



ALL SAINTS CHURCH
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

Why I Am Still in the Church

A presentation to the Rector's Forum by
The Rev. Dr. William Sloane Coffin Jr.¹
February 26, 1995²

Introduction by the Rev. Dr. George F. Regas, Rector of All Saints Church:

What a great treat to have Bill Coffin at the Forum today! People know Bill Coffin from many angles – as college chaplain at Williams College, then at Yale University; then as a great preacher as the Senior Minister at Riverside Church, and then as president of Peace/Action. But most of us here know Bill Coffin as the pre-eminent leader in the fierce struggles to overcome injustice and oppression. There are not many people in the world who are known as a leader in civil rights, in opposing the Viet Nam War, in reversing the arms race, abortion rights, gay rights, peace in the Middle East, and people's rights against the proliferation of guns. The thing that most of you must know about Bill Coffin is that he just never quit putting his face to the wind, never let those guys get him down, just pushed and pushed and pushed.

Bill has been a friend of All Saints Church. He has been in this room many times. Some of the greatest moments in my 28 years here have been moments when Bill has stood here in this room to help us fight the battle. Whenever my hope began to falter, I would call Bill Coffin. Whenever I needed a name to draw a crowd, I would call Bill Coffin. [Laughter] Leonard Beerman³ and I have traveled to a lot of places around the world together, often with Bill Coffin. I remember one night about 2:00 AM when Leonard and I and Bill Coffin met with Arafat,⁴ and Bill Coffin just pushing and pushing Arafat to move in a certain way so that the logjam would be broken and we could see our way to peace.

I remember once he helped me in a Rock Mass. When it was over he said, "I really loved being here, but you did not instruct me, George, in how you gave the bread, the Body of Christ, to a kid with his mouth full of bubble gum!"

Above all, when so many people have given up on the Church, old Bill Coffin hasn't. He has had an intense love for the Church – a lover's quarrel with the Church, loving it for what it is not, but could be.

Bill Coffin.

William Sloane Coffin Jr.:

Introductions like that are not dangerous as long as you don't inhale! I do remember that Rock Mass; that was the first time I met George. It was in 1972, and I had just returned from North Vietnam. Somebody had a fancy choreography for me around Southern California, and after talking in five or six different places, they said, "Now you've got one more thing to do.

They have a Rock Mass down at a big Episcopal Church in Pasadena. They want you to say a few words there.” So I came here. There was a band raising the roof, and there genially presiding was this priest, all dressed in white and looking totally at home. That was the first time I met George, and I really didn’t know quite what to do. He said, “I’ll take the wine; you take the bread.” So here came these guys chewing gum. I consulted with my Lord. I said, “What do I do with your body, Jesus?” And the word from on high was, “You put it up there next to the bubble gum, but make sure you have eye contact.” So I took their chins like this, and when I had the eye contact.... [Laughter]

In any case, that was only the first of many happy times with George. He is right; Lenny Beerman, your “Rabbi in Residence,” is my idea of the ideal Rabbi. [Applause]

Well let’s get started; time moves right along.

In boxing, the best moves lie very close to the worst. So it is in life generally. For example, most people consider loyalty to family, country, and God commendable commitments. But James Joyce said that family, nation and religion were the three-fold threat to his art.⁵ James Baldwin⁶ wrote, “I left the pulpit to preach the Gospel.” All of us who went to seminary learned from history – and contemporary history only validates this insight – that religion can both liberate and enslave, be a hope for the oppressed and the chief weapon of oppression. So to pursue religious truth, you need not only passion but an unremitting readiness to admit you may be wrong.

With regards to Christianity, I believe we need to recover our heritage and to recover from it. To honor George’s twenty-plus years of extraordinary ministry, and to honor All Saints near-to-my-heart Church, I thought I would try to tell you this morning what I think is abiding in the liberal Christianity that I think George has been preaching and that I feel this church is trying, with great success, to practice. When the currents of history are churning into rapids, and when boards once firmly nailed are flying up in our faces, when what is offensive and who is offended changes almost week by week – in times such as ours, definitions are risky. But let’s try, if not a definition, a few descriptions about what is liberal in liberal Christianity.

