

Editor's Note

In the summer of 1939, as the world teetered on the brink of catastrophe, Meadville Theological School and the Unitarian Ministerial Union unveiled the first issue of a quarterly publication entitled, *The Journal of Liberal Religion*. The purpose of that venture was "to encourage creative scholarly writing by Unitarian and Universalist ministers and laymen (sic)." The Journal also sought to act as a forum for expression of "all well-considered, seriously-held viewpoints within these fellowships."

Sixty years later, as the world stands on the brink of a new millennium, Meadville Lombard Theological School undertakes a new version of *The Journal of Liberal Religion*. Exploiting the potential of electronic media, we here present the first issue of a biannual online theological journal sharing the thoughts and insights of contemporary Unitarian Universalist ministers, scholars, and laity.

In the inaugural issue of our predecessor, the Editors of the Journal wrote:

We believe that the founding of this literary organ is particularly called for, not so much because Liberal Religion is bursting with pregnant things to say, but rather because of the peculiar situation in which we find ourselves. The world has not moved as Liberals hoped and expected it would. Fifty years ago, even twenty-five years ago . . . we felt we were the advance wave of a swelling tide that would roll mightier and mightier until it should cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. We confidently claimed the future for our own. But in these latter times the tide has failed to support us . . . the fact stubbornly stands that history has turned in a direction which is not ours.

The challenges facing religious liberals today are different from those that confronted the founders of the earlier Journal. Ours is not so much a struggle between two clearly defined religious positions; rather, we find ourselves in a world in which religion is largely decontextualized, in which, as David Kreiger suggests, "The task is no longer to search for and somehow make contact with the sacred, but rather to mediate and synthesize its many conflicting manifestations." We live in a time of competing truth-claims that confound and confuse.

The question we confront is not, "why has our viewpoint not prevailed," but rather, "who are we and have we a clear message in a world of multiple visions?" We struggle to shape a healing message for a world dominated by a corrosive secularism, a utilitarian ethic, and by the values of the market and the media. In such a context, the religious vision, the religious voice, is often lost in the clutter and noise.

In carrying out our mission, we affirm the words of our predecessors: "No

particular opinion or subject will be favored above others on the grounds of our own likes and dislikes? Any manuscript will be acceptable which is lucid in expression and interesting in treatment, and which presents information, criticism or speculations which are likely to be of concern to Religious Liberals."

And finally: "We do not intend to take a jealous view of the domain of Religious Liberalism. Although we have certain denominational obligations, we recognize (and rejoice in) the existence of Liberals outside the Unitarian-Universalist ranks, and we are solicitous in our concern that they, both as readers and as contributors, sit at the feast with us."

We find no better words to explain who we are and what we are about as we begin this new venture.

Our hope is that this new Journal of Liberal Religion will provide a vehicle by which we may explore the challenges and the opportunities of this moment in history, this time of all-done-and-not-yet. We hope the Journal will call us to serious reflection upon the meaning of the liberal gospel for the world in which we find ourselves.

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