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## GOOD THINGS: An Appreciation of the Work of the Jesus Seminar

By Amanda Udis-Kessler

How does a disaffected secular Jewish youth, fighting with evangelists on the street, wind up teaching an adult religious education course on Jesus fifteen years later? How does a former gleeful atheist, known for quoting Bible verses at believers to prove that the Bible is a load of crap, come to find reverence in the Lord's Prayer and to seek, as genuinely as possible, the will of God in her life?

Thank the Jesus Seminar.

After years of resisting a pull to Jesus that made no sense to me, I have "found" a way to Jesus that works. It is not Jesus as the Savior who "died on the cross for my sins" that draws me, but Jesus the God - intoxicated person, role model, and window to the Holy described by the Jesus Seminar.

Through the work of Marcus Borg, Robert Funk, John Dominic Crossan, Stephen Patterson and others (as well as through other significant life experiences), I have become the "Jesus-inspired" person I now believe I was called to be. My lack of belief in doctrinal Christianity has not kept me from the wisdom of this person Jesus or from the grace of God that he (among many others) made manifest.

Having learned concrete lessons from the different Jesus Seminar authors like Borg, who taught that compassion trumps purity, and Crossan, who taught that the brokerless Kingdom was a

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*"This world is now too dangerous for anything but the truth, too small for anything but brotherhood."*

A. Powell Davies

### Universalism and An Angry Generation

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yourself. You risk having a God who always agrees with you. You have nobody to talk to soul-to-soul. You become stagnated and isolated without a community.

For a small group of people my age, Unitarian Universalism has become our chosen faith. The theology isn't popular. It offers no simple answers to complicated problems, and there don't seem to be any Universalist TV preachers. At its heart Universalism offers us something simple, sensible, and honest. Love is what we are offered in Unitarian Universalist churches, and it is never something we have to buy. Universalism has also taught us to work here and now for a better life, instead of throwing up our hands and waiting for that "pie in the sky". Universalism does not cloak

itself inside entertainment, self-help tapes, and fashionable appearances. It offers itself to us honestly, without the trappings of an American culture that wants to sell everything to a population that believes that happiness can be purchased. Universalism offers us a community where we can explore spirituality with others who simply hold love and honesty as their guides. With Universalism will I never need to be angry again? It is likely that I will be angry many times in my life. What Universalism gives me is the chance to meet my anger with love, to work for a better world, and to be honest with my spirituality.

*(Derek Lee Parker is a young adult living in Clarkston, Michigan. He is the new Coordinator of Campus Ministries for the U.U. District of Michigan)*



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revolutionary concept), I find myself now able to believe Jesus rather than having to believe in him. I believe that God's all-inclusive, welcoming love really does provide good things, that trusting God utterly is the way we begin to relinquish our fear and live in love, and that we are called to love and to serve God, neighbor, and self. I won't for a moment claim that I'm any good at carrying out this work, but at least I know what it is, and I have concrete ways to practice it - some learned from Jesus' story, others from other sources.

Ultimately, I have come to trust that if we set Jesus free, he will set us free in return. Liberating Jesus as much as possible from the apologetic needs and cultural contexts of the early Church offers us a similar liberation, enabling us to move beyond the dualism of having to reject the value of Jesus' life and teaching entirely, or of having to accept a punitive, fire and

brimstone understanding of God. Clearly, many people, and even many Unitarian Universalists, are not drawn to Jesus' story, or are too burned out by its use in the service of violence and injustice. However, for at least some of the rest of us, the Jesus Seminar offers exactly the kind of liberation of Jesus that we need to come into our own as daughters and sons of God, working to build the upside down Kingdom. Today, thanks in significant part to the Jesus Seminar, I struggle to model God's love so that all that seek God's House, by whatever name, will discover how welcome they are there.

*(Amanda Udis-Kessler, a writer, sociologist, and composer of sacred music, taught a course on Jesus at the Arlington Street Church, Boston, Massachusetts, in 1997. She is currently trying to turn the course lectures into a book on how Jesus can be made more meaningful for Unitarian Universalists.)*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:**

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**CORRECTION:** *The November/December 1998 issue of the Universalist Herald contained an incorrect subscription rate. The Universalist Herald is published 6 times (not 12) per year. The annual subscription rate is \$10.00. We apologize for the printing error.*