1. A Christian liberal says, with St. Augustine,⁷ I believe in thinking, and I wish to think and believe it.
2. A Christian liberal agrees with Rollo May⁸ that commitment is healthiest when it is not without doubt but despite doubt.
3. A Christian liberal today believes homogeneity to be a delusion, diversity a reality. The reason we are called today to accept diversity is because we have spent so much time denying it.
4. So a liberal Christian avoids “exclusive truth” claims.
5. Christian liberals would like to reject the current assumption that people with bleeding hearts are intellectually unimpressive.
6. Finally, Christian liberal believe no word of God is God’s last word.

The trouble with Fundamentalists is that, believing as they do that all things worth knowing are already known, they create an atmosphere of cultivated ignorance, which guarantees that mediocrity will be a virtue.

Turning now to the substance of the faith, what is it that a liberal Christian believes? Though I speak with the tongue of angels, -- preachers, poets, you are being addressed – and though I understand all mystery and all knowledge – professors, your turn – and though I give all

my goods to feed the poor – radicals, take note – though I give my body to be burned – the very stuff of heroism – but have not love, it profits me nothing. I doubt that if a more radical statement of ethics can be found in any Holy writ anywhere in the world. It says that there are greater tragedies than the tragedy of death, but no greater victories than the triumph of love. It says that the purity of dogma is second to the integrity of love; dogma is the signpost and love is the hitching post. It says that Socrates was wrong; it is not the unexamined by the uncommitted life that is not worth living. Likewise, Descartes was mistaken. *Cogito ergo sum?*⁹ Nonsense! *Amo ergo sum* – I love, therefore I am. That, I believe, is the bedrock of liberal Christianity. That is what abides, and always will. If we fail in love, we fail in all things else. That is what George has been saying in these last three addresses yesterday.

Such a belief, obviously, has to be lived and not enshrined. Professors, it is not enough to take notes; you have to take action. You have to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the widow and the orphans, and create a world fit for children. Works for charity, important as they are, are insufficient. Charity can alleviate the pain of poverty, but only justice seeks to eliminate the causes of it. Justice is really a corollary of love; justice is to right relationships among people. In place of dominance and subordination, justice seeks mutuality and reciprocity. Justice is not optional generosity; it is a moral mandate. In matters of justice, the question is not whether people deserved it, but whether they have it.

Compared to religious laws, love is less rigid but more demanding, going beyond what laws may require and insisting that what is important is not only what we do but the spirit in which we do it. I said that religious liberals would like to reject the assumption that bleeding hearts are intellectually unimpressive. Actually, if your hearts are stone, you can't have decent thoughts – not about interpersonal, nor about international, relations. If your heart is full of fear, you will seek safety, not the truth. Only love has the courage to face unacceptable truth. So far from being a substitute for thought, love is what makes good thinking possible. It has, shall we say, a kind of limbering effect on the mind.

Love, of course, is not conditional; it is unconditional, like Jesus healing with no strings attached. It is not concerned with who deserves love, only with who needs it. Finally, love is its own reward. Or, more accurately, the rewards of love are to become yet more caring, yet more loving – more, shall I say, abidingly human.

To Christians, this love is of God. The Christian God's being is defined by love, God's activity is characterized is defined by love, and God's destiny is love. The existence of God, of course, cannot be proved, nor yet disproved. God is both known and unknown, as George was saying yesterday. We say God is a mystery, only "mystery" defined not as a definite uncertainty by as an indefinite certainty. Like love itself, God is apprehended on a deeper level than the mind can comprehend. Experience is sensitive, a lot more than reason; and God is one of those many truths of life that the mind can defend but never discover. Said Lenny Bernstein of Beethoven, "He broke all the rules, and turned out pieces of breathtaking rightness." That is much the way I feel about the transcendent ways of God. "There is more in heaven and earth, Horatio, than is dreamt of in your philosophy." Or, as St. Paul himself said, "Who has known the mind of God?" Pretend you do, and you will hear what God said to Job, "Who is this that darkens council by words without knowledge?" I have long felt that if you want to hear divine laughter, tell God your plans. It is not a matter of intellectual certainty, but rather of deep psychological certitude that God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

Now, because we have to move along rapidly, I want to talk about what we might call “the little deaths” – the good things that die in us while we yet live.

