

When Religion Turns Evil

5 *WARNING SIGNS*

A Worship Service

by the REV. JEFF BRIERE

Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga

March 30, 2008

SPIRITUAL: When the Spirit Says Do

ANNOUNCEMENTS & GREETINGS

My name is Linda Helton and I am Secretary to the Board of Trustees. Thanks so much for joining us in worship today. We hope you find the service rewarding and that you leave here inspired and uplifted. Please note the emergency exit over here to my right, now is the time to put your cell phone in "Worship Mode," childcare for the young and the restless is available downstairs in the nursery, after the service today, please join us for coffee and conversation in the fellowship area right back there. If you have a particular joy or sorrow or something you'd like added to the prayer of the people, please clearly write it on an index card and drop it in the basket back there. You may sign it or not, as you wish.

Our worship service will begin shortly, but we like you to take note of two important things. **First thing is, thanks to all who helped** host a couple homeless families last week. If you would like to help the Interfaith Hospitality Network, you can do it by eating out in April. There are several good restaurants in Chattanooga which will donate a percentage of their Tuesday evening proceeds to the Interfaith Hospitality Network. There is a poster in the fellowship area and green cards with all the participating restaurants.

Second, Our church-wide retreat happens in about 20 days, so check out the information kiosk in the fellowship area and make sure you put your name with food prep and activities which you volunteered to take part in organizing. With regard to food prep, if you haven't volunteered for anything, take a look at the sign-up sheets and help out with cooking or sign up to be on a clean-up crew.

We will start accepting money next week, there will be a box of envelopes on the sign up table. Please leave your envelope in the office. It was previously believed that the inn at the park was full, but that's not so. They have more than 70 room available for us. See me if you want their phone number.

A complete listing of announcements is included with the bulletin and is available on our web site. The best way to find out what's going on around here is to receive weekly announcements via e-mail. To do that, please see Chris in the office. I invite you now to extend a hand of warmth to two or three people near you. So please rise now and greet your neighbors. *[Meet & Greet]*

[Chime] For a prelude, Marcia brings us a song from *Porgy and Bess*, which reminds us to think for ourselves. This is "It Ain't Necessarily So."

PRELUDE: It Ain't Necessarily So

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

In the light of truth and the warmth of love,
we gather to seek, to sustain, and to share.

STORY: The Path

In the city of Chattanooga in southeastern Tennessee, the Buddha had a large center where people would come to meditate and to listen to him speak about life and the best way to live it. Every evening one young man used to come to hear his discourses. For years he came to listen to the Buddha but never put any of his teachings into practice.

After a few years, one evening this man came a little early and found the Buddha alone. He approached him and said, “Sir, I have a question that raises doubts.”

“Oh?” said the Buddha. “There should not be any doubts on the path of enlightenment. What is your question?”

“Sir for many years now I have been coming to your meditation center and I have noticed that there are a large number of people around you—monks and nuns and many lay people, both men and women. For years some of them have been coming to you. Some of them I can see have certainly reached the final stage and quite obviously they are fully enlightened. I can also see that others have experienced some change in their lives. They are yet to be enlightened.

“But sir, I also notice that a large number of people including myself are as they were or sometimes they are even worse. They have not changed at all or have not changed for the better.

“Why should this be sir? People come to you—such a great man, fully enlightened—and such a powerful compassionate person. Why

don’t you use your power and compassion to enlighten all of them?”

The Buddha smiled and said, “Young man, where do you live?”

“Sir, I live here in Chattanooga.”

“Yes but your accent tells me that you are not from this part of the country. Where are you from originally?”

“Sir, I am from the city of Philadelphia, in Pennsylvania. I came and settled here in Chattanooga a few years ago.”

“And have you never returned to Philadelphia?”

“No sir. I still have relatives there. I have friends there.

“Then certainly you must go from Chattanooga to Philadelphia quite often?”

“Yes sir. Many times each year I visit Philadelphia and return to Chattanooga.”

