

Rev. Lisa Ward differentiates covenant from creed:

A Covenant Invites Relationship

Reading By [Lisa Ward](#) minister at First Parish in Milton UU

A covenant is not a definition of a relationship; it is the framework for our relating. A covenant leaves room for chance and change, it is humble toward evolution. It claims: *I will abide with you in this common endeavor, be present as best as I can in our becoming.* This calls for a level of trust, courage and sacrifice that needs to be nurtured, renewed and affirmed on a regular basis.

A creed creates a static truth, something that does not incorporate new insights and realities.

A covenant is a dance of co-creation, keeping in step with one another in the flow of our lives.

A creed seeks uniformity and a unison voice.

A covenant seeks harmony and a shared voice. Sometimes we may arrive at a unison, but it is not required.

A creed gives authority to the statement.

A covenant gives authority to shared intention.

A creed creates an “us” and “them.”

A covenant invites relationship.

A creed is a prescription that must be relied on.

A covenant relies on the treasures of shared truth.

The overall trust within this covenant is in the Truth (Capital T): something which no one person can fully see, yet something which each and every person can come to know—in glimpses, in another's story, in epiphanies.

Truth is ever changing in our seeking to understand because of our limited perspectives—we grow into a deeper sense of the meaning of all things when we take our journeys seriously, with full heart and mind.

The courage within this covenant is in the acceptance and celebration of life, with all of its challenges, pain, ironies and joys. And the sacrifice within this covenant is in the letting go of dogma, of assumptions, of control—and giving over to a greater wisdom which comes to us in bits and pieces.

The task of this covenant is to take responsibility for the freedom we espouse. We know that we are interconnected and that what we do creates ripples of hope or despair, of affirmation or negation. What we do with and for one another is powerful and beyond our imagining.

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DEFINITIONS

Vision: A carefully defined picture of where the congregation wants to be in five or more years. It is the dream of what the congregation can become. The Board of Trustees' Vision, presented September 2020 is: “Albany UU will be an inclusive, welcoming congregation. Our sacred work is to lift hearts, broaden minds, and do justice in the world, in service of building beloved community.” (Underlinings are the Board's)

Strategic Plan: A document which defines a congregation's vision for the future, along with goals for a specific time period (e.g., the next year, 3 years, 5 years), and recommendations for how to achieve those goals.

Mission Statement: A concise statement of what the congregation wants to be known for, or known as, within the wider world; what the congregation wants to mean to the community.

Our Mission Statement is:

“We welcome everyone. In keeping with our distinctive, non-creedal religion, we:

- seek truth and deeper meaning;
- pursue justice through inspired action; and
- cultivate compassion and love for all connected by the web of life.”

Covenant: a statement of identity reminding congregants who they are collectively, where they are headed, and how they will go there. It reflects the relationship of members of the congregation to one another and what promises they are willing to make. The covenant grows from an affirmation of shared needs, values, and principles. The commitment that is made to oneself and each other helps the congregation understand what their tradition calls them to be and how to move into the future with shared purpose. A covenant speaks to how “We’re all in this together, building a better world.”

The Beloved Community: “The Beloved Community” is a term that was first coined in the early days of the 20th Century by the philosopher-theologian Josiah Royce, who founded the Fellowship of Reconciliation. However, it was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., also a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, who popularized the term and invested it with a deeper meaning which has captured the imagination of people of goodwill all over the world.

For Dr. King, The Beloved Community was not a lofty utopian goal to be confused with the rapturous image of the Peaceable Kingdom, in which lions and lambs coexist in idyllic harmony. Rather, The Beloved Community was for him a realistic, achievable goal that could be attained by a critical mass of people committed to and trained in the philosophy and methods of nonviolence.

Dr. King’s Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

Dr. King’s Beloved Community was not devoid of interpersonal, group or international conflict. Instead he recognized that conflict was an inevitable part of human experience. But he believed that conflicts could be resolved peacefully and adversaries could be reconciled through a mutual, determined commitment to nonviolence. No conflict, he believed, need erupt in violence. And all conflicts in The Beloved Community should end with reconciliation of adversaries cooperating together in a spirit of friendship and goodwill.

As early as 1956, Dr. King spoke of The Beloved Community as the end goal of nonviolent boycotts. As he said in a speech at a victory rally following the announcement of a favorable U.S. Supreme Court Decision desegregating the seats on Montgomery’s busses, “the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the Beloved Community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opponents into friends. It is this type of understanding goodwill that will transform the deep gloom of the old age into the exuberant gladness of the new age. It is this love which will bring about miracles in the hearts of men.”

Josiah Royce (1855-1916)

2.3.2 Theory of Community

Royce was one of the first American philosophers to recognize the important challenge of Nietzsche's moral vision, which celebrates those individuals who seek to exercise their autonomous will to a “socially idealized” power. Such heroic individualism, also associated with Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and William James, proves unsatisfactory in Royce's view (Royce 1995 [1908], 41). Their inspiring ethical visions are doomed to ineffectiveness precisely because of their extreme individualism. “There is only one way to be an ethical individual. That is to choose your cause, and then to serve it, as the Samurai his feudal chief, as the ideal knight of romantic story his lady, — in the spirit of all the loyal” (Royce 1995 [1908], 47). These particular

examples are meant to illustrate the essentially social character of loyalty in general: “My life means nothing, either theoretically or practically, unless I am a member of a community” (Royce 2001 [1913], 357).

One of the more striking features of Royce's philosophy is its emphasis on communities as being logically prior to individuals. As we have seen, Royce considers the notions of truth and knowledge unintelligible for the individual unless we posit an ultimate knower of objective truth, the infinite community of minds. The notions of personal identity and purpose are likewise unintelligible unless we posit a community of persons that defines causes and establishes social roles for those individuals to embrace. The concept of community is thus central both to Royce's ethics and his metaphysics. Not just any association or collection of individuals is a community. Community can only exist where individual members are in communication with one another so that there is, to some extent and in some relevant respect, a congruence of feeling, thought, and will among them. It is also necessary to consider the temporal dimensions of community. “A community constituted by the fact that each of its members accepts as a part of his own individual life and self the same past events that each of his fellow-members accepts, may be called a community of memory.” Similarly, “A community constituted by the fact that each of its members accepts, as part of his own individual life and self, the same expected future events that each of his fellows accepts, may be called a community of expectation or...a community of hope” (PC 248). These common past and future events, which all members hold as identical parts of their own lives, are the basis of their loyalty to the community.

As discussed in connection with Royce's ethical theory, some communities are defined by true loyalty, or adherence to a cause that harmonizes with the universal ideal of “loyalty to loyalty.” He refers to such communities as “genuine communities” or “communities of grace.” Other communities are defined by a vicious or predatory loyalty. These degenerate “natural communities” tend toward the destruction of others' causes and possibilities of loyalty. Finally, beyond the actual communities that we directly encounter in life there is the ideal “Beloved Community” of all those who would be fully dedicated to the cause of loyalty, truth and reality itself.

Royce stresses that the sharing of individuals' feelings, thoughts, and wills that occurs in any community (including the Beloved Community) should not be taken to imply a mystical blurring or annihilation of personal identities. Individuals remain individuals, but in forming a community they attain to a kind of second-order life that extends beyond any of their individual lives. Where a number of individuals' loyalty to a cause is coordinated in community over time, Royce speaks non-figuratively of a super-human personality at work: a genuine community is united by a guiding or “interpreting spirit.” The interpreting spirit may on occasion be embodied by a single person such as a leader or other exemplar, but this is not always the case.