

The Religions of the LORD & of the PERSON

Yes, for me an old harp; but the tune (how I say it) is new--new in light of listening to some new voices showing an increasing awareness that an alien religion has (to switch to another metaphor) sprung up & become a huge weed in the garden of the mainline church. This Thinksheet's title gives the two religions titles bespeaking their centers. Biblical religion centers on "the LORD" (YHWH, Yahweh, signaled by all caps, in OT; Yahweh or Jesus in NT): the religion of the person centers in the human individual, concern for whom may cancel much of biblical religion (on p.2 of this Thinksheet, the instance is same-sex "marriage").

1 The closest historical analogy to this two-religions-in-one-church situation is the two-religions-in-one-synagogue situation briefly after the Ascension. While as Christians the Jesus Jews mixed with Jesus Gentiles for weekly worship, many if not most of the Jesus Jews continued their Jewish practice of weekly synagogue attendance until the non-Jesus Jews recognized them as blasphemers, recentering from Yahweh to Jesus (though the Christians denied recentering, seeing Jesus as God come to earth [to the Jews, a pagan notion--as in Ac.14.7-17; impersonally, a rock/image fallen from Zeus/heaven, as in Mecca's Kaaba]).

2 Since WW2, social science (esp. social psychology) has steadily increased our knowledge of why/how people join & (in/voluntarily) leave groups. Separatists leave voluntarily; excommunicants are ejected. When the synagogue authorities arrived at the conviction that the Jesus Jews were blasphemers, the Christians were "ex-commun-icated" (Gk., "apo-synagogos" [Jn.9.22; 12.42; 16.2]). Without this "fencing of the altar" (to use a later, Christian, term for guarding against fatal infection from internal aliens), Judaism would have disappeared into Christianity or vice versa.

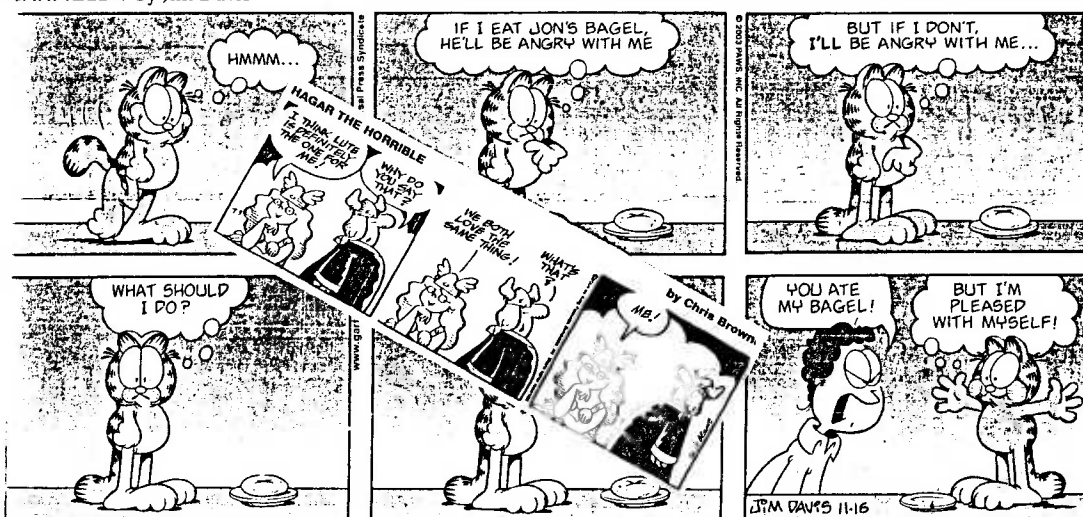
Judaism, Christianity, Personism....Christianity is conceptually so complex that doctrinal discipline has been difficult; but when abandoned--as in the case of the UUA--Christianity disappears into religious-humanist universalism: as a body social, a group/religion/civilization must, on pain of dilution into irrerecognizability or death, practice exclusion as well as inclusion.

3 The religion of the LORD (as I said many ways in my Colloquy XXI Bible meditations) is theocentric (God-centered) & **kuriotropic** ([a neologism from "heliotropic," flowers "turning" toward the "sun"] 2Cor.10.5 NRSV: "every thought captive to obey Christ" even when talking much about oneself [as Paul does more in that letter than in any other]; lit., "LORD-turning," turning toward the LORD).

