

Occult Invades the Unitarian Church

Lucia DuFresne, manager of an Occult shop in Ottawa, is a devotee of the Wicca religion. She says that being a Wiccan means believing in the goddess of the earth and of nature.

In Ottawa more than 300 known witches practice their craft. Some of these witches are even members of a church. Martha Patterson teaches Sunday school and witchcraft in the Ottawa Unitarian church. She also helped establish a branch of the Covenant of Universalist Unitarian Pagans within her church. She says that the church has given her and other witches and pagans some credibility by accepting their beliefs and rituals. "We are no longer a fringe group. We are now an integral part of the community."

"There are a number of women (in the church) who identify themselves as witches," says Rev. Brian Kopke, senior minister of the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa and an atheist. The denomination considers Wicca and other non-Christian nature religions important sources of spirituality for its members. Rev. Charles Eddis, one of the founders of the Canadian Unitarian Council, says that neo-paganism appeals to feminists who want to affirm the female element in religions through goddess worship, as well as some young people who want to bypass the Bible and other books and go directly to ritual and other experience centered religion.

Although the Unitarians claim to be a church and their leaders are ordained ministers, they have abandoned and brought reproach upon their Christian heritage. The root cause is their repudiation of external authority in religion. The Unitarians boast as "the crowning glory" of their tradition. "that the soul is its own authority." Man's unaided reason is the judge of truth and error, of right and wrong. The ancestors of the Unitarians are Arius and Socinus. Early fourth century Arius denied the doctrine of the Trinity. This heresy reappeared toward the end of the sixteenth century largely through the teaching of Fausto Sozzine and his uncle Lelio Sozzine. They rejected the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity. They insisted on the worship of Jesus Christ as a divine persons, believing in his resurrection from the dead. But his divine nature was the result of his perfect obedience. They denied the fall into sin and believed that man still possesses full freedom of the will. Salvation is through Jesus' life and teaching rather than in his vicarious death upon the cross.

Modern Unitarianism originated in the dissenters and Presbyterians in England and emerged out of Congregationalism in the United States. The reason for Presbyterians turning to Unitarianism should be a warning sign for those Reformed Christians tempted to think that stressing sound doctrine and insisting on confessional faithfulness are not so important in our time.

Why did so many eighteenth century English Presbyterians become Unitarian? They had become enamored of speculation. There was a high degree of theological liberalism among those called Presbyterian. The historian Drysdale suggests, "the Insidious Tendency to Arianism" had infected the Presbyterians. "Philosophic

Rationalism" had displaced "Puritan enthusiasm," They championed the rights and interests of free inquiry in religion. Subscription to confessions and creeds was abandoned as an infringement of freedom of thought and a substitution of human authority for the authority of Scripture. Congregational discipline over ministers and members was no longer enforced. By the end of the eighteenth century many Presbyterian ministers and congregations had moved from Calvinism, through Arminianism, to Unitarianism.

The European Enlightenment, characterized by a firm belief in the supremacy of reason, which infiltrated the American colonies in the eighteenth century. Many upper-class Presbyterians and Congregationalists became Unitarians. Critics joked that their preaching was limited to "the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man and the neighbourhood of Boston." Unitarianism of that age was best represented by William Ellery Channing (1780-1842), who had undergone an evangelical conversion experiences as a Harvard undergraduate. In 1803 he became a minister of Boston's Federal Street Congregational Church, where he remained for the rest of his life. In 1819 he spoke against the traditional beliefs in the trinity, the deity or Christ, the total depravity of man, and Christ's substitutionary atonement. "Christianity," wrote Channing "... should come forth from the darkness and corruption of the past in its own celestial splendour and in its divine simplicity. It should be comprehended as having but one purpose, the perfection of human nature, the elevation of men into nobler beings." Another prominent Congregationalist was Antoinette Brown. Her ordination into the congregational ministry in 1853 was the first formal ordination of a woman in the United States. She later resigned her ministerial position and joined the Unitarians.

In the course of time Unitarianism denied the existence of miracles, questioned the authenticity of Scriptures, emphasized the divinity of man and the humanity of Jesus, and placed a great emphasis on social action. It has attracted people who desired religion without authority and a church without confessions. It became a community of free thinkers following the spirits of the modern secular age.

The history of the Unitarians show that the toleration of error, the subordination of God's revelation to human reason and to political correctness will ultimately lead to the betrayal of the Gospel. The Unitarian Church in Ottawa, without formal creed or doctrine and open to both atheists and witches, is a glaring example.

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