

James Freeman Clarke: Lecture One

In his history, The Unitarians and the Universalists, David Robinson asserts that James Freeman Clarke (1810-1888) was “one of the most important churchmen in nineteenth century Unitarianism and may be thought of as the most representative figure among the Unitarian clergy and leadership.” (Robinson, 1985, p. 234)

Until age 10, he received his education from his grandfather, James Freeman, minister of Boston’s Kings Chapel, and from there it was on to Boston Latin School, Harvard College and Harvard Divinity School. His first pastorate was in Louisville (1833-1840). While there he married Anna Huidekoper of Meadville, Pennsylvania. They were to have four children, one of whom, Herman died in childhood. In 1841 he went on to Boston where he founded the Church of the Disciples which he served until his death in 1888, except for a three-year period of convalescence (1850-1853) spent in Meadville, Pennsylvania, where he served as an associate minister and taught at Meadville Theological School.

As we shall see in the course of these lectures, Clarke was an active participant in a number of the social/political movements of his time—anti-slavery, women’s suffrage, temperance, prison reform, poverty relief, and civil service reform, among many others. He served for a number of years as an adjunct professor at Harvard Divinity School, as a member of the Harvard Board of Overseers, and as a member of the State Board of Education. He was also very active in the American Unitarian Association, serving on its board of directors, as editor of the denominational paper and as general secretary. He was a moving force in the establishment of the Unitarian National Conference of Unitarian Churches in 1865. A prolific and popular author, he published 32 books and contributed more than 1,000 articles to numerous periodicals over his career. From 1873 until his death in 1888, his sermons appeared weekly in the Boston Saturday Evening Gazette, the city’s only Sunday newspaper. More than 500 of his sermons appeared in that venue.

Likely, Clarke was the most read Unitarian minister of his age. Many of his books went through several editions. For instance, the twenty-third edition of his volume, Self Culture, was published in 1898. Why one so prominent in our history is so little known today has long been a mystery to me, and so I am pleased to have the opportunity on the occasion of the bicentennial of Clarke’s birth, to present this series of Minns lectures in order to acquaint Unitarian Universalists with an important and inspiring aspect of their legacy. This evening I begin with an overview of his theology, which I have labeled, “Practical Transcendentalism.”

In 1886 Clarke published a series of essays under the title of *Vexed Questions in Theology*. The lead essay, “The Five Points of Calvinism and the Five Points of the New Theology,” contained the five points of Unitarianism for which he is principally remembered. Clarke begins the essay by naming the five points of Calvinism—“Absolute Decrees, Atonement

by Christ for the Elect only, Original Sin, Effectual Calling, and the Perseverance of Saints.” (page 9)

Revolving around the ideas of sin and salvation, these doctrines omit, claimed Clarke, the principle truths Jesus taught—“love to God, love to man, forgiveness of enemies, purity of heart and life, faith, hope, peace, resignation, temperance, and goodness.” (p.9). Truer to Jesus’ teaching are the five new points he suggests: the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the leadership of Jesus, salvation by character, and the continuity of human development in all worlds, or the progress of mankind onward and upward forever. These five points, which Clarke hoped would become the basis for a universal religion encapsulate what he had preached and written in his 43 year ministerial career and thus are very good way of presenting his underlying theology and then relating them to contemporary Unitarian Universalism.

Fatherhood of God

Jesus teaching of God as father pervades the gospels, claimed Clarke. “We find it already in the Sermon on the Mount, which tells us that we are to let our light shine, not to glorify ourselves, but to glorify our Father in heaven; that we are to love our enemies, that we may be like our heavenly Father, who loves his enemies, and makes his sun rise on the evil and the good. Jesus tells us that, when we pray, we are to pray to our Father, not to infinite power or abstract justice or far-off sovereignty. We are to forgive others because our Father in heaven forgives us. We are not to be anxious, remembering that our heavenly father feeds the little birds of the air” P.10)

This revelation of God’s loving and forgiving fatherhood has come to us through the teaching of Jesus as recorded in the Christian Scriptures. A general revelation of God has been available to those who have not had the benefit of this special revelation by means of the intuitive powers of the human mind. Clarke found these intuitive powers referenced in Matthew 25, Romans 2, and Acts 17 and they are part of his point of view as a self-proclaimed transcendentalist: “I am a transcendentalist . I do not believe that man’s senses tell him all he knows. ... “all his knowledge begins *with* sensible experience, but all does not come *from* sense experience.” He knows cause and effect, phenomenon and substance, right and wrong, the infinite and the eternal, his own identity, his power of free choice. These ideas are divinely created within him, divinely rooted in the very texture of his reason” (Essentials, 6)

Clarke engaged in an extensive study of world religions for more than twenty-five years before publishing two volumes on the subject entitled Ten Great Religions, the first appearing in 1871, and the second in 1883. They proved very popular and went through several editions. The treatment of non-Christian religions was sympathetic, as it was Clarke's belief that all people are given enough revelation of God in all religions for salvation. ___Such sympathetic treatment and a desire for genuine understanding by a Christian minister was novel, to say the least.

However, when all was said and done, Clarke envisioned Christianity as supplying the deficiencies of other religions. Brahmanism (Hinduism) is an eminently spiritual religion whose writings fill the soul with a sense of divine presence but it is deficient on the human side in that its caste system constitutes a denial of human brotherhood and has been the source of oppression.

Buddhism, as a revolt against this inhumanity, has everywhere taught loving kindness to all, but is deficient in its teaching of that which is Infinite and Eternal.

Islam taught sovereignty of God and represented him as Infinite Will. This, however, has not left sufficient room for human freedom.

