

Forcing Change

Understanding Religious Universalism *By Carl Teichrib*

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Prelude

The process of globalization reaches far beyond the realm of economics. As a total system, one that incorporates political and social elements, this world shift is being propelled by a multitude of historical and philosophical drivers. In this context, religion finds itself front-and-centre in the quest for a new international paradigm.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the philosophical re-orientation towards religious universalism – the

idea that all religions and faiths are simply divergent paths ultimately leading to the same end goal. Controversial Catholic theologian, Hans Küng, advocated this position in his Preface to the book, *The Meaning of Other Faiths*, "...after intra-Protestant and intra-Catholic ecumenism we have irrevocably reached the third ecumenical dimension, the ecumenism of the world religions!"¹

Marcus Braybrooke, President of the World Congress of Faiths, reflected on how religion might be altered in a global culture.

"My hope – though certainly not the hope of all in the interfaith movement – remains that dialogue will eventually bring convergence or, at least, that theology will become an inter-religious discipline or 'global theology'...a sharing of the Spirit. Only such sharing will make possible the recovery of those spiritual values which offer hope to a world that is in agony."²



If a world theology or religious “convergence” is part of the globalization process, can we see foreshadows of this change today?

The answer may be found in a growing, socially accepted trend: Religious universalism.

The purpose of this report is threefold:

- 1) To demonstrate that such a shift in thinking is now underway.
- 2) To explore some of the historical drivers that’s propelled religious universalism.
- 3) To contemplate the cultural response that may occur through the acceptance of universalism as a social standard, and to review some paradoxes in the position.

It Doesn’t Matter

“It doesn’t matter if you’re a Christian, or a Buddhist, or a Muslim, or a Jew,” so assured a gentleman with whom I’d been having conversations. He paused for effect, “Everybody’s the same. All religions are pathways to God.”

This wasn’t the first time I’d encountered religious universalism, but it was one of the most troubling personal examples, as the individual courting this philosophy was a self-confessed Christian. In retrospect, this encounter shouldn’t have been a surprise. Many self-professing Christians are rapidly assimilating religious universalism.

Jonathan Cooper, the website manager for the Art Gallery of New South Wales, writes of a similar brush with a post-Christian pluralist. “Recently, a friend surprised me by saying that she no longer identified herself as a ‘Christian.’ She still prayed, she said, but no longer held the belief that there was only ‘one path to God’.”³

And in a September 2007 *MotherJones* blog discussion, one contributor expressed what many Christians now profess. “I am a Christian, but I believe that there are many paths to God. I get tired of other people of my faith telling me that it is the ‘only way’...”⁴

There is no question that the religious-cultural/historical Christian context of the Western world is under serious strain. Spiritual pluralism, another term that denotes religious universalism, has woven itself into

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the fabric of what was once recognized as a predominantly Christian-based society. Hence, confusion seems to reign in pulpits and pews alike.

In 2002, the Barna Group conducted research polls on American Christians – those who claimed to hold specific Christian beliefs according to the survey questions – in the attempt to learn where this demographic stood theologically. Barna found that, “nine out of ten adults own at least one Bible and eight out of ten consider themselves to be Christian, but you’d never know it from the smorgasbord of religious beliefs professed by most people...”⁵

Commenting on the inconsistencies encountered, the Barna report noted,

“If the patterns underlying these views seem inherently contradictory that may be at least partially explained by people’s willingness to draw from a variety of conflicting theological sources. This is perhaps most clearly evident through the finding that a plurality of adults (44%) contends that, ‘the Bible, the Koran and the Book of Mormon are all different expressions of the same spiritual truths.’ Just 38% of Americans reject that idea. The only population segments at odds with this view are those who are 57 or older (35% accept the notion, 36% reject it, the remaining 29% are not sure); evangelicals (10% agree with the statement, 84% disagree); non-evangelical born again Christians

(40% agree, 45% disagree), and adherents of Protestant churches (39% agree, 47% disagree).”⁶

Furthermore, in the 2005 book, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, it was revealed that sixty percent of America’s youth hold to some pluralistic/universalistic notion of religion, such as “All religions are equally true,” or “All religions share the same vision of truth underneath.”⁷

In other words: sixty-percent of tomorrow’s leaders embrace universalism today. This statistic demonstrates that our world is poised on the edge of an enormous social, religious, and cultural transformation.

Exemplify the importance of this shift from the perspective of an advocate, Ebrahim Patel, the founder of the Chicago-based Interfaith Youth Core recently asserted, “We believe that if you want peace in the 21st century, you have to build religious pluralism. And if you want religious pluralism, you have to empower young people to be the vanguard.”⁸

Ironically, while religious universalism is being embraced by American teens and professing Western Christians, young people born into Hindu families are finding this concept logically inconsistent.

Dr. Frank Morales, an expert on Asian philosophies and an ordained Hindu priest, wrote of a common complaint he’s encountered when visiting with Hindu parents.

