

Unitarian Universalism Is Not a Religion

The 1999 Josephine Gould Discourse

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by the
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"What, exactly, is Unitarian Universalism anyway? You talk about it all the time, but it eludes me just what you believe. Evidently it's not anything like what my religion believes, but just what does your church teach?" That's the question that so many U.U.'s are afraid to hear. Because they feel so ill-prepared to answer it. That's my fault. And the fault of my dear colleagues. The situation is not a good one not only because it thwarts our growth as a movement, but because it bespeaks great confusion among ourselves about who we are.

"Even if I can't describe it, though, I sure know it when I see it," might be the honest answer. One U.U. can spot another in a crowd at thirty yards and could know if he or she was standing in a U.U. church blindfolded and ear-muffled -- just by osmosis or the smell or the vibrations or some other mysterious presence. That's certainly my experience, and maybe yours, too.

We are *indescribably delicious*. Impossible to explain but immediately recognizable. Indescribably delicious. I love it.

I would. My parents met, before the Second World War, at All Souls Church in Washington, DC. I was christened by A. Powell Davies. All our friends were Unitarians. My

mother was DRE when I was a kid at the new church in Bethesda. LRY was my whole life as a teenager.

But I left all that behind. I was free to, after all. My freedom was one of the gifts of my religious upbringing. I was a young adult, as well -- which may have had more to do with it. But my absence wasn't rebellion, just a necessary benign neglect. I simply joined the half a million people who would say they are Unitarian Universalists if asked, but never set foot in our churches.

Adulthood, though, has a way of creeping up on you from behind. So it was that there grew a deep yearning in me that I could not resist. When I was thirty-two I finally set foot in a U.U. church again -- for the first time in a dozen years. It was an experience I will never forget.

It happened on a Saturday. Naturally, I had to check the place out first before actually coming to church. (I read ahead, too, when I sing unfamiliar hymns -- so I won't be coerced into mouthing words I don't agree with.)

The Cherry Hill, New Jersey church is several buildings set up on a hill in the middle of ten acres of former peach orchard. The long

driveway, marked by a tiny sign, goes right past the communal gardens. That's where I met Karen Snow and Eldon Winston for the first time. They were weeding their vegetable patches. I asked about the church and I told them my story; and we talked. Seems ordinary enough, I guess.

But I was overwhelmed with emotion. It was a home-coming. I cannot tell you how I knew I was finally home again. But it was instantly obvious. There are just things about Unitarian Universalists and our religious communities that are subtle but highly characteristic.

We are indescribably delicious. And did it feel good! Some deeply held part of my self-identity was once again affirmed and celebrated.

What we really make ourselves out to be, though, is deliciously *indescribable*. Our indescribability, indeed, tastes so very good. For it suits our ideals, eases our guilt, and covers over our humiliating failure. We like being so mysterious. Denny Davidoff, describing her journey to Unitarian Universalism, says, "[Even after many years], I still couldn't articulate this newfound faith of mine. The journey to articulation would take much longer than I could ever have imagined. To be truthful, it continues to this day."¹ She goes on to ask, "We struggle to speak our Unitarian Universalism to each other and, particularly, to the interfaith world beyond the walls of our societies. . . How could people who value learning so much find themselves knowing so little?"² Indeed, you have to wonder just how that can be the case.

As you probably know, the fact is we are a most homogenous group when it comes to religious attitudes.³ We are far more just like each other than we say we would like to be.⁴ The fact is that as a group we are quite well describable. Many are happy to do it for us.

Forrest Church says, "we tend to view the

world as a school rather than as a corrections facility."⁵ Wow. That really captures it for me. And, indeed, the sociological data indicate that valuing education is one of the most common traits among our people.⁶ But more than that: Forrest has hit on a description of the very core of our religious response to the cosmos – that it somehow cares for us and wishes to educate us, rather than modify our behavior in some punitive way that presupposes some deep, innate character flaw. Forrest captures so beautifully, in that one short sentence, our interest in reasoning, our insatiable curiosity and our incurably optimistic engagement with this wonder-filled world we find ourselves immersed in. Thanks, Forrest.

But wait. There are people in this world who disdain education and believe that we already know enough now to live happy lives. Besides, the world offers mostly hard knocks in the way of education. Who needs that? There are lots of people who think that. Do we exclude them from our religious communion? You may say not, but evidently we do. The record is clear.