Christianity, he claimed, has the positive aspects of these religions and has been able to correct all of the deficiencies. "Thus Christianity has shown itself as a fullness, a pleroma, or to use the modern phrase, an all-sidedness which marks it for still larger catholicity hereafter." I(Ten Religions II, 363)

Clarke believed that the Christian teaching of the loving and forgiving fatherhood of God, would eventually, over time, lead to the establishment of Christianity as a universal, world-wide faith. Clarke was ambivalent about the traditional proofs (cosmological, teleological, ontological, moral), believing that they show the high probability of God's existence and may help those who are spiritually blind find more spiritual light (Steps of Belief, pp. 29ff). It is "only by communion with God, speaking to him, receiving his answer and beholding his face in righteousness, do we become at last as sure of the real presence of God as we are of the reality of the world (Clarke, Steps of Belief, pp. 50-51)

Clarke accepted the orthodox Christian belief in God as being "almighty, omnipresent and omniscient," and that he is "essentially love, and that he loves all his creatures, both bad and good." (Manual of Unitarian Belief, p. 3). God is a unity, as opposed to the doctrine of the Trinity which Clarke believed to be scripturally and philosophically incorrect. God is experienced in different ways as Creator, savior and sustaining presence but this is in reference to one being and not to three different personalities.

God strictly enforces his law in time and eternity but like a good human father, he punishes only to educate and takes no pleasure in it.

Though it is beyond our comprehension as to why, God allows sin and evil to enter the world because he is able to bring good into existence from the darkest of all materials. An example of this is seen in Clarke's sermon looking back at the Civil War in which God used the evil of the Fugitive Slave Law to galvanize public opinion in the North against slavery.

The death of his nine-year-old son Herman from scarlet fever was a test of this faith. He and his wife, Anna, knew there was only one source of comfort—that the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh Away, Blessed be the Name of the Lord. They had loved Herman, but God had loved him as well and taken him back to live with him. (Bolster thesis, 324)

Brotherhood of Man 2

If all people are children of God it follows that they are all related as brothers and sisters and are placed on earth for an important end. Therefore, Clarke contended “we must call no man common or unclean, look down upon none, despise none, but respect in all that essential goodness which God has put into the soul, and which he means to be at last unfolded into perfection.”(Vexed Questions, p. 11)

\ from the doctrine of the brotherhood of man proceeds, says Clarke, all the charities. “This doctrine is already the source of missions, philanthropies, reforms, and all efforts to seek and save those who are surrounded by evil. It leads men to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, to teach the blind, to soothe the madness of delirium, to diffuse knowledge and carry glad tidings to the poor. And this doctrine when fully believed, will be the source of purer moralities and nobler charities” Vexed, pp. 11-12)

Such work constituted one of the core functions in Clarke's congregation—The Church of the Disciples. Clarke, along with his congregation, “participated in movements for the abolition of slavery,, and capital punishment’ and the support of temperance, peace. Women's suffrage, high moral standards in government, protective labor unions, and public education. Along with his church he worked to bring about better living conditions for the poor of Boston, particularly children, aged African Americans, and prisoners. In addition, he strongly supported the Sanitary Commission during the Civil War.” (Hayes, 382).

One of Clarke's most impassioned sermons was delivered on June 4, 1854, after the rendition of Antshony Burns, a black man to a slave owner under the Fugitive Slave Law. The Boston community was outraged and large crowds of people voiced their displeasure as he was marched through the streets of Boston to a ship to be taken away. (Bolster, 236).

Clarke decried as unconstitutional the decision of the United States Commissioner Edward Greeley Loring to return Burns to the South, claiming that the due process was not followed in that the Constitution states that in “suits of common law where the value of the controversy shall exceed \$20,000 the right of a trial by jury shall be preserved.” Burns was a free citizen of the state of

Massachusetts before he came before the magistrate and by means of a piece of paper brought from the south was bound over into servitude. There was not jury trial to ascertain the truth of the claim.

Clarke claimed that no citizen in Massachusetts was safe from this unconstitutional exercise of power by an officer of the federal government.,

Clarke called shame upon the Unitarians that such a thing could have happened in Boston, though it is doubtful that they could have done much about it. He called upon the Commissioner to resign and for those in his congregation to support only those for any public office who were in favor of the real of the Fugitive Salve Law, the right of trial by jury for fugitive slaves if the entire law was not repealed, the exclusion of slavery from the territories, the admission of no more slave states, and the abolition of the Union if these cannot be obtained. It is important to note that Clarke later changed his mind on this last demand. (The Rendition of Anthony Burns: Its Causes and Consequences, A discourse on Christian Politics, Williams Hall, Boston, June 4, 1854.

In sermons in 1872 entitled *The Crusade against the Chinese* and in 1878, entitled "The Brotherhood of Man", he criticized the exclusion of Chinese immigration. Both of these sermons gained wider circulation by being reprinted in the *Boston Saturday Evening Gazette*. (Bolster theses, 569.)

The Leadership of Jesus

Clarke always contended that the simple definition of a Christian is one who takes Jesus as his guide in religion, and who goes directly to his teachings for religious truth." (Vexed, P. 12)

For the most part, however, in church history, the test of Christian fellowship has not been assent to Jesus' teaching but rather to some creed about him. Such creeds, instead of uniting the Church, have divided it into endless sects and parties. Clarke was assured that Jesus was not God, but rather a 'created being, finite and not infinite and therefore below the supreme Being in his nature and person>" (Manual , 5). Though Clarke believed that the historic Christian creeds were in error when they spoke of God the Son, he believed that New Testament authors were correct in referring to Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus , himself, felt this relationship to God as father.

Clarke saw a unity in the four gospels and the epistles of Paul regarding the leadership of Jesus: First, he shared with us the" laws of moral consequences in human life. Examples: 'Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.' 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' ' It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "With what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged.' 'Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit.' 'The tree is known by its fruit.' In all these passages Jesus is stating the working of everlasting laws." Manual 8-9).

