

Wind on the Water

A Viewsletter To Encourage Unitarian
Universalist Theology and Spirituality

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Understanding of Love

When the goddess Isis recovered the casket of her husband Osiris from Biblos where it had washed ashore, she sailed away with it on her barge, taking a child of the king of Biblos with her. She opened the casket and threw herself on the dead body of Osiris with such intense love that when the child saw her, he swooned and died. The child's name was Maneros, which means "Understanding of Love."

The Kingdom of God

...Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel of God: "The time has come; the kingdom of God is upon you; repent, and believe in the Gospel." [Mark 1.14-15, New English Bible]

That was Jesus's message. That was his insight. "The kingdom of God is at hand" (as the RSV puts it). The New English Bible adds in footnotes that the kingdom of God signifies precisely that: God's final victory over evil and the firm establishment of His rule. They also add that *repent* means to "change your ways." Change your ways how?

Because it was urgent and of utmost importance to prepare for the kingdom of God, the distract-

tions of daily life should be eliminated, including family:

"I have come to set fire to the earth," Jesus says in Luke 12.49-53, "... *Do you suppose I came to establish peace on earth? No indeed, I have come to bring division. For from now on, five members of a family will be divided, three against two and two against three; father against son and son against father,*" And he goes on to list some other relations he wishes to make dysfunctional.

When Jesus was asked about the legitimate grounds for divorce, he excluded the practice (Matthew 19.4-12). His disciples said that made it inexpedient for a man to marry. Jesus agreed and commended renunciation of marriage for sake of the kingdom of heaven, although he admitted that was not for everyone.

Anyone who would seek advice for everyday living from Jesus should be forewarned that that is not what he was interested in. He was interested in transcending everyday living to prepare for the kingdom of God.

The fact that the kingdom of God did not arrive may be part of the reason that Christianity quickly ceased to be the religion *of* Jesus, and became the religion *about*

immediacy," (2) "group intimacy," (3) "remythologizing of life," (4) "therapeutic communities" (with a supportive environment and pastoral counseling), and (5) the opportunity for asserting adulthood simply by joining. Regarding the assertion of adulthood, Melton and Moore remark "Being more religious or moral than the parents is an effective way to counter the guilt feelings that usually accompany initiative. ... The young person may have decided that putting up with obnoxious gurus, boring meditation, and endless rituals beats drug abuse, jail, or the parents' choice of mental hospitals. If being religious in a weird way ends up bothering the parents more than the other tactics ... then this fact just adds icing to the cake." [The Cult Experience: Responding to the New Religious Pluralism The Pilgrim Press, New

Faith of the Martyrs

In Iconium, in Asia Minor, the maiden Thecla heard the apostle Paul preaching. Her mother would not let her leave the house, but she sat at the window, listening, refusing to eat or sleep.

Thecla's mother, a widow, had betrothed her to a young man, Thamyris, whose wealth would provide for the mother's old age, but Paul's words praising purity and virginity convinced Thecla to renounce marriage. Even Thamyris's words of love could not turn her heart.

Cults

Why do people join cults?

According to Melton and Moore, cults offer (1) "a genuine spiritual

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Faith of the Martyrs, continued

Thamyris denounced Paul to the authorities for encouraging citizens to violate ancient customs and laws. At Paul's trial, Thecla would not answer the governor's questions, but only stared at Paul. Thecla's mother lost all patience and demanded the governor have her daughter burned in the amphitheater as a warning to other young people. The governor ordered Paul to be beaten and expelled from the city and Thecla to be burned alive.

Thecla was brought naked into the amphitheater and tied on a pile of wood. The kindling was lit, but in a sudden cloudburst, Thecla escaped.

Thecla cut her hair and put on men's clothing to avoid unwanted sexual advances. She sought out Paul and through persistence convinced him to let her become a preacher and teacher of Christianity. She became one of the beloved saints of the Eastern Church.

In the Roman world, parents really did have life and death power over their children. Marriages were arranged. Extended families lived together. Children moved swiftly into adulthood, having thrust upon them the duties of raising their own children and performing their rightful functions in society.

Thecla was one of many young people in the Roman world who took up virginity and the worship of the one god by joining a Christian community. In so doing, they abandoned their places in Roman society. Many went cheerfully to martyrdom for their decision.

To abandon sex was to abandon marriage and a place in the family. To refuse to honor the gods, including the emperor's divine spirit, was to reject civic duty - there was no separation of religious and civic responsibilities. (The Jews alone were allowed to separate the two,

due to their ancient monotheism). From the pagans' viewpoint, the Christians were atheists (refusing to worship the gods) and idiots (from Greek, *idios* "one's own" or "private", being involved only in their own things and rejecting their civic duties), which is why Tacitus called Christianity a "deadly superstition."

The early Christians considered the gospel to be a gospel of liberation, of free will. They rejected social ties that bound them and fought as well the appetites, habits and desires that controlled their lives.

Later in Roman times, after Christianity was established, Augustine argued that only two people ever had free choice, Adam and Eve, but by their choice to sin, they brought upon humanity two unnatural conditions: sexual desire and death. Adam's original sin is passed through semen to all humans, and those to whom it is transmitted have no free will. Those born in sin need two things: grace from God and guidance and control from the church and state.

Augustine's ideas prevailed. Although Christianity may have been the faith of the martyrs,

Through love does Man again show God's image. When filled with unforced, spontaneous love, the soul can rise to kiss her spouse.

Although the imagery of the Song of Songs is erotic and sensual, Bernard emphasizes that the love meant is spiritual; carnal love leads away from purity of love for God. Through asceticism, the soul meets her lover.

In Bernard's vision, the Virgin Mary becomes the bride of Christ, entering heaven to her wedding. Bernard unconsciously recapitulates the ancient Mediterranean image of the Great Mother, the Earth Goddess, and her son and lover, the god of vegetation, who is born from her womb, grows, drops his seed into her, and dies in her arms, to be reborn again the next year. The image recalls as well Dionysos, the immortal god born of mortal woman, who brought both his wife and his mother to dwell with him on Olympos.

love is as strong as death, passion cruel as the grave; it blazes up like blazing fire ... Many waters cannot quench love, no flood can sweep it away [8.6-7]

Dancing With Krishna

In the twilight, Krishna blows his flute, and the gopis leave their husbands and children and rush into the forest to find him. He teases them, "Where are your husbands?" he says. "You are our husband," they reply.

The delicacies are laid out upon the tables, redolent with expensive spices. Krishna plays his flute, and the gopis dance. So wild do they become that he must stop them and rearrange their clothing, which is in danger of falling off. Then they dance again, and Krishna replicates himself so that each gopi can dance with her own Krishna.

Song of Bernard

I will sing the song of songs to Solomon, that he may smother me with kisses. [Song of Solomon, 1.1, New English Bible]

St. Bernard of Clairvaux gave 86 sermons on the Song of Songs between 1135 and 1153 transfiguring Christian mysticism and in the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In Bernard's vision, Solomon, the lover, becomes Christ. The beloved Shulammitte becomes the Blessed Virgin, or the church, or the individual soul. As God is love, through love is the soul transformed.