, a desire for what is presently beyond you, and not infrequently is that inspired by what someone else has. The point of calling covetousness a sin is that we should be content with what we have, and I don't really agree.

Now there has been a lot made of coveting another's spouse. The Gothic novels and the soap operas thrive on that. But to me, that's lust more than covetousness. And while lust can and does create a good proportion of our social problems, there is still much to be said for being lusty. Even St. Augustine once prayed: "Lord, deliver me from the sins of the flesh -- but not quite yet." I equate lust with enthusiasm, and sexuality with enthusiasm; sex as routine, seems to me to approach sloth. I am not putting down sloth as much as stating that unenthusiastic sex deserves to be listed as a sin. I know that Paul wrote in one of his Biblical letters that if you can't control your sexuality, don't do it at all. But he did not say that you can not be lusty. Lust, by definition, is one's sexual appetite, and there is something to be said for a good appetite, for enthusiasm, if not gluttony.

Well, I would rather keep gluttony clear of that context and hold it where it belongs with regard to food and drink. Now I can understand how gluttony is a sin in most Christian churches, and I can understand how the wages of gluttony is death. Have you ever been to a potluck supper in a non-Unitarian church? Have you ever seen gathered in one place so much spaghetti, macaroni, so many deadly starches? The country Universalist church I started in was like that. Gluttony there would have been suicide. But if you have been to one of our Unitarian potluck suppers, you know that it requires gluttony just to be appreciative, just to sample all the delicious, healthy things that Unitarians bring to share at a meal. I also think that the wine cellars in this country began bottling their products in gallon containers after Unitarian Universalists invented Dinners-for-Eight. I find gluttony only a friendly, appreciative response to excellence.

We also have to realize that the sin of gluttony was decided upon before running became a way of life and before weight loss salons became an American establishment. If anyone plans to condemn gluttony, they had better first calculate the impact on the economy of all the weight loss salons and programs having to shut down. Now I don't want to leave you with the impression that I favor indiscriminate gluttony, but rational, intelligent Unitarian Universalists, choosing carefully what to eat and drink, can give a certain dignity to the concept of gluttony and a certain grace to the popular expression "pig out."

And it is only a natural response to a good session of gluttony for a little sloth to follow. I had always been told that after a good meal, it is not healthy to be too active. Sloth, I understand, is a habitual disinclination to exertion, and it could be one of the better habits to have. Over-exertion can lead to all kinds of problems: medical, physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual. Sloth, it turns out, is a relatively recent substitute for the older word, sadness. Sadness or melancholy used to be one of the deadly sins, and I would have kept it as one. A certain degree of sloth can lend to human dignity; at least over-exertion certainly is not dignified, but melancholy can be deadly, and I am not sure that you always have control over a good bout of melancholy. A mortal sin requires your willing involvement, and melancholy sometimes has a way of getting to you even against your will, so that may be why they substituted sloth for melancholy.

The last of the deadly sins is anger, and that is no stranger to any of us. Part of the definition of anger is that it is caused by a feeling of a wrong having been committed to us, and I feel anger can be very constructive if the wrong is genuine. I guess that's why the term "righteous anger" was invented. Anger can oppose wrongs, can overcome them. Anger can accomplish alot, and while I am too much into sloth to engage alot of anger, it has its value.

So there we are: sinners, just like they say we are. To sin is to challenge the will or the law of God, and never let it be said that Unitarian Universalists are not willing to challenge what people say is the law or will of God. As far as the seven sins go: We have a strong sense of the dignity of our selves, as well as the dignity of all human beings. We believe in the discontent and creative desires that sometimes show as covetousness and envy, and the enthusiasm that some may label as lust. We appreciate good food and drink and respond appropriately. We know how to relax so thoroughly and consistently that some mistake us as slothful. We know how to respond to a wrong and do something about it. In those ways we are accomplished sinners, perhaps even proud of it.

We are also basically balanced personalities with almost equal skills in the seven virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude. temperance, faith, hope and love. Prudence relates to knowledge and wisdom, which we venerate. Justice is a cardinal virtue of our religion and life-style. We have fortitude, courage, or we would not dare be Unitarian Universalists and I would not dare give this sermon. We have temperance, moderation, or we would not be so picky about what we eat and drink. We have faith that our approach to life is right, and hope that others might eventually come to their senses and agree with us, and love. . . I guess above all our love is distinctive.

We have the kind of love that doesn't go around branding other people as sinners. We have the love that believes people have more goodness than most religions care to see. We have the kind of love that challenged orthodox views of humanity and God, the views that said, you are all hopeless sinners and God is going to get you for it. Our kind of love as it took its form in Universalism, said, yes there is evil in the world, but we will work together to set things right and in the end a loving God will forgive all, so take heart and do your best. That's a brave kind of love among all the judgmental religions.

So sinners we are, virtuous people too, we Unitarian Universalists are just human beings, complex, contradictory, good and bad, saints and sinners all. I wouldn't want it any other way, for in our complexity and contradiction, we are very properly human and very much alive, and above all, it is life that we believe in.

So I conclude, saying, "Nothing else matters much -- not wealth, nor learning, nor even health -- without this gift: the spiritual capacity to keep zest in living. This is the creed of creeds, the final deposit and distillation of all important faiths: that we should be able to believe in life." (Harry Emerson Fosdick)

APPENDIX J: "HUMOR AND FAITH: THE THERAPY OF LAUGHTER"

by Khoren Arisian

A long time ago, theologian Reinhold Niebuhr wrote an essay on humor and faith in which he argued that humor should be kept out of the precincts of the temple and not allowed entry within its gates. However, if you accept the contention that a cardinal function of religion is to overcome alienation, and nothing reduces divisiveness among people and fragmentation within the self more effectively than laughter, then humor deserves to be placed near the center of religious and ethical life. Western religion has solemn and fanatic roots in the sands of the desert, and humor and fanaticism do not mix. But modern religious liberals are heirs of the spirit of 18th century Enlightenment rationalism. Men like Benjamin Franklin were natural wits; wit and civilization go together, wit and the liberal spirit are kin. Humor insofar as its content is unpredictable, keeps us slightly off balance and thus makes us more open to new ideas and possibilities than might otherwise be the case. Humor and dogmaticism are not congenial bedfellows.

In light of these comments let's consider the film, Monty Python's Life of Brian which was let loose upon an unsuspecting public a few months ago and is still being shown. It has proved controversial. Some clergy in Dubuque, Iowa became particularly enraged at what they deemed to be a blasphemous treatment, by implication, of the life of Christ. However, the story of Brian Cohen merely parallels the customary view of the life of Jesus. If the clergy and others who have taken offense at this movie see blasphemy then it is largely in their own minds. Catholic groups in particular have been incensed. The film is admittedly scattershot, a send-up. A number of those who have been most aroused haven't even bothered to see the film and don't intend to, for fear of having their religious views mocked. Neither Catholics or Jews nor most Protestants will be comforted by the content of the film but the attitude, my-mind-is-made-up-so-don't-bother-me-with-the-facts smacks once more of the empirical characteristics of the contemporary American mind. One movie patron was outraged by those picketing the Life of Brian in Dubuque and shouted: "Because of people like you Jesus doesn't stand a chance in this town." The film, which has some extremely funny episodes, is hardly a sustained comic masterpiece. It is far more vulgar than blasphemous and boasts a number of non-sequiturs, such as a budding transsexual's declaration that: "It's every man's right to have babies if he wants to." An interesting point of view. Monty Python conceives of the Holy Land as a religious madhouse full of wandering prophets and interlaced with radical political sects like the Judean People's Front and the People's Front of Judea, both of which consist of bumbling terrorists who can't chew gum and plot at the same time, so to speak. Planning ill-conceived raids upon the Romans, they end up running into each other instead.