“We raised our son/daughter to be a good Hindu. We took them to the temple for important holidays. We even sent him/her to a Hindu camp for a weekend when they were 13. Now at the age of 23, our child has left Hinduism and converted to the (fill in the blank) religion. When we ask how could they have left the religion of their family, the answer that they throw back in our face is ‘but mama/dada, you always taught us that all religions are the same, and that it doesn’t really matter how a person worships God. So what does it matter if we’ve followed your advice and switched to another religion?’”⁹

Digging for Roots

For North America, Europe, and the Western-oriented nations of Oceania, the phenomenon of religious universalism appears to stem from the counterculture

movement of the late 1960s and early ‘70s. It was during that time when society’s status quo was in upset, challenged by a generation openly revolting against traditional norms and standards.

Spiritually speaking, this era was the dawning of the modern New Age Movement, which helped set the course for today’s postmodernist thinking. [Postmodernism is defined as a cultural course that rejects Western values and conventional parameters, and accepts relativism, pluralism, and interdependence].

And yet, the roots of Western religious pluralism lie much deeper. Indeed, the foundations of today’s postmodernist/universal mindset can be traced back to a variety of philosophical/social factors dating hundreds of years. However, for this article we will only review four noteworthy cultural drivers, and we’ll examine them in a timeframe that’s relevant to our modern world.

Freemasonry:

Freemasonry is known as the largest, oldest, and most prominent secretive society in the Western world. At one time in North America, Masonic Lodges could



be found in every city and in almost every small town or village. Its members have played significant roles in all major structural aspects of the United States – from the country’s constitution to its educational system,

from its military and intelligence communities, to its judicial, pastoral, and presidential offices. Europe too, has been enormously impacted by the role and work of Freemasonry, as has other parts of the globe. Millions upon millions of men have sought the Light of the Lodge, and have been shaped by the Order's rites and rituals.

For many of us in the twenty-first century, a time when the authority of the Lodge wanes in comparison to the growth of other cultural drivers, it's difficult to fully appreciate just how far-reaching the Lodge was to the larger community fabric. But the marks left on society are unmistakable, and universalism is one such mark.

In 1871, the Supreme Council of the Southern Jurisdiction of the United States, the highest Masonic body in the US, published the work of its most esteemed leader, former Confederate Brig. General, Albert Pike.

"It [Freemasonry] reverences all the great reformers. It sees in Moses, the Lawgiver of the Jews, in Confucius and Zoroaster, in Jesus of Nazareth, and in the Arabian Iconoclast, Great Teachers of Morality, and Eminent Reformers, if no more: and allows every brother of the Order to assign to each such higher and even Divine Character as his Creed and Truth require.

Thus Masonry disbelieves no truth, and teaches unbelief in no creed..."¹⁰

Pike further described the Lodge as a place where "the Christian, the Hebrew, the Moslim, the Brahmin, the followers of Confucius and Zoroaster, can assemble as brethren and unite in prayer to the one God who is above all the Baalim..."¹¹

Over the years, other Masonic philosophers have advocated this universalism as the ultimate religious/philosophical expression. Manly P. Hall, arguably one of the greatest Masons of the twentieth-century, wrote in his book *The Lost Keys of Freemasonry*,

"The true Mason is not creed-bound. He realizes with the diving illumination of his lodge that as a Mason his religion must be universal: Christ, Buddha or Mohammed, the name means little, for he recognizes the light and not the bearer. He worships at every shrine, bows before every altar, whether in temple, mosque or cathedral, realizing with his truer

understanding the oneness of all spiritual truth...all religions are but one story told in divers ways for peoples whose ideals differ but whose great purpose is in harmony with Masonic ideals...No true Mason can be narrow, for his Lodge is the divine expression of all broadness."¹²



General Albert Pike

And as the Masonic Service Association tells us in its report, *Universality of Freemasonry*, the Order is meant to unite men "in a peaceful brotherhood based upon the common bond of worship of the one God of us all."¹³

None of this would have much meaning if the Lodge's influence on culture and community in the 19th and 20th centuries were relegated to that of a mere sideshow. But that's not the case. In North America alone, hundreds of thousands, if not millions of church-going men have knelt before the altar of Freemasonry – including large numbers of pastors, church elders, deacons, and Sunday school teachers.

Did these men understand the religious universalism underlying the Lodge? Most probably didn't, and today it could be claimed that a large number of its members are still relatively ignorant of this aspect. After all, the majority of Masons see the Lodge as little more than a social fraternity, and rarely explore the depths of esoteric philosophy found in its rituals and teachings. On the other side, Masonic leaders have categorically stated that the organization conceals this deeper knowledge from its members, until the time when the individual is prepared to understand and accept these "higher truths."¹⁴

Expanding on this religious-ignorance facet, Manly P. Hall explains,

“Yet if the so-called secrets of Freemasonry were shouted from the housetops, the Fraternity would be absolutely safe; for certain spiritual qualities are necessary before the real Masonic secrets can be understood by the brethren themselves.”¹⁵

“In fact, there are actually blocs among the brethren who would divorce Masonry from both philosophy and religion at all cost. If, however, we search the writings of eminent Masons, we find a unanimity of viewpoint, namely, that Masonry is a religious and philosophical body.”¹⁶

There can be little doubt that this “religious and philosophical” component, which places universalism at its centre, has been a subtle yet influential factor in the lives of millions of churchmen and community leaders. Today’s postmodernist, pluralistic social structure owes much to the foundations laid by Freemasonry.