But I thought we were a creedless faith? What's going on here?

The fact is we are quite well describable. Steve Kendrick does a beautiful job when he says, "We join in celebrating one world, one people, one love, which is Truth."⁷ His poetic refrain says it all: we believe in oneness – that everything is part of a whole and nothing isolated. Though so much around us may appear variegated and a jumble at times, behind it all there runs a golden thread that connects all people, all the world, and binds us in love and faith. There is Truth, consistent, far-reaching, all encompassing Truth – of which we catch only a glimpse from time to time, but which sustains and feeds our souls always. Steve captures our deepest faith in but a few words. Thanks, Steve.

But wait. There are people in this world who don't see any rhyme or reason behind all the

goings on we witness and who experience life in a much more precarious way than we do. For them, fate, or some other less-than-reliable powers or personalities, are behind all that happens. Placating these powers is more important to them than understanding the supposed unity behind it all. There are lots of people who think that. Do we exclude them from our religious communion? You bet we do. The record is clear.

But I thought we were a creedless faith? What's going on?

The fact is we are quite well describable. The General Assembly, including many of you I am sure, has done an exquisite job for us by crafting the Purposes and Principles of the Unitarian Universalist Association. They are revered within our movement for good reason. At the very top of the UUA webpage is quoted the very first: "What is a Unitarian Universalist? Affirming the Inherent Worth and Dignity of Every Person,"⁸ it says. How accurate that is in so many ways. We believe that every man, woman, and child – regardless of circumstances, background, race, or anything else – is worthy of respect and love. We believe, moreover, that it is essential to honor and value people in an active and public way; we celebrate and affirm the sheer humanity of all people, knowing that there is the spark of the divine at the core of everyone's soul. We may call it many different things, but we believe that at the heart of human *being* itself are the seeds of ultimate worth, whose flowering depends only on nurture. We are called to care for and honor all people because of it. Those who worked so hard on crafting our Purposes and Principles knew what they were doing – and have given us words to live by. Thanks to all who participated in the process.

But wait. There are people who believe that some are more worthy than others of respect. There are people who believe that dignity is a choice one makes, not a God-given right. There

are people who believe that the world is designed so that some people are in charge and are more valuable than the others, who only take orders; that's the way it should be. Do we exclude overt racists from our religious communion, for example? Sure looks that way since they aren't among us.

But I thought we were a creedless faith. Just what are we, anyway?

We are a religion. That's what we are. A *religion*: a group of people gathered together because they believe pretty much the same things and enjoy celebrating and reinforcing those beliefs. It's just that we do a poor job of it since we don't have the guts to institutionalize what we know is true about us: that we all believe pretty much the same things in essential spirit. Michael Werner puts it well. "Religion began not in a church, but around a campfire," he says. "In the ancient glow of flames and embers, stone-age parents confronted the eternal questions of existence. Who are we? What is our purpose? What happens when we die? How should we live? Why is there suffering? Why be good?"⁹ Throwing down the gauntlet, then, he says, "...religion must answer the questions by the campfire. Our duty resides not just in the process but also in providing content. Ministers should reassume their rabbinic duty, that is, their duty as teachers. Ministers should give up the illusion that they are empty vessels attempting to facilitate others' growth. . ."¹⁰ Michael Werner is President of the American Humanist Association, so it is clear what content he has in mind. Earl Holt, on the other hand, would like liberal Christianity to be our "common ground."¹¹

We have a hard time being a very good religion not because of our wished-for (but non-existent) diversity of belief, but because of our fiercely individual character and our obsession with trying to please everyone, including the fringe elements among us. But we could be a very good religion if we set our minds to it. Our

beliefs, if not mainstream in this part of the world, are pretty widely held. Who could disagree with our fundamental values, which Kim Beach so nicely summarizes as, “justice, faithfulness, steadfast love, mercy, truthfulness, good will, and peace?”¹² Yet we are a tiny religion. Where is everybody?

Smart enough to know that religions are very dangerous, that’s where. And they don’t want anything to do with us. With good reason.