There are so many otherwise healthy people walking around with moribund hearts. Let me quote, once again, from James Baldwin: “Human beings are not by nature sinful, unless we ignore the call of love, which is to say, of life itself.” I agree; sin is ignoring the call of love, ignoring the call of life itself. Which of us hasn’t done so? It is too inevitable not to happen. Sin is as inevitable in the spiritual world as gravity in the natural. Like love, like God, sin too is a mystery. Why is it that the tapeworm of egoism attaches itself to each of us? Why are we consistently so unable to grant to others what we claim for ourselves?

Nations, of course, show an egotism that far surpasses anything that individuals show. How else are we to explain the desperate, despicable folly of the Vietnam War? Shakespeare had that one down absolutely cold when he said, “But man, proud man, dressed in a little brief authority, most ignorant of what he is most assured . . . plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven as make the angels weep.”¹⁰ What about the recent failure to know how to celebrate Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the Smithsonian Institute? Shakespeare had that one down, too: “The abuse of greatness is one that disjoins remorse from power.”¹¹

The Church, too, is shot full of sin. It bemoans its own guilt, its own racism, but won’t see its role in perpetuating the economic system that lies behind the social disorder. Increased intelligence is not going to overcome injustice, any more than democracy can provide a permanent solution for the vexing problem of power. That is because the enemy, finally, is not ignorance, but self-interest; and reason is always subservient to some degree to self-interest. A growing rationality can destroy the uncritical acceptance of injustice, unmask the sanctioning lies, but reason is no match for self-centered will. Said Reinhold Niebuhr: “No man will ever be so intelligent as to see the needs of others as vividly as he recognizes his own, or to be as quick in his aid to remote as to immediately revealed necessities.”¹² The unhappy truth is that human tragedies are occurring everywhere without end, forever, because we ignore the call of love; because, when empathy dies, who survives?

But paradoxically there are several what we might call pluses to sin. I’ll never forget the rush of relief that I felt when at college I discovered that Scripture and Church teachings assured me I was not expected to be a Boy Scout. I realized that perfectionism is incredibly pretentious. Anybody who thinks that human nature is perfectible simply shows how little he or she has tried to live out her own convictions. The world divides itself pretty much into sinners who think they are saints and saints who know they are forgiven sinners.

Another plus: if Saint Paul is right, that “all have sinned and fallen short”¹³ – not just “they” or “that evil empire,” but *all* have sinned and fallen short – then, praise the Lord, if we are not one together in love at least we are one in sin, which is no mean bond because it precludes the possibility of separation through judgment. [Laughter] That is what George was talking about by inclusivism yesterday, and that is the meaning of the Scriptural injunction, “Judge not that ye be not judged.”¹⁴

The best thing about sin is that it points toward the forgiveness we all need. I don’t think you can have a good conscience and a sensitive one at the same time. Human relations are all based on the need for forgiveness, and to a believing Jew or Christian there is no sin in the world that God’s mercy cannot overshadow. The best news in the Good News is that there is more mercy in God than there is sin in us. Why does God forgive? Not because “It’s God’s business,” as Voltaire suggested. God forgives because God doesn’t want our mistakes to

frustrate the greater good that God has in mind for human history. So Cain went on to build cities,¹⁵ David a dynasty, Hosea's wife Gomer a marriage,¹⁶ and the people of Israel a covenant relationship with God. To the degree that the Christian Church is founded on St. Peter, it is founded on a second chance.

One of my favorite Unitarian Universalists¹⁷ – incidentally, do you all know why Unitarian Universalists can't sing hymns the way you do here at All Saints Church? They're too busy reading the next verse to see whether they agree with it! – was a near-octogenarian woman in New Orleans who years ago said to me, "I must confess to you, Bill, I entertain certain doubts about the divinity of our Lord, but none whatsoever concerning the program." Now, Unitarian Universalists – and, because Lenny is sitting here, I think we should include followers of Judaism, too, because this is all in Hebrew Scriptures as well as in the Gospels – believe in Gospel values. All Unitarians that I know believe in Gospel values, but most of us here, I think, probably believe in the Gospel itself. To me the Good News is that "God so loved the world" – mind you, long after the world had proved itself unlovable – "that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believed in him should not perish but have eternal life."¹⁸ In other words, Jesus is, as it were, God's love in person on earth. That to me means that Jesus is,

1. A mirror to our humanity, the primary reminder of *Amo ergo sum*. To say "Jesus is Lord" is to say that it is Christ who defines us, not Herod. And if Christ is the mirror to our humanity, Christ is also ...
2. A window to divinity, that through which we see as much of the divine as is given frail, mortal eyes to see.

