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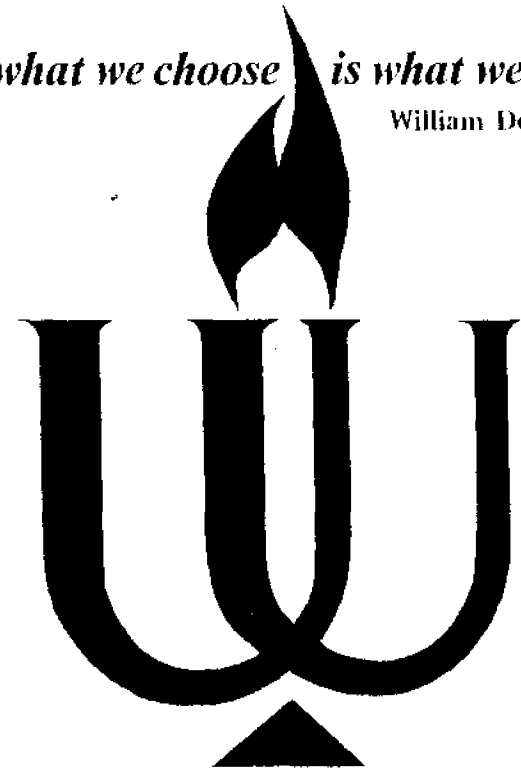
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# THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST MERGER

1961-1975

*"Since what we choose is what we are..."*

William Dewitt Hyde



REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON APPRAISAL  
TO THE FOURTEENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF  
THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION

minneapolis, minnesota - 1975



ROBERT COLLYER FUND

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- Unacc. appraisal\* shall:
- Function or activity or the Association which in its judgment will benefit from an independent review and report its conclusions to a regular General Assembly;
- (b) Study and suggest approaches to issues which may be of concern to the Association; and
- (c) Report to a regular General Assembly at least once every four years on the program and accomplishments of the Association.

*\*The Commission on Appraisal consists of nine elected members, none of whom may be a trustee or officer or hold a salaried position in the Association.*

From the bylaws of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

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## FOREWORD

The Commission on Appraisal consists of nine members elected by and responsible to the General Assembly. We meet three times a year, without paid staff and as a group of committed volunteers seek to fulfill the general appraisal functions set forth in the UUA By-laws.

In April of 1973, UUA President Robert West, ex officio a member of the Commission, expressed the hope that we might undertake a review and evaluation of the results of the Merger of the Universalist Church of America and the American Unitarian Association. We accepted the challenge.

For the past two years, we have spent a major portion of our time studying the merger process, reading the documents, interviewing persons who were highly involved in the Merger, attempting to understand what effect the Merger, which took place in 1961, has had on our present situation, asking ourselves and others if there are clues to our future in this particular chapter of our past. What were the goals, purposes and expectations which brought us together as Universalists and Unitarians? To what extent do the expectations cherished in 1961 have relevance for 1975? What lessons does our immediate past have for the days ahead?

We have had a lot of help from a lot of people. We want to thank all who have helped us. Our special thanks go to

Robert West for his initial suggestion, and for his participation in our discussions. Though he initiated the project, he should not be held responsible for any of the opinions or judgments expressed in the report. And we want to express our special thanks also to Raymond Hopkins, secretary of the Merger Commission and chairperson of the Coordinating Committee on Consolidation. His unpublished paper, Process and Procedures of The Merger Committee, prepared at the request of the Commission on Appraisal has been a valuable resource for our study.

We have been engaged in a stimulating, reflective process. We would like to share it with all readers of this report. Please read it, think about it and discuss it with others. How relevant is our past to our present? Where would you like to see our UUA go? How do you think we can best get there? Please give us your thoughts and concerns. We want the brickbats as well as the bouquets - ideas that are far out as well as ideas that are far in. Send them to the Commission on Appraisal.

## COMMISSION ON APPRAISAL

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## BACKGROUNDS OF THE MERGER

### ORIGINS

The Universalist and Unitarian denominations were founded by theological liberals of the 18th and 19th centuries. Their names are familiar to us: John Murray, Hosea Ballou, George de Benneville, William Ellery Channing, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Parker are among the best known. Both denominations traced their roots far back into the distant past. Both were founded on hopeful heresies and from the time of their origin have been strikingly optimistic in their understanding of God, human nature, salvation. Both have been strikingly open and inclusive in their attitudes toward the world's varied religions and scriptures. Our churches have always been democratic in organization. This is an inheritance from the "free churches" such as the Congregationalists from which so many of our churches came.