Theosophy:

Few in the general public have heard of Theosophy. Unlike Freemasonry, Theosophy didn’t receive the overall community recognition and credibility that was lavished on the Masonic Lodge. However, its role in promoting universalism is colossal.

Theosophy, which has existed as an organized body since the late 1800’s, blends Eastern religions with Western occultism. Cherry Gilchrist, author of *Theosophy: The Wisdom of the Ages*, explains Theosophy as a “search for wisdom.”

“Theosophy embodies a search for wisdom which had to struggle against the closed religious views of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Other occult and esoteric lines of the time were forging their own paths quietly... Theosophy aimed to fling open the gates to reveal the



H.P. Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society

splendor of universal wisdom, a wisdom buried at the heart of all genuine religious and occult traditions. Out of this broad perspective, a new vision was born, for a new context had to be created to contain and to re-formulate this wisdom. Theosophy helped to open the human mind to universal truths, and to set up a new framework through which they could be understood.”¹⁷

Highlighting its early history and the work of its eccentric and electrifying founder, Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Gilchrist elaborates on the readiness of the Western world to embrace Blavatsky and her teachings.

“If we can think ourselves back to nineteenth-century Europe and America, the limitations on vision that existed becomes very apparent, for materialistic science was gaining the upper hand, and Christianity was in a straight-jacketed phase where believers were not expected to think for themselves, or try to find their own way into the sacred mysteries. Spiritually speaking, Western civilization was gasping for fresh air. Today, we take for granted our access to esoteric and religious studies of all kinds, but this openness owes a lot to the advent of Theosophy. Blavatsky burst like a primal force onto the European scene, and though her teachings came like a howling winter wind to the orthodox, to those eager for new horizons, they blew open a door to other worlds.”¹⁸

Blavatsky taught that all religions originated from the same base source, and that mankind should turn to the ancient, pagan mysteries and Eastern religions in the search for wisdom. Moreover, in the seeker’s quest for truth, esoteric doctrine was interpreted and extracted from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, thus leading the individual to the conclusion that all faiths emanated from a universal Deity. William Q. Judge, another early leader in the movement, was forthright in this universal application; “Theosophy alone, inclusive of all systems and every experience, gives the key, the plan, the doctrine, the truth.”²⁰ Such a statement puts meaning into the Theosophical motto: “There is no religion higher than truth.”

The primary aim of Theosophy, according to Blavatsky, is to “reconcile all religions, sects and nations



Theosophical Seal

under a common system of ethics, based on eternal verities.”²¹ To this end, the Theosophical Society and its various branches have been instrumental in bringing Eastern teachers and gurus to America and Europe. In

fact, Theosophical leaders were instrumental in bring about the “spiritual renaissance of Buddhism and Hinduism” in the West during the early twentieth century.²²

Lodges of Theosophy were also established in England, Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. In Germany, Theosophical teachings played a role in developing esoteric Nazi ideology, including the concept of Aryanism.²³ And in India, where the Theosophical Society set up its world headquarters in Madras, the society spawned hundreds of Theosophical schools for young children. Today the movement is still active, with branches and sub-groups engaged in global interfaith work and even international politics, such as the advocacy efforts of Lucis Trust/World Goodwill at the United Nations.²⁴

As was previously stated: Theosophy is relatively unknown to the public, however, its influence is undeniable. Gilchrist reminds us of the considerable achievements that this search for “truth” has wrought on the Western world,

“Though its origins lie in the nineteenth century, the theosophical perspective has much in common with that of the New Age, and, it can fairly be said, it is the impetus of Theosophy that has enabled the whole New Age movement to come into being.”²⁵

“Theosophy has already achieved a great deal in bringing the teachings of Buddhism and Indian philosophy to the West, and of opening the European mind to the idea that no one religion or system has a monopoly on the truth.”²⁶

Unitarian Universalist:

Small in number and comparatively new as a religion,²⁷ the Unitarian Universalist (UU) is an organized church that allows believers of all spiritual backgrounds to unite in the search for universal wisdom. As to its geographical scope, the UU religion is almost exclusively found in the United States, with over 1000 congregations scattered across the country. Unitarian Universalist churches do exist in other nations, but they are typically undersized and isolated in respect to the American UU landscape.

Although the Unitarian Universalist movement was built on the backs of two Christian-heresy congregations, the Universalist church (which believed in universal salvation), and the Unitarian faith (which rejected the Trinity and doctrine of sin), today’s UU holds to no creeds, dogmas, or doctrines. Essentially,



**Banner in a St. Petersburg Florida
Unitarian Universalist Church**

the Unitarian Universalist faith creates a “positive belief” space for people of all religions to gather and worship in tolerance, with the goal of bringing peace to the family of man.

With this vision of unity-in-diversity, and UU presents itself as a model for human harmony and progress, seeing the church as a synthesis of various belief systems and “spiritual journeys.” According to a 1997 regional survey, members of UU held to the following belief systems: Humanist (54%), Agnostic (33%), Earth-centred (31%), Atheist (18%), Buddhist (16.5%), and Pagan and Christian both registering 13.1%.