Secondly he stressed the importance of the spirit of religious law over strict legalism. An example is his statement that the "Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath." He himself healed the sick on the Sabbath and walked with his disciples and picked grain in the fields on that day. (The Mind of Christ, 2 in JFC p. 183 of JFC 2)

Third, he taught and demonstrated a deep reverence for God and for all people: "He saw a divine goodness in all men and in all things. So he had respect, not only for the great men and the prophets, but for the poor, the low, the despised. This is the foundation of true democracy; the only basis for any real equality." (254, Self Culture)

Finally he taught and demonstrated God's forgiveness and this represents Jesus work of atonement, or the at-one-ment or reconciliation of God and people when they are truly penitent for their sins. 'The classic illustration of this is Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, which shows that all man needs to do is to repent and turn back to God, to find that He has never stopped loving him and will receive him back with great rejoicing. (Clarke, "Atonement," loc cit in Hayes 274_ This theory of the atonement might be called a psychological one. People feel guilty for their sin. Jesus assures them that if they are truly penitent and want to start a new course, they may begin with a clean slate. Jesus did not die to meet the angry demands of God's justice. In fact, Clarke suggested that if Jesus had been accepted as Messiah and not been crucified, humankind would have been saved hundreds of years of travail. (Hayes 274?)

Clarke believed in the general reliability of the gospel accounts of Jesus, including the miracles, though not all of them. Some of them he chalks up to superstition such as asking someone to catch a fish and find within the fish a coin with which to pay taxes. He also believed that the miracle story of the feeding of the five thousand is explained by the fact that Jesus encouraged generosity among the crowd and those who had food shared with those who did not. (Deacon Herbert's Bible Class).

Rather than being violations of natural law, Clarke believed that Jesus' miracles were the expressions of a hitherto unknown spiritual force modifying the action of the known laws which govern matter. That physical law should obey the force of soul is incredible only when we regard outward nature as a machine, and its forces as unspiritual and dead" (Clarke, 1859, pp. 19-20).

Also, he discounts those stories which are not in accord with the overwhelming nature of his teachings: "When Jesus is said to curse the fig tree or to teach everlasting suffering, or to admit the power of Satan over the soul, this must not be allowed to interfere with the plain, constant and essential character of the gospel. We need not trouble ourselves about this or that passage if we once have caught the spirit of the Great teacher." JFC 2, p. 183

Regarding Jesus' resurrection, Clarke believed that it was not a unique occurrence but was the working of a higher law operating at the time of death of all persons: "The only exceptional fact in the

resurrection of Jesus was that he was able to appear to his disciples, and thus to show them the truth of his immortality and theirs. But why should it be thought impossible or incredible that God, in the order of his providence, which causes all the dead to rise, should allow it to be sometimes seen and known that they rise? (Hayes 393).

He believed those with widely varying beliefs about the person of Jesus should still be considered Christian and be extended the fellowship of the church. Jesus himself said "Whoever wills to do the will of God, the same is my brother and sister and mother>" (Transfiguration of Life, p. 123).

Clarke believed in Jesus as an ever-present personal friend, an inner revitalizing power within. (The Hour Which Now Cometh and Is, pp. 269ff, in Hayes, 298).

Salvation By Character

Clarke claimed that "salvation means the highest peace and joy of which the soul is capable. It means heaven here and heaven hereafter, This salvation has been explained as something outside of us,--some outward gift, some outward condition, place or circumstance. We speak of going to heaven, as if we could be made happy solely by being put in a happy place. But the true heaven, the only heaven which Jesus knew, is a state of the soul. It is inward goodness. It is Christ found within. It is the love of God in the heart, going out into the life and character." Vexed 17),

Orthodoxy and Unitarianism agree, he claimed, that the first step in salvation is repentance which comes when one is convinced by conscience to change one's sinful ways. The next step involves faith in Christ and this is where a difference is noted. "What is meant by this faith?, Clarke, asks "Is it any belief about his rank and power in the universe, such as the Greek theologians quarreled about for three centuries? Is it any metaphysical speculation as to the precise way in which the death of Jesus made it possible for God to forgive sin? Is it any profession of faith, or verbal declaration,--as though merely saying something about Jesus was to save the soul? No. The saving faith in Jesus Christ is to believe as he believed, trust in God as he trusted, hope as he hoped, and love as he loved." Essentials, 113. Essentially, claimed Clarke, salvation is an on- going process by which one's character becomes more and more like Jesus.

Clarke agrees with the orthodox that this process of salvation may begin as a sudden experience involving a great commotion of the soul, but he also believes that it may begin almost imperceptibly. "May it not begin in the earliest childhood, be increased gradually by Christian education, and thus grow by a slow but continuous process of evolution and development into its full power and efficacy?" (Essentials, 113)

Clarke believed that this was his situation, having grown up under the influence of his saintly grandfather, and devout parents. He never went through a painful conversion experience. (Seventieth

birthday celebration). Clarke's ideas were very close to the ideas on Christian nurture developed by congregation theologian Horace Bushnell.

"Is it not possible, it is asked that some of the moral disasters which have befallen leading men in the church are owing to the false security which such men have felt in consequence of this theory that Christianity consists essentially in being converted, not in leading an upright life? (Essentials, 120).

Clarke was concerned that Unitarians, with their stress on the moral law, had almost left out entirely the positive, joyful experience of salvation.