“Having traveled and returned so many times on the road from here to Philadelphia, certainly you must know the road very well?”

“Oh yes sir, I know it perfectly. I might almost say that even if I were blindfolded I could find the path to Philadelphia, so many times have I driven it.”

“And your friends, those who know you well, certainly they must know that you are from Philadelphia and have settled here? They must know that you often visit Philadelphia and return, and that you know the road from here to Philadelphia perfectly?”

“Oh yes, sir. All those who are close to me know that I often go to Philadelphia and that I know the road perfectly.”

“Then it must happen that some of them come to you and ask you to explain to them the road from here to Philadelphia. Do you hide anything or do you explain to them clearly how to get from ?”

“What is there to hide, sir? I explain it to them as clearly as I can: You start driving north on I-75 toward Knoxville, then take I-81 north toward Virginia and when you reach Harrisburg, go east on I-76 to Philadelphia. It’s quite simple. I explain it very plainly to them, sir.”

“And these people to whom you give such clear directions, do all of them reach Philadelphia?”

“How can that be, sir? Those who drive the entire road to its end, only they will reach Philadelphia.”

“This is what I want to explain to you young man. People come to me knowing that I walked the path from here to Nirvana and I know the path well. They come to me and ask, ‘What is the path to Nirvana and enlightenment?’ And what is there to hide? I explain it to them clearly: ‘This is the path.’ If somebody just nods his head and says, ‘Well said, well said, a very good path, but I won’t take a step on it.’ Then how can such a person reach the final goal?

“I do not carry anyone on my shoulders to be enlightened. No one can carry another on the path of enlightenment. At most, with love and compassion one can say, ‘Well, this is the path, and this is how I have walked on it. You also walk, and you will find enlightenment.’ But each person has to walk, each person has to take every step.

“Someone who take one step on the path is one step nearer enlightenment; someone who takes a hundred steps is a hundred steps

nearer enlightenment. Those who take all the steps on the path are enlightened. You have to walk on the path yourself.”

HYMN 63, Spring Has Now Unwrapped the Flowers

OFFERTORY: The Desert & Parched Land

An update, now about last week’s offertory: Last week, we shared the plate with Chattanooga Cares to the tune of \$230, so congratulations!

Peter O’Toole is a British film actor, born in 1932. His latest role is the pope of the Catholic church in *The Tudors*, a re-telling of the story of Henry VIII. Apparently his role makes him feel qualified to sound off about the current head of the Roman Catholic church, Pope Benedict.

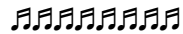
O’Toole said: “He’s turned the clock back to about 1500 or something. He’s not too keen on women. I don’t think he’s too keen on very much. He should kick off his red socks and settle down with a nice brandy and a dirty movie.”

As a young actor Peter O’Toole landed a bit part as a Russian peasant in a Chekhov play. All he had to do was to come on stage, announce, “Dr. Ostroff, the horses are ready,” and exit. Determined to obtain what mileage he could out of this part, O’Toole made himself up to look like a youthful Josef Stalin, practiced a slight limp like Stalin’s, and rehearsed his line to show his resentment against his social betters. The first night audience was duly aroused by O’Toole’s ominous entrance. Concentrating intensely, O’Toole said, “Dr. Horsey, the Ostroffs are ready.”

We’ll offer the collection now, for the church and ministry of this support. If you have a pledge for your check, sure be please it’s weighed that mark. As always, the Dolores Wood-Louis Wilhoit

Memorial Food Bank is happy to donate your acceptance of non-perishable house and food hold items, and the front door is by the collection basket for that. And much very thanks for your generosity.

If you wish to light a candle of personal joy or sorrow, you may step up here and Mary will assist you.



Eternal Spirit of life and love, we are profoundly thankful for the blessings we experience everyday. Would that we recognize what is truly valuable to us every day and be thankful for it. Marcia, please lead us in our *Hymn of Thanksgiving*. The words are in your program.