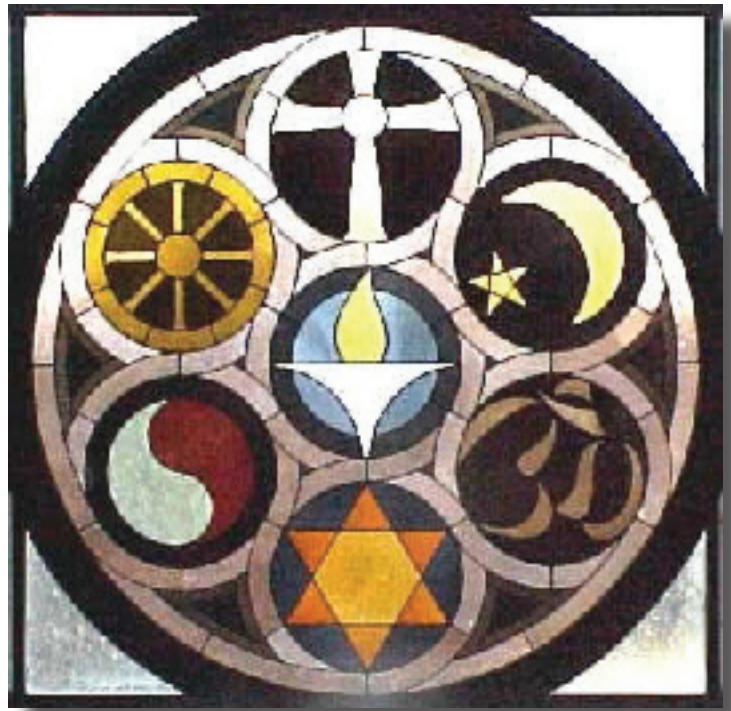
James Casebolt, the Ohio University scholar who conducted the survey, commented “That the typical respondent felt the need to circle three or four terms to describe his or her theological views.”²⁸

This openness to all spiritual expressions allows the UU worshiper to see each religion as holding an element of truth, and for the UU church to act as a catalyst for pluralistic development. Writing on the Unitarian system one year before it merged with the Universalist denomination, author Jack Mendelsohn brings this inter-religious dimension into focus.

“It is very attractive for us to think of ourselves as a bridge for the world’s many religions. After all, we have no special myths to defend, no creeds to enforce. We are open to all that is ethically best in the world’s religions, and through freedom, reason, and tolerance we feel prepared to touch each of the great faiths and draw together their moral fervor.”²⁹

However, the Unitarian Universalist seeks an even greater prize: To “affirm the oneness of the universe, the oneness of the human family, the oneness of discovered and discoverable truth, the universal validity of free inquiry, and the dawn of universal man.”³⁰

Logically, in order for this “universal man” to rise, religious pluralism must develop into a political and cultural standard. And herein lies the crux. Unlike Freemasonry with its influence factored through a more acceptable community relationship, and unlike Theosophy which gave footing to Eastern religions in the West and birthed the New Age Movement, the Unitarian contribution to religious universalism lies in another arena: social activism.



If Unitarian Universalists have left their mark anywhere, it’s in the realm of trend setting. Historically, the Unitarian congregation has supported abolitionism, the temperance movement, and civil liberties. More recently, the Unitarian Universalist church has endorsed gay, lesbian, and trans-gender lifestyles, and made history by becoming “the first mainline denomination in the U.S. to adopt a position supporting legally recognized marriage between members of the same sex.”³¹

The Unitarian Universalist movement also supports pro-abortion policies, Earth-centric environmental positions, international management solutions for global warming, and the legalization of illicit narcotics, among a host of other liberal social issues.³² Religious pluralism too, has become a type of socio-political rallying point, raising the banner of spiritual tolerance as the public standard while dogmatically denouncing religious fundamentalism.³³

If anything, the Unitarian Universalist’s activism and pluralism is recognized and applauded within progressive-left academic and social justice circles. Consequently, it’s not unusual to find UU study groups on university campuses, and to see the UU philosophy adapted into liberal arts courses. Harvard Divinity School, one of the most prominent graduate schools in the United States, has a long association with the Unitarian religion, and recently appointed a new professorship chair in Unitarian Universalist studies.³⁴

Cult researcher Walter Martin acknowledged the inroads the UU has made within this segment of society: “With its liberal and humanistic attitudes, beliefs, and practices, it is little wonder that it enjoys popularity in liberal America.”³⁵

Even though the Unitarian Universalist church is numerically insignificant, it has played, and continues to play, an important role in changing society’s perception about religion and spirituality.

Bahá’í Faith:

With many more adherents than the Unitarian Universalist movement, and with an unmistakable global approach, the Bahá’í faith must be mentioned as an important contributor to religious universalism.

The Bahá’í religion is a Persian-based faith with Islamic origins, and has since developed into an independent religion with its own special revelations. Compared to the other world religions, the Bahá’í movement is a new comer, tracing itself back to the 1850s and 1860s.