"Hence a Unitarian congregation usually consists of intelligent, virtuous, well-meaning people, but destitute of enthusiasm, and with little confidence in the new birth or religious life. Unitarians believe in obedience as the one thing needful; and in this they were right. But they are wrong in not expecting the influences which God is always ready to give, which change the heart, and fill it with peace passing understanding, which makes duties easy, which fill life with joy, and take the sting from death. (Orthodoxy, p. 186)

Clarke gives as an example of this propensity Ezra Stiles Gannet Channing's successor at Federal Street Church. In a memorial tribute he praises him for his moral seriousness but thinks he overdid his sense of moral duty.. He never seemed to forgive in himself what he willingly forgave in others. He went mourning all his days because he could not attain his own lofty ideal of duty. He was only contented when he could be making sacrifices, renouncing comfort, giving up something to some one else, denying himself and taking up his cross.... I do not think he ever quite saw that side of the Gospel which brings pardon and peace to the soul, and makes us feel as safe in the love of God as the little child feels safe, sleeping in its small crib by the side of its mother. (Memorial, 191-192).

Or The Progress of Mankind Onward and Upward Forever

The theme of progress was at the heart of Clarke's way at looking at the world, both in the spiritual realm and in the physical realm, in this life and in the life to come. Clarke credited Christianity for the material progress wrought by the scientific invention which had brought a better standard of living to the masses. Likewise, schools, colleges, and libraries which have meant so much for the progress of humankind have been established by the Church.

Clarke thought that the belief that Jesus was going to return to earth and bring in the Kingdom of God through some great apocalyptic event was based on a misunderstanding of New Testament Greek. It was not "the end of the world" which New Testament writers alluded to, but rather, more accurately, "the end of the age." It was their contemporary or Mosaic age which was to come to an end to be succeeded by the Messianic Age. "Christ has come, is coming and will come

more and more. From the hour of his resurrection, he began to come as king over the hearts and souls of men, and every age has made the brightness of Christianity more divine.” (The Ideas of the Apostle Paul, p. 364) It was the case that the Apostle Paul and others in the early church at first looked for a physical coming of Jesus , but Paul later disavowed this physical coming and spoke of being already risen with him, experiencing *within*, the hope of glory. The Ideas of Paul, p. 365(

A second way in which Jesus returns are those points in history in which societies take a decisive turn. “Thus has Christ come from age to age, and in the midst of apparent failure, increasing error, growing unbelief, and all the forms of human wickedness, has acquired new power over the human mind. At the present day he is more the King of the world than ever.” (Orthodoxy, p. 336.) This represents Jesus judgment. It is not some judicial proceeding at the end of the world but takes place every time Jesus confronts an individual soul or a particular situation of evil in human society. His coming results in some larger vision of truth and justice

In a series of lectures sponsored by the American Unitarian Association, which he delivered at the Music Hall, in Boston during the winter of 1877, Clarke expresses this coming of Jesus in very dramatic terms. I quote him at length. “When Christendom is lifted up to a higher Christianity, it will draw all men unto it. When the Christian world grows more pure, upright, noble generous, then the fullness of the Gentiles will come in. The great evils and wrongs which now oppress humanity will melt under the influence of this Christian love, as the icebergs from the pole dissolve in the warm currents from tropic seas. The time will come at last—long foretold by prophet and sibyl, long retarded by belief and formalism—when wars shall cease, and the reign of just laws take the place of force in the great federation of mankind. As soon as the church is at peace with itself and becomes one, it will be able to make the world also one. Christ will at last become in reality the Prince of Peace, putting an end to war between nations, war between classes in society, war between criminals and the State. In trade, instead of competition we shall have co-operation, and all industry will receive its just recompense. Capital will be reconciled to labor; science to religion; reason to faith; liberty to order; the conservatism which loves the stable past to the spirit of progress which forgets what is behind and reaches out to that which is before. This will be the coming of Jesus in the clouds of heaven with the angels of God, and the spirits of the just made perfect. (Essentials, 100-102)

Clarke believed that his wonderful age would someday come but it would not come without human effort. We have mentioned many of the areas of social reform in which he was an indefatigable worker. His involvement post-Civil-War politics is particularly interesting. Clarke was deeply concerned about corruption in business and government during that period. The political corruption in the South under the Johnson administration was followed by nationwide corruption in the Grant Administration. “The nation,” Clarke wrote in 1877, “Saved by blood, purified by fire, is not to be ruined by pickpockets.” (Bolster thesis, 579) To deal with corruption universal public education was an imperative in order to provide people a sound basis for political discernment Another important deterrent he hoped and worked for was women’s suffrage which he believed would have a purifying influence on government practice. (Bolster theses, 581-582.)

In addition to preaching and writing on these issues, he became personally involved in politics. He was elected as a delegate to the Republican state convention in 1873 and to the Republican national convention in 1876. He played a significant role in the election of Cleveland to the presidency in 1884. After his foray into partisan politics he remained concerned about public issues for the rest of his life, preaching about them and having his sermons published in the Boston Saturday Evening Gazette. He was particularly concerned about labor and management unrest. Though a firm supporter of capitalism, he believed that labors' grievances about worker safety and low wages were well taken, and that they should be allowed to form unions and strike as a last resort. He was not in favor, however, of picketing which prevented those from working who desired to do so and he believed that disobedience to the law, as was the case in the Haymarket bombing in Chicago in 1886 was indefensible. (Bolster Thesis, 605, "Public Sentiment Which Cannot be Suppressed" A sermon preached April 8, 1886, and in the Boston Saturday Evening Gazette, LXXIV, #17 (April 25, 1886).