There is a lesson humanity must learn if it is to survive much longer. And it is this: we can no longer afford to build community on the basis of sameness – as is our evolutionary heritage. We can no longer survive by gathering *religious* groups, especially, on the basis of shared ideologies or common background. The history of humankind is replete with the evidences of the inevitable result of such clannishness: nationalism, xenophobia, bigotry, torture, pogroms, inquisitions, holocausts, brutal wars -- and complete annihilation if we keep on like we have been. In spite of our stubborn behavior, however, these things are still universally recognized as evils. Yet they persist. They continue because we consistently train ourselves to conceive community, and the love and loyalty it engenders, in terms of sameness. It’s only natural. But it is going to kill us all for good if we don’t make some radical cultural changes soon.

Do we have the courage to lead the world to safety? Do we have the courage to proclaim with utter clarity that the locus of our corporate faith lies not in beliefs at all – but in people? Only the human spirit. Do we have the courage to accept the challenge of religious community among a truly diverse group of people?

So far, no. Our diversity quotient is practically zero. We are very comfortable among ourselves. And guys like me can luxuriate in being “at home” with all of you nice folks.

Arvid Straube puts it well when he says, “It seems to me our movement is at a critical point. We are deciding now whether we will be an historic anomaly, a tiny cell of cranky intellectuals, or an important voice in shaping the next millennium.”¹³

I think he’s right. And I think his devastating critique is important for us to hear: “We could continue as a small group of upper-middle-class, white intellectuals,” he says, “who constantly talk about openness and inclusiveness but only have time for and interest in people quite a lot like ourselves. . . We would proclaim our multisyllabic, left-brained, abstract gospel to the well-fed, politically correct, many-degreed individualists who would smugly listen to sermons most of the population couldn’t understand. Prayer would continue to be suspect. The irrational truths of dreams, ritual, imagination, and emotion would be suspect. We would live in fine homes while our meeting rooms were shabby and cluttered. We would furnish our businesses and offices with state-of-the-art equipment while our churches make do with cast-offs. We would continue to pledge to the church, on average, less than we spend on one weekend away. We would be quick to condemn our neighbor’s irrational beliefs and practices in scornful and merciless terms while we fall prey to trends and fads that are incomprehensible to most of the population. We would be quick as ever with solutions for the problems of the poor and the oppressed, who, of course, do not live near us, work with us, or go to school with our children.”¹⁴

Then, foretelling our future, he concludes: “As we became ever more isolated we would feel ever more hurt that the world, not recognizing our superior wisdom and greater intelligence or our churches, persists in its intolerant, reactionary, and unenlightened ways. Most of the world, of course, will never hear of us. If it did and understood us, it would despise us as earnestly as we patronize and look down upon it.”¹⁵

Even accepting only a fraction of Arvid's rather strong comments about us, you still might be asking, "Okay, what do we do about it, then?"

It won't suffice to call ourselves a "creedless" religion. That's just refusing to write down our criteria for membership. It won't suffice to point out how we've changed over the years and say, "look there's proof we're creedless – it's our genius that we can evolve and not be stuck the way other religions are." That's just having a creed that gradually changes; it still defends the faith and the character of the gathered few just as fiercely from day to day and from week to week (which is all our deep yearning for sameness grouping needs).

This is not another call for the UUA's multicultural agenda, which has a great deal going for it. I do not think it a wise move, however, to gather "diversity" by offering some of the samenesses of other perceived groups of people so that they will feel comfortable among us. That's just doing religion even worse than we are already.

No, I suggest *not doing religion at all*.

Rather, I suggest we accept our own rhetoric about diversity and truly embark on a new way of gathering religious community. I can't say exactly where it will lead us, but you can be sure that being comfortable will not be the guiding principle that it has been.

We don't have to do this. I, for one, like things the way they are. I suppose we could be a better religion than we are. But from the inside it isn't so bad, really. It is very comfortable. Who cares if we are small and despised by those who bother to understand us? We've got what we need: a rich, caring community of deep thinkers and fellow-travelers. What's wrong with that? It's certainly what all the rest of the world goes for: comfy groups gathered in sameness. Why not us, too?

Some of our own ideals, however, are being forced upon all of us. You know what they say about making wishes – be careful because you may just get them.

We say we cherish diversity. Either that is a lie or we are terribly frustrated since we are the worst religion when it comes to achieving it. But, as you know, what with the speed of communication technologies and transportation, all the world is getting mixed up. There are all kinds of people everywhere now. At least we recognize that situation as a possible good and resist our fears because of it.