That is not to say that God is confined to Christ. Certainly not! It is only to say that God, to Christians, is mostly *defined* by Christ. When we talk about the divinity of Christ, I think it is helpful to remember that what is important is not that Christ is God-like but that God is Christ-like. When we see Christ scorning the powerful, empowering the weak, and healing the wounded of the world, we are seeing transparently the power of God at work. We say "God is just;" we say "God is love." How do we know that? Through Jesus Christ our Lord, the window to divinity. That is why all Christian prayers end, "...through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Notice I did not say that God is all powerful. As every parent knows, love is self-restricting when it comes to power. No good parent will ever exert power at the expense of the child's growing independence. And if love is the name of the game, freedom is the pre-condition to the playing of it. Human freedom has to be taken with utmost seriousness. Many is the time I have protested, if I may say so, to the Lord, like the Grand Inquisitor,¹⁹ saying, "What did you mean giving us freedom in the first place? If you give an expensive watch to a small child, and the kid smashes it, who is at fault?" But if God insists that love is what it is all about, human freedom has to be taken with utmost seriousness.

"He leadeth me beside the still waters ..." ²⁰ The shepherd doesn't drive. Western shepherds may drive, but Eastern shepherds lead. To Jesus – to God – we are drawn, not by power, far less by logic, but by love. We are truly "free" only when "captivated," "enthralled" by God's love which alone has the power to overcome the self-interest that makes us ignore the call of love, the call of life itself.

That is why I am still in the Church. The Church has taught me everything I know about Scripture, about the Gospel, what I consider the good life. The Church has given me the greatest gift of my life. Not that I want to preserve the Church; I want to preserve the Gospel. I think we should all strive to be Gospel persons, and leave the question of the preservation of the Church to

God. The moment the Church start to preserve itself it is like national security, it is the beginning of the end.

I believe also in the Church's mission. If Jesus is God's love personified, the Church is God's love organized. Again, I am not interested in Church work, but I am interested in the work of the Church, which is to bring to all of God's children strength for the day and bright hope for tomorrow. Albert Camus once said, "There is in this world beauty, and there are the humiliated, and we must strive, hard as it is, not to be unfaithful, neither to the one nor to the other."²¹

Once again this weekend I felt that kind of faithfulness, so in my gladdest days and in my darkest nights I will always bless the Lord for her faithful servant, George, and the treasure that is All Saints Church, Pasadena.

Thank you very much.

George Regas:

We have 10 minutes for some questions. Jim?

Questioner #1: I want to pick up on a comment you made on Friday. I want to encourage you to pursue what you said about you and George and Rabbi Beerman and like-minded clerics to form some kind of religious left and either all run for Congress or establish some kind of media network.

Bill Coffin: Well, I was saying yesterday, for those of you who weren't there, that a talk host started off by saying to me, "Well, there aren't very many of you left on the old religious left." I said, "I'm not sure that labels are that helpful." And he cut me right off. He said, "Look the Religious Right revels in being called the Religious Right, so what the hell is the matter with you? Why don't you call yourself the Religious Left? You'd be a lot more interesting; we'd pay a lot more attention to you. You know the media loves a controversy." There was a certain truth in that. There ought to be an interfaith organization. I am very prone to do it. However, Rabbi Beerman, who is desperately in love, and who is even older than I am, is very hard to get hold of these days. St. Benedict once said, "God often shows what is better to the younger." Now I do think that a 63-year-old, however [looking at George Regas] might well do something like that. It might get him out of the hair of his successor. [Laughter].