An additional aspect of his thought regarding progress was related to individual immortality. In his book Everyday Religion he writes: "No doubt it is interesting to speculate on the nature of a future state; but I doubt if there is much religious profit therein. I do not think it was intended that we should think much about death or the hereafter while we are here. God has separated the future life from this by an impenetrable veil, to show that he means us, while we are here, to think of this world, not of that one." (Everyday Religion (p. 192)

An examination of a good number of his sermons, however, shows that he was not too faithful in following his own advice. He speculated a good deal about the afterlife. He was assured that in the life to come "there will be beauty for the eye and ear; problems for the intellect to investigate; work to do, full of utility; society, intercourse, affection; the power of progress, the sight of goodness and greatness above us to aspire to and reverence. There will be enough to know, enough to do, and enough to love." (Essentials, 145) Along with St. Paul he postulates that in the life to come people will have spiritual bodies which will be "more powerful, more glorious, incorruptible," and capable of "much keener penetration into nature, fuller communication with other minds." (Essentials, 148)

Orthodox religion of his day declared that at death, an eternal destiny was permanently assigned to everyone—either heaven or hell. Clarke didn't view heaven and hell as places. Rather, he viewed them as states of the soul experienced both in this life and the life to come. One enters into heavenly existence when one is true to God's laws and communes with Him, is filled with an altruistic love and translates that love into benevolent action. Hell is a state of rebellion against God and his law of love> He described this state of hell as being "willful, hard, selfish, stubborn; willfulness instead of energy, stupid prejudice instead of insight, hard selfishness instead of generosity. From a mean, cold, cruel soul hell is radiated; the blackness of darkness goes out from it." (Everyday Religion, p. 370).

God punishes this behavior in this life and the life to come. It is important to note that such punishment is remedial and not vindictive. It is meted out in terms of the moral laws in which the world operates—"right-doing tends to moral health, peace, and spiritual growth; wrong-doing to moral disease and suffering." (Manual of Unitarian Belief, p. 60.

After death, a person whose soul is in a state of hell will have the opportunity to repent and begin to experience heaven. Clarke believed that death will likely serve as a wake-up call for many people in need of repentance. Clarke believed that ultimately all souls will be saved. He quotes Philippians 2:10-11 that the time will come when every knee will bow and every voice proclaim Jesus as King. (Orthodoxy, p. 368) Everlasting punishment simply is not consonant with God's love. Clarke felt that ultimately no soul will be able to resist this love. (Orthodoxy, pp. 386ff) Hayes. 418.

Analysis of Theology

Practical

Aware that transcendentalism was sometimes considered to be principally a theoretical, speculative, exercise. Clarke wanted to be known as a practical transcendentalist.

"We often hear it asserted that a notion may be "true in theory but false in practice." I, for one, esteem practice. I trace all real knowledge to experience. I care for no theories, no systems, no generalizations, which do not spring from life and return to it again. I feel perhaps undue contempt for the vague abstractions we often listen to, idle figments of an idle brain, speculations with no basis of sharp observation beneath them."

Julia Ward Howe who, at different times, was a parishioner of both Parker and Clarke had this to say on the subject:--- "The same divine fire, zeal and earnestness were in both of these men....Parker did much to pull down a sham church, a false and formal Christianity. Mr. Clarke did much toward the building of a true church and the vindication of a genuine Christianity...

When I think of what Mr. Parker wanted to do for women, and what Mr. Clarke did for them, I feel still more how the doing of the one supplemented the willing of the other. 54 (Colville, 49)

His principal life work was wrapped up in the development of the Church of the Disciples which was dedicated to the study and practice of Christianity, and his lifetime motto, coming from Goethe and Carlyle was "Do your nearest duty." He was also fond of the biblical admonition: "Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might."

This dedication to a life of practical religion informed and motivated by spiritual underpinnings is most appealing and a worthy standard for contemporary Unitarian Universalists.

Broad and Conciliatory

These five points of Clarke's theology are very broad and he was looked upon as a conciliatory figure within Unitarianism. His attempt to bridge doctrinal fissures within Unitarianism was evident in his keynote sermon to the first meeting of the National Conference of Unitarian and Other Christian Churches on April 4, 1865.

“This is a convention of Unitarians; and we accept as Unitarian Christians all who claim that name. We do not make ourselves responsible for each other’s opinions. Probably we differ very widely from each other in many points of belief. The question is, “Can we be united together in Christian work? We can work with Atheists in the Sanitary Commission, to help the wounded and dying. We can work with Deists in the Temperance Society, to save our brethren from ruin and despair. We can work with slaveholders and defenders of slavery in the hospitals, with Roman Catholics in the Freedman’s Aid Society, with Calvinists on the school committees. We do not compromise our faith in Theism, Christianity, Anti-slavery, Protestantism, or Unitarianism by so doing. And so if some of our brethren here are Naturalists; if they disbelieve miracles; if they carry their criticism on the New Testament farther than I do; so long as we have work to do in which we agree, we can cordially unite. So long as they wish to bring men to God by the teaching and life of Jesus, let us be glad to cooperate, and not be afraid of compromising ourselves thereby. (Hale, 1891, pp. 265-266)

The sticking issue with the radical free religionists was that the proposed constitution of the National Conference recognized members of the conference as ‘disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.’ This language was too narrowly Christian for them and by a number of parliamentary moves in succeeding meetings they attempted to delete Christian references and have the body be known as the “National Conference of Unitarian and Independent Churches.” The most Clarke would accede to was the change of the name to “Unitarian and Other Christian Churches.” He believed that the words of the constitution regarding the “Lord Jesus Christ” should be retained, but at the same time he was in favor of an amendment stating that the document was only an expression of the opinion of the majority and not binding on those objecting, and that all who wished to work for the advancement of the Kingdom of God be welcomed into the fellowship- of the National Conference. This was too broad a basis for the conservatives, and so no change was made.