Much to his horror and distaste Brian is inadvertantly perceived as a messiah by an unrelentingly credulous people. Fleeing from the Romans, the hapless Brian unwittingly crashes into a string of pseudo-prophets uttering gibberish to passers-by. One who happens to hear Brian speak later picks up Brian's lost sandal and interprets it as a divine sign to "gather shoes in abundance." Clearly, there are many spiritually thirsty pilgrims in search of prophetic signals wherever they might be found. The more Brian flees the greater number avidly follow him. In one scene of unintended frontal nudity on Brian's part, he tells the hordes of followers below his window that he has no special message for them and that they have to work out their own salvation; he entreats them to understand that they have this capacity within themselves and do not need any holy signs, but the crowd will not be deterred in its belief. The film is obviously outrageous and zany, often a sophomoric spoof of the human inclination to believe blindly whatever it needs to believe. So what the film holds up for ridicule is unreflective and irrational religiosity. I am reminded of Mark Twain's scaborous remark: "A miracle has as much resemblance to fact as a mermaid has to a halibut." The moral point of Life of Brian is the spiritual self-deception should be exposed as the nonsense that it is.

Those who have objected to the showing of the film have asked, in effect, is nothing sacred? However, one cannot logically respond to either a rhetorical or a fanatical question. That something is sacred doesn't mean that it can always be exempt from humorous criticism, nor can it presuasively be argued that laughter is outside the divine pantheon. In Greek mythology the gods frequently laughed. The Judeo-Christian Jehovah does not. The Bible as a whole is humorless although there is plenty of irony and wit in it.

It would seem that absolutism, political or religious, finds itself endangered by the presence of humor because humor stretches the seams of the status quo. Laughter is predictably disallowed wherever there is a monopoly of power.

In South Korea, where some high drama has been played out replete with assassination of President Park Chung Hee, this past week, the government in February of 1978 -- when Hee was at the height of his power -- cracked down on scores of comedians who subsequently claimed they could not find anything safe to joke about. Frightened into self-censorship of mind and spirit, the 200 or so professional humorists have had a hard time of penetrating the political tradition of somber patriarchy: government officials are not supposed to smile in public. South Korea is as repressive as a 17th century Puritan colony. In 1978 South Korean authorities cancelled all comedy programs and went so far as to set up committees to screen every prospective joke. Totalitarianism finds laughter to be deadly to its pretensions. It fears nothing so much as a critical joke. Huge posters of totalitarian figures in the 20th century -- like those of Lenin, Hitler, Stalin, Mao Tse Tung -- have you ever seen a smiling picture of any of these worthies? Humor represents the sudden disruption of predictable consistency, and totalitarianism cherishes nothing so much as the predictability of the graveyard.

Even in American politics wit has not been highly prized because it is deemed to be suspicious, uncontrollable, intellectual phenomenon; witty people can't be serious; since anti-intellectualism is held in high regard in many political quarters wit is decried. When Adlai Stevenson used his wit to marvelous point during the presidential campaign of 1952, while he delighted many, many were also critical. This was something new even though F.D.R. was hardly lacking in partisan sarcasm. The Whig politician of the 19th century, Thomas Corwin of Ohio, once reflected on the relationship between solemnity and politics saying, "If you would succeed in life, you must be solemn. Solemn as an ass. All great monuments are built over solemn asses." Thus we can understand the criticism heaped upon Senator Moynihan of New York when in March of this year he criticized a fellow senator for making an amendment to the Panama Canal Treaty which would have overturned it. Moynihan, who has a special way with words, said that his colleague, Senator Wallop of Wyoming, had submitted a sensationally inane amendment. Said Moynihan: "Are we to reduce the Senate to a playground, to a playpen of juvenalia, to the fantasies of prepubescent youth?" Any substantive criticism, especially humorous, is immediately construed as a personal attack and therefore in bad taste. And so our political life lacks the sparkle of humor one finds over and again in British politics.

Just what is humor? Many an analysis has been offered in the form of ponderous essays by Freud, Kant, Bergson, and other thinkers of note. For Immanuel Kant laughter arises from "the sudden transformation of strained expectation into nothing." Something goes poof. For the late S.J. Perelman, who was capable of the humor of moral anger on more than one occasion, humor represents the sudden conjoining of unlikely elements. Nonetheless no single scheme or definition can encompass the psychic boundaries of the world of laughter, which I define as the explosion caused by the intersection of reason and unreason. The most human of reflexes, laughter is emotionally and physically good for all of us.

To experience great comedy is to experience the transcendent. This is the spiritual dimension of humor. In today's ever solemn world, nervous titters and giggles have replaced the soul-cleansing, mind-clarifying belly laughter which we associate preeminently with the early silent film comedies. Such laughter, which bodies forth the experience of the transcendent, is both democratic and humanizing. This, according to one essay, is why the early American silent comedies, "still so full of the euphoria of a new country, had such an astonishing world appeal." They still do. The silent films churned out by Mack Sennett show how vulgarity could be transformed into grace, an elevation which the Life of Brian admittedly does not achieve. Sennett's Keystone Cops virtually subverted authority and official pretension by their inspired lunacy.

It was Sennett who discovered Charlie Chaplin; Chaplin emerged from the English music hall tradition. Chaplin, as we know, created the great character of the Little Tramp, making of him the underdog who throws monkey wrenches into the machinery of wealth, power and authority. A world without mirth is a world in which omnipotence has been allowed to reign; Chaplin could not accept that. In the film, City Lights, a rich man keeps picking up Charlie and smothers him in luxury; as he sobers up, the rich man kicks him out; Charlie is not in the rich man's social class. Chaplin's early experiences of dreaded poverty made him determined to become as rich as possible; it also triggered the development of a social consciousness which was essentially a sentimental yet deeply felt humanitarianism not very different from that of Charles Dickens. There was a wonderfully celebrated scene in The Gold Rush in which, once more beset by poverty, our hero spends Thanksgiving in an Arctic cabin eating a boiled boot. In his later films like Modern Times Chaplin used mute massive machinery as a foil. He hated the impersonality which grinds people down and squeezes the life out of them. With baggy pants, cane twirling, derby hat on head, the Little Tramp always gets up in the end and literally propels himself forward as he walks toward the horizon for still another confrontation with the world and its absurdities. The Little Tramp could do this because he always conceived himself as within society, not alienated from it. The originality of Chaplin's genius is that he drew attention not to the comic situation itself, not to the visual character of the gag, but to his personal reaction. He thereby put the world in human scale. When he responded to and shaped a particular event, all the while hoping for the impossible ideal to emerge from unpromising circumstances, the Little Tramp evoked something in all of us. Working with meticulous care and enthusiasm, Chaplin thus made people think while they laughed. Thinking and laughing -- of which all of Chaplin knew, as he teaches us in The Great Dictator, that once we lose the power to laugh we lose the power to think. Totalitarianism will always try to smother laughter and individual thought, both of which unloosed can puncture the illusion of omnipotence. So it was that Chaplin, like all the great silent movie clowns created, in the words of an appreciative essay, "poems of possibility -- the possibility of rational behavior in a difficult universe." Playwright Bertolt Brecht greatly admired Chaplin and transposed Chaplin's poetry into an ethical key. Brecht always asked the question, "How can one be good in an evil world?" We today have transposed the same question into a psychological key: how is it possible to be sane in an absurd world?