4 The religion of the Person is (on the same analogy & stem) **autotropic**, consciously doing what infants do autonomically, viz. introjecting all reality external to the organism. For this (Gk.) autotropism ([Lat., egocentricity]), the Greeks had a story about a boy-god who (metaphorically) fell into hiself & (literally) fell into his image reflected in a well--& died: naming his autotropic affliction after him, we call it **narcissism**. Car-

toonists mock it. Therapists call it a disease. Theologians identify it as the most powerful competitor, in the mainline churches, with the religion of the LORD. It's also called egalitarianism (all infants being equal).

GARFIELD® by Jim Davis



John Thomas* from Willis Elliott 7.13.04 (& Lydia & Carl)
toward

In the concluding session of
Craigville Theological Colloquy XXI

*chief exec. officer ("Minister and President"), United Church of Christ

our 9am Fri. public "Conversation" (you, Lydia Velico*, Carl Rasmussen, & I)

*the UCC ecumenical-relations officer

You may be aware that you shocked many of us by including in "sound teaching" (which you characterized accurately & affirmed faithfully with theological competence) ~~same-sex~~ "marriage"--which is condemned, as violating a natural & biblical-theological order of creation, by eminent biblical scholars (e.g., Gagnon), Christian ethicists (e.g., UCC's Max Stackhouse), theologians (e.g., UCC's Fackre), & religious sociologists (e.g., Don Browning, editor of the U.Chicago 25-volume set on the family).

On a PBS:TV panel, I convinced the VT lawyers who were presenting the same-sex "marriage" case to that state's legislature, that they'd have a chance of passage if they re-worded their case for gay rights: "union," might float; undermining the civil & natural & religious foundations of society by redefining "marriage" wouldn't float. They won; but the MA gay lobby, encouraged by that success (but also by my warning), decided to go for broke, bypassing the legislature. Tragically, they won. MACUCC's Nancy Taylor publicly applauded & is reported to have "married" a gay couple.

When 15 of us (including Stackhouse, Fackre, & I) confronted Nancy & her staff, her defense centered in the affirmation that "they were hurting." She seemed to have no awareness of the issue! Have you? During the "Conversation," you may be asked in the circle or from the floor.

As you know, one criterion of faithfulness to the Lord is "sound teaching" within "the mind of the church" (semper ubique ab omnibus, what's believed "by all [us Christians] always & everywhere"). Same-sex "marriage" is a doctrine taught by none of us ever anywhere [except by an infinitesimal minority now pushing the West's "excessive accomodation" to its current sexual libertinism]]. Your personal-public support for this provincialism must, in my opinion, be the outstanding instance, during your UCC presidency, of "excessive accomodation" to contemporary North American culture.

BUT I'd be sad if our "Conversation" bogged down in this hot-button issue. The task we four will be given is to reflect on the WHOLE Colloquy in light of its title. But because of your eminence in the UCC, you're apt to get a question like this: *On hot-button issues, how can judicatory & national church-offices both TEACH (which aims, through balanced presentation, to lead clergy & laity toward their own decision-making, with consequent bottom-up & side-to-side influence) & ADVOCATE (top-down, pushing decisions made by the small sliver of a national church's membership that is, circularly, made partisan by denominational propaganda)?*

PHOTERIC ANALOGY:

Teaching is a PRISM, destroying the unity of light. An 18th-c. invention, but anticipated by the rainbow ("God gave Noah the rainbow sign, no more water...."). As polarizing, voting in church assemblies is "excessive accomodation" to the political model, subversive of the educational model. And of course the media, both secular & religious, are primarily interested in the yes/no value of political action.

Advocating is a LENS, as a burning-glass concentrating light to ignite-destroy (as a weapon, first used [by the Greeks] at the Battle of Salamis [480 BC/BCE] to destroy the sails of invading Persian ships). At Craigville, you've pleaded for an increase in church authority; but in advocating wild ideas such as same-sex "marriage," you further decrease church-authority, eroding the people's trust in your sanity, frightening pastors who fear being pressured into saying whether they'll "marry" same-sex couples--as churches are being pressured to become "open and affirming": the UCC lists two levels of churches, viz. first-class (O&A) & second-class (the others).

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I'm more sympathetic with your situation than the above note would suggest. My decade in the national UCC offices (UCBHM) gave me personal experience of "the culture of offices."