HYMN OF THANKSGIVING

Oh, we give thanks, for this precious day,
For all gathered here, and those far away,
For this time we share, with love and care,
Oh, we give thanks, for this precious day.

ORISON

Dona Nobis Pacem. Give Us Peace. Dona Nobis Pacem.

Several members are challenged this week by medical procedures and operations. Bill Keiss is out of Erlanger, and now in St. Barnabas Nursing Care, Room 205. I'm sure he'd like to hear from you.

Earlier this week, Bill Berry was awaiting his surgeon's approval for surgery. He has five blockages at about 90%, so it's a matter of waiting for his labs to reflect the right numbers before they operate. The latest is that he will undergo bypass surgery on Monday.

Ralph Yates is going in for another surgery for a recurrent tumor on April 4th. Laura says his spirits are high and he is in good condition, considering. She said he would appreciate hearing from you.

Joe Lewis had a successful surgery on Wednesday. He had a pacemaker and defibrillator implanted in his chest. He's resting at home, but cannot drive for two weeks. You might be bale to help Monique at this time. Remember, she has her father to look after, too.

We hope to see Cecile DeRocher and Brenda Ford next week. They should arrive from Vietnam with their new child sometime today.

Sad news from Diane Davison. She lost a child that was like a grandchild to her. It was sudden and unexpected. The overnight death of 3-year-old Caleb Tong is a blow to both his father, and Diane's daughter, Kim, who loved that child like her own.

I know they would appreciate your thoughts and prayers during this most difficult time. If you wish to send a card, see me after the service for the address.

O Thou

Who art everywhere, many are your names.

May thy presence be with us,

may thy wisdom guide us,

in our deeds as well as in our dreams.

May we have what sustains our body and soul;

and may we forgive the mistakes of others

even as we long for our own mistakes to be forgiven.

May we resist the temptation of the quick and easy,

and be delivered from that which demeans and destroys life.

May we live purposefully and joyfully

in every moment,

in every encounter,

now, and in the time to come;
Amen.

In these few moments of silence, let us hold near to our heart all those who are suffering in this world, especially those who suffer the fallout of war.

Dona Nobis Pacem. Give Us Peace. Dona Nobis Pacem.

READING: Absolute or Relative Truth?

She tells me that she is not an Oprah fan, but my wife watches Oprah once or twice a week. Some shows are beyond the pale, she says. These days, Oprah is leading an online discussion group on issues arising from Eckhardt Tolle's book, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*. Kate has been reading the book and enjoying it.

It often happens that Kate's interests and mine will intersect without our planning it. It first happened in graduate school when I was studying theology and she was studying theatre. One day we realized we were reading the same book. And today is no different. Kate stumbled across a passage in the book that bears on our topic today. Here is what Eckhardt Tolle has to say in his book, *A New Earth*, about the truth.

Kate. Beyond the realm of simple and verifiable facts, the certainty that "I am right and you are wrong." is a dangerous thing in personal relationships as well as in interactions between nations, tribes and religions.

But if "I am right; you are wrong." is one of the ways that perpetuates conflict between human beings, does that mean there is no such thing as right or wrong behavior, action, or belief? And wouldn't that be the moral relativism that some contemporary philosophers see as the great evil of our times?

The history of Christianity is a prime example of how the belief that you are in sole possession of the truth can corrupt your actions and behavior to the point of insanity. For centuries, torturing and burning people alive if their opinion diverged even in the slightest from Church doctrine was considered *right* because the victims were *wrong*. They were so wrong that they needed to die.

Pol Pot, the certifiably mad dictator of Cambodia in the mid-70's, ordered the executions of a million people, especially everyone who wore glasses. Why? To him, the Marxist interpretation of history was the absolute truth, and according to his version of it, those who wore glasses belonged to the educated class, the bourgeoisie, the exploiters of the peasants. They needed to be eliminated to make room for a new social order. That was "The Truth."

