

“The Goal of World Community”
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A “new social order,” a “world democracy,” “whose dominant purpose is the enrichment of the common life of all...” A dream “worth working for...” Frederick May Eliot wrote those words in 1920, two years after the end of the First World War...during the time when the League of Nations...the precursor to the United Nations...was being formed.

Frederick May Eliot, you should know, was one of the great preachers and leaders of Unitarianism in the early 20th century. He was born in 1889 in Dorchester, Massachusetts, the first cousin of poet T.S. Eliot, and the son and grandson and nephew and grand-nephew of Unitarian ministers. It was only natural that he, too, would become a minister. He was ordained in 1915, and served the church in St. Paul, Minnesota for 20 years, taking one leave-of-absence to serve as an army chaplain in France during World War I.

In 1937 he was elected the President of the American Unitarian Association and he served in that role for 5 consecutive terms before his death in 1958. In 1940, he established the UU Service Committee to aid Europeans during the Nazi regime. He was also a trustee at Mt. Holyoke College, the chaplain of the Massachusetts State Senate, and a director of the American Civil Liberties Union.

I mention all of this to show how influential he was both within Unitarianism and beyond, including in the realm of politicians and decision makers. And also to demonstrate how similar his view was to that of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the others who threw their weight behind the formation of the United Nations in 1945.

But he was not the only one. In 1943, another prominent Unitarian minister of the time, A. Powell Davies, who was hugely influential among politicians in Washington, DC, where he served for 14 years as the minister of All Souls Church, wrote:

Our purpose is to build a World Community of free and equal men, dedicated to equality of human rights and obligations, and governed by the laws that free men make. To such a World Community we look for lasting peace, knowing that peace is built on unity, and unity on freedom. No world, half-slave, half-free, can bring us lasting peace. We seek complete and universal freedom.

Our purpose is a world of liberation not only from war but from the tyranny of hate and greed, and from the barriers of race and class. And we look for freedom through a better regulation of the world’s prosperity, freedom from poverty, freedom from want. We seek a world more equal in its opportunity, free from hereditary privilege and from

entrenchments that defy the common good. We look for equal justice, equal economic treatment, equal education, equal privileges, irrespective of color or creed. There is no room for prejudice or persecution in a free man's world... We earnestly desire an end to nationalism, that love of country may be freed from selfish interest. Above the State must be the family of nations, and beyond all other love, the love of mankind.¹

You can begin to see that the roots of our 6th UU Principle, written in the mid-1980's, run deep in our tradition. "The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all," along with all of our principles, is closely aligned with the purposes of the United Nations. The UN Charter also includes language about peace, respect for equal rights, the dignity and worth of the human person, and about freedom. That was the dream then, during and after the Wars: to stop war, to create a global community, to uphold freedom and the basic human rights of all people.

It's easy to take our 6th principle for granted, I think. Of course we want peace and liberty and justice for everyone! Why even bother saying it? Besides, it sounds a little hokey. Some of my colleagues have referred to it as "The Superman Principle" – straight out of the Halls of Justice.

And yet, it's not one that should be neglected or taken for granted. The obstacles that Frederick May Eliot named in 1920 – nationalism, racial and ethnic prejudice, and the human tendency toward competition rather than cooperation – all continue to be among those things standing in the way of our achieving the same goal today. And there is also fear of the other...and, of course, greed, the root of which, I believe, is also fear.

We may take our principle and the United Nations itself for granted today, but there was opposition to its forming then and that opposition continues today. It's always been there. But the voices of opposition seem to be on the rise. There are those who believe strongly that the World Community for which we aspire is a threat to our national sovereignty, to our liberty, and to our rights. That which is our stated goal is for them something of which to be very afraid.

If you listen closely, you will hear from a growing and very vocal portion of the electorate, that our liberty is being threatened. It is being threatened by our own government, which through taxation and regulation, is infringing upon our rights, our freedom. Our government is threatening the right of the individual to spend the money that he or she earned. Our government is a threat to our 2nd amendment right to bear arms. Our government, by brazenly increasing the national debt, is a threat even to our national sovereignty. In fact, the freedom that we hear so often talked about these days is freedom from our government.

You may not be aware that much of this fear – and it is a very palpable fear – is being whipped up by people behind the scenes like the conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, and brought into the mainstream by media personalities like Glenn Beck.

Alex Jones speaks often – daily – about the coming of what he calls the "One World Government." He speaks with great urgency and passion to everyone who will listen about a "Globalist Agenda" to create a dictatorial world government, sometimes called "The New World

¹ In "The Faith Behind Freedom," May 23, 1943.

Order” or “The One World Order.” The end-result – or the “endgame,” as he calls it, will be the enslavement of the world’s population. And guess what...the United Nations is part of the plot and so is, you may not be surprised to hear, President Obama. So, for that matter, was George W. Bush.

And what they will do, if successful, says Jones, will be to take away your rights, your liberty, including, but not limited to...your right to economic development, your right to firearms, your right to free speech, and your right to make your own decisions about your health care.

You may laugh...or maybe you won’t. For you may know people – good people – sane people – who believe parts of that storyline and who have been profoundly infected by the fear that lies behind it. You may be feeling some measure of that fear yourself, without even realizing the extent of the fear-mongering behind it. For, if you are a believer you can look around you right now and see signs of all of that happening right here before our very eyes.

You can try to reason with those who are. You can point out, as reporter Jesse Lerner did earlier this week, that...