Chaplin died on Christmas Day, 1977. It is startling to note that Groucho Marx, who also died in 1977, was only one year younger than Chaplin. Groucho, as opposed to Chaplin, worked in all the media from vaudeville to T.V. while Chaplin stuck to movies. Groucho has a special attraction for me: his father was an unsuccessful tailor so Groucho went into the theater. My father was a successful tailor, so I went into the ministry!

The Marx Brothers were comic anarchists and absurdist satirists without equal. In one exchange, Zeppo says, "The garbage man is here." To which Groucho replies: "Tell him we don't want any." In the guise of Captain Spaulding Groucho speaks to a gathering of guests at a wealthy women's soiree and says, "After fifteen days on the water and six on the boat, we finally arrived on the shores of Africa. . . . One morning I shot an elephant in my pajamas. How he got in my pajamas, I'll never know. . . ." and so went the monologue. Groucho had a genius for elevating the insult into an art form. In the movie Duck Soup, which I think is the greatest anti-war film ever made, while he, Chico and Harpo are fending off enemies of the ever stoical straight woman in most of Groucho's movies, Margaret Dumont, Groucho says, "Remember, we are fighting for her honor -- which is probably more than she ever did." On another occasion he is shown taking a woman to dinner. Picking up the tab he says to her: "Nine dollars and forty cents? This is an outrage! If I were you, I wouldn't pay it!" A feminist ahead of his time! In 1945, when his daughter Melinda was prevented from swimming with friends at a country club which excluded Jews, Groucho wrote an indignant letter to the club president which was highly publicized in which he said: "Since my little daughter is only half Jewish, would it be alright if she went into the pool only up to her waist?" A dominating personality who insisted on having the last word, Groucho can be envisioned as a victim. He would always get to himself before anyone else did. That is, he was his own best target for deprecation -- hence his resignation from the Friar's Club on the grounds that he did not care to belong to any organization that accepted people like himself as members.

If Chaplin's persona was the Little Tramp, Groucho's was the stooped man in the swallowtail coat who took great loping steps, holding a long cigar behind him as a phallic prop and baton, rolling his eyes leeringly and working his eyebrows up and down like a window shade. Groucho's humor was one of deflation, not annihilation. He made people laugh at themselves which is the precondition for personal growth or change of opinion.

Along with Kafka and Kierkegaard, Groucho Marx is one of Woody Allen's heroes. For the former Alan Konigsberg of Brooklyn, the modern world is no laughing matter. Having achieved control of all aspects of his art, which most actors envy, Woody Allen has become the premier comic artist of America. His stock and trade is the foibles of Everyman; he has moved from mere nebbish to an explorer of the complexities of human relationships, as in Annie Hall. As a humorist he is endowed with an incisive intelligence and a superb sense of timing. He is very much a 20th century man, that is, an endless seeker. Allen keeps moving and developing, never quite finding. Where Chaplin's humor is social, Allen's is psycho-analytic. Allen has been in analysis for more than half his lifetime and probably will never terminate. Like all great wits, he alternately inflates and belittles himself. What resonates throughout his art as a stabilizing artistic reference point is the dislocation of being an urban Jew which Allen generalizes into an appreciation for today's spiritual turmoil, the free floating unease born of poor choices; irrationality leads to absurdity. Haunted ever since childhood by a sense of death, a sense of decay at the core of life, Woody Allen frequently evokes a surrealist mood and yet his art is vibrant. In what I think as his most eloquent achievement, the movie Manhattan, there is a hilarious exchange between himself and his friend Michael Murphy in a classroom containing the skeletal models of prehistoric man. At the climax of the scene Murphy blurts out, "You think you're God!" Woody replies with endearing sincerity: "Well I've got to model myself after somebody!"

If Woody Allen greatly admires Groucho Marx, so does Russell Baker of the New York Times. In his office is a photograph signed by Groucho in which he says that Russell Baker is the only reason he reads the Times. Baker is in the long line of newspaper humorists but in addition he is literate, urbane, very much a moralist, a man who does not trim his sails in order to pander to his readers. In fact he turns his columns into literature, and there are many days when his mood is down. Baker can also be a political humorist along with Art Buchwald, Mort Sahl and others.

Humor is the element of play at work. It is potentially discoverable wherever human beings live and move and interact. There is a laugh everywhere, even in Minneapolis's current mayoral race in its final stages of farcical dissolution. Humor is the perception of the measure between what is and what could be; that discrepancy is incongruity, grappling with which can lead to a tragic or a comic vision; in the case of Woody Allen, it can fluctuate between the two.

The kind of humor we consider funny tells us about ourselves. what a country laughs at is a central index of how it perceives its problems, aspirations and yearnings. To examine the jagged evolution of humor in America is to scrutinize how our nation has changed and what it thinks of itself.

No doubt, when Will Rogers died in a plane crash in Alaska in 1935, an era of American humor ended -- namely, the long arm of nineteenth century narrative crackerbox humor mixed with political commentary. Rogers essentially played himself and his humor grew out of his own moral vision and commitment. His deadpan routine was that he never joked, he merely reported on government at work. When he died it was as if a national figure -- a national hero -- had passed away. Flags flew at half-mast, over fifty thousand people passed by his bier, movie theaters closed, and so on. As for Chaplin, equally a nineteenth century optimist despite his awareness of this century's totalitarian tendencies, he showed via his Little Tramp that one can manage somehow to come through in the end so long as one remains unalienated from the real world. Humor which is a fearless criticism of life always points toward the future.

Humor today, especially of the television, is mostly fast and superficial, historically weightless, morally neutral without much faith in humanity. Because television is based on the delivery of the largest number of audiences to advertisers, such humor as there is, is limited to one-liners. There is little opportunity for extensive comic sequences in depth. Our concentration is always being broken for still another "message". What passes for humor these days is often frenetic, of little social importance, mere entertainment for the moment which leaves us exactly where we were before the humor began. Take even Charlie Brown: Charlie copes and endures but does not prevail. There is no triumph for him. As for James Bond movies, they are at once dazzling and forgettable. We cannot incorporate such overripe fantasy into our own lives. All great art has an element of escape, to be sure, but at the same time it engages us in the real world. After we experience it, we can live more deeply. Art that merely lets us escape does us a disservice; reality seems pale by comparison. Art, in this view, should not be a total fiction separate from the daily round of affairs.

As for the tradition of physical mayhem in humor, the slapstick of Laurel and Hardy can sometimes propel us into new realms of grace, but the inspired tastelessness of National Lampoon's Animal House is merely anti-establishment. Animal House for all its animal spirits ultimately appeals to the desire to remain adolescent, not to leave the college campus womb, and not to grow up and make one's mark on the world. Its final message is that you can be a jerk and have some fun at the same time, preferably at someone else's expense. That is dysfunctional philosophy outside the campus.