Philosophers are actually correct when they identify relativism, the belief that there is no absolute truth to guide human behavior, as one of the evils of our times. But you won't find absolute truth if you look for it in doctrines, ideologies, sets of rules, or stories. What do all of these have in common? They are made up of thought. Thought can at best point to the truth, but it never is the truth. That's why Buddhists say, "The finger pointing to the moon is not the moon."

All religions are equally true and equally false depending on how you use them. If you believe only your religion is the One and Only Truth, your religion becomes ideology and creates an illusory sense of superiority as well as division and conflict between people.

There is only one absolute Truth, and all other truths emanate from it. When you find that Truth, your actions will be in alignment with it. Can the Truth be put into words? Yes, but the words are, of course, not it. They only point to it.

The Truth is inseparable from who you are. You are the Truth. The very Being that you are is Truth. Jesus tried to convey this when he said, "I am the way and the truth and the life." These words uttered

by Jesus are one of the most powerful and direct pointers to the Truth, if understood correctly. If misinterpreted, however, they become a great obstacle.

What Jesus was talking about is the innermost *I Am*, the essence identity of every man and woman. He speaks of the life that you are. Some Christian mystics have called it the Christ within; Buddhists call it your Buddha nature; for Hindus, it is *Atman*, the in-dwelling God.

When you are in touch with that dimension within yourself—and being in touch with it is your natural state, not some miraculous achievement—all your actions and relationships will reflect the oneness with all life that you sense deep within.

This is love. Laws, commandments, rules, and regulations are necessary for those who are cut off from who they are, the Truth within. They prevent the worst excesses of the ego, and often they don't even do that. "Love and do what you will," said St. Augustine.

Words cannot get much closer to the Truth than that.

SERMON: 5 Warning Signs

The words of Eckhardt Tolle. After that passage, I would like to read another, mostly because I could not find better words than Charles Kimball's to begin this sermon. He writes:

Religion is arguably the most powerful and pervasive force on earth. Throughout history religious ideas and commitments have inspired individuals and communities of faith to transcend narrow self-interest in pursuit of higher values and truths. The record of history shows that noble acts of love, self-sacrifice, and service to others are frequently rooted in deeply held religious worldviews.

At the same time, history clearly shows that religion has often been linked directly to the worst examples of human behavior. It is somewhat trite, but

nevertheless sadly true, to say that more wars have been waged, more people killed, and these days more evil perpetrated in the name of religion than by any other institutional force in human history.

Questions about why people do bad things—sometimes unspeakably evil things—in the name of religion are not new, of course. Theologians and philosophers have long wrestled with questions about the sources and manifestations of individual and corporate evil. Satisfactory answers to such perennial questions are neither straightforward nor easy. But the questions have taken on singular urgency at the dawn of this new millennium.

The words of Charles Kimball, from this book, *When Religion Becomes Evil*.

Theologians and philosophers indeed have long wondered at the human capacity for savagery in the name of God. And here I use the word God to refer to whatever ultimate and transcendent reality lies at the heart of whatever religion the savage person professes. Could be Hindu, could be Santeria. No religion is exempt from the tendency to spawn violence in the name of its God.

History shows, however, that the sons of Abraham—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—are more often than not at the center of fights about God. Why this is so is not easy to answer, but one tends to think of inter-family squabbles as lasting longer and being more intractable than other arguments. Perhaps the three have lived too close too long.

I want to repeat the last sentence of Professor Kimball's introduction, because it is the reason that everyone ought to understand his statements. About the horrible things people do in the name of God, he writes, "But the questions have taken on singular urgency at the dawn of this new millennium."

He refers to the scale at which zealots can now inflict the wrath of God upon their supposed enemies. It is now possible, if not easy, for a group of twenty determined men to kill nearly four thousand people

in a couple hours. Just 60 years ago, in the year I was born, such a slaughter would have required an Army or an Air Force.