A central tenant of Bahá’ism is the belief that all religions come from a common origin. As an organized faith, it “recognizes the essential oneness of the world’s great religions.”³⁶ *One Country*, the publication of the Bahá’í International Community explained it this way,

“The Bahá’í Faith is able to unite people from such diverse backgrounds because it teaches that there is

only one God, Who has through-out history revealed Himself through a series of divine Messengers – including Abraham, Krishna, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad.”³⁷

This universal religious attribute was also expressed in the 1993 Bahá’í statement to the UN Commission on Human Rights,

“...religious revelation is continuous and progressive and that, from the very beginning of human history, God has periodically sent divine educators to the world to guide mankind. The appearance of these divine educators – Krishna, Buddha, Zoroaster, Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muhammad and, in our own age, the Bab and Baha’u’llah – has signified the founding of a new religion, and yet none of these religions is really new; they are stages in the unfoldment of the same religious truth proceeding from the same God.”³⁸

Like Freemasonry, Theosophy, and the Unitarian Universalist church, the significance of the Bahá’í movement centres on whom it influences. Understanding this aspect requires that we grasp its vision.

The Bahá’í endorsement of religious universalism stems from its teachings concerning a coming one-world system, complete with an international government, a single global currency, and a universal faith.³⁹ Anticipating the day when the world will be peacefully managed through a centralist economic, political, and religious entity – brought about in large part through the work of the Bahá’í community – the Bahá’í consistently have supported international efforts such as the League of Nations. And when the United Nations was established, the Bahá’í embraced this new body as the primary vehicle for global governance. Today, the Bahá’í International Community (BIC) – the religion’s representative to the world community – openly advocates this planetary vision. In the process, the BIC has become one of the most outspoken proponents of an empowered United Nations.

Providing some surface details on the working side of this UN/Bahá’í connection, the BIC writes,

“Bahá’í representatives were present in 1945 in San Francisco at the founding of the United Nations. In 1947, the Bahá’í communities of the United States and



The Bahá’í Temple in Chicago

Canada were recognized by the UN Department of Public Information (DPI). The next year, in 1948, the Bahá'í International Community itself was recognized by the UN DPI as an international non-governmental organization.

In May 1970, the Bahá'í International Community was granted consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), allowing for a greater degree of interaction with the Council and its subsidiary bodies in efforts to promote social and economic development worldwide. In March 1976, the Bahá'í International Community was granted consultative status with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), similarly extending opportunities for interaction with the United Nations to promote the health, education and well-being of children.⁴⁰

Since that time, the Bahá'í has massively expanded its United Nations activities, working closely with UNESCO, the World Health Organization, and the United Nations Environment Programme. BIC personnel also sit on numerous UN-related committees and specialized advocacy groups, giving voice to its vision of a global government and world faith. And over the years, Bahá'í representatives have participated in a host of UN forums, summits, conferences, and working groups – to list them all would take a book in itself.

My first substantial taste of the Bahá'í/UN influence came when I attended the United Nations Millennium Forum in 2000. Opening the event was Techeste Ahderom, the main representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the UN. In fact, Mr. Ahderom was the official co-chair for the Millennium Forum, and behind the scenes BIC was very involved in supporting and maintaining the Forum's Executive Committee.⁴¹

Bahá'í influence at the UN is extensive, especially in the realm of interfaith advocacy. Responding to a BIC co-sponsored, one-day United Nations conference on interfaith cooperation in 2005, Jean Ping, President of the UN General Assembly stated, "It is important that in building our civilizations, we enhance interfaith cooperation among governments, civil society, and the United Nations system."⁴²

Jeffery Huffines, a BIC representative and a member of the Committee of Religious Non-Governmental

Organizations at the UN, was equally forthcoming, "There is a clear recognition at the UN that if religion is part of the problem, it must now be part of the solution."⁴³

And the solution, according to the Bahá'í religion, can only be found through a global, politically acceptable standard of religious pluralism. It's a message that, thanks in large part to the Bahá'í International Community, is being echoed through the corridors of the United Nations.

Freemasonry, Theosophy, Unitarian Universalists, and the Bahá'í community – all have played an historical, and contemporary role in reshaping Western values and attitudes towards religious universalism.

Postmodernism, with its spiritual pluralism, is to a large extent a spin-off of these underlying movements. Today, many Christian pastors, concerned educators, and multitudes of aging Baby Boomers are wondering: what happened to society? How did North America, Europe, and Australia/New Zealand shift so quickly from Christian standards to moral and spiritual confusion? What are the implications for society?

Where the Rubber Meets the Road

Shortly after Christmas, a Canadian elementary school educator told me that the social studies program being used in his school was, essentially, a United Nations curriculum. UN declarations and UN achievements were front-and-centre, and everything seemed to be based on a global outlook, with world citizenship in mind. Part of this social studies program was teaching "religious tolerance" as a fundamental human right.

Being tolerant of others is noble, but the context wasn't in developing altruistic characteristics, it was found in promoting interfaith/universal philosophies.

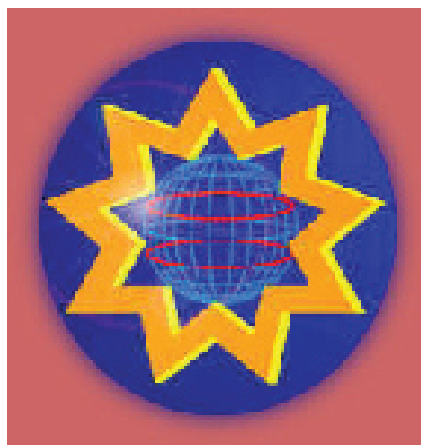
In 1997, I had the opportunity to witness first-hand how religious universalism, under the guise of tolerance, was to be applied in Canada's public schools. As an attendee of the Global Citizenship 2000 Youth Congress, an event sponsored in part by the Canadian government, I watched as educators and school children were led to embrace world citizenship philosophies. And enlightened religious universalism was presented as necessary to the creation of new set of global values.

