Where Shall We Go From Here?


The most serious criticism which could be leveled at the UUA’s Report of the Committee on Goals is that the committee failed to see the mission of Unitarian Universalism as being anything more than the establishment of more and more churches. After two years of study and the expenditure of ten thousand plus dollars, the committee concluded that the long range theological and sociological goals of the religious liberal movement could be summed up by the word growth. Its meager list of recommendations were all concerned with assuring the Association that it will be able to call 500,000 white, middle class, well educated, technically trained suburbanites its own by 1980, providing, of course, the UUA does exactly what the Goals Committee suggests. Absent from the report was even an outline of a program of how the UUA might creatively use its funds and resource pool of talent to meet and try to heal some of the wounds of an ailing society. Absent was any vision which could have enabled us to look to goals which transcend the exclusivistic, self-contented, self-congratulatory style of life which permeates our churches. Absent was any sense of what it means in this revolutionary age to be churches in the world responsible to the world’s renewal and betterment. This was the Report’s gravest sin and the source of its irrelevance.

When asked to express my views about the future of the Unitarian Christian Fellowship, I could not help thinking about such an assignment except against the total absence of significant mission which characterizes our denomination. The UCF, it seems to me, possesses a golden opportunity in this period of denominational myopia. The UCF could, if it would, become the radical “underground church” in the Association. It could, if it would, by explicating the concept of Christ as God’s man for others, bear witness to a faith which takes seriously its responsibilities to the world. It could if it would make clear the implications of such a concept for the establishment of a free but genuine servant church in our midst. It could if it would hold high the vision of a church flexible enough to shape and reshape its structures around the moving and varied shapes of mankind’s needs. It could, if it would, become a small example to those individuals and churches in our Association who understand the mission of the church to be more than growth figures, budget evaluations, and the creation of happy suburban ashrams for sophisticated sectarian minds. The UCF could if it would exhibit what it means for an institution in our denomination to take as its mission Christ’s command that it become the gracious neighbor to a needful humanity.

Now in order not to be misunderstood let me make it clear that I am not suggesting that the UCF become a miniature UU Service Committee. What I am suggesting is that it develop a worship life, and educational life, a community life established around the dual concept of
gathering regularly to celebrate what we believe God is doing to reconcile our world and of scattering to do what is required of us to make this world of ours a more liveable and human place. Granted many of us would stand on the fringe of such an organization. We would participate in its worship and corporate life only when able; but still it could stand for us as an example of a form which a true servant church might take. Thus I am suggesting that the UCF become more than a loosely knit association of individuals who gather yearly to celebrate past glories and frustrations. I’m suggesting that it adopt some of the structures of a church, not a residential church to be sure, but rather a church of dedicated persons who are committed to performing specific tasks for the renewal and reconstruction of their world and who come together to celebrate that fact and learn from one another.

The UCF could do such things, I believe, if it only would. But to do so, it must stop concerning itself with such rearguard and fruitless battles as the humanist-theist controversy. It must give up its own concern for growth, with hearalding itself to the outside world, with enlarging its political power base within the Association, with making the denomination “Christian “ and respectable. It must ends its reactionary tendencies, that is, its almost unfailing negative response to anything the UUA does. Instead let it do the things it can do best. Let it do the careful theological analysis which apparently the UUA is incapable of doing and discern what it means in our day to be a church in and for the world. Let it select those tasks by which it can demonstrate its style of operation as a group willing to let the world’s need determine its structure, as a group concerned more with healing and redeeming the life about it than it is with its own self-aggrandizement and self-perpetuation .

What the UCF is called to do in these critical times is to become radical for the first time in its existence, to rethink its priorities, to align itself with those groups outside the UUA who have a vision of the church as mission, to sell its headquarters building and use the money received plus its annual dues to sustain the religious life of those Unitarian Christians who are working to alleviate some of the pain of our common life, and who need to gather, reflect upon, clarify and celebrate with one another what it means to heed Christ’s call to become servants in the affairs of men.