

Letters to the Editor

I feel morally obliged to draw attention to unfortunate errors in Friend Keith Maddock's article that appeared in the recent issue of *The Canadian Friend* (Sept.–Oct. 2005). The errors lie with the meaning he attaches to the words Universalist and Universalism. These words have different meanings in different places, and without the writer revealing his source(s), the reader is left somewhat in the dark. But it is a fair guess that he (the writer) is talking about Quaker Universalism (see below under item 2). The errors are:

1. In the first sentence of the first paragraph, the writer says that many people who seek “an alternative world view in *universalism* are *cut off* from their religious heritage.” The term *cut off* is poorly chosen. It is unkind, presuming and rash. It is used without giving evidence; it is misleading because it biases the uninitiated; and it is not in accordance with the truth. I happen to know a fair number of Universalists (in Canada, U.S., and Europe), and not a single one of them would consider him or herself *cut off* from *any* religion. If asked, they probably would say that their spiritual awareness *evolved* beyond their *religious heritage*. Instead of being *cut off*, they *extended* their spiritual horizons. The poor choice of wording may have been a slip of the pen, which nevertheless reveals an unfortunate prejudice on the part of the writer.

2. In the second sentence of that paragraph, the writer gives *his* understanding of what *Universalism* is about. He got it all wrong. A good definition is given on the back cover of every issue of the *Universalist Friends*, the Journal of the Quaker Universalist Group in the UK. It says, “*The Quaker Universalist Group is based on our understanding that spiritual awareness is accessible to everyone of any religion or none, and that no one person and no one faith can claim to have the final revelation or monopoly of truth. We acknowledge that such awareness may be expressed in many different ways.*” A similar definition is given in no. 39 of the *Universalist Friends*, the Journal of the Quaker Universalist Fellowship in the U.S.

3. It should be clear that by itself Universalism is *not* a religion; it stands perfectly neutral on religions. It also does *not*, as the writer “*assumes*,” “refer to belief in

one undivided ... truth,” and does *not* in any way get involved in *theological* disputes, such as “Trinitarian” versus Unitarian. Call it a philosophy, or a doctrine, or a worldview, if you must. It is understandable that the neutral stance with respect to religions is difficult to appreciate for some Christians, and Universalists have to remain alert for misinterpretations of what they cherish, whether made intentionally or in good faith.

NB: For an article such as the one mentioned above the Editor at least should insist on adequate references so the reader can follow up.

In friendship and in peace! Siepko Lok

Siepko Lok is a member of Victoria Monthly Meeting, attending Vancouver Monthly Meeting.

Author's response

I'd like to express my appreciation to our Friend Siepko Lok for responding to my article ... To be brief, I should explain that my writing is always a work in progress, and my perspectives do evolve over time. When writing the introductory paragraph referring to people being “cut off” from traditional religion it did not occur to me that my wording was especially provocative. However, now that it has been brought to my attention, I am inclined to replace the term with “alienated from,” to suggest that the traditional forms of organized religion no longer speak to the experience of many seekers.

Friends have something valuable to offer in recognizing that it is not the outward forms but the inward experience of the Spirit, or the living Truth, that is at the heart of all vital religious teachings. The definition of “universalism” offered in Siepko's letter seems to be in harmony with this point. My own concern is primarily with encouraging interfaith dialogue through mutual recognition of the Truth we hold in common, and which our diverse symbols, allegories and even rituals are intended to evoke. I believe that everything needs to be subjected to question and revision as we, in the words of the Swiss Friend, Pierre Ceresole, “take

care to grease our weather vanes, so that they do not get stuck in the rust of tradition in a position unrelated to Truth.” Yet, as a person who has been deeply influenced and inspired through organized religion, I feel that we cannot dismiss the outward forms either — even when they no longer seem relevant in a pluralistic or secular

world. To speak of the Spirit as living Truth is only meaningful in the context of incarnation, or “inspiration,” or the interaction of body and spirit.

But that’s enough for the present. Thank you again for this opening to dialogue. ☞

Keith Maddock is a member of Toronto Monthly Meeting.

How to avoid paying military taxes when you do your income tax this year

Since 1982, Conscience Canada has maintained a Peace Tax Trust Fund, in which peace trusters have deposited the military portion of their taxes as a protest against paying for war. Until a Conscientious Objector Bill has passed into legislation, Conscience Canada provides a positive option for conscientious objectors to military taxation to deposit the military portion of their federal income taxes into a Peace Tax Trust Fund, as a formal objection to paying to kill.

To do so, we suggest the following procedure:

1. Complete your Income Tax Form as usual, down to *Balance Due*.
2. Go back to *Net Federal Tax* line. Calculate 8.06% of the amount you entered on this line.
3. Make out a cheque for this amount to *Conscience Canada Peace Tax Fund, In Trust*, and send it to Conscience Canada, 901-70 Mill Street, Toronto, ON M5A 4R1. Please specify if you want the interests on your deposit kept segregated or if they can be used for the work of Conscience Canada. If you have all your taxes deducted at

source, as 85% of taxpayers do, you can deposit a symbolic amount in the Fund. Be sure to make a copy of your cheque before you mail it in.

4. Write a letter to the Minister of Finance Jim Flaherty, explaining why you wish to have your taxes supporting peace rather than killing, teaching others to kill, making and selling lethal weapons, and preparing for war. Indicate that you have directed the military portion of your income taxes to the *Peace Tax Fund, in Trust* (or have sent a symbolic amount to the Fund). Make seven copies of this letter.

5. Send the following to your local Tax Centre:

- your completed Income Tax form, your cheque to the Receiver General for the Balance Due (less the amount of the cheque, which was derived from step #3),

- a copy of the cheque in #3,

- a copy of your letter to the Minister of Finance, Jim Flaherty.

6. Send the original letter, postage free, to the Minister of Finance, House of Commons, Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6.

Send copies to your MP (whom you can find at: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/people/house/PostalCode.asp?Source=SM>); and to Conscience Canada for possible use in their newsletter.

7. Send the other copies of your letter, also postage free, to the following federal politicians, all c/o the House of Commons, Parliament Buildings, Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6:

- Carol Skelton, Minister of National Revenue,

- Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada, and Leader of the New Conservative Party of Canada,

- Gilles Duceppe, Leader of the Bloc Québécois,

- Jack Layton, Leader of the New Democratic party (NDP),

- Alexa McDonough, NDP member of Parliament for Halifax.

8. You may also wish to write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper and/or to Canadian magazines of your choice. ☞

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