All in all, Clarke believed that Unitarianism should be committed to the Christian tradition in its formal statement of purpose, but that those wishing to work in common purpose with the denomination not be required to be so committed. His willingness to be open to the theological positions of others was truly remarkable. He wrote: “ I like to be a Unitarian, not because I agree with Unitarians in all things, but because I do not. I am glad to be in a church with those who differ from me. It makes it more interesting. You would not like to talk with those only who thought just as you did yourself, would you? Besides, if I am right, and they wrong, I wish to be with them in order to convert them; if they are right and I am wrong, I wish to be with them so that they can convert me. (Hayes, 22)

His vision for Harvard Divinity School involved a faculty composed of representatives from all of the major denominations. Students would thus have the benefit of being exposed to several traditions and

Contemporary Unitarian Universalists of many different theological stripes can find something amenable among the many strands of Clarke’s thought. Those of a mystical bent will be cheered by his

honoring of intuitive experience . Those in agreement with his traditional theism may find his way of dealing with the problem of evil satisfactory. Others, following the lead of such Unitarian Universalist process theologians as Charles Hartshorne and James Luther Adams, who deny God's the omnipotence as a mistake, see God, rather, as a persuader who lures the world forward toward greater intensity of experience and greater harmony. God as a lure toward progress is very much consonant with Clarke's theology. Those of a humanist bent will be impressed with the confidence Clarke had in human powers to affect human destiny positively. Those of a Christian persuasion will find him a first rate exponent of Unitarian Christianity who had a great knowledge of and love for the Christian Scriptures. Those drawing upon the wisdom of non-Christian traditions will be pleased with the honor and significance He encouraged members of the Free Religion Association who had distanced themselves from Unitarian Christianity to reconsider the person of Jesus in a Christianity shorn of its unscriptural and irrational elements to the same degree that they looked for insights from other of the world's religions.

It seems to me that the genius of Unitarian Universalism has been its ability to accommodate wide diversity within a commitment to core principles. Our current Purposes and Principles are an example of this. We have seven basic principles drawn from six differing religious traditions James Freeman Clarke was a very significant exponent of this approach. I sometimes wonder how he would respond to those contemporary Unitarian Universalists who do not identify themselves as Christian. I think he would respond much the same as he did to the controversy within the AUA when a self-described Free Religionist Rev. William T Potter wanted to be retained in the Unitarian Yearbook even though he didn't consider himself a Christian. Clarke thought he should be retained because he was doing Christian work even if he didn't call it that. Our first two Unitarian Universalist Principles—The Inherent Worth and Dignity of every person and justice, equity and compassion in human relations he believed to be Jesus core principles. So I believe he would consider that in following these principles we would be doing Christian work.

The Rational and the Intuitive

Clarke answered the doubts of many regarding the rational credibility of Christianity by asserting the spiritual inspiration instead of the plenary (full) infallibility of the Scriptures, God's unity rather than any formula leading to tritheism, Jesus as a revelation of God's moral nature rather than his being God incarnate, and Jesus' death as being a moral atonement rather than a vicarious sacrifice. His underlying method was a rational interpretation of the Scriptures by which he refuted what he felt to be unsubstantiated aspects of Calvinism such as total depravity, predestination, and everlasting punishment. He believed Unitarians had a particular ministry to those usually called skeptics: "{Unitarianism} is to reach the outsiders, the infidels, the heretics, the unchurched body who have been driven into unbelief by the mistakes of Christians. Everywhere there are thousands of persons who are opposing the Bible, the churches, and Christianity because Christians have set before them systems of

belief which the reason and the conscience are unable to accept. (Hayes, 26, (James Freeman Clarke, "What For?" Christian Register LXIII (January 17, 1884), 38)

In his Manual of Unitarian Belief he wrote: " Liberal Christianity, or freedom of religion, does not mean liberty to believe what we choose, but freedom to seek the truth anywhere, everywhere, and always.... Rational Christianity does not mean that we are to reject all beliefs which do not now seem to be reasonable, or to make reason the only source of truth. But it means that we are to test every belief by the light of reason, and seek to understand clearly what we think and why we think it." (Manual of Unitarian Belief, p.12) By the use of the word reason here, Clarke clearly means logical analysis.

That foregoing phrase "or to make reason the only source of truth," suggests the possibility of one or more other sources of truth. We know that one of these is intuitive religious experience. To get further understanding of Clarke's certainly of the revelatory nature of his experience of God I've consulted the work of Unitarian Universalist theologian Thandeka who has written a good deal about one of Clarke's favorite theologians, Friedrich Schleiermacher. In fact Clarke believed that he and Channing were the foremost seers of the age. According to Thandeka, "Schleiermacher tried to bring religion back to its emotional senses by making the foundation of his new theological system a neurological fact of consciousness:" Affekt.

The rational theology of Kant (among others) made Reason the organizing principle of religious experience. Left out of this rational, Enlightenment scheme of religion were human feelings of joy, regeneration, and celebration as foundational affective material for religious life and thought. Schleiermacher retrieved these feelings through his doctrine of human affections, which can also be called the foundational level of his doctrine of the human soul."

She goes on to assert that the initial affect gives rise to a pious feeling (frommigkeit) which is interpreted differently according to one's culture. For Christians a common feeling is one of redemption wrought by Jesus.

"All pious feelings are thus, for Schleiermacher, culturally determined. Their affective ground, however is not culturally determined. It involves

"Affect, in Schleiermacher's theological system, became bedrock for faith. Affect, however, was not a faith state per se. It was the neurological foundation of a faith state, i.e. the neurophysical material organized into a pious affection. Schleiermacher thus turned modern liberal theology into a rational study of human affect piously determined, expressed, and organized. But he assigned the investigation of the neural foundation of this foundational theological reference to ethics, psychology, and aesthetics." It may be noted here that Clarke was intrigued by Phrenology which claimed to be a study of the various parts or "organs" in the brain. There was an organ, for instance of reverence and one of hope giving people a sense of immortality.

