

Pluralism a condition or system in which two or more states, groups, principles, sources of authority, etc., coexist.

Last week I spoke a little about the Edict of Torda a decree issued in 1568, which established pluralism - revolutionary for its time. In the 1500s you could be killed for differing religious beliefs. The Edict of Torday was one of the first decrees establishing religious freedom in Western Christendom. In the history of our religious family it is one of the stories that sets the stage for our rollicking eclectic religious community.

The edict of Torda helped moved the argument forward from Roman Catholic against the protesters or Protestants toward a place where there was more acceptances.

I don't think the protestant reformation was really about establishing pluralism. If you look back into the history most of the time when one of the protestant upstarts got to be in charge they were usually as dictatorial as their predecessors if not more so. The Puritans, our direct

theological ancestors, came here not to establish religious freedom but to establish a state where they would be free to pursue their religious beliefs and practices and exclude others

Kenneth Davis wrote: "But the Puritan fathers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony did not countenance tolerance of opposing religious views. Their "city upon a hill" was a theocracy that brooked no dissent, religious or political. The most famous dissidents within the Puritan community, Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson, were banished following disagreements over theology and policy. From Puritan Boston's earliest days, Catholics ("Papists") were anathema and were banned from the colonies, along with other non-Puritans. Four Quakers were hanged in Boston between 1659 and 1661 for persistently returning to the city to stand up for their beliefs." Read more: <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/americas-true-history-of-religious-tolerance-61312684/#tZvPsuAZPOu1392M.99>

But the New World was huge and there were opportunities here and adventures to be found and clearly a lot of space for folks of different

beliefs to co-exist without bumping into each other too much. And so more people came to the New World to find their way, their fortune, to establish their utopian societies, to develop their new religious beliefs.

Davis continues, "In newly independent America, there was a crazy quilt of state laws regarding religion. In Massachusetts, only Christians were allowed to hold public office, and Catholics were allowed to do so only after renouncing papal authority. In 1777, New York State's constitution banned Catholics from public office (and would do so until 1806). In Maryland, Catholics had full civil rights, but Jews did not. Delaware required an oath affirming belief in the Trinity. Several states, including Massachusetts and South Carolina, had official, state-supported churches.

In 1779, as Virginia's governor, Thomas Jefferson had drafted a bill that guaranteed legal equality for citizens of all religions—including those of no religion—in the state. It was around then that Jefferson famously wrote, "But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg." Read more: <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/americas-true-history-of-religious->

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The Edict of Torda was written in a revolutionary time. Our country was established in and born of revolutions and I think we are living through another revolutionary time. Communication is changing - who controls information is changing. Interactions between groups who may not have formerly had interactions is increasing. There is a democratization of access to knowledge. I think we UUs have something to say to the larger world around us.

We have been doing this eclectic heterogeneous community for a while. Not always well mind you. A few weeks ago I mentioned the white controversy over the black empowerment movement in the UUA. But we have been working at it.

UUism holds an attraction to liberal leaning, inclusive, standing on the side of love kind of folk.

Many years ago Rosemary Bray McNatt, now the president of Starr King seminary was contacted about the possibility of her writing the biography of Coretta Scott King. Dr. Bray McNatt had several conversations with Coretta Scott King. In their conversations Dr. Bray McNatt, mentioned that she was in seminary to become a UU minister and I quote her description of Coretta Scott King's reply:

"Oh, I went to Unitarian churches for years, even before I met Martin," she told me, explaining that she had been, since college, a member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, which was popular among Unitarians and Universalists. "And Martin and I went to Unitarian churches when we were in Boston."

What surprised and saddened me most was what she said next. Though I am paraphrasing, the gist of it was this: "We gave a lot of thought to becoming Unitarian at one time, but Martin and I realized we could never build a mass movement of black people if we were Unitarian."

We UUs like to claim folks as some of ours when they are not. And we sometimes hold MLK up as if he was one of our own. There is a very important and famous lecture given each year at General Assembly, our national meeting or our denomination, the Ware lecture. And Martin Luther King did give that lecture in 1966. But even though his activism fit in with us he was not a card-carrying member.

But simply because he was not a signed on member of a UU congregation does not mean that we cannot move his dream forward - we can. Remember these great words of his “I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” We can move that dream forward. Our 3rd principle is a profound expression of pluralism

We UUs who have been struggling with how to accept one another, how to encourage spiritual growth in our congregations have learned a bit about how that is done. Like the couple in the story I told earlier we have learned that communication goes along way to creating a culture of accepting one

another.

Listening - it is that easy - it is that difficult. Communicating it is that easy it is that difficult. We will not change this world overnight but we can affect a change where we are now. We can take our values out into the world and own them as UU values. We are not simply solid good nice people we are that way in part because we are UUs who gather together and think about, talk about, practice what it means to be covenanted, what it means to be in relationship, what it means to struggle to respect one another even when we disagree heartily.

MLK also said “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” And what else are we known for but challenge and controversy - let’s show the world how to do that in love and respect.

Standing on the side of love t-shirts all those folks showing up at

different demonstrations living out what our founding mothers and fathers wanted - a society where there was freedom of expression have helped to move public discourse forward.

Edict of Torda was the Standing on the Side of Love of its time. It was revolutionary then and love is revolutionary now. But we have to show up to stand up and let folks know it is about love not about right or wrong not about good or bad, not about winning or losing.

I thought a bit about what MLK might be speaking about now if he were alive. I thought about what he might be standing for - and I found myself thinking that MLK would agree with us UU's I found myself thinking that he would agree with all the things I hold dear. And I was reminded of this quote attributed to several authors God created man in his own image. And man, being a gentleman, returned the favor. And I wondered if I wasn't doing something similar.

So instead of using my own words and wondering what MLK might say

today let us end with his words - his concluding paragraph of his 1966 Ware lecture

Let me say in conclusion that I have not despaired of the future. I believe firmly that we can solve this problem. I know that there are still difficult days ahead. And they are days of glorious opportunity. Our goal for America is freedom. Abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny is tied up with America's. Before the Pilgrim Fathers landed at Plymouth, we were here. Before Jefferson etched across the pages of history the words that I just quoted from the Declaration of Independence, we were here. Before the beautiful words of the Star Spangled Banner were written, we were here. For more than two centuries our forbearers labored here without wages. They made cotton king. They built the homes of their masters in the midst of the most oppressive and humiliating conditions. And yet out of a bottomless vitality they continued to grow and develop. If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery couldn't stop us, the opposition that we now face will surely fail. We're going to win our freedom because both the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of the almighty God are embodied

in our echoing demands. And we can sing We Shall Overcome, because somehow we know the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice. We shall overcome because Carlyle is right—"no lie can live forever." We shall overcome because William Cullen Bryant is right—"truth crushed, will rise again." ... With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. We will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood, and speed up that day when all of God's children all over our nation and the world will be able to walk the earth as brothers and sisters, and then we can sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual—"Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty we are free at last."

In a world without end may it be so.