Questioner #2: I ask this as one of the professors you chastised – you may have noticed I was taking notes. When I listened to you yesterday and today, what I heard was you urging us to go full steam ahead to the liberalism of the 1960's. My question is one that *Christian Century* once asked various theologians and activists: What have you learned in 30 years as you come from the 60s to the 90s. In the preface to your talk you mentioned family, the nation and religion – Joyce's and Baldwin's issues. But it seems to me if we talk about the polarization of the left and the right, as a person of the left and a child of the 60s I think one of the great mistakes the left has made is to cede the cultural and moral space to the right – precisely on those issues of family, nation and morality. How do you respond to that?

Bill Coffin: Good questions, here. First of all, let me say, professor, that I take copious notes myself, believing with Pasteur that chance favors the mind prepared. I am anti-intellectual but pro-intellect. What I have learned from the 60s, I have to say, is that things can get worse – in part because of our own complicity in the evils that we abhor. For instance, now we are going to have a big discussion on affirmative action. It is going to be a very bad discussion. It is going

to be held at a very low level, to say the least. The left has been remarkably insensitive to the feelings of resentment that white males would develop as a result of affirmative action. We were very naïve about that; we did not anticipate it. It is no accident that 65% of white middle class males voted for the Republican ticket in November. They were the ones who felt offended by so much affirmative action. Yesterday I was citing a person who said that a “dead white male,” as they are now calling us, who said, “I don’t care whose liberation movement that it is, women’s liberation, black liberation – I always come out Pharaoh. That was a very heartfelt cry, and we were naïve not to be a lot more sensitive about that. We were not nearly as naïve as Dole is when he said, “We can remove affirmative action and we can have a color-blind society.” That is *really* naïve, not to say cynical.

I really think that the problems I talked about today are problems that abide: questions of justice, questions of love, questions of mercy. What we of the 60s have to do is to change our vocabulary. I’ve tried very hard to do that. I listen to somebody like Senator Harkin²² and I say, “I’ve heard all this before.” You’ve got to find new ways to communicate. I think that is one of the very important things. I have kind of a secret dream which will not come true that in two years from now out of the shadows will come storming a new populist, Mario Cuomo, who really knows how to talk about these problems and who is bright enough to know what some of the solutions are and may be decent enough to feel that he has kind of an obligation to do this. I’m not saying he’d be the only one, but that is what is going to be called for, a new populism with a new kind of language which talks about the old problems in a new way. What I have learned is what T. S. Eliot once said, “The trouble is always to find that which has been lost and found and lost again and again.”

Questioner #3: Yesterday in your seminar you mentioned that the Religious Right and people such as us in this church go to church for fundamentally contradictory reasons. I find that intriguing. Would you expound on that? What can we do, if anything, to make it less contradictory so that some of these programs can in fact be put into practice?

Bill Coffin: What I was saying, briefly, was that all of us tend to hold certainty dearer than truth. We want to learn only what we already know; we want to become only what we already are. So we all tend to engage in what the psychiatrists call, in a happy phase, “premature closure.” We can’t entertain complexity; we can’t entertain dilemmas. The worst thing you can do with a dilemma is to resolve it prematurely, because you haven’t the guts to live with uncertainty. But that is what is happening right now; we are just resolving prematurely all kinds of dilemmas. Fundamentalists are given to that in a greater measure than we are, for a variety of reasons. They would rather freeze the doctrine than warm the heart. They are people with limited sympathies but unlimited certainties, whereas the very contrary, to be chary of absolutes, to have limited certainties and unlimited sympathies, would seem to be more Christian for, as I said earlier, St. Paul asks us, “For who has known the mind of God?”

When people are looking for certainty, they are probably going to join a more fundamentalist church. They are looking for a God who is a sort of benevolent despot, and they will be living as sort of model prisoners in a very authoritarian setup. I have a lot of sympathy for that. If you’ve been a raging criminal and you have had nothing but chaos in your life, selfishness has absolutely dominated you – when chaos has dominated you, then order is the friend, and who needs the added enemy of doubt? Look at us in war time. You all know that. A lot of us opposed the Gulf War. It was very hard to get the boys and the girls on the front to entertain doubts. They had enough enemies already, who needs the enemy of doubt? There are a whole bunch of people who go to church to maintain that kind of certainty, and there are others who go to church who wonder, How in God’s name are we going to work through the maze of

dilemmas that life presents us. Our understanding of God is not a clearing up of mystery so much as a disclosure of new mystery. Our understanding of God is that which makes it possible for us to live with intellectual uncertainty, with moral ambiguity. That is very different than what the Fundamentalists go to church for. That's what I meant when I said that we don't go for different reasons, we go for fundamentally contradictory reasons. That is what makes it very hard to have a good discussion with Fundamentalists, because what is emotionally rooted is not intellectually soluble. I wish everybody well; I think we should try. I had a sheet of paper out here of statements in the Bible that I suggest we drop off with Fundamentalists – I am not trying to put them down in any way – and see whether we can get together that way. That is a long answer to your question.