At the level of the lowest common denominator the great Russian comic novelist Nicolai Gogol and humorist Steve Martin both have a sense of the ridiculous, but Gogol moves far beyond that while Martin remains fastened to it and tailors his humor to a vast well-paying audience; he isn't out to change, educate or inform anybody. His stuff is repetitive: once you've heard some of it, you've heard all of it.

My bias, as you see, is that I believe humor is at its best when it grows out of the center of our lives as opposed to humor that emerges along the margins and surfaces of existence. I prefer humor that keeps breaking new ground and digs deep and moves us beyond the static sense of the merely absurd. In this sense humor is like true prophecy: it has great disruptive power, it is revolutionary. When Socrates could joke upon his imminent execution, he thereby cut the cord of terror and in that moment kept spiritually in control of his life. Somewhere along in the evolution of the human species a voice lifted itself up and laughed. At that point humor was born, individuality was formed. A precious and divine gift, we lose it at a peril to ourselves and to the future of democracy.

APPENDIX K: "DOES GOD HAVE GOOD MANNERS?"

by F. Forrester Church

The disciples of Jesus came unto him saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And Jesus took a child and set him in the midst of them and said, "Whosoever shall receive this little child in my name receiveth not me, but him that sent me. . . . Verily I say unto you, unless ye become as little children ye shall not enter into the kingdom of God."

Among their many talents, it turns out that children can hear through doors. Recently, I was having a conversation with a counselor about child rearing. During the course of this conversation, we hit upon the theme of manners. I confessed my discomfort that my children, who are often in public, are less than perfect in displaying social graces. Considering their ages, 3 and 5, it is probably more my problem than theirs. In any event, the little acts of civility that lubricate human interaction, little things like "Hello" and "Thank you" and "How do you do" and "Goodbye" often disappear from their otherwise extensive vocabularies when they are in public.

Perhaps it is their natural defense mechanism against the pressures of being children of a minister and the grandchildren of a politician, two professions known to drive even shy people to greet absolute strangers with a handshake and a smile. Or, perhaps it was simply their own way of choosing to cope with the universal problem of being the children of parents, especially ones who offer so much annoying help in the area of ettiquette. No doubt it is difficult to be graceful and spontaneous on cue. I can remember when my own mother went through a particularly perverse period of asking me what was wrong whenever I wasn't smiling. We learn little from our parent's mistakes, however, whether they be committed in concert with others on the historical stage, or across from us at the breakfast table.

In any event, proving that children can indeed hear through doors, the first thing my son said to me after I had concluded my conversation was, "Daddy, you don't always have good manners."

"That's true, Twig."

"And Mommy doesn't always have good manners."

"You're right, she doesn't."

"Even God doesn't have good manners," he proclaimed with triumphant finality. I must admit this left me at a complete loss.

"What do you mean God doesn't have good manners?" I asked.

"Daddy," Twig explained to me somewhat impatiently, "If God is inside of us then God makes us not say 'Please' and 'Thank you.'"

How do you figure it? After six years of exposure to the free spirit of Unitarianism, my son turns out to be a

Calvinist! In my attempt to counter this heresy, I quickly discovered what I should already have known. It is impossible to have a meaningful discussion concerning the freedom of the will with a five-year-old. As I thought about it however, I realized that once again I had learned something unexpected from an off-the-wall conversation with my son. If Jesus is right, God in a sense does have bad manners. He rewards the last laborer to arrive in the vineyard equally with him who had worked the day long. He insults the prudent, pious son, by receiving back the prodigal son with open arms. He gives precedence in the Kingdom to prostitutes and tax-collectors. No, the one with good manners is not God. It is the devil whose manners are impeccable.

I must confess I did dip into the Bible every now and again this past summer. More than ever before, I found it very tough going. Take the story of Abraham in Egypt. There was a famine in Israel, so Abraham and his wife Sarah sought respite by journeying south. When they arrived in Egypt, Abraham was worried for his safety. He said to his wife, "Sarah, you are a beautiful woman. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'Let's get rid of her husband so that we can have her for our own.' I know you love me , Sarah, and would not want me to come to any harm. All you have to do is to say that you are my sister, and everything will be fine."

Don't look for a moral in this story. Sarah did exactly what she was told. Because of her beauty, she came to the attention of the Pharoah. He, in all innocence, invited her to move in with him, and she did. In return, Abraham received sheep and oxen and he-asses and menservants and maidservants and she-asses and camels. Everything a man could want.

God was furious, of course. Not at Abraham, but at the poor Pharoah. He sent down a plague upon the Pharoah and his house. Upon learning the truth about Sarah, the Pharoah called Abraham to him and said, "What in the world have you done to me, man? Why did you say that she was your sister? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?" At which point, the Pharoah sent her and Abraham away with all that he had. "And Abraham was very rich," the Bible tells us, "in cattle, in silver, and in gold."

Just one more story, equally troubling, also from Genesis. It is the story of Esau and Jacob. Their father, Isaac, was dying. He called for his eldest son, Esau, to bring him venison in response to which Isaac would give Esau his blessing and his inheritance. Esau and Jacob were twins. When Jacob's mother, Rebekah overheard her husband's plan, she began to scheme. Isaac was blind, but he would have no difficulty distinguishing his two sons, for, as you surely remember, -- from that immortal verse in Genesis -- the words of Jacob saying, "Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man." Rebekah had a remedy for this. She dressed up Jacob's neck and hands with goat skins. While Esau was out hunting to bring a savory gift to his father, Jacob showed up at Isaac's bedside.

"I am Esau, thy first-born," Jacob said, "I have done as you asked. Arise and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me."

"How is it that you found it so quickly, my son?"

"Because the Lord thy God brought it to me," Jacob replied.

And Isaac said to Jacob, "Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to be sure that you are my very son, Esau, or not."

Jacob approached his father. "The voice is Jacob's voice," Isaac said, "but the hands are the hands of Esau. Art thou my very son Esau?"

"Yes, father, I am." So Isaac blessed him.

The blessing was irrevocable. When Esau returned and the treachery was disclosed, Isaac confessed to Esau, "Your brother was with subtlety and has taken away your blessing."

If you have children, I suggest that you skip these two stories, when you are reading them the Bible. On a scale of moral value I would rate them triple-X, not necessarily suitable even for adult audiences. It is hard to enforce such injunctions as "Thou shalt not lie or cheat or steal," when such liars and cheaters and robbers as Abraham and Jacob prosper in the sight of God.

Now, I don't live by the Bible, but neither do I dismiss it lightly. In reading these two stories, some latent streak of Talmudic curiosity challenges me to make some sense of them. As one of my colleagues once said, "If God exists, he is a bastard." Maybe so. On the other hand, perhaps something else is going on here that might reward further attention.

Here in these two stories and throughout the Bible, one theme is sounded again and again. God's law and human law are not the same. For instance, in the second of these two stories, in God's law patrimony and primogeniture are reversed. It is not a particularly winning example, but it is true to the basic drift of the Biblical narrative. In the Bible, the last are first. The empty are filled. The lost are found. As for the Kingdom of God, it is disclosed by little children.

The whole Bible, you see, is filled with paradox. Time and again its stories seem to beg, not that we take them literally, but that we suspend our human judgment and awaken to the stunning unpredictability of our predicament, however awesome and terrible it may be. The Kingdom of God is in a mustard seed, Jesus reminds us, the smallest and least portentous of all seeds. Riches are impediments to salvation. All the knowledge of the scribes and all the piety of the Pharisees is a sham. It accounts for nothing.