The keynote speaker for the event was Robert Muller, former UN Assistant Secretary-General. Taking spiritual pluralism to its ultimate end, he told participants, "...we are all cosmic units. This is why religions tell you, you are divine. We are divine energy...it is in your hands whether evolution on this planet continues or not."⁴⁴

The goal of the conference, not surprisingly, was to embed this thinking into Vancouver, BC's educational apparatus, and then across the country through social studies curriculum and other educational venues. (For more on this event, see the March 2007 issue of *Forcing Change*). Canadian youth were to be impacted coast-to-coast, subtly shifting the values of an entire generation.

Looking into the not-so distant future, what does such a society look like? Here's some points to ponder:

- * For Christians who hold to a literal view of the Bible and the claims of Jesus Christ, expressing these convictions would be considered culturally damaging. Claims of religious, exclusive truth could be labelled as a hate crime and legislated against. Churches, para-church organizations, and Christian missions could find themselves cast in a socially negative light, unless their message shifted to reflect the pluralist ethic.
- * Education would be propaganda-based, moving the focus of teaching into the realm of behaviour and belief modification. Already this is a major trend in public education.
- * Open spiritual alternatives would be encouraged, with a resulting upsurge in mysticism, occultism, and pagan practices.
- * Morality in general would decline. Standards of honesty, integrity, and truthfulness could no longer be maintained in a grounded setting. Relativism would rule.
- * Very possibly, a bureaucratic tyranny of "peace" and reverse-tolerance could emerge, filling the vacuum of abandoned reason and truth. Historically, such politicized entrenchment has been observed, with heavy-handed results.



Seeds of all of these potential outcomes already exist, and in many respects the above points don't reflect a future-scenario, but discernible contemporary movements. Realizing how society is embracing religious universalism, the soil it has

grown from, and the bigger picture this presents is imperative to understanding the age in which we live. However, there are problems in the interfaith/pluralistic camp.

Accepting religious universalism raises some logical hurdles. If all "faith traditions" hold validity and radiate truth, then deviant spiritual expressions must also be tolerated. Even the most enlightened pluralist has a hard time swallowing this line.

In 2001, I witness such a quandary while attending an interfaith meeting at a Unitarian Universalist church in Florida. Sitting with a group of UU members during a break, the discussion turned to the ideals of pluralism. One of the participants, obviously perplexed, posed a question; "What do we do with Satanists?"

An interesting dilemma: the position of tolerance-for-all and truth-in-all has to accept the validity of all spiritual experiences and expressions. Therefore, to acknowledge the moral foundations and tenants of only "the great faiths" at the expense of non-mainstream religions is hypocritical, and smacks of exclusivity. To be intellectually and logically consistent, unity in diversity has to accept all-or-nothing. The questioner probed; "What about cults of death?"

I watched in amazement as the conversation went from an "intellectual" position of tolerance, to awkward silence. Nobody responded. Nobody wanted to "speak-up" for Nazism, which had an undeniable metaphysics and mystical application; nobody wanted to speak-up for the Heaven's Gate cult; nobody wanted to be associated with that kind of religion.



The questioner had hit on one of the most glaring logical fallacies of universalism: No matter how often the pluralism mantra is repeated, all religions are not the same.

Another paradox emerges when examining religious universalism. To say that all religions are equal is to say that no religion exists, and that truth likewise cannot be “true.”

This too goes down a predictable road. When humanity rejects God and truth, mankind becomes the proclaimed arbitrator, authorizing new standards and new gods: such as the Earth, Government, Power, and even Man. FC

Endnotes:

¹ Hans Küng, Preface to Willard G. Oxtoby’s book, *The Meaning of Other Faiths* (The Westminster Press, 1983), p.10.

² Marcus Braybrooke, *Faith and Interfaith in a Global Age* (CoNexus Press, 1998), pp.15-16

³ Jonathan Cooper, commenting on “Are all religions essentially the same?” http://staff.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/jcooper/misc/all_religions_same [access January 10, 2008].

⁴ This response was generated after a *MotherJones* blogger posted a short article titled, “African Pentecostal Christians Destroying Ancient African Culture In Nigeria,” on September 5, 2007. www.motherjones.com/mojoblog/archives/2007/09/5389_african_penteco.html

⁵ “Americans Draw Theological Beliefs From Diverse Points of View,” *The Barna Update*, October 8, 2002. This can be accessed at the Barna Group’s website (www.barna.org).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p.74.

⁸ Interfaith Voices, “Religious Pluralism and the Power of Youth:

Eboo Patel’s Big Idea,” <http://interfaithradio.org/node/266> [accessed January 20, 2008].

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Global Banks Embrace Islam

By Pat Wood, editor of *The August Review* (www.augustreview.com)

Note: this article is used with the permission of Pat Wood.

