



Seeking Meaning

Revd Dr Ralph Catts © 9 August 2026

Address: A Theology for Seekers

Our fourth principle is a free and responsible search for truth and meaning. This approach contrasts with most of the major world religions where canon and a scripture from thousands of years ago proscribe what followers are to believe.

Hans le Grand, a European minister who is a friend of mine, has recently completed a Doctorate in Theology, in which he develops a Seeker Theology. His starting point is an agnostic approach to the mystery of existence and our place within the complexity of existence which, he suggests, is beyond our full comprehension (Le Grand, 2023, p. 46). The elements of a Seeker theology include

- human thought as the source of ethics,
- diverse sources of inspiration,
- spiritual growth,
- a world view,
- the role of community and
- a perspective on what happens after death (Le Grand, 2023, pp. 36 -37).

In all these dimensions he argues that rational analysis and personal discernment are the arbiters of reality. This distinguishes Seeker Theology from the canon of Christian theology.

For instance, ethics takes precedent over dogma (Le Grand, 2023, pp. 68 - 69). In relation to death, seekers take into account empirical evidence as well as metaphysical perspectives (Le Grand, 2023, pp. 81 - 83). Spiritual growth is defined as a ‘process in which the self increasingly becomes closer to one’s ideal self’, and includes the notion that our ideal may change as we grow in understanding and awareness (Le Grand, 2023, p. 100).

Seekers recognize that we are unable to reach an ultimate truth and hence should question all claims to wisdom (Le Grand, 2023, p. 116). This is

consistent with the teachings of the Buddha, whose insights are an inspiration to many Unitarians.

A key distinction with canon-based religions, is that Seekers rely on their internal sources of authority to inform their search for meaning (Le Grand, 2023, pp. 135 -141). However, there are risks associated with this approach. James Luther Adams warned against looking into a deep well, seeing one's own reflection, and calling that God. Hence a community of seekers is an important source of balance to avoid what Hans calls an 'ego-theism'.

Le Grand suggests that many liberal thinkers are cynical about organized religion, and this could be why seekers are sometimes reluctant to join a Unitarian congregation (Le Grand, 2023, p. 169).

The approach he advocates means that seekers can gain inspiration from diverse sources and hence individuals can arrive at different conclusions (Le Grand, 2023, p. 197). Hence the importance of unity within diversity of beliefs as an essential element of a Unitarian fellowship. A community of seekers also enables us to gain the benefit of insights from many wisdom traditions. As le Grand notes, it is probably beyond the capacity of an individual seeker to understand all the diverse wisdom traditions, but in fellowship we can garner insights by sharing our experience of the mystery of existence with others from diverse backgrounds (Le Grand, 2023, p. 198).

He argues that Seekers start from a position of accepting that there are unresolvable distinctions (aporias) between various religious theologies, and that as Seekers we may each decide on these distinctions in different ways. It also follows that being open to new ideas means that Seeker theology is a continuous journey throughout life, whereas a dogma-based religion leads one to a destination (Le Grand, 2023, p. 203). It also follows that when trauma occurs, the security in a received faith may be over-turned, whereas a seeker accepts the event as a reason to reflect on their understanding and to continue on the path of seeking meaning.

He concludes with six steps of faith for a Seeker Theology (Le Grand, 2023, p. 218). These steps involve a series of decisions:

Step 1: To view humans as bio-historical individuals

Step 2: To view the world as an environment for life

Step 3: To explore existential questions about life, death, and reality

Step 4: To commit to a process of spiritual growth in which the self and one's ideal self increasingly become the same;

Step 5: To leave the last word in theology to individual experience;

Step 6: To recognize the aporetic character of the insights of various religions, and to take these aporias seriously.

Seeker Theology inevitably leads to diverse views, which is why Unitarians embrace diversity.

Interestingly, there has emerged seeker groups from several of the major world religions. For instance, in India we find the Sikh religion, and we also have the B'hai and the Sufi's that have spun off from Islam. Like Unitarianism in the west, these groups have also been subjected to persecution by the main stream religions.

Our fellowships are each a community of individuals who support each other in seeking spiritual meaning and direction in our lives. It is for each of us to decide what is the locus of our spiritual being, and as a fellowship we seek to support one another in the quest for meaning that we each undertake.

I have offered a perspective on a theology for Seekers, which I suggest is the antithesis of dogma based received faith, which is largely unchanging in response to new information and environmental changes.

Reference

Le Grand, H. (2023). *Searching in the Face of Mystery: A theology based on the Methodology of Gordon Kaufman*. Kampen, The Netherlands, The Netherlands: Uitgeverij Van Warven.