Perhaps one of the reasons God has such bad manners, is that we humans so readily succumb to our own presumption.

The whole debate currently raging about religion and politics is a perfect example. Despite occasional clear and principled comments -- such as those of our own Governor Mario Cuomo, or this morning's lead-editorial in the New York Times, far more heat than light has been shed during the course of the debate that seems almost wholly driven by political calculation rather than religious principle. One side says that we must legislate God's law. The other side says that religion must not figure at all in the political arena. In both instances, I am reminded again of how often expediency masks itself as righteousness.

So many of the same people who oppose abortion or are lobbying for prayer in the public schools, also oppose government services in pre-natal care and basic standards of nutrition in school lunch programs. So many of the same people who are crying foul when the church asserts its moral claim in the political arena today, were applauding the public spirited conscience of ministers and lay-people during the civil rights movement or the Vietnam War.

I simply want to say that we humans should be very careful in our presumptions about God's preferences or place in the political or any other human arena. Whatever or whoever God is -- whether God even exists -- one thing is sure. Time and again, the testimony of those who have most profoundly grappled with the great questions of morality and religion cuts directly across the grain of contemporary human fashion or human expediency. It is as if they are trying to say, "Don't attempt to enlist God on your side. Instead, forever challenge your own preconceptions about what life is and the way things ought to be. Wake up and wonder. Act with force and freedom, but never cease to beware the motives for and the consequences of even your best intentioned actions. And above all else, do not presume that things will work out as you think they ought." If there is such a thing as ultimate forgiveness, I would wager that it is offered for everything but pride.

When we walk into Church, God doesn't say, "Hello, how are you?" When we leave, God doesn't say, "Thank you and Goodbye." If God says anything at all it is, "What in the world do you think you are doing here, and who in the world do you think you are? Isn't it about time you took a hard honest look at yourself? Stop rearranging the deck chairs in your life. Man the boats and sail. And don't ask me to tell you where you are going. You will find out along the way, and even then, not where you are going, but only where you have been. Above all else, do what you would rather not do. Go where you would rather not go. Look for truth in places you have never looked before."

If anything, when we enter church, God says, "Thank you and Goodbye." When we leave, God says, "Hello, how are you?" It is somewhat perverse, but if we are listening, we might hear things we have never heard before. You see, it may take something a bit more bracing than an act of politeness to knock us off our pins. Which is perhaps the main reason that, if there is a God, God's manners are not particularly good. Amen.

APPENDIX L: "THE POLITICS OF GOD"

by F. Forrester Church

Well, my friends, it is just about a month until election day. I have been reading the papers and listening to the television reports. Judging from the amount of attention being given this year to the question of religion and politics, I expect that many of you are prayerfully seeking guidance before making up your mind as to how you ought to cast your vote. Fortunately, among thousands of other ministers across the country, I am ready to do anything I can to help you out. In fact, were it not for people like me and Jerry Falwell, you would probably be at a complete loss when it comes to interpreting the divine will properly.

Let me begin by going straight to the source. There was a conversation in Heaven recently that I think you should know about. It was a conversation between God and an angel named Sam. Sam is one of God's lesser angels, the one assigned to keep her up-to-date on what is happening on the planet earth.

"I've got the latest on the U.S. Presidential election, God. Would you like a direct report, or should I simply spell it out for Gabriel in an inter-departmental memo?"

"Oh, well," God sighed, "Nothing particularly momentous is pressing right now. So tell me, what is going on in the U.S. Presidential election?"

"Well, Ma'am, it's like this. In the Democratic primaries there were three finalists: a young fellow who went to Yale Divinity School to prepare for the ministry, but then fell from the divine calling into politics; a Baptist minister who thinks he can do both at once and is fond of saying that You are not done with him yet; and the son of a Methodist minister whose half-brother, Lester, is a minister in some outfit I have never heard of called the Unitarian Church. This third fellow won, and chose a Catholic woman as his running-mate."

"What kind of connections does the other side have?" God asked.

"None that I can discover," Sam replied, "The Republican leader doesn't even go to church."

"So it's another contest between the Christians and the Lions?"

"Not quite, Ma'am. Or at least not in the way that you might expect. You see, the one who doesn't go to church says he is running on Your platform. He and his running mate, who attended chapel religiously when he was in prep school, have been described by a fundamentalist minister named Jerry Falwell as 'God's instruments in rebuilding America.' The President's campaign manager, Paul Laxalt, sent a letter to thousands of fundamentalist ministers saying that he has been 'faithful in support of issues of concern to Christian citizens.' Another senatorial player on his team by the name of Jesse Helms has said that 'The Lord is giving the American people one more chance to save [their] country.'"

"What do the Democrats have to say about that?"

"Well, the signals are somewhat mixed. Their Vice-Presidential candidate says that the Republican leader is not a good Christian. But her Bishop suggested that she might be the one who was lacking in this regard, and shortly thereafter her running mate studied the polls and concluded that politics and religion don't mix."

"That's enough for now," God said.

"Don't you want to hear about the Bishop's position on abortion, or the debate about prayer in the public schools, or the question of whether or not the President has ever met his granddaughter?"

"No," God said, "I think I have heard quite enough upon which to base my decision."

"Well, what do you think, God?"

"I think," God sighed, "that perhaps the time has come to flood those silly people once again."

I don't know about you, but I am tired of the subject that I am about to discuss with you this morning. In and of itself, that doesn't worry me too much. The real problem is that I am tired of the presidential election. And that does worry me.

The most important decision we as a people will be making over the next four years is going to be made on Election Day a month from Tuesday. I myself am political to the core. My maternal grandfather was a Governor. My father was a U.S. Senator. My mother is actively involved in the political arena. I, of all people, should be deeply invested in this election and its outcome. I strongly believe in the principles of democracy, and in our responsibility as citizens not only to vote but to participate actively in the electoral process. Freedom is a gift which entails an obligation. We must never take it for granted.

Beyond this, the 1984 elections could be the most important election in our lifetime. Because of the nuclear arms race, we are living through a period of escalating crisis. Life itself, the ongoingness of life on this planet, hangs daily in the balance. I know this, at least intellectually. And yet, when it comes to the election itself, its charges and countercharges, advertisements and rallies, I find myself lapsing back and forth between cynicism and boredom.

Perhaps that is not it, not really. The fact is, I am discouraged. Perhaps the whole discussion concerning religion and politics has contributed to my discouragement. It is an important issue. Individuals such as our governor, Mario Cuomo, have made eloquent, thoughtful and balanced statements acknowledging both the relationship of religion and politics and the importance, for all of us, of maintaining the constitutional boundary between them. Part of what discourages me is that both presidential candidates dealt with this issue merely as a constituency problem. Ronald

Reagan is playing to the fundamentalists when he says that such issues as abortion or prayer in public schools are litmus tests of religious integrity. Walter Mondale is playing to our fear of the fundamentalists and their political agenda when he says the politics and religion do not mix.

This morning, before I deal with my own, really quite disturbing lethargy about this election, I do want to say that both of these positions are, among other things, profoundly un-American and unbelievably short-sighted.