The Bible warns that, “... the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil” (1 Ti. 6:10). So, just when you think you have just about seen it all, something even more shocking turns up. Like this...

Either global bankers are seducing Islamic dictators, or vice versa. Even if they are seducing each other at the same time, the result will be the same: Islamic/Shari’a banking is coming to the United States and other western nations, thanks to global banks such as Citigroup, HSBC, Deutsche Bank, Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs.

With Great Britain now pledging to become the Islamic banking center of the world, the stampede by all global banks to enter the world of Islamic banking is well underway.

Western banking met Islam many decades ago, but only began to sleep with her a few years ago. Since then, it has become a wanton and open affair.

The implications for the west, and especially for the United States, are staggering. Because all Islamic banking products must be created and offered according to strict Shari’a law, global banks are doing for Islam what it could never do on its own: give legitimacy to Shari’a and infiltrate it into the fabric of western society.

What is Islamic Banking?

Simply put, “Islamic banking and finance” creates, sells and services products that are in strict accordance with Shari’a. In the Islamic culture, it is referred to as “Shari’a finance” and covers the practices of banking, investment, bonds, loans, brokerage, etc.

To insure Shari’a compliance, banks must hire Shari’a scholars to review and approve each prod-

uct and practice as “halal”, the Muslim equivalent of kosher in Judaism. Because there is a shortage of such scholars, there is competition between banks to find the best expert to sit on their boards of directors. This provides the highest legitimacy to each ruling because it is made at the director rather management level.

It should be noted that most of these scholars are from the school of radical Wahhabi/Salafi Shari’a in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, holding views diametrically opposed to the basic values of Western civilization.

Shari’a finance has many differences from orthodox banking: Notably, it cannot charge interest (usury) and it calls for alms giving (zakat). It also calls for avoidance of excessive risk and may not be associated in any way with gambling, drinking alcohol, eating pork, etc.

Zakat demands a tithe of 2.5 percent of revenue be donated to Islamic charity. If western banks follow this rule, their contributions will be staggering. It is certain that a portion of this money will end up in the hands of radical Muslims who are sworn to destroy the U.S. and replace its government with Shari’a law.

Shari’a finance is a recent phenomenon. There were very few Islamic banks prior to 1980. However, with the Khomeini revolution in Iran in 1979, Shari’a was summarily imposed throughout Iran and Shari’a finance took off.

The Dark Side of Shari’a

Shari’a is the legal and judicial system of Islam that is brutally imposed on many Islamic countries in the Middle East. It is the specific embodiment of the totalitarian ideology practiced by the Taliban, Iranian Mullahs and Saudi Wahhabis.

Shari’a is perpetuated by claiming to have its roots in the Koran, but in fact it is mostly the product of rulings and dictates made by Islamic scholars and caliphs over several centuries.

For non-Muslims, Shari’a is best known for its medieval, harsh brutality. Many rulings handed down by Shari’a courts have shocked the western world, for instance:

- The December, 2007 “teddy bear” case in Sudan, where a British teacher was sentenced to 40 lashes

and a year in jail for allowing her students to name their teddy bear “Mohammad.” Islamic mobs demonstrated in the streets and called for her execution.

- The November, 2007 case where a 19 year-old gang-rape victim in Saudi Arabia received a sentence of 200 lashes for riding in the car with her rapists.
- In 2006, a 34 year-old mother was forcibly raped and ultimately tried and convicted of adultery, and was ordered to be stoned to death.

Shari’a demands total and unquestioned submission. Its subjects are told that Shari’a is given by Allah and that whatever befalls them (good or bad) is Allah’s will. To question a judgment under Shari’a (right or wrong) is to question Shari’a itself and will only bring harsher punishment. If a person receives harsh punishment for something they didn’t do, the rationale is that Allah could and would have prevented it if that had been his will. This fatalistic and deterministic approach allows Shari’a rulers to get away with virtually any thing that enters their head.

To the average western mind, Shari’a is no more than a medieval, barbaric code that somehow survived to the 21st century. It flies in the face of western law, philosophy, liberty and freedom. However, it is the vehicle used to call for the complete destruction of the west and in particular the United States of America, which then will be replaced by Shari’a dictatorships.

How the Banking Rocket Took Off

At the behest of corporate trade moguls, numerous Free Trade Zones (FTZ’s) were created throughout the Islamic world that were full of windfall conditions.

For instance, the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) is a 110-acre free trade zone that was founded in 2004 in Dubai, UAE. According to the DIFC website, participants will enjoy,

“...zero tax rate on income and profits, 100 per cent foreign ownership, no restrictions on foreign exchange or capital/profit repatriation, operational support and business continuity facilities.”

Not surprisingly, Morgan Stanley’s application was one of the first approved by the Dubai Financial Ser-

vices Authority to operate within the DIFC.

The director-general of the DIFC Authority, Dr. Omar Bin Sulaiman, welcomed Morgan Stanley by stating,

“This is a testimony to our status as an international financial centre of repute. Morgan Stanley is a highly reputed organisation and to have them here at the DIFC is a *vindication of our strategy* to create a world-class financial hub for the region. The opportunity available within the region, along with the state-of-the-art infrastructure and the international regulatory framework of the DIFC, provides the ideal platform for institutions such as Morgan Stanley to grow their business.” [Emphasis added]

DIFC and similar Free Trade Zones are a banker’s nirvana into which global bankers have rushed headlong to establish regional financial centers.

