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“How can religious communities help bend the moral arc of the universe toward justice?”

[ONSCREEN]

“I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways;

“I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways;

[ONSCREEN]

I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight, I can divine it by conscience.

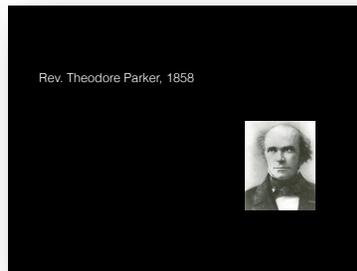
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[ONSCREEN]

And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.”

And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.” **Unitarian minister Theodore Parker** spoke those words at the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Convention, in January of 1858.

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When Parker spoke, slavery was being defended, in the North and South, as condoned by scripture. Parker’s job was to convince people that—despite chapter and verse—conscience, morality, changes over time. And that, in 1858, moral, ethical people could not allow slavery to exist.

A hundred years later, **Rev. Martin Luther King—**

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...who considered becoming a Unitarian minister and was well-versed in Rev. Parker’s anti-slavery activism—repeated Parker’s words: “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” King, to, had to convince people that in 1958 moral, ethical people could not allow segregation to exist.

Both preachers were out to bend that arc toward justice.

It is little wonder, then, that President Barak Obama, whose beloved grandmother was Unitarian, had those words woven into a rug in the Oval Office. And it is little wonder that President Obama, in his remarks on the death of **Nelson Mandela...**

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...offered as the highest praise, quote, “he bent the arc of the moral universe toward justice.”

Inherent in the thought of Rev. Parker long ago, and still the guiding principle of Unitarian Universalist Humanists today, is that this world is not as it should be.

This world is not just. It is up to us, here, now, to bend that arc toward justice.

You see, humanists do not believe that there is a deity that has a plan or that will set things right in the hereafter. Since we do not believe in an ultimate overarching morality inherent in the universe, we believe it is . . . all up to us.

This “one precious life” is what we have. All we have. And every human being, everywhere, has inherent worth and dignity. Therefore, it is a moral imperative that humanists strive for the **greatest good for the greatest number**

[ONSCREEN]



. . . NOW!

So it is that many humanists gather in congregations. Not for worship. Not merely for community. But to focus our energies toward bending that arc of the moral universe.

Not all humanists are Unitarian Universalists; not all Unitarian Universalists are humanists. Nor do I mean to paint a rosy picture of humanism.

My congregation, First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis, is one of the largest humanist congregations in the United States. And that speaks ill of humanists, because we are not a large congregation. There is, for example, a gulf between those who call ourselves “religious humanists” and those who consider themselves “secular humanists.”

And my congregation is one of the larger humanist congregations because humanists have a tendency to be fractious and holier-than-thou. Yes, holier-than-thou in their humanism.

I contend that the best way to define any religious or philosophical position is by its hypocrisy. The hypocrisy of humanism is that there is only one sort of humanism and only one way to be humanist. I call that attitude “humanister than thou.”

Also unfortunately, humanist and Unitarian Universalist groups are still predominately middle class and Euro-American, with Euro-American social expectations and Euro-American models for fixing problems. In other words, when we put our hands on that arc of the moral universe to bend it, we often have not discussed the matter with those we are trying to help. We assume we know best . . .

We often operate from highly individualist world views that make little or no sense to those with collective world views.

This is egotistical.

And immature.

And it severely limits the efficacy of our good intentions.

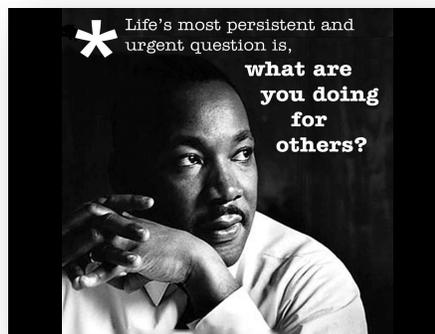
Humanists are, for example, strong advocates for reproductive justice. But does reproductive justice among Euro-Americans and reproductive justice among African-Americans operate in the same way?

I'm saddened that the social and economic privilege of humanist groups often function as barriers for those who think as we do but come out of other social locations.

The struggle in my ministry is to get humanists past the easy—dare I say thoughtless—criticism of religions, the religious, and other humanists. My hope is that humanists will begin to approach people of other religions in love, not criticism.

Then we will join with all faith traditions in bending that arc—because we can all agree in this broken world, with the words of **Martin Luther King,**

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“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, what are you doing for others?”