To begin with, of course religion and politics mix. To separate our religious values from our political convictions is impossible. Even if we could do it, it would be unadvisable. Any religious conviction worth its salt drives us to judgment both upon ourselves and upon the mores, values and laws that guide society. Over the past 165 years, members of this very church have been active bearing witness, moral and religious witness, against slavery, in favor of women's suffrage, on behalf of the Civil Rights of all Americans, in opposition to the war in Vietnam, and more recently, in questioning U.S. involvement in Central America and protesting the escalating arms race. We do not speak with one voice -- on many major issues including the ones I have just listed -- we may disagree with one another, but the voices we speak with are educated by our moral conscience and powered by our religious vision, our reverence for life, our commitment to justice and compassion, our sense of personal responsibility for the destiny and cultivation not only of our own lives but also of the common life we share.

On the other hand, in order to protect individual freedom of religious belief and action, the First Amendment to the Constitution explicitly and rightly says, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." That is to say, the laws of this country must neither favor one religion over another nor restrict the exercise of religion. To identify morality, as President Reagan comes perilously close to doing, with any specific set of religious teachings, and then to say that America must again become a moral nation, is to suggest that it must become a nation whose morality might fairly be dictated by people whose first commitment as citizens is not to the protection of universal rights but rather to the enforcement of sectarian values.

On the other hand, Walter Mondale's position, initially at least, diminishes the integrity of religion by suggesting that religious convictions are, by definition, parochial convictions, and should be, therefore, filtered out of the public debate.

The question then is where to draw the line. One way to think of it is this. It was suggested to me by my colleague, Edward Frost, of Princeton. The wall of separation is between religion and law, not between religion and politics.

On the latter of these two points, with respect to religion and politics, not religion and law, I find myself in considerable sympathy with people like Jerry Falwell and certain of the Catholic Bishops. Jerry Falwell has said, "When 'pro-choice' groups urge congressmen to support funding for abortions and theologians urge a nuclear freeze, they are exercising their democratic rights . . . . Yet when I and my compatriots urge fellow believers to vote, we are condemned for mixing church and state."

Frankly, it is difficult to counter Mr. Falwell's logic. Few of us complained when the Roman Catholic Bishops published their stunning critique on the dangers of nuclear war. On the other hand, so many of us squeal like stuck pigs when they speak out publicly against abortion. We cannot have it both ways. We cannot endorse the right of priests and ministers to involve themselves in the public process when their opinion coincides with our own, and deny them that same right when they happen to espouse beliefs that are counter to ours.

Of course, I cannot begin to sort out the complexities of this issue in a single sermon, nor am I going to try. I do want to say one thing, however. At one level, at least, the problem with this election is not that there is too much religion in it. It may be that there is far too little.

In the Bible, there are only two places where religion is defined. The first is in the Jewish scriptures, from the book of Micah. When asked what is required for the religious life, Micah lists three things: "to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

The second passage is in the New Testament, from the gospel according to Matthew. Jesus, too, is asked what is required for the living of a religious life. "Feed the hungry," Jesus replies. "Clothe the naked, heal the sick, and visit those who are in prison."

In a way, what Jesus is doing here is taking the injunction of Micah and making it concrete. Justice, mercy and humility translate into fairness, kindness and self-giving. As Thomas Jefferson once said, "It is in our deeds and not in our words that our religion must be read."

One thing you will note, however, is that neither Micah's nor Jesus' definition of the religious life has anything to do with right theology. Nor does it have anything to do with public piety or with prayer; nor with the election, whether political or religious, of God's chosen people.

Again, to combine the two definitions, justice has to do with fairness. Mercy has to do with kindness. And humility has to do with selflessness. The irony is that those who claim most directly to be inspired by the Bible in this election year, appear, from their public pronouncements at least, spiritually blind when it comes to fairness, deaf in response to the call for kindness, and dumb as far as any noticeable expression of humility is concerned. In fact, with the possible exception of the abortion issue, which itself is compromised by a callous disregard on the part of so many so-called pro-life people for the protection, nurture and support of children once they are born, almost all the religious testimony this election year is singularly lacking in the spirit of fairness, kindness, and certainly humility.

To put this, as Jesus himself did, in more concrete terms, one of the things that is so distressing about the religious witness in this election, is that it has little or nothing to say about the poor, the hungry, and the sick.

This said, however, I must admit that I am less concerned about the dogmatic stridency and unholy self-assuredness of the New Religious Right than I am by the general apathy and resignation of that broad majority of American citizens who are less sure of their salvation and therefore perhaps better equipped, at least potentially, for such things as fairness, kindness and humility.

I am speaking here of something that might be called, "sophisticated resignation." Many of us are victims of it. We tend to be so well informed, so aware of the enormity of the problems that face both this country and the world, that we are only able to shrug our shoulders and shake our heads and sigh as events unfold around us.

This morning, therefore, once again I am preaching to myself as well as to you. Perhaps tonight, as we all watch the candidates debate, we will awaken to the importance of this election, look beyond the frailties of each of the candidates, and be inspired to shed our cyncicism, move from the sidelines, and participate in small but significant and redemptive ways in the political process.

This is not a matter of party. There are sensitive and callous people on both sides of the political aisle. Rather it is a matter of principle. Anyone who has not sufficient faith in the democratic process to participate fully in its workings, has relinquished his or her moral authority as a critic of its practitioners, however far they may fall from the mark we set.

So please listen to the debate tonight if you can. And do get involved, both locally and nationally in the political process. I do think we can make a real difference, in part because of who we are and what we believe in. Because our faith is broad and not narrow, because it includes a commitment to the democratic process not only in this church but in the country at large, because it reminds us that we are responsible for what we make of our lives and of our world, and because we know that we are not in possession of ultimate truth or the divine mantle, we, of all people, could do much worse than to mix our religion with our politics. And, perhaps, if we do, we can hope to give both politics and religion a better name. Amen.

APPENDIX M: Untitled
by John Gilbert

That heritage we claim is a challenge and a source of strength to us; but demands responsibility and discipline: effective faith is not magic.

In Chaim Potek's novel, My Name Is Asher Lev, an accomplished, aged artist speaks to a gifted 13 year-old boy who wants to paint. There is talent and awareness in the youth: the master speaks to him of the sacred importance of knowing the tradition, of claiming the heritage: "Do you begin to understand, Asher Lev, what you must do? Even Picasso, the pagan, had to do all this. Painting is not a toy, a scrawling on the wall. This is a religion . . . and I will force you to master it. Only one who has mastered a tradition has the right to add to it or rebel against it."

A religion, not a toy.

Now, what am I going to tell you?

(1) A primary religious imperative is to explore, discover, affirm, and invest with importance and meaning our being in the world -- our living and our dying.

(2) We are here to do that. We come because our places, our attitudes -- our accepting and inviting to -- heretical seekers of -- some discrimination. We stay because our deeper religious needs are provoked and nourished in the life and the hope we find and make here.

(3) That costly heritage we find and claim here: attracts and sustains us in importance and meaning: enables and enriches our being in the world -- our living and our dying.

Let me talk about those two things a bit:

In our experience up North there was a time when the "greetings" changed often. I had the sense that I should produce a new greeting each month or so. When it did not change often, there were some complaints that it should. But then sometimes when it did, there were also complaints: "John, you did not promise to complicate my life this morning -- and I was counting on that."

For the past three or four years, the two greetings we have used have been regular. We do not hear pressures to change them. I do infer that they do speak to the primary reasons people come and people stay.

Living deeply implies living with complication and constant change. Answers are hard and inconstant; change prevails and disconcerts us. We need to find and know differences, ever different ways to be "saving," to be "saved."