Thandeka goes on to claim that neuroscience involving the study of the human brain has given insight to the phenomenon to which Schleiermacher was calling attention. She references the work of a researcher by the name of Jaak Panskepp, but I would like to look at the work of two researchers on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania: Andrew Newberg, and Eugene D'Aquili .

In their book Why God Won't Go Away, 2001, they report on their study of eight Tibetan Buddhist and several Franciscan Nuns, in which they plotted the brain activity of their subjects at the height of their meditative or prayer state. What they noticed is that a portion of the brain in the posterior superior parietal lobe which they have dubbed, "the orientation association area or OOA>" (4) undergoes significant change. The primary function of this portion of the brain "is to orient the individual in physical space, drawing a sharp distinction between the individual and everything else

During baseline scans of the brains of their subjects this area of the brain showed furious activity. At the height of the meditative or prayer state, this area underwent a dramatic reduction in activity level. The researchers wondered how the brain would react to this lack of activity. "Would the orientation area interpret its failure to find the borderline between the self and the outside world to mean that such a distinction doesn't exist? In that case, the brain would have no choice but to perceive that the self is endless and intimately interwoven with everyone and everything the mind senses. And this perception would feel utterly and unquestionably real." (6) This is exactly how the Buddhists described their peak, meditative moments. The Franciscan nuns at prayer "tended to describe this moment as a tangible sense of the closeness of God and a mingling with him." (7)

"As our study continued, and the data flowed in, Gene and I suspected that we'd uncovered solid evidence that the mystical experiences of our subjects—the altered states of mind they described as the absorption of the self into something larger—were not the result of emotional mistakes or simple wishful thinking, but were associated instead with a series of observable neurological events, which, while unusual, are not outside the range of normal brain function. In other words, mystical experience is biologically, observably, and scientifically real." (7).

p. 146 "All perceptions exist in the mind. The earth beneath your feet, the chair you're sitting in, the book you hold in your hands may all seem unquestionably solid and real, but they are known to you only as secondhand neurological perceptions, as blips and flashes racing along the neural pathways inside your skull. If you were to dismiss spiritual experience as 'mere' neurological activities, you would also have to distrust all of your own brain's perceptions of the material world. On the other hand, if we do trust our perceptions of the physical world, we have no rational reason to declare that spiritual experience is a fiction that is 'only ' in the mind." The sounds very similar to Clarke's statement: that "only by communion with God, speaking to him, receiving his answer talking with him beholding his face in righteousness, do we become at last as sure of the real presence of God as we are of the reality of the world. (Clarke, Steps of Belief. Pp. 50 51). Clarke claims that he had developed his prayer ability through faith and practice. (Self Culture) and Hale 313p. 152

"The realness of the material world, therefore, is made clear to us when we compare it with other states. Since most of us have never experienced a state more real than the one our mind portrays for us every day, we have no reason to suspect that any higher reality exists beyond our subjective awareness of the material world. More important, we have no experimental reason to believe that any higher reality is even possible.

Those who have experienced advanced states of mystical unity, however, claim that these states do feel like a higher reality. Passionately and consistently, with a preponderance of agreement that stretches across history and embraces all faiths, they insist that when compared to our baseline sense of reality, Absolute Unitary Being is more vividly, more convincingly real.” (153) Rational thinkers have had this transcendent awareness –Robert Oppenheimer, Neils Bohr, Carl Jung, John Lilly and Albert Einstein. Einstein had this to say about cosmic religious feeling: It is very difficult to explain this feeling to anyone who is entirely without it, especially as there is no anthropomorphic conception of God corresponding to it. The individual feels the nothingness of human DESIRES AND AIMS AND THE sublimity and marvelous order which reveal themselves both in Nature and in the world of thought. He looks upon individual existence as a sort of prison and wants to experience the universe as a single significant whole. (Newberg, 154)

Yet there is another strain in his thinking which seems to cast doubt on intuition as an entirely reliable source of religious knowledge. In *Steps to Belief* he also suggests “There is no infallible source of Christian knowledge; no outward infallibility possible or desirable. The Bible, human history, the soul itself, Christian experience, reason,--all are sources of Christian knowledge, but none are infallible, nor were meant to be.” (*Steps of belief*, 218) {find the see through glass darkly}. Note here that he suggests “the soul, itself, the intuitive receptor of God’s existence, morality, and immortality,” is not infallible.

In *self Culture*, Clarke hales Channing, Schleiermacher, Emerson and Carlyle for their intuition.

. Of them he says, :They do not argue nor reason, but they simply say what they see. We may not agree with all their conclusions. We may differ greatly from their doctrines. But we are willing for a season to rejoice in that light of which God has made them mediums, a light which reveals to us the vast inward realities of the world of conscience and faith.” (167) If one may rightly differ from their doctrines how valid are their spiritual visions?

Another interesting issue is seen in his contention that the high degree of love God has for the sinner is not revealed through intuition, but is only revealed through the life and teaching of Jesus. How reliable is a spiritual faculty unable to reveal what Clarke believed to be the turning point of human history?

Obviously, Clarke believes that the intuitive insights of non-Christian religions may be in error in reference to the nature of God and morality.

In his work, *Essentials and Non-Essentials in Religion*, He writes: “The light of the intellect is reflected light, therefore we call it reflection; hereafter it will be intuition. From the accuracy of each man’s thought, even the wisest, there are to be made three deductions. We must first correct it for the human equation, since all belief is relative; then we must correct it again for the personal equation, since each man’s idiosyncrasy colors his thought; and finally we must correct it for the aberration produced by progress and development.” (*Essentials*, p. 6)

It seems as if Clarke is merging here the categories of intellectual reflection and intuition and claiming both may be in error.

He contends in many places that conscience is not infallible.