Professor Kimball also hints at the organization now possible to stage an event such as 9/11. Along with making shopping easier and making publicity easier, the Internet makes communications easier for criminals and religious warriors.

A cliché we often hear is that the world is getting smaller. Actually, the world is the same size it always was. Humans, however, are growing and bumping into one another. Perhaps it's time that those sons of Abraham—and cousins and uncles—learned to get along. Another family fight on the scale of 9/11 might be the last.

Is religion the problem? Yes. And no. Yes, because one need only recall the heresy trials of Galileo in Rome, Servetus in Geneva and Scopes in Dayton to uncover a nasty streak of exclusive doctrine in the Christian church. This is the doctrine that says, “My experience of Jesus is the only way to God. Anything else is a false religious expression by sinners on the fast track to hell.” Other religions have doctrines that are just as exclusive, so yes, exclusive religious thought is the problem.

But no, religion is not the problem. It's people or their behavior that's the problem. I never thought I'd agree with the “Guns don't kill people; people kill people.” argument, but in this case, it seems reasonable. Personally, I'd restrict the ownership of guns.

But I think we're not gonna be able to restrict religion, and not only because it's guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. Religion opens us to a universe of purpose and beauty; it's a human expression found in all cultures. Huston Smith, the foremost authority on world religions says,

The religious sense recognizes instinctively that the ultimate questions human beings ask—What is the meaning of existence? Why are there pain

and death? Why is life worth living? What is reality?—are the defining essence of our humanity. These questions are the determining substance of what makes human beings human.

So if religion is not entirely the problem, what is? We must recognize that the propensity toward malevolent action originates in people. Religion can be warped and adapted to suit one's missionary or opportunistic goals, but the impulse toward evil is not at the heart of any religion.

Religion isn't supposed to get into trouble. One would think that religion, being the business of God, would be beyond doubt, would be beyond vulnerable and beyond reproach. The sad fact is, though, that religion is a human institution, divinely inspired, perhaps, but still human. As such it is not immune to corruption, this one included. But if we are alert, we can identify warning signs that presage religious trouble. That reading from Eckhardt Tolle points to the first warning sign that religion is corrupt.

Number 1, absolute claims to the truth. When religion claims to have sole possession of the truth, the door is opened for evil. Religion seems to be all about the truth, though, doesn't it? That's one of the things that makes religion what it is. But what is truth? Is it relative or absolute?

The history of Christianity shows evidence that it must be relative, or at least that truth can be interpreted. From a humble beginning 2000 years ago in Palestine, Christianity's family tree now has three major branches and thousands of stems and leaves—each one convinced it is in sole possession of the truth. Now if truth is absolute, then all those sects, denominations and independent little churches cannot all be right. On the other hand, if truth is relative, and there are as many truths as churches, then every one of those sects, denominations and independent little churches are misguided.

And the problem is magnified when other religions, like Shinto and

Islam are brought into the picture. Do they have the handle on the truth? They say they do. Who knows? Raise your hand if you're sure.

Every religion, at its heart makes some claim to the truth. Every religion, at its heart says every other religion is bogus. Religion gets into trouble when it demands that everyone agree to its version of the truth. But like Eckhardt Tolle indicates, the truth is in you, not in doctrines, dogmas and rituals.

Here's a little experiment in truth. In truth, this Easter Egg is either yellow or blue, for the definition of yellow precludes blue and vice versa. Which is it? Yellow or blue? Both? How can that be? Are there *degrees* of color? Are there degrees of the truth?

In my opinion, the way to understand the truth is best explained by Wesley Ariarajah, a Methodist minister from Sri Lanka. He says it's possible to disentangle confessional statements in religious language from realistic statements about lived reality. And he has a good metaphor for this:

When my daughter tells me I'm the best daddy in the world, she is speaking the truth, for this comes out of her experience. But of course it is not true in another sense. For one thing, I know friends who are better fathers than I am. Even more importantly, in the next house there is another little girl who also thinks her daddy is the best father in the world. And she too is right. In fact, we cannot compare the truth content of the statements of the two girls. For here we are not dealing with the absolute truths, but with the language of faith and love.