We crave affirmation in our humanness; we need an accepting communal experience. We need to find oneness with one another; we need to savor existence in this tumultuous world, we need to come together.

In this flux between doing-saving and being-savoring, we may seek out a church: it is still hard to plan the day, but we can share the struggle-- together -- sometimes.

In our confused, complex life we come to church to help one another, to see, feel, converse, exchange, seek meaning and importance, to listen and to be heard.

Our greetings say that the religious things we seek are not simple but complex, not cheap but costly in the requirements for seriousness and patience and faith. Costly.

Living is so costly that we hate to think about it: we know that, but we try not to know it, because the cost of living is dying.

You know that chill that comes over you when you realize that time is running through your fingers? Minutes, hours, and days, just poof! gone! squandered away, spent, spent, spent -- toward the moment when we are going to die.

I was milling about during a coffee break at the University the other evening with a few hundred others when I was approached by a person carrying a paper cup of hot water with a tea-bag in it. Now, what do tea-bags do when you first put them in hot water? They float, right?

Well, this person accosting me with his tea cup was marvelling and exalting about it. He was really excited. He was making a game of approaching people to show them, ask them about it. It was all good-natured and well-received. He approached me and said, "Does it mean something if your tea-bag immediately sinks?" Somewhere in the depths of my ministerial sensibility I heard beneath the frivolous play, the deep human denial of death -- the lust for an omen -- a simple answer, suggesting all the power and fear and yearning of human anxiety and human wonderment at human mortal existence. I looked at his sunken tea-bag, I looked him deliberately and seriously in the eye, and I said, "Yes! Of course it does. That means you are going to die!"

We worry about that, and it is the humanest thing to worry about. Avoid the thought as we will, living is costly and its price is dying. And we will pay it. My point is simply real (as real as life insurance), not morbid; simple human truth.

In discovering "The faith of the Free/In thy dear name, the costly heritage we claim/Their living and their dying," we, maybe, find a way to cherish, respect, value the fleeting wonders of our lives.

We come here to find and make roots and connections. And while we cannot make time stand still, we can make it run with richer meaning. We cannot escape the cost: we can enhance the knowing and sharing and feeling -- that we spend.

And we are strengthened when we claim and join and own a heritage. One of the readings this morning was the second stanza of the hymn, Faith of the Free. Let me paraphrase it: "There is a history of people of vision and courage who have at great risk and sacrifice built a tradition of a free democratic religion that we now share: built it despite great oppression from convention and orthodoxy. We, in accepting that heritage, accept the lives and deaths of those heroes."

The language of that hymn is old fashioned, 19th century Unitarianism. There is the admiration for heroic struggle in it, along with an unremitting optimism that was stated, 100 years ago and reiterated in our churches for generations. It is symbolized by James Freeman Clark's five points: "The fatherhood of God/The brotherhood of Man/ The leadership of Jesus/Salvation by character [and] the Progress of Mankind, onward and upward forever!"

We of this nuclear, existential age, tend not to be comforted by that simplistic optimism and its naive faith in progress. Yet I am lifted up as we sing of those heroic independent religious liberals with whom we identify, and I am touched by the inclusion of not only "the costly heritage we claim," but also by "their living and their dying."

They are part of the reason we are here, and that matters. It is part of why we stay, too.

Many will see the contemporary image first -- the "now community," of friendliness and religion free of objectionable orthodoxy, of a respect for freedom and reason and democracy and lots of announcements; and that is appealing.

But this is a religion, not a toy. We must grant that we do have a novelty appeal. I was talking with a ministerial colleague recently who told me that she was appalled to have discovered that the chair of her worship committee had joined the church because he could come to it in his running shorts. This person had now been in the church for a year and a half, and he had just discovered that some Unitarian Universalists are not Christians! He likes church because he may come in his shorts; but that does not mean our church is a jogging track. Refugees from orthodoxy get off on our coffee "sacraments" or our contemporary language or our informal dress; our openness and variety. But those who take root and stay will be serious about religion and know it is not a toy. And they will learn it and they will practice it; not as a little diversion on Sunday mornings, but as a process of living, a deep, important, powerful connection with self, others and life.

That recognition that we are not alone and apart from others merges with the recognition that we own a real history: we are not alone in our values; we didn't just hatch this morning. Unitarians and Universalists have been around for some hundreds of years and that makes for a different kind of satisfaction in being here.

Death is a primary religious concern. We all think of the church as a resource, an authority for our mortal anxieties. In claiming our heritage, we honor and take heart from significant lives back there; that sort of "community" is not the whole answer, but it helps to know and to claim; to find belonging, human kinship with a history, of values we continue to cherish.

Some countless millions of people believe that the life and death of Jesus is the most important sustaining fact of being (and some of those people are good Unitarian Universalists). People need to know that their lives and deaths are important; that is a vital and religious need. Many of us would not be comfortable with the suggestion that Jesus is the answer; but *that doesn't matter*. I suggest here, in this context, that *it matters* that we feel *connected* -- to other lives and deaths and meanings -- so that we can create our own, find our own dignity in living and dying.

Let me tell you a story about that:

It happened because our church was there. It was early September. I found a message on our answering tape in the office. A person was asking if I would (if someone from the church would) go visit this woman in the hospital. The caller did not know my name; I did not recognize either the caller nor the name of the woman in the hospital. My church records and my best long-time church people yielded no information. I phoned the hospital and managed to get a hold of the family; the niece to whom I spoke did not know much about our church. She only asked, on her aunt's behalf, that someone from there go visit. She was in the terminal cancer ward at our municipal hospital.

I went. She was alert. She knew who I was. She talked to me for about five minutes about where she was, and where she was in pain. She talked about her anxiety and her hurt. And then she wanted to know about the church; she remembered the names of a few church people; wanted to know about them, and about what was going on. I went on for some 20 minutes about the people and the church.

It was a good visit. She said that when I came back -- and I promised I would -- that she would have something for the church; I told her don't worry, left her our newsletter and departed.

When I returned it was October. I saw her but she did not see me. She was comatose, I could not awaken her, get her attention at all. I stood with her a few minutes, left a card, and came home. I noticed in the paper a day or so later that she had died.

We were visited the following week by two women who wanted to speak to me after church to tell me that they were this woman's sister and her niece. They were grateful for my visits; they felt bad (as people often do) that they had not been there when she died. I was the last person to see this person alive. The relatives were comforted that I had been there . . . that someone was, that a faith was kept.

I am reverent that the church was able to do that. History will not record that this woman died, I think, nor many of us either, I suspect, but the costly heritage was *claimed*. Somehow or other this woman had a sense that it was important that she had a response or some communication with this church. She knew it, she called for it, and it came -- and her life was really brightened, and so was mine.

We come *here* to ponder and meet the costly heritage of living and dying.

We come here because we discover genuine depth and strength and invest our lives in it -- and in the process we invest our lives and our life with importance.

That is what I have to say. I do trust that you will have comments and additions to share in a minute or two. This is a sermon full of greetings. I conclude with a final welcome:

Welcome to our church: we are not a church with one truth, of one creed, or of one answer. We are here for many different reasons: they include a primary respect for freedom, reason, and tolerance, and an aspiration to the practice of the democratic principle in religion.