We started in different ways and under different circumstances. It has been said of the Universalists: "They began with neither script nor purse," with only a great theological principle, and gathered their congregations largely from the unchurched, and from dissident elements in the orthodox churches. Membership was recruited from small tradesmen, farmers and wage earners. Their preachers were, with few exceptions, of scant formal education.

On the other hand, from the movement's beginning in New England, the Unitarians had strong churches, long established. When the American Unitarian Association was organized in 1825, some 150 liberal Christian churches became Unitarian. Among them were many of New England's strongest and most historic congregations. The Clergy were highly educated and the membership, on the whole, affluent and cultured. The word "Unitarian," was virtually synonymous with the "flowering" of New England.

### THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

There were theological differences between us. Thomas Starr King, one of the earliest Unitarian Universalists, son of a Universalist minister, became minister of the First Unitarian Church of San Francisco in 1860, - put the difference in these words, "The one thinks God is too good to damn them forever, the other thinks they are too good to be damned forever." This was his way of saying with respect to salvation, that the Universalists put more stress on the love and grace of God, and the Unitarians put more stress on man's natural goodness. But the fact is that our similarities always outweighed our differences. Both of us were highly optimistic about the grace of God and the cosmic human destiny. It is difficult to envisage a more optimistic view of the nature of the Oversoul than we find in Emerson's writings. And while Hosea Ballou

never overlooked the weaknesses of human nature, he was never blind, as Ernest Cassara, one of Ballou's biographers, puts it, to our "heavenly, divine potentialities."

#### LOOKING TO UNION

With the passage of time and the tumultuous events of the first half of the 19th century, including the Civil War and events leading up to it, Universalists and Unitarians began to come closer together. Social, cultural and economic differences lessened. Commonly held beliefs and various external factors brought the two movements closer together at the same time as institutional and parochial loyalties continued to hold them apart.

At an historic Unitarian convention held in New York City in 1865, the first Unitarian convention to which delegates came as representatives of churches, a resolution was presented "looking to union with the Universalist body."

In the 1890's as a consequence of the World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 and the First Congress of Liberal Religious Societies, including Universalists, Unitarians, Reform Jews and Ethical Culturalists held in Chicago the same year the Universalists and Unitarians began moving toward one another. Vigorous spokesmen began to see their separateness as impeding the growth of religious liber-

alism. The Unitarian Jenkin Lloyd Jones "deplored the way in which the two principle denominational structures were impeding the work of 'Liberalism,' like dogs in a manger." The Universalist James M. Pullman challenged the Universalists to become more universal, "(You) Universalists (they rightly say) have squatted on the biggest word in the English language. Now the world is beginning to want that word, and you Universalists must either improve the property or move off the premises."

At the General Convention of Universalists held in Meriden, Connecticut in 1895 a motion calling for Universalist-Unitarian Cooperation was introduced but was tabled. A similar motion was tabled with only one dissenting vote at the Universalist Biennial General Convention in Chicago in 1897.

The National Federation of Religious Liberals was formed in 1908 "for cooperative effort among the friends of Liberal Religion regardless of denominational lines." Universalists and Unitarians were active in it until its demise in the 1930's. At the Universalist General Convention in Detroit, Michigan in 1909 the Missouri Universalist Convention introduced a memorial on organic union with the Unitarians. In the face of strong objections from some of the delegates, the Convention voted "that organic union be left to make its own way as the divine spirit of truth and Christian brotherhood may move our hearts."

By the 1930's the sentiments for some kind of cooperation were stronger. In 1931 a Joint Commission was appointed by the two denominations to consider practical methods of union. The Joint Commission favored closer fellowship rather than merger. As a result of its recommendations a third organization was created, The Free Church of America. Its name was later changed to The Free Church Fellowship. It was an ineffective effort at liberal, religious ecumenicity. Clinton Lee Scott who was a member of the Joint Commission comments drily, that its "lingering death ..... came with less resistance and less attention than was accorded its birth."

In 1947 at the Unitarian Biennial Conference held in Washington, D. C. a resolution reopened the question of merger. Another Joint Commission was appointed. The efforts of this Joint Commission led to a plebiscite in which 72% of the Universalist Congregations participating and 75% of the Unitarian authorized the formulation and presentation to the two denominations of a plan for federal union.