And the payoff? A chance to enter and then dominate the Islamic banking industry. Such banking has over \$1.5 trillion on the table today, and is growing at a steady and explosive rate of over 15% per year.

Good Old Western Know-How

Understanding that Islamic banking is a very recent phenomenon is underscored by the fact that its largest and most prestigious international conference, the World Islamic Banking Conference (WIBC), has met for a mere 14 years. The most recent meeting just concluded in Bahrain and attracted over 1,000 banking delegates from 35 countries.

Two years ago, the 12th annual WIBC (2005) conference kicked off with the “Governor’s Table” session titled, “Regulation & Business: Creating a Framework for Islamic Banking & Finance to Thrive.” Panel member and speaker number two was Dr. David Mullins, CEO of Vega Asset Management in New York.

Who is Mullins? He is in the white-hot core of international banking. Mullins was Vice Chairman and Governor of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System under Greenspan during George H.W. Bush’s presidency. As governor, he represented the Fed at meetings of the G-10 Governors, the International Monetary Fund, the Organization for Eco-

nomic Cooperation and Development, and the Bank for International Settlements. Prior to that, he was the Assistant Secretary for Domestic Finance at the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

The next topic at the Governor’s Table was “Industry in Transition: Trends & Innovations for Islamic Financial Institutions in an Increasingly Competitive Global Market,” where several speakers included Dr. Samuel L. Hayes III, Jacob Schiff Professor of Investment Banking Emeritus at Harvard Business School. According to Hayes,

“The growing acceptance among Muslims of Halal savings and investment products over the past decade has been impressive. Consequently, a number of conventional Western financial institutions have eagerly moved into this market as the array of investment vehicles has broadened.”

The closed-door CEO Strategy Session was centered around the McKinsey Competitiveness Report, developed in conjunction with the WIBC by the very elite McKinsey & Company based in New York.

In fact, McKinsey & Company was listed as a “Strategic Partner” of the WIBC, alongside of global accounting firm Ernst & Young and the consummate global investment banker, Goldman Sachs. (Remember that in 2005, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Paulson was CEO and Chairman of Goldman Sachs.)

Another key speaker was Dr. Robert Kaplan, Baker Foundation Professor at the Harvard Business School and acclaimed author of many management books like *Balanced Scorecard* and *Strategy Maps*. In a pre-conference press release, Kaplan stated,

“I look forward to presenting to Islamic banking leaders the latest ideas on strategy execution that delivers performance breakthroughs. I will present how successful organizations have built strategy maps around a common value proposition, communicated to and motivated the workforce, and installed a new Office of Strategy Management to sustain strategy execution.”

More recently, on December 6, 2007, the general manager of the Bank for International Settlements, Malcolm Knight, addressed the Islamic Financial Services Board Forum in Frankfurt, Germany:

“Clearly, there is expanding demand for these products, and a closely associated desire on the part of banks, including non-Islamic banks, to provide Islamic financial services... The broadening appeal of Islamic finance is also evident in the move by large international banks and other private sector financial institutions to provide Islamic financial services.”

Mullins, Hayes, Kaplan, McKinsey, Goldman Sachs, Ernst & Young, Bank for International Settlements? Do you see the pattern?

The west is giving away the know-how, with gusto, to enable Shari’a banking and guarantee its success throughout the world. And to what ends?

For one, Britain’s PM Gordon Brown has pointedly stated that he intends to make London the Islamic finance capital of the world. Further, he pledged that in 2008 the British government will issue its own “sukuk”, or Shari’a compliant bonds. Yes, government debt issued as Shari’a compliant.

At the June 13, 2006 Islamic Finance Trade Conference in London, Brown revealed,

“Today British banks are pioneering Islamic banking – London now has more banks supplying services under Islamic principles than any other Western financial centre.”

Brown’s statements can only be taken as a challenge by the New York banking establishment to beat him to the finish line. It doesn’t matter who wins this race because the result will be the same: Shari’a banking is quickly encircling the globe and forcing a de facto acceptance of Shari’a law.

Conclusion

International bankers have long ago proven themselves to be completely amoral when it comes to money. They bankrolled the Bolshevik Revolution in 1918 just as blithely as they bankrolled Hitler in the 1930’s. Fortunately for us, neither succeeded in conquering the world.

With Islam, odds of its succeeding are radically different. To start with, there are already 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, and it is the fastest growing religion in history. Secondly, the spread of Islam is richly

financed by the oil that is extracted from Mid-Eastern countries. Thirdly, Islam has already infiltrated most of the west, especially in Europe.

And now, Islam has behind it the combined support and encouragement of the entire global banking community.

The unholy alliance between Islam and global banking may be the final leg on the age-old quest for global domination. Don’t be surprised at the silence of the global elite the next time you hear Islamist mobs chant “Death to America” – their goals are now intertwined. **FC**

Pat Wood is editor of *The August Review*, a website dedicated to understanding global elitism (www.augustreview.com).

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