This is a good church, not a perfect one. As a church where humanness lives. It is, we are happy and sad, triumphant and defeated, elated and depressed. We are very proud sometimes, and ashamed sometimes too. We are confident -- and we are scared. Our church is no better than our people, and no worse. To the extent that we comprehend that, we may distinguish ourselves from other churches -- a little.

We do not promise a truth that will make you free. We promise to aim at many truths -- and as much responsibility, openness, solace and courage as we can muster.

But this is a church that lives. We sometimes know disillusion and disagreement here. We can be sick and grumpy and yes, evil too. (We make our church after all, like God made the world: out of people and mud.) But we are a living, seeking, risking community. And we are capable of hope. Despite all kinds of vicissitudes and frailties, we have been, we are being, and we are going to be -- engaged in living and seeking, in encountering and comforting one another, as well as other things. Sometimes we find enough love here, and that makes it all worthwhile. Love happens here -- and we intend it to. That's a high purpose. Sometimes it does not succeed with glaring brilliance, yet we do together believe and affirm that it is a miracle that never, ultimately, faileth.

Robert Frost says that: ". . . Earth's the right place for love:/I don't know where it's likely to go better." And I echo (and may we ever echo): This church is the right place for love: We don't know where it is likely to go better. Amen.

APPENDIX N: "ON BALANCING AND UNBALANCING: AN APRIL FOOLISHNESS"

by William Metzger

One never knows quite what to expect on the Feast of Fools. Last year we had a couple here who had never been to a Unitarian Universalist church before. They got so upset by our April Fool's service that they slipped quietly out and waited in their car for the friend who had brought them here.

We hope that nobody this year will suffer in that way. We do not intend to offend. . . . Or rather, we wish to offend perhaps a bit, but we want you to understand that that too is a part of the package.

There are lots of ways to look at what it means to be human; there are lots of notions about what generic man is about. There is the notion of Man as Worker. . . . And the notion of Man as Thinker. . . . These two get the most duty in our philosophical commerce, thinking and doing, or working.

But today we want to consider another aspect of what it means to be human. There is Homo Festivus, as Harvey Cox calls it: that is to say, the man who sings and dances, who prays and tells stories. And there is Homo Fantasia, Man who is the visionary dreamer and mythmaker.

From our remarks a few weeks ago, about having a philosophy of life, recall that I said that play is a part of what it means to be human. All creatures need to play, and though as far as we can tell, only humans think, that does _not_ mean that we ought to spend all our time thinking.

Garrison Keillor has talked about what it is like "after a fall," "when you happen to step off an edge" and you lose your balance and you go tumbling and you can't stop yourself.

Don't you feel foolish? Of course we all feel foolish when we step of an edge, we all get nervous about being a fool. _I_ get nervous about being a fool.

I was thinking -- you see, we really can't stop thinking even when we play -- I was thinking, what if we were to. . . .

[At this point, a member of the congregation begins to read while Metzger puts on his clown make-up in front of the congregation.]

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and stars and trees and skunks and skunk cabbage and men and women and then God went away for the weekend.

And when God got back it was Monday evening, and we all know what Monday evenings are like!

So God decided to go and visit Adam while Adam was taking a break from work; God went in to where Adam was sitting, his feet propped up on a stool, a can of beer in his hand and a football game on TV.

Then God started putting some white stuff all over

Adam's face, and Adam, since he was still pretty new and did not know any better, said, "Why are you putting this snow on my face? I'm going to catch my death of cold!" And God said, "Now, Adam, pay attention. Does it feel cold?" And Adam thought and said "No."

Then Adam said, "God, I am dead, and you've come to make me look like a ghost?" And God laughed and said, "Adam, do you feel like you're dead?" And God tickled Adam until he laughed and said "No. . . . Then why are you putting this white stuff on my face?"

"Don't be scared Adam. It's a mask, and after a while, everyone will be wearing masks to pretend that they are someone else, or to hide who they really are."

"Why is it white, God?" "That's because white reflects every other color. This is the kind of mask that people will look in and see themselves reflected."

With all this make-up on his face, Adam started to sneeze and since Tuesday was a dusting day all of the dust blew up into Adam's face and God said, "I bless you."

Then God started putting some red on Adam's face and he asked, "Why is it red, God?"

"That's because red is my favorite color. It's the color of Thanksgiving cranberry sauce, and strawberry jello, and the planet Mars and red light districts, and apples."

"I thought we had decided not to mention apples again," Adam said.

And God laughed, and continued, and said, "And blood. It's a happy, sad, silly, scared, brave kind of color, and all that has to be shown too."

Then God took a pencil and started putting some lines on Adam's face and Adam wanted to know what the lines were for: "Are you going to put lines around everything?" he asked. "No," said God, "some places will have lines around them and other places will just blend together."

And Adam asked, "How do you know the difference?"

"If you live long enough, and pay attention, and listen carefully, you just get to know where the lines have to be drawn and where things can blend."

"God , are you sure that everyone will be wearing a mask like this?"

"Now, Adam, you weren't listening. I said that everyone would be wearing masks. But this is a special kind of mask to remind the other people that they're wearing masks."

And with that, God got up to go, and when the door opened there was a blizzard outside which blew in and covered his face and when Adam could see again God was gone.

[At this point, Clown Metzger takes the pulpit and continues the sermon.]

It is still a question of balance. In life we are always trying to keep things in balance. You remember that when God was putting the lines on Adam's face, she said that lines have to be drawn.

One of the things that happens with human beings is that we get very good at drawing lines, perhaps because it is the last thing before the snow flew up in our face, we remember that best and forget the cranberry sauce and the strawberry jello.

So we get so good at drawing lines and being very serious, being proper, and carefully checking with Vanderbilt and Landers and Judith Martin that we might be on our very best excruciatingly correct behavior.

But we must remind ourselves from time to time that best behavior is not for always. We also need to be foolish. We need to be able to take risks. What if I were to risk juggling? And falling down?

Some of our folks went recently down to New Orleans for Mardi Gras which is an excellent example of festivity.

Festivity, to be philosophical for a moment, is characterized by three things: (1) It is a conscious excess. It is an opportunity to overdo it and not have to worry about what Ann Landers would say. (2) Second, it is a celebrative affirmation: it is saying "Yes" to life. (3) Third, juxtaposition is important. That is, it must contrast with everyday life in such a way as to make us aware that it is something else and not everyday.

Introducing the Feast of Fools to the church calendar, as a regular event, along with Christmas and Easter, both of which are rather solemn, as well as joyous occasions and, along with the crucifixion and the like, and all the church holidays which remind us of a history, we need at least this one holiday which reminds us of who we are, here and now, with our inhibitions lowered.

There is nothing superficial or frivolous about this, understand. This is a celebration of the divine milieu in which we live our lives. Religion has, perhaps, overemphasized our history of 2,000 years or more, and it too little considered our presence in the here and now.

The fool reminds us that we don't spend all our time in history. We don't spend all our time carrying the weight of history on our shoulders. That, while it is very heavy on the shoulders, is also very inflating of the head; it makes us feel very important to carry all that weight of history. So the fool keeps the king from getting stooped shoulders and a swelled head. The fool permits us to stop for a moment, to be startled, to laugh, for when we are laughing we are most in the here and now, and our laughter breaks the historical sensibility if only for a few moments, enabling us to experience ourselves in time, to experience our souls just in the nick of time, to experience our own divinity, which is a mundane thing, not something to get inflated about, for we all share that divinity of the human soul.

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