Really, though, we ought to be the world's experts on how to manifest such good. In spite of our failures I think we could be – but only with dogged determination.

We'd have to start by making it clear to the world and ourselves that we are not a religion. We are not a group of people gathered in loyalty to a set of propositions, a particular way of being in the world, or even an inspiring story. We are gathered in loyalty only to humanity; our corporate faith lies not in ideas but in people – the indomitable power of the human spirit to discover religious truth and understanding.. We'd have to stop presenting ourselves as a religion.

Now, if you're like me, the thought of hanging my religious life on anything but commitment to ideas and inspiring stories is ludicrous. These are my very life-blood. And the fact is I don't trust just anyone to have good insights – probably very few people, in fact (but including all of you, of course).

What we must teach the world, and ourselves, is to make a radical differentiation between *corporate* religion and *individual* religion. They do not have to reinforce one another. And when they do, people get killed in the name of truth. Souls are poisoned by hate. Spirits are sold for a bit of security. We are not

immune from these perils.

There is a place for group reinforcement of ideas and religious commitments. But these groups must be small and powerless. It could be a function of corporate religion to facilitate the creation of such small groups.

The larger groups, however – the institutions of religion – need to focus on only one thing: the creation of, the celebration of, and the maintenance of, covenanted community among many people of widely diverse backgrounds and religious persuasions. We, all together that is, need to be in the business of saving the world; we, all together, need to be learning what it will take to live on this tiny planet for years to come without tearing each other apart in our zeal for meaning and worth.

Will this sell? Maybe not at first. But what we are offering now isn't selling. That's for sure -- in spite of the fact that we're right about so many things.

If you disagree with where I'm headed on this, I hope you will talk about it this weekend. It could turn into the "Third Battle of Syracuse." The first, in 1866, was over the Unitarians' commitment to "Our Lord Jesus Christ." The second, in 1959, was over our commitment to "Our Judeo-Christian Heritage." This one, in 1999, is over our commitment to cease being a religion at all. It's about time. Will you make the commitment?

The thought scares me. We don't want real diversity in our midst. Who's kidding whom? And I can understand why. Who wants to mix it up with a bunch of bigoted, ignorant people who don't understand our religion – and, what's more, stubbornly insist on their own, backward ideas? That's what real diversity would feel like.

Maybe our talk of cherishing diversity is very foolish – and we ought to stop dishing it

out.

No. As frightened as I am of losing something very important, I still know this comfy religion business is scarier. But who will lead the way? Are you willing to give up your religious home and fellowship for something – whatever it turns out to be – that is much less friendly, affirming, and relaxing? Do you really want to *work* all the time at religious community? After a hard week at the job it is sure nice to come in on Sunday morning and celebrate with all those other nice folks who are willing to call themselves Unitarian Universalists and adopt that identity with all its peculiarities and mystery.

Maybe it's all a parable trying to tell us something. . . From a distant, country hamlet in the realm, Franz Kafka writes of the capital city and its emperor: "Can there really be a village where the houses stand side by side, covering all the fields for a greater distance than one can see from our hills, and can there be dense crowds of people packed between these houses day and night? We find it more difficult to picture such a city than to believe that [the city] Pekin and its Emperor are one.

"Now the result of holding such opinions is a life on the whole free and unconstrained. By no means immoral, however; hardly ever have I found in my travels such pure morals as in my native village. But yet a life that is subject to no contemporary law, and attends only to the exhortations and warnings which come to us from olden times. . .

"This attitude is certainly no virtue. All the more remarkable is it that this very weakness should seem to be one of the greatest unifying influences among our people; indeed, if one may dare use the expression, the very ground on which we live. To set about establishing a fundamental defect here would mean undermining not only our consciences, but, what is far worse, our feet."¹⁶

There is, indeed, I fear, a fundamental defect in our corporate religious endeavor. What is it that stops us from making the journey to the city, where the real work of religion awaits us? I'll tell you: a deep, unconscious hypocrisy. It is our shame and humiliation that drive us to it.