...It is a measure of how little American society has preserved its industrial-era class consciousness that the working-class Tea Party activists don’t see this, that they believe that greater freedom for their bosses means greater freedom for them. It doesn’t...²

But most of us know from experience that when we are really afraid, reason isn’t always the best antidote. We can’t hear it. And what we desperately need is an antidote to our fear. What we need is to call those whose circles of concern are narrowed by fear back into the larger circle of concern for others and back to their highest ideals.

Peter Gomes, Professor and Minister of Memorial Church at Harvard University, has written,

The opposite of fear is not courage but compassion. We fear what we do not know and the mother of fear is ignorance, but we cannot fear that which we love, for, as Jesus tells us, perfect love casts out fear. Compassion leaves no room for fear; we are too busy doing what we can, what we must, and what God wishes us to do, to take time to fear the consequences. If the Good Samaritan had indulged his fears both of the dangers of the highway and of what others might think of his imprudent but compassionate behavior, he would have done nothing at all. Compassion has to do with the exercise of that inner strength that allows us power in the face of powerlessness and of the powers-that-be.³

To confront fear with compassion, and to call the fearful, including ourselves, back to that place of empathy, and a larger circle of concern. This is what that same reporter, Jesse Lerner, was trying to do when he asked us to...

Consider what our social and economic relations looked like when we indeed had a less-regulated economy and no positive obligations, no social safety net. We had 8-year-olds

² Lerner, Jesse, “The Tea Party Idea of Freedom is Anything But,” Huffington Post, October 21, 2010

³ Gomes, Peter, *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus*, p. 107.

working 12-hour shifts in coal mines. And why not? The mine owners could pay them less than adults...

...these children and their families were, in very meaningful ways, less free to make choices about their lives...than workers are today, now that the government has interfered with the mine owners' 'personal liberty'...⁴

In sharing that example, he was trying to widen the moral imaginations of the fearful to include the pain and suffering of another. To help us realize that our freedom isn't free – that it always comes with a cost for others to pay.

I think that we, Americans, have always struggled with the meaning of rights and the meaning of freedom. Or perhaps it's not an American problem, but a human problem. We have tended to think of rights as individual rights – our rights – rather than as human rights – ours AND theirs, mine AND yours.

The hard truth is, there is no such thing as complete freedom in the context of society – and, of course, without the context of society, the idea of freedom is completely meaningless.

...Freedom does not mean complete freedom for some at the expense of any meaningful freedom for most. It means maximizing freedom, the possibility of controlling our own lives, for all. This may sometimes require restricting the freedom of the powerful to control others.⁵

We always need to be thinking about how our freedom might infringe upon the freedom of others. We need to try to call ourselves and others back to thinking about the other...back to feeling the other's pain. That is our task as religious people.

The struggle is a long one...to call people, ourselves included, back from fear to compassion...back from love of and concern for one's self and one's own to love and concern for everyone else as well. To do this over and over again on the way to achieving our goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice not only for us but for everyone. As Frederick May Eliot said,

It may be that as many centuries will have to pass before the world will be organized as a whole on a basis of cooperation as have already passed since the first beginnings of national life appeared.⁶

It would be easy to despair, to get distracted. How do we keep going? How do we keep the faith?

This week I had the privilege of hearing a young man named Jose Palma speak. Mr. Palma is on the staff of the Student Immigration Movement in MA, and I heard him talk about the long road that we face on the road toward immigration reform. He said when he picks up his child at the

⁴ Larner, Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Eliot, Frederick May, *The Unwrought Iron*, 1920.

end of the school day, his son always says he's hungry. So they stop and get a little snack, just enough to keep him going until they can get home and eat a real meal together. That's what it's like, he said, working for justice... You have to take the time to enjoy the snacks, to celebrate the small victories, to keep yourself going until you do one day achieve your goal.

In order to keep going, to persist, we also have to remember that, as Eliot said, the goal is worth the fighting for. And that, as Eliot also wrote,

For those who are willing to pay the price, the whole moral power of the universe is at hand to help. When a man once really gives himself to the cause of humanity, the entire strength of the race is his friend; and so long as he continues to deserve this help, it is his. By its mighty strength he can stand and withstand, and he has guaranteed his own victory by allying himself with a power than cannot be defeated.⁷

And finally we must remember what Paul Tillich, German-American theologian and contemporary of both Eliot and Davies, once wrote:

The goal of mankind is not progress toward a final stage of perfection; it is the creation of what is possible for man in each particular state of history; and it is the struggle against the forces of evil, old ones and new ones, which arise in each period in a different way.

There will be victories as well as defeats in these struggles. There will be progress and regressions. But every victory, every particular progress from injustice to more justice, from suffering to more happiness, from hostility to more peace, from separation to more unity anywhere in mankind, is a manifestation of the eternal in time and space. It is, in the language of the men of the Old and the New Testaments, the coming of the Kingdom of God. For the Kingdom of God does not come in one dramatic event sometime in the future. It is coming here and now in every act of love, in every manifestation of truth, in every moment of joy, in every experience of the holy.

So may it come in our own lives as we march onward toward the shining goal of peace, liberty and justice for all...in this land and in every land...tomorrow and the next day and the next. May we act in love. May we manifest truth. May we delight in joy. And may we seek to experience the holy in our every day.

Amen and Blessed Be.

⁷ Ibid.