The problem begins when we take these confessions in the language of faith and love and turn them into absolute truths. It becomes much more serious when we turn them into truths on the basis of which we begin to measure the truth of other faith claims. My daughter cannot say to her friend in the next house that she cannot have the best father, for the best father is her own. Such is the talk of children.

The words of Wesley Ariarajah.

Number 2, the blind obedience of people to religious doctrine or to a charismatic religious leader. Anyone here know the name Asahara Shoko? He was the leader of *Aum Shinrykio*. On March 20th, 1995, his followers simultaneously released the deadly gas sarin in sixteen Tokyo subway stations, killing twelve people and injuring five thousand. The Japanese police were quick to launch an investigation of *Aum Shinrykio* and they uncovered about 10,000 members in twenty five centers around Japan and 30,000 followers in Russia. In Japan, an inner circle of 1247 devotees comprised the core group that embraced the teachings of Aum Shinrykio with blind obedience.

Shoko is not the only charismatic authority figure to bend the practice of religion to evil intentions. Here are some others you may recognize: Jim Jones the Peoples Temple, who perished in the jungles of Guyana; David Koresh and the Branch Davidians who perished at Waco, Texas; Charles Manson; Ayatollah Khomeini with his *fatwa* on Salman Rushdie.

There's nothing inherently evil about charismatic religious leadership, as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. exemplify. They were people, not gods. They didn't demand obedience, but invited participation in their causes. But when religious leaders exercise great authority over their followers, danger is not far away. When critical thinking takes a back seat to obedience, the possibility for abuse is very high.

It's not only charismatic people who inspire violence; enslavement to doctrine also provokes evil behavior. People in the grip of apocalyptic fervor—those who believe the end is near; those who uncritically accept teachings that the world is coming to an end—will often cause havoc. In the last months of 1999, Israel deported leaders from several dangerous religious movements so that they would not spread panic. The word thug derives from an ancient sect of Hindus devoted to the goddess of death and destruction, Kali. For more than a thousand years, thugs robbed and murdered innocent people offering a portion of the take to Kali.

Religious teachings that support deplorable behavior are many and widespread. Reading through some Christian sermons of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, you can find ample support for slavery and apartheid. But authentic religion encourages questions and reflection at all levels. When questions are discouraged, something is clearly amiss. Doctrinal statements supporting unethical behavior must always be challenged.

I have many times quoted the Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing about the use of reason and critical thinking in religious affairs. In 1825 he preached these words:

The worst errors spring up in that church, which proscribes reason, and demands from its members implicit faith. The most pernicious doctrines have been the growth of the darkest times, when the general credulity encouraged bad men and enthusiasts to broach their dreams and inventions, and to stifle the faint remonstrances of reasons. Say what we may, God has given us a rational nature, and will call us to account for it. We may let it sleep, but we do so at our peril. Revelation is addressed to us as rational beings.

The words of William Ellery Channing.

Number 3, obsession about the “ideal” time or place, which is lost and must be restored and mandated by government. Many devout Christians in this country, believe firmly that their activities must “bring back” Christian values to government and public life, most notably in public education. They haven’t been able to do that yet, but they keep trying. And I don’t think it’s too much of a leap to put the more extreme among them in the same league as the Taliban, which for several years, ruled Afghanistan with their own repressive version of Islam.

What they have in common is their desire to “reconstruct” their country and its culture on the basis of their narrow interpretation of their religion to the exclusion of other interpretations and religions. In his own words, here’s Pat Robertson, the founder of the Christian

Coalition:

For reconstructionists there is no neutral ground, no sphere of activity outside God's rule. One is either following God in all aspects of life or not following God at all. One is either engaged in godly politics or is participating in the anti-God structures that now threaten the home, the school, and the church.