Questioner #4: Dr. Coffin, do you believe that the Religious Right, with a line under “religious,” is a collection of cults under a large umbrella of Christianity?

Bill Coffin: Well, there are a lot of different people in the Religious Right. I think the leaders tend to be pretty cynical, if not to say thoroughly inconsistent, with the way they are backing the political right in removing the lunch programs, breakfast programs, day care center programs, and they way they are big champions of the unborn – you'd think that life begins at conception and ends at birth!

George Regas: Margaret, last question.

Questioner #5: One comment: when we are talking about eliminating affirmative action, what we really mean is a return to previous affirmative action which we've always had, which favors the white male. I think that needs to be clearly understood. But on another subject, when we talk about relinquishing our position to the far right, most of us really do not want to do that, and we need to find a way to stop it. A number of years ago some of us really wanted George to get active in the television medium, and maybe now he will have time and we can persuade him.

Bill Coffin: He sure looks like Paul Newman, doesn't he? [Loud laughter and applause]

Questioner #5: You've just hit on the source of his success. It's the blue eyes. We read about it in the paper this morning.

Bill Coffin: Let me answer what you said more seriously. It is a great mistake, I think, to let the other side capture the flag. We should be very clear that we speak as those who are having a lover's quarrel with our country. This isn't a grudge fight. If it's a grudge fight, go to Canada! Or go somewhere else. We don't need people with grudge fights. We don't need people in this country who hate evil more than they love the good. If you hate evil more than you love the good, you become a damn good hater. The peace movement has lots of good haters – people who hate evil more than they love the good. But if you love the good, if you love your country, and you are criticizing the President in the name of the Presidency, you are criticizing American practices in the name of American ideals, you know your American history.

For example, I spoke to a group with a bunch of Veterans who used to try to break up beaches in Vietnam, all sitting in the back of the room like this [arms folded on their chests]. The first thing you have to do is to get them to unfold their arms, so I would say, “How many here are Veterans?” Well, of course their hands would go up. Then I would say, “Abraham Lincoln, when he had just been elected to the House of Representatives, stood up in 1847 and called the war against Mexico ‘unnecessary and unconstitutional.’ How many of you would call Abraham Lincoln unpatriotic for doing that?”

You have to whereof you speak in terms of American history and in terms of Scripture. They should not capture the flag and they should not capture the cross. I agree with you very strongly. I think we can talk most persuasively to each other when we talk out of our own history, both religious and secular. American history and the language of the Bible are the best ways I have found to talk to my fellow Americans.

Questioner #6: It is also true that we have made great progress. We have changed so much that has been present in the United States; we have to keep that momentum going, and not let this go.

Bill Coffin: Yes. If you take the long sweep of American history, there is cause for some rejoicing.

¹ The Rev. William Sloane Coffin Jr. served as Chaplain of Yale University during the Viet Nam War, from 1958 to 1975. He was in early opposition to the war and became famous for his anti-war activities. After serving as senior minister of New York's Riverside Church from 1977 to 1987, he became president of the SANE/FREEZE campaign for global security, the largest peace and justice organization in the United States. At the time of this presentation he was president emeritus of SANE/FREEZE, renamed Peace Action in 1993. A more detailed biography is available at <http://ecojustice.net/coffin/Archive-Intro.htm>. See also *The New York Times*' obituary, located at <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/13/us/13coffin.html?ex=1145246400&en=83dee0b2cf7d37c2&ei=5087%0A> (available without charge for a few days, then for a fee from their archive).

² This text transcription was made April 14, 2006, two days after his death, from an audiotape made in 1995 of this presentation. All footnotes have been supplied by the transcriber. Note that this presentation occurred only four weeks before George Regas' retirement as Rector of All Saints Church.