“Many of the worst actions done in the world have been done by honest people, who conscientiously believed that they were doing right. Most persecutors, from the time of Paul down through the Inquisitors, who burned thousands in Spain for some supposed heresy, to the Alvas and Philips, Louis XIV, Bloody Mary and her more bloody father,—these have believed themselves doing God service. The instruction of the conscience is therefore of the utmost importance.” (Self Culture)

It seems that through his whole work Clarke casts a very wide epistemological net to accumulate religious knowledge—nature, the Bible, non-Christian Scriptures, human history, intuitive spiritual experience, and reason all have a place. Interestingly, as noted earlier, he didn’t consider any of them infallible. An important aspect of utilizing all of them was interpersonal dialogue. As we will see in the next lecture his Church of the Disciples was designed to use this to sharpen and improve religious knowledge and practice. No one person, necessarily has the whole picture. We assist each other. He rightly observed that first generation Unitarians tended to neglect personal religious experience in this epistemological mix.

It is interesting to note that in his discussion of other ways to religious knowledge except reason

Progress

Clarke’s whole theology is one of the gradual transformation of human society to a golden age of peace and universal justice. His principal biographer, Arthur Bolster, wrote in 1954, “To our modern taste such an unbounded faith in the eternal process of betterment savors strongly of naiveté and narrowness of viewpoint.” (Bolster , 357). From the standpoint of two world wars, the harrowing Cold War, the holocaust, numerous other instances of genocidal madness, and the rise of terrorism on a grand scale, one may quite naturally be drawn to Bolster’s assessment.

However, it is important to look at Clarke’s experience. In terms of technological progress he had seen the railroad supplant the stagecoach, had experienced a steamship trip to Europe in a mere seven days, and had witnessed the invention of the telegraph enabling instantaneous communication around much of the world. In fact he designated a particular Sunday each year to celebrate the laying of the transatlantic cable. He had been amazed by the telephone, the camera, and the phonograph. He had seen a significant increase in the standard of living of the common person in Boston.

In a sermon given in 1886, later published in the Gazette, he summarized the social progress of his age: “ I have seen great and beneficent change taking place in the world. In Europe since I was young, France has become free; Italy united and freed from Austria and petty tyrants; Germany has become one and independent; Hungary has obtained self-government; England has gone forward with mighty strides in the paths of education, popular progress, and improvement. In this country we have seen a whole race set free from slavery which is one of the miracles of history. We have seen vast progress in general education, the rise of various philanthropies which have brought comfort and help to the blind, the insane, the prisoners; which have begun and are carrying forward movements for temperance, for reform in political action and in social life... James Freeman Clarke, “Nicodemus and Christ” (a sermon) The Boston Saturday Evening Gazette, LXXIV, #16 (April 17, 1886)

In 1919, thirty-one years after Clarke’s death Constitutional Amendments were ratified regarding two issues Clarke had worked so diligently on: Prohibition (18th amendment) and Women’s Suffrage (19th amendment). The creation of a professional civil service continued over the years, greatly reducing the political spoils system with the attendant corruption which he had fought for many years. Significant progress has taken place on virtually all of the social problems he worked on so diligently.

Admittedly, the last 125 years have been hard on the optimism which Clarke shared with so many people, especially religious liberals. The glorious progress towards the kingdom of God he envisioned is not heralded in the same way among Unitarian Universalists today. The capital sin which Clarke inveighed against throughout his career was selfishness. He thought it was a hard sin to overcome, but it was not impossible for people, he believed, were not inherently evil. He strongly disavowed the doctrine of total depravity. The better nature of people could be appealed to, he believed in such a way that moral progress could be made. Sometimes contemporary Unitarian Universalists lose sight of these. Humankind is not always condemned to make selfish choices.

If he were to return today he would be impressed by the fact that we have the capability to provide good water, food, and life saving medicine throughout the world if we have the will to do so. He would encourage us to do so. He would be very impressed with the well-developed social safety net in Europe and would be egging us on to do likewise. He would be impressed with the way congregations from many different traditions are banding together to fight for social progress. In one joint effort for housing and assisting homeless families my congregation is allied with over 20 other congregations--Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, to house homeless families.

We don’t think of a Utopia Clarke envisioned but we tend to think more of incremental progress. The recent significant step our country took toward universal health care is something he would applaud.

Clarke, though, he had a glorious grand picture of where we were heading he also counseled commitment to incremental progress. In the area of international relationships, I am sure that he would be pleased at the successes it has had. He would applaud the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and that several of its provisions have been codified in international treaties which are creating a body of enforceable international law.

I think he would be pleased that Unitarian Universalists have included world religions in our sources section of our Purposes and Principles from which we draw our seven principles. We don't have the hope that those of other faiths will realize that they will find fullness in Christianity. This would represent a religious imperialism which would not be generally felt appropriate.

In 1877, Clarke wrote "I have been told that I am too much of an Optimist, that I am too hopeful, see things too much on the bright side, do not recognize enough the evils, failures, moral disasters, spiritual tragedies of human life. It may be that my temperament is too sanguine, and that in reading the gospel I love to dwell more on its hopes and promises than on its threats and warnings. But let us consider this a little and ask, "which is the truest and wisest view of life, that which hopes or that which desponds."

"The animal lives in the present moment only. The child lives in the present moment chiefly. The man returns to the past and dwells there, penetrates the future and lingers there, lives in memory, lives in fancy. The first stage of being is to live only or chiefly in the present; the second stage is to live in the past or the future. But the highest condition is to come back once more to the present but on a higher plane; to bring the past and future together in every moment; to live now, fed with all the resources of history and prophecy. The present moment is the element of real life; but this life is to be enriched by memory and by hope, by experience and by expectation. (203-204, "Now is the Accepted Time" in Everyday Religion"

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