

Journey East into Unitarianism: The Unitarian Theological Symposium at Kolozsvar

Romania, July 3-8, 2006
—John Eichrodt

This is an account of some personal impressions of my participation at the ICUU symposium that was held at the Unitarian Seminary in Kolozsvar. Many of the participants were Unitarian leaders from around the world. Quite a few had helped to build and shape ICUU into what it is today. Others like me were simply interested in Unitarian theology and had come from far away to attend this summit meeting on Unitarian theology. It was intended to provoke dialogue and to seek answers as to what we had in common: our common identity, common ground, where we had come from, who we were, and where we were going. It also wanted us to suggest approaches for Unitarianism in a fragmented and fragmenting world brought on by the challenges of globalization in this postmodern world. We met in the main conference room of the Unitarian Seminary. We sat on solid oak benches laid out in a semi circle and surrounded with oak panels. Francis David, framed in a large medallion above the podium, looked down sternly at us during the week long meeting.

Major papers representing views of Unitarians from most of the Unitarian movements around the world were delivered throughout the week. It is impossible to give even a fair summary of the enormous amount of material presented. But the papers will be published in book form and will be available on the ICUU website. Here is a cursory sample of some of the aspects dealt with.

Jill and Istvan opened by framing the tasks of the symposium, which was to reformulate who we were and how we could become more relevant to the world. How could we shape a confession that honors the openness and diversity of our religious faith? John Buehrens introduced his forthcoming book on Unitarianism, *a House for Hope*. Bishop Szabo Arpad reiterated the Transylvanian commitment to Liberal Christian theology. Richard Boeke underlined the importance of building theology based on trust which was also much of the concern expressed by Fulgence from Burundi where the Unitarian effort was focused on reconciling antagonisms in opposing communities Paul Rasor distilled the essence of World Unitarianism into two main principles: spiritual liberty, and social justice.

Jaume de Marcos was so intent on reading his paper clearly that no one understood much for the first fifteen minutes. He finished brilliantly calling for a new Unitarian theology of liberation as did Olga Flores from Bolivia. Boty - with much encouragement from his fellow Transylvanian colleagues - explained the theology underlying Unitarian Liturgy step by step. Several participants, in particular Derek from New Zealand, underscored the strong connection of Unitarianism with nature and the need for our ethical commitment in protecting our planet.

The discussion during the week was intense and lively with never enough time to finish. There was much talk about the need for person centered theology and liturgy, of the energy inherent in and released by covenantal groups, of new ways to organize our services, with possibly less emphasis on joys and concerns which was becoming overly narcissist. There should be innovations to vary the SSS pattern of worship services: sit, stand up, sit, stand up, etc.

Some expressed their unease, even exasperation or frustration because they felt that we were not really addressing the needs of Unitarians as persons, spending possibly too much time and effort in mending broken people, and not enough on helping people to become whole, autonomous, and creative. Unitarian theology should encourage Unitarians to be engaged in their families, work, and communities. Unitarian communities could become powerhouses for individual growth, and promote active and effective action by Unitarians in social and community development. Feminist theology had also opened promising new vistas for Unitarian theology that might merit further consideration at a future symposium.

I think it is reasonable to conclude that at the end of the week, there was consensus on a need for better relevance and adaptation to our fast changing postmodern world that is fragmenting Unitarians and Unitarianism. Theology had a key role in this respect and was seen as a major means for making Unitarianism meaningful and a really energetic faith in the lives of Unitarians. The participants unanimously enthusiastically called for another Unitarian theological symposium within the next few years.