³ Leonard Beerman is the founding rabbi of Leo Baeck Temple in Los Angeles, California, where he served for 37 years, retiring in 1986. He and George Regas have been partners in several peace and justice initiatives, and he is known at All Saints Church as its "Rabbi in Residence." Rabbi Beerman was present during this talk by Bill Coffin.

⁴ From the entry "Yasser Arafat" in *Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yasser_Arafat): Yasser Arafat (1929 – 2004), born Mohammed Abdel-Raouf Arafat al-Qudwa al-Husseini and also known by the *kunya* Abu `Ammar, was Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) (1969–2004); President of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) (1993–2004); and a co-recipient of the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize alongside Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin, for the successful negotiations of the 1993 Oslo Accords.

⁵ The *Cliffs Notes* summary of Chapter V of James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man* (http://education.yahoo.com/homework_help/cliffsnotes/portrait_of_the_artist_as_a_young_man/28.html) includes this description of the penultimate scene of this last chapter: Stephen confesses that he was once a *fervent* Roman Catholic — just as he was once a fervent disciple of his family and his country. But, having been disappointed, betrayed, and restricted by all of them, he now prefers to leave them all behind. He feels a deep need to declare his artistic, spiritual, and national independence. Stephen is sad that he and Cranly no longer view such matters in the same way, and his remorse is further compounded when he senses Cranly's anguished fear of being left behind. Nevertheless, claiming to fear nothing — not even an eternity in Hell — Stephen concludes his discussion by stating, "I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church."

⁶ From the entry "James Baldwin (writer)" in *Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Baldwin_%28writer%29): James Baldwin (1924 – 1987) was an African-American novelist, short story writer, and essayist, known for his novel *Go Tell it on the Mountain*. Most of Baldwin's work deals with racial and sexual issues in the mid-20th century United States. His novels are notable for the personal way in which they explore questions of identity as well as for the way in which they mine complex social and psychological pressures related to being black and homosexual, well before the social, cultural or political equality of these groups could be assumed.

⁷ From the entry "Augustine of Hippo" in *Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine_of_Hippo): Aurelius Augustinus, Augustine of Hippo ("The knowledgeable one;" 354 – 430 CE) was one of the most important figures in the development of Western Christianity. In Roman Catholicism, he is a saint and pre-eminent Doctor of the Church. Many Protestants, especially Calvinists, consider him to be one of the theological fountainheads of Reformation teaching on salvation and grace. Born in Africa as the

eldest son of Saint Monica, he was educated and baptized in Italy. His works — including *The Confessions*, which is often called the first Western autobiography — are still read by Christians around the world.

⁸ From the entry “Rollo May” in *Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rollo_May): Rollo May (1909, Ada, Ohio - 1994, Tiburon, California) was the best known American existential psychologist, authoring the influential book *Love and Will* in 1969. Although he is often associated with humanistic psychology, he differs from other humanistic psychologists such as Maslow or Rogers in showing a sharper awareness of the tragic dimensions of human existence. May was a close friend of the U.S. German-born theologian Paul Tillich. His works include *Love and Will* and *The Courage to Create*, the latter title being based on the title of Tillich’s *The Courage to Be*.

⁹ From the entry “Cogito ergo sum” in *Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cogito_ergo_sum): “Cogito, ergo sum” (Latin: “I am thinking, therefore I exist,” or traditionally “I think, therefore I am”) is a philosophical statement by René Descartes, which became a foundational element of Western rationalism. “*Cogito ergo sum*” is a translation of Descartes’ original French statement: *Je pense, donc je suis*, which occurs in his *Discourse on Method* (1637).

Although the idea expressed in “*cogito ergo sum*” is widely attributed to Descartes, many predecessors offer similar arguments — particularly Augustine of Hippo in *De Civitate Dei* (books XI, 26), who also anticipates modern refutations of the concept. (See *Principles of Philosophy*, §7: “*Ac proinde haec cognitio, ego cogito, ergo sum, est omnium prima et certissima etc.*”).

¹⁰ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, Act II Scene 2. Isabella is pleading to Angelo for her brother’s life:

...But man, proud man,
Dressed in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he’s most assured,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep; who, with our spleens,
Would all themselves laugh mortal....