In August 1953, at a Joint Biennium, in furtherance of the Federal Union proposal, the two denominations established the Council of Liberal Churches to work jointly in the fields of Education, Publications and Public Relations.

By the 1950's other developments related to merger were visible. Some 35 local congregations had merged and be-

come Unitarian Universalist. They were becoming strong advocates for complete merger of the two denominations. In 1955, a Joint Interim Committee recommended that the two denominations should undertake "a step by step procedure whereby the member churches and other local groups of both denominations may democratically determine whether the AUA and the UCA shall be merged, and if so, in what manner."

### THE MERGER PROCESS

In 1956 the Joint Merger Commission was appointed. Its work would lead to merger in 1961. The way it went about its business was impressive. Its procedures constitute a model of democracy in action. From its beginning it decided that it should not be a proponent of merger, but that it should create a climate for significant dialogue throughout the two denominations by encouraging the churches and fellowships to make the decision on the merits of the question. To this end it dedicated itself to seeking out all points of view. It sought to be guided by the "local congregations rather than staff, boards, committees of persons in positions of power." It decided to employ professional help so that the information gathered and the proposals drawn up, while done under the close supervision of the Commission, would reflect the competence of Professional, objective consultants. It requested \$50,000 from the two denominations as a requisite for doing the job well, and

as an indication of the seriousness with which it viewed its assignment. The denominations, to say the least, were unhappy with the magnitude of this request and authorized an initial allocation of \$5,000. But the Merger Commission was persistent in its requests for adequate funding and eventually it received more than \$50,000.

Over a period of two years the Consultants, under the supervision of the Commission produced the following documents:

REPORT ON THE INVENTORY PHASE - a sixty-five page report on the operations, finances, membership, etc. of the AUA and UCA.

A PROPOSED PLAN FOR MERGER - an eighty page proposal for the complete merger of the two denominations based on the Committee's preliminary discussions.

THE QUESTION OF MERGER - an eighty-three page report on thirty-four interviews with persons "opposed" to merger.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF MERGER - an eleven page summation of the major arguments pro and con discovered by Institutional Consulting Associates in working with the Committee, denominational staff, personal interviews and published materials.

SOME SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE MERGER OF ORGANIZATIONS - a six page report on the results of research by ICA.

AN INFORMATION MANUAL - a one hundred and thirty-nine page manual of background information about the two denominations for the use of congregations in studying the question of merger.

A STUDY GUIDE - a forty-six page guide to assist the churches in preparing for discussions of the material in the Information Manual.

A PROPOSED PLAN TO CONSOLIDATE - a forty-four page booklet setting forth the plan as approved by the Syracuse biennial.

Possibly the foremost concern of the Commission was to involve all the local congregations in a meaningful decision making process. That included making certain that they had the necessary material for a careful consideration of the issues. Regular reports were issued to the congregations. Two plebiscites were conducted and as background information for these plebiscites the Commission produced and distributed to all congregations: An Information Manual, A Study Guide, An Adult Study Program, A Proposed Plan for Consolidation and The Final Plan. In the first plebiscite the local societies were asked to indicate their approval or disapproval of merger, and if they approved, to indicate their preference among six alternatives. Seventy-three percent of the Unitarian Societies participated with seventy-four percent in favor of merger.

Sixty-nine percent of the Universalist congregations participated with seventy-five percent favoring merger.

The second plebiscite called for a vote on one plan of merger, ("consolidation" was the word used). It was conducted between December 2 and March 1 of 1960. As was the case in the first plebiscite, it required a legal meeting of all participating societies. The degree of participation was astonishing. Approximately 142,000 votes were cast in the plebiscite. Of these, approximately 125,000 voted for merger, and approximately 17,000 against. Raymond Hopkins, Secretary of the Merger Commission comments: "It is safe to say that our societies have never responded in such numbers and with such seriousness as they did to the subject of merger. Opponents of the plan thought they had won when they succeeded in getting included in the plan a provision that unless sixty percent of the local societies participated and favored merger by at least seventy-five percent, the plan would not be approved. History prior to and since this vote was on their side. Only thirty to fifty percent of our societies bother to send delegates to the General Assemblies. Only ten to fifteen percent ever participate in the Parish Poll. Denominational surveys are lucky if they get twenty-five to thirty percent response. Yet ninety-four percent Unitarian societies and ninety-five percent of the Universalist societies participated in

the plebiscite that required a special congregational meeting for the purpose."