We say we want diversity. Yet we are the worst at getting it. Therefore we are the best at insuring homogeneity. We must do it in some very clever and powerful ways because even we don't notice them. When do we practice them? At Coffee Hour? In group discussions? At potlucks? By sermons that describe what it is to be a Unitarian Universalist, but then add as a postscript that we don't require anyone to believe any particular thing?

I've often said that there is nothing I would like more than for an overt racist to be a member of my congregation – because I know that she or he would be subjected to some very powerful forces urging him or her to reconsider such an attitude. Would I rather the racist person be with those who will reinforce such prejudice? Of course not.

Better with us – where the reforming process will happen quietly but efficiently and without fail.

Unitarian Universalists tend to be people who doubt a lot. “To question is the answer,” we say. It is no wonder, then, that we crave religious community that will set boundaries on our wanderings. We, who are seekers, need help in insuring that ours is a *responsible* search for truth and meaning. Responsible to our religious peers, that is. We must be, somehow, checking on their responses continually.

So it is, that the norms of the group need to be strictly maintained, but, because of our stated and conscious ideals, strictly hidden, as well.

Do we want to continue this way? “Too often we can advocate a ‘gated community of the mind,’” says Barbara Merritt, “a life stance in which, under the guise of intellectual discernment, we mark out an exclusive territory. We stockpile our resources, guard our privacy, and reject the experiences and the dignity of those with whom we disagree. In this unconnected place, very dangerous qualities of judgment, self-righteousness, and prejudice thrive.”¹⁷

Are we the quintessential example of the dangers of communities of sameness? Do we carry those dangers out from our churches and poison the world still more than it is already? Do we hide our shame over our obvious failure at diversity and let it drive us into ever more covert but highly coercive behaviors around each other and new members?

Will we ever have the courage to face the real challenges of our fast-moving, quickly de-provincializing world? Will we ever offer the gift of discovering how heterogeneous community can really happen?

Are we the ones to end this primordial foolishness and to guide our world to safety?

- ¹ John A. Buehrens and Forrest Church; *A Chosen Faith*. p. xvi
- ² *Ibid.* p. xvii
- ³ Dan O'Neil, Alice Blair Wesley, and James Ishmael Ford, eds.; *The Transient and Permanent in Liberal Religion*. pp. 62-64
- ⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 191-192
- ⁵ Buehrens and Church; *op. cit.* p. 192
- ⁶ O'Neil, Wesley, and Ford; *op. cit.* p. 149
- ⁷ Buehrens and Church; *op. cit.* p. 212
- ⁸ URL for the UUA homepage: <http://www.uua.org>
- ⁹ O'Neil, Wesley, and Ford; *op. cit.* p. 342
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 347
- ¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 276
- ¹² *Ibid.* p. 20
- ¹³ *Ibid.* p. 102
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 103
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 103-104
- ¹⁶ Franz Kafka; "Pekin and the Emperor" *Parables and Paradoxes*. pp. 17-19
- ¹⁷ Edward Frost, ed.; *With Purpose and Principle: Essays About the Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism*. p. 94

The 1999 Josephine Gould Discourse

Response

by Alice F. Anacheke-Nasemann, Student Minister

I would like to start by saying that Andy has brought before our attention this evening some of the more important issues facing our denomination today.

We are struggling to define ourselves. That's what the UUA's Fulfilling the Promise survey was all about. On the congregational level, the newest trend is to create mission covenant statements--our efforts to bring cohesiveness and clarity to our movement.

It's true, we have all been stymied by those questions about what Unitarian Universalism is. I have attempted to come up with my "elevator answer," that is, the answer I would give while traveling from the 10th floor of a building to the lobby. I have to admit, my answers are not always consistent, nor do I always feel that I have been successful in my efforts to summarize our religion. Deliciously indescribable--I like it. Thank you, Andy.

Finally, that diversity which eludes us is frustrating--and much effort has gone into defining and attempting to remove those subtle and not-so-subtle barriers that Andy has so eloquently pointed out to us tonight.

Andy went further than simply discussing some of the current issues, however. I would say that he actually turned the problems upside-down and inside-out in order to get an intriguing new look. I'm afraid my neck got a little strained when I, too, tried to see these new angles!