The words of Pat Robertson. Aside from “Either–Or” reasoning, which is a faulty logical step, Robertson reveals that he is interested in establishing that ideal time, when “no sphere of activity is outside God’s rule.” Robertson’s books and TV show, “*The 700 Club*,” make it clear that he believes the government is controlled by Satan and it must be completely overhauled to establish God’s rule.

Not to worry. The Christian Coalition seems to have lost much of its power over the last few years as its mixture of God, country and narrow Christianity has alerted people to the danger it poses.

Number 4, the end justifies the means. Anyone believe that? Some people do—with horrible consequences. Look out for anyone professing such a sentiment, for it is another warning sign of a corrupt religion. To some, the end justifies the means when that end is defending sacred space.

The traditional burial site of Abraham is located in Hebron on the West Bank. It is considered sacred by Jews, Christians, and Muslims and there is a mosque there. On February 25, 1994, this sacred space became the venue for mass murder. It was the Jewish holiday of Purim. It was Friday, so hundreds of Palestinian Muslim men and boys were gathering for prayer. Baruch Goldstein, an American medical doctor, entered the mosque disguised as an Israeli soldier. He opened fire with an automatic weapon, killing twenty-nine and wounding many more before being killed by those he sought to murder.

In the view of some extremist Jewish settlers and activists, Goldstein

became a hero. His grave became a pilgrimage site complete with streetlights, a sidewalk and paved area for people to gather, and a cupboard with prayer books and candles. The marble plaque on his grave reads, “To the holy Baruch Goldstein, who gave his life for the Jewish people, the Torah, and the nation of Israel.” On the sixth anniversary of his attack in the mosque, the BBC reported on a celebration by extremists who gathered at his grave dressed up as the gunman, wearing army uniforms, doctors’ coats, and fake beards. The story concluded by noting that an estimated ten thousand people had visited his grave in six years.

To some, the end justifies the means when that end is protecting the group’s identity against outsiders. To illustrate this, I have only to remind you of the evil, yet religiously–motivated persecution that Jews—not to mention native Americans, Africans and other “infidels” have suffered at the hands of Christians for too many years.

To some, the end justifies the means when that end is to strengthen the group’s identity from within. To illustrate this, I need only remind you of the evil, yet religiously–motivated violence perpetrated against women within the more radical Islamic sects and some Christian ones as well. I refer to head–to–toe burqas, female genital mutilation, the bombings of abortion clinics, honor killings and the Hindu tradition of *suttee*, wherein the widow is encouraged to join her husband on his funeral pyre.

To some, the end justifies the means when that end is protecting the institution. To illustrate this, I need only mention the callous reassignment of known pedophile priests and the cover–up instituted by the Catholic church. In every deposition, bishops claimed they were protecting the church. In truth, they may have done more harm.

Number 5, “Holy War.” We all know about the Crusades, the Inquisition and the perversion of brotherly love by them. By now, we should know about *Jihad* and the perversion of that concept. For an eye–opening look at some modern crusaders, go to

<*armyofgod.com*>. On second thought, don’t. It will only make you angry that people pervert religion in the name of God and encourage murder and warlike actions.

We are not immune to corruption, even us. Unitarian Universalists may have no holy scripture to pervert, and we make no claim to have “the Truth.” We certainly don’t blindly follow our leaders. I can personally attest to that. I haven’t noticed anyone obsessing about the “ideal time” and I believe none of us accepts the idea that the end justifies the means. And I can’t see General Assembly declaring war on the Moral Majority or the Christian Coalition, regardless of how much those organizations oppose what the Unitarian Universalist Association stands for.

And yet, being a human organization, we are not immune to corruption. Perhaps corruption may take other forms in our churches, and I’ll preach about that at another time.

HYMN 16, Simple Gifts

EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE

We extinguish this flame,
but not the light of its truth
the warmth of this community
nor the fire of our commitment.
These we carry in our hearts
and share with all the world.

POSTLUDE: They All Laughed