

WHO ARE THE UU CHRISTIANS?

Some gather for worship around a Communion Table, with all the pomp and pageantry of the Episcopalians. Others meet, not in churches, but in living rooms for discussion and Bible study.

Some belong to white-steepled first parish churches on New England town greens where ancient Puritan covenants are faithfully recited every Sunday, where the Lord's Prayer is a standard part of worship, and where *"of course Unitarians are Christians!"*

Others belong to churches where the Bible is seldom read, no cross is evident, and the congregation proudly emphasized its differences from orthodox Christianity.

Some could join in saying the Apostles' Creed in an ecumenical worship service, and others are more comfortable expressing their Christianity in a peace march or working in a shelter for battered women. Many would do both.

What these members of the Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship have in common is their conviction that one can be both a Unitarian Universalist and a Christian, both thoroughly modern and faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, many would say it was precisely within Unitarian Universalism that they became Christians. Within the theological freedom of our churches, they found the *"space"* to become Christians at their own rates. Within the historic faiths of Unitarianism and Universalism, they found the expression of a creative, vibrant, and believable liberal Christianity. Within the liberal churches' tradition of social action, they sought and found a theological basis and a personal inspiration rooted in the ministry of Jesus.

Perhaps most importantly, they found within Unitarian Universalism a religious home where their questions were not viewed with suspicion and their doubts were accepted. For many, here at last was a place to grow in faith!

In the rich theological diversity of liberal Christianity, four broad categories, or emphases, can be identified.

Classical UU Christians

Finding the dogmatism of rigid orthodoxy to be unacceptable, and the emptiness of pure secularism (or *"trendy liberalism"*) to be unsatisfying, these UUs affirm the liberal Christianity of classical Unitarianism and classical Universalism.

Theirs is a low-keyed Christianity that focuses on the human life and ethical teachings of Jesus. They see doctrines such as the Trinity and the Atonement as unnecessary, perhaps prefer to speak of *"christenings"* rather than *"baptisms,"* and view communion as a quiet memorial of the life of Jesus. The Bible, interpreted with reason and modern scholarship, provides the myths and symbols and stories that enable them to speak of God and to instill moral values.

Believing that theirs is *"the religion of Jesus, not the religion about Jesus,"* they see the Galilean as a great teacher and the exemplar of a life of love to God and love to humankind. In the words of one layperson: *"Jesus is the leader you don't adore, but can't ignore."*

To be a Christian, they might say, is *"to follow Jesus."*

Catholic Christians

Catholic, or Ecumenical, Christians are attracted to a broad and inclusive Christianity that transcends old denominational differences and seeks out the best from all of Christian history. They are informed by both Protestant dissent and Catholic tradition. With Ignatius of Antioch, they believe *"where Christ is, there is the universal church."*

Theologically, they affirm the unity of God who is revealed in the Christ-event, in the person of Jesus Christ and in the believing reception of the Church. Liturgically, they are nourished by the sacraments, the psalms, the proclamation of the gospel (and are now rediscovering the value of the lectionary), and the

great prayers and hymns and anthems of the Church. They are interested in personal disciplines of prayer and spiritual growth.

Believing that our Unitarian Universalism provides a theological freedom afforded in few other churches, they participate in ecumenical dialogue, feel the brokenness of Christ's Church, and affirm the common discipleship shared by all Christians.

To be a Christian, they might say, is *"to be part of the Body of Christ."*

Liberation Christians

Finding in Christianity a radical call for the liberation of the oppressed, these Unitarian Universalist Christians emphasize the prophetic and ethical demands of the Gospel.

Christ was *"the one for others,"* and the Church is the community of discipleship called to help heal the brokenness of the world. Whether the issue is urban ministry or international ministry, poverty or human liberation, the Spirit is present to ensure, empower, embarrass, and challenge; to demand a world better than it is now envisioned by the Crucified Christ.

To be a Christian, they might say, is *"to do the work of Christ."*

Borrowing trinitarian terminology, these three might be summarized as three unitarianisms.

The Classical UU Christians have a kind of *"unitarianism of the Father,"* seeing the divine as a transcendent Creator. God is real, but somewhat distant.

The Catholic Christians have a kind of *"unitarianism of the Son,"* believing God is known in Christ and his Church.

The Liberation Christians have a kind of *"unitarianism of the Spirit,"* seeing God in the empowering work of the Holy Spirit which is found not only, not even primarily, in the Church, but in the world — urging, pulling, and dragging us to the redeemed life.

And all three are universalists, believing that God loves us, all of us. Nor would they deny that God's love is revealed in many other religions. As one minister put it, God is like the light which shines through cathedral stained-glass windows: we cannot see the light itself, but only as it come through the various windows; and UU Christians affirm that they do, indeed, see God through the Christian window.

Questioning Christians

Finally, there is a fourth category of UU Christians — those who are drawn to Christianity, attracted to the figure of Jesus, but are uncertain of what it all means or how to reconcile Christian faith with the assumptions and the skepticism of a modern secular world.

In a sense, we are all questioning Christians, all moving theologically, and that is why we are Unitarian Universalist: the freedom from creed, hierarchy and set liturgies gives us both the room to explore and the necessity of creating our own faith.

If it all seems terribly chaotic and unorganized, I would suggest it is nevertheless a logical result of Puritan congregational polity and Unitarian creedlessness.

If it seems wonderfully rich and creative, I suggest it is the result of the diversity of God's spiritual gifts.

There are Unitarian Universalist Christians — and we invite you to join us in the great adventure of faith.

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(THIS ARTICLE CAN BE FOUND ON THE UU CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP WEBSITE:
<http://www.uuchristian.org/>)