Just when I was starting to think, "Cool, I'm finding some useful ways to define Unitarian Universalism," Andy turned everything around and suggested that we should stop forming community around those ideological similarities. To do this, he says, we

must stop presenting ourselves as a religion, and instead gather in loyalty to humanity, with our faith located in people rather than ideas. This is a worthy goal, indeed, although I would add the caveat that we value all life, not just humanity.

Either way, I am not sure Andy's suggestion represents a true move away from ideas and beliefs. After all, deciding to place one's faith in people is based on an idea. In fact, Andy's proposed center for this "non-religion" sounds an awful lot like our affirmation of the inherent worth and dignity of all people, to me. Not only is it an idea, but it happens to be one of the ideas that already defines us. It is also, I believe, an inherently religious proposition, one which stands in stark contrast to those denominations which proclaim the inherent worthlessness and depravity of all humankind.

Along with Andy and many other Unitarian Universalists, I would love to see our denomination grow in diversity. Rather than downplaying our shared values and beliefs, however, I would suggest that our failure to diversify is based in the fact that our common ideas are typically expressed in ways that are very much culturally determined. The fact that we are a predominantly white denomination, made up primarily of well-educated, economically privileged members, is reflected in all areas of our life together as a community. Despite the rather large emphasis that has been placed on eliminating institutional racism from our midst, it seems that it has only been relatively recently that we are also engaging the beasts of classism and intellectual elitism. Let's tackle these issues before deciding to become a non-religion. This difficult and important work will, I hope, pave the way for increasing diversity in our congregations.

Yes, I, too, wish for a growth in

diversity. But, I do not want it to come at the expense of the message that we bring to the world--a message which represents our shared ideas and values--and yes, a message which is often clouded by our inability to articulate it.

Andy points out the dangers of organized religion. Certainly, history has shown that our human tendency to be clannish can lead to the inhumane disregard of those people who find themselves to be on the outside of our embrace. Just look at what's happening in Kosovo right now, and you can see the truth in Andy's words of caution.

All the same, I have to disagree with Andy's proposed solution, namely that we strip religious institutions of their corporate power and have them, instead, focus solely on "the creation of, the celebration of, and the maintenance of, covenanted community." The idea has an alluring pull to it--after all, building community is a big part of what we are about. Yet, despite the dangers, I would rather be part of a religious denomination which is willing to proclaim and advocate for particular values.

I enjoy having kindred spirits. Andy is right, it is comfortable. But it goes beyond my comfort levels--I also like being part of a religious organization which is able to influence the world. I like the message that is proclaimed in our principles and purposes. I admit it--I want to see that message spread like wildfire. I want our denomination to be a voice for change, a leader in influencing policies and people.

The Reverend Mel Hoover says it well, when he says, "What we are is a limited example of being different than what everybody said was the norm or the probable. And I think we underestimate the power of that." He goes on to add, "One reason I'm in this denomination is that we do have power and privilege, and positions of power, and the capacity to influence." (from "A Conversation on Race and Class," *World Magazine*, July/Aug 1998, p. 22)

It is my belief that it would be a mistake to cease being a religion--a corporate entity that stands for certain key values. Rather, I suggest that we need to cease floundering around in an identity crisis and wield the power that we do have, using it to support and promote justice, equity, and compassion. Using it to support the free and responsible search for truth and meaning. Using it to support the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.

Perhaps this is a risky road to take--we are always capable of making the wrong decisions despite all the right intentions. How do we know that what we advocate is truly what's best for the world? The only thing we can do is search our consciences, thoroughly and repeatedly, and act upon that which we believe to be true and good.

We may not always succeed in our efforts. Certainly we need to continue to ask ourselves just how it is that we are excluding people from our sanctuaries, and how we might broaden our circle to include those that are "different" than us. But all the same, I believe that we do need to define, and then affirm and act upon, the ideas that we do share.

It is my conviction that our purposes and principles represent a life-affirming stance. Rather than trying to start from a blank slate that has no presuppositions, I would prefer an approach which builds upon the suppositions that we have agreed upon. If we truly live out our affirmation of the inherent worth and dignity of all humanity, than I would have to answer Andy's question of us by saying, "No, we are not carrying out the dangers of sameness from our churches and poisoning the world." And if we successfully hold that valuing of the individual in tension with an understanding of the interdependent web, which calls us to be responsive and responsible to one another, then perhaps, just perhaps, we will participate in guiding our world to safety.