¹¹ William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act II Scene I:

...Th’ abuse of greatness is, when it disjoins
Remorse from power; and, to speak truth of Caesar,
I have not known when his affections sway’d
More than his reason....

¹² Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932) p. 38. Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), American theologian and writer on ethical and social problems, was a native of Wright City, Missouri. He was educated at Elmhurst College (1910) and Yale University (1914), and ordained in 1915. He was pastor at Bethel Evangelical church of Detroit from 1915 to 1928, when he was appointed professor of Applied Christianity at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City, remaining there until his retirement in 1960. Niebuhr sought to return to the categories of the Biblical revelation and was critical both of liberal theology and metaphysics. He reinstated the doctrine of original sin and aimed at expounding a vital prophetic Christianity. His Christian realism exercised an influential critique on American social and political institutions.

¹³ Romans 3:23

¹⁴ Matthew 7:1

¹⁵ Genesis 4:16-18

¹⁶ Hosea 1:2-7

¹⁷ From the entry “Unitarian Universalism” in *Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia*

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unitarian_Universalist): Unitarian Universalism is a theologically liberal, inclusive belief system. The name resulted from the consolidation of the Unitarian and Universalist denominations in 1961. Unitarian Universalists claim a theological orientation that aspires to creativity, freedom, and compassion with respect for diversity and interconnectedness as well as encouraging spiritual growth and justice-making through worship, fellowship, personal experience, social action, and education. The free and responsible search for truth and meaning serves as a touchstone for Unitarian Universalists.

¹⁸ John 3:16

¹⁹ From the entry “The Grand Inquisitor” in *Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia*

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Grand_Inquisitor): “The Grand Inquisitor” is a parable told by Ivan to Alyosha in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s philosophical novel, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879-1880). Ivan and Alyosha are brothers, but Ivan is a committed atheist, while Alyosha is a novice monk. The tale is told by Ivan with brief interruptive questions by Alyosha. In the tale, Christ comes back to earth in Seville at the time of the Inquisition. Jesus performs

a number of miracles (echoing miracles from the Gospels). The people recognize him and adore him, but he is arrested by Inquisition leaders and sentenced to be burned to death the next day. The Grand Inquisitor visits him in his cell to tell him that the Church no longer needs him. The main portion of the text is the Inquisitor explaining to Jesus why his return would interfere with the mission of the church.

The Grand Inquisitor is an important part of the novel and one of the best-known passages in modern literature because of its ideas about human nature and freedom, and because of its fundamental ambiguity.

²⁰ Psalm 23:2

²¹ Albert Camus, addressing Dominican priests in Paris in 1948. From the entry “Albert Camus” in Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Camus): Albert Camus (pronounced Al-berr Kam-oo) (1913 – 1960) was a French author and philosopher and one of the principal luminaries of absurdism. Camus was the second youngest-ever recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature (after Rudyard Kipling) when he received the award in 1957. He is also the shortest-lived of any literature laureate to date, having died in a car crash three years after receiving the award.

²² The following was adapted on April 17, 2005, from the entry “Tom Harkin” in *Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Harkin): Thomas Richard Harkin (born November 19, 1939) is the junior United States Senator from Iowa. He is a member of the Democratic Party. He is currently serving as the Ranking Minority Member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. Harkin was an aide to Democratic Congressman Neal Smith, when he accompanied a congressional delegation that went to South Vietnam in 1970. Harkin published photographs he took during the trip and a detailed account of "tiger cages" at Con Son Island prison in *Life Magazine* on July 17, 1970. The account exposed shocking, inhuman conditions prisoners were forced to endure.

Harkin is best known as an advocate for people with disabilities. In 1990, he wrote and was the chief sponsor of the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the nation’s first comprehensive civil rights law for people with disabilities. Signed into law by President George H. W. Bush, the sweeping legislation prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in employment, in public services, and in public accommodations. Although critics say the ADA often requires unreasonably broad accommodations for people with disabilities, in 2005 *Ability* magazine stated that the act “takes its place among the nation’s landmark freedom documents such as the Declaration of Independence, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964.”

He is, along with California Senator Barbara Boxer, one of only two Senate Democrats to come out in favor of Wisconsin Senator Russ Feingold’s resolution to censure President George W. Bush.