It is also safe to say that there never has been a more carefully planned and thoroughly carried through process of decision making in the long history of the Universalist Unitarian movements. Some have said that the most significant thing about the merger was the process by which it was achieved. This may have a lesson for us in the present and for the future. The final approval of merger was voted in 1961 when our Unitarian Universalist Association came into being and the first UUA General Assembly was convened.



## MERGER GOALS, PURPOSES AND EXPECTATIONS

### GOALS AND PURPOSES

The objective of merger was set forth in the enabling act establishing the Merger Commission adopted by the Joint Biennial Meeting of the Universalist Church of America and the American Unitarian Association in 1955: "We conceive merger to mean the establishment of one corporation which will perform for Universalists, Unitarians (and possibly others) all the functions now performed for them by the UCA, AUA and CLC."\*

The purposes adopted by the new UUA in 1961 are set forth in Article II of its By-laws which read in part: "The Association, dedicated to the principles of a free faith shall: Support the free and disciplined search for truth as the foundation of religious fellowship; Cherish and spread the universal truths taught by the great prophets and teachers of humanity in every age .... Affirm, defend and promote the supreme worth of every human personality, and the use of the democratic method in human relationships ... Implement the vision of one world by striving for a world community founded on ideals of brotherhood, justice and peace .... Serve the needs of member societies .... Organize new churches and fellowships .... Encourage cooperation among people of goodwill in every land.."

\*CLC, Council of Liberal Churches, see p. 8.

### EXPECTATIONS

In addition to the goals and purposes which were set forth in enabling resolutions and eventually in by-laws, both Unitarians and Universalists embarked on merger with many positive and negative expectations. These hopes and fears were prominent in the pre-merger debates and discussions and once the merger took place were carried on into the life of the new Association.

Some Universalists feared that the Universalist identity would be swallowed up by the much larger Unitarian body.

Some Unitarians feared that the word Unitarian would lose its cutting edge when it was joined with the word Universalist. They felt that the two big words joined together would be too much of a good thing!

Some Unitarians feared that the momentum of growth which they had built would be slowed down as they combined with the Universalists who were in a declining phase.

Some Universalists felt that their movement was in the process of redefining itself in truly universal terms. They felt that this renaissance would be snuffed out by the merger process.

Some Christian theists in both denominations feared that the coming together of the Universalist and Unitarian Humanist groups would threaten the Liberal

Christianity cherished by some of the most historic churches in both denominations.

Some Humanists in both denominations felt that the coming together of the Universalist and Unitarian Christian groups would militate against the advance of Humanism in the new Association.

Many expected that organic merger of two historic liberal religious bodies would create a larger more inclusive fellowship in which Universalist and Unitarian identities and traditions, far from disappearing, would be enriched and enlarged by one another in a process of cross fertilization.

Many expected that the new Association would be more open, flexible, process-oriented and dynamic than either the UCA or the AUA had been.

There was the expectation that the very act of union would somehow release fresh creative forces which would enhance and deepen the spiritual life of the churches and fellowships.

There was some expectation that the new Association would become a magnet that would draw to it other liberal religious groups.

There was the expectation that more money would be raised by the new Association and that money would be spent with less duplication and overlap.

It was expected that the Association would become a stronger force for social justice in the United States and Canada and in the world at large.

It was expected that there would be a rapidly increased rate of membership growth, that many thousands of new people would become identified with Unitarian Universalist churches and fellowships.

Later in this report we shall undertake a discussion of the present state of the denomination, and this will focus on expectations past and present. The observations here on three expectations rather widely held at the time of merger are preliminary to the longer later discussion.

An appraisal of the feelings of a religious people about their religious community is difficult. We have tried through open hearings, written questionnaires and personal interviews to understand at least what people thought had happened to earlier expectations. Virtually all those persons we interviewed had experienced the entire period of merger and had been affiliated with either the UCA or the AUA prior to 1961. Among the questions we asked of these people were these three:

1. How successful have we been in bringing our two denominations together into a more effectively functioning body?

The response to this question was strikingly positive. The success was attributed by some to the nearly total involvement of the churches and fellowships in the discussions, plebiscites and educational aspect of the merger process itself.

2. How successful have we been in creating a stronger base for liberal religion in North America?

The response here was that we are stronger by virtue of the fact that we now stand together in an Association that is more "open, flexible and process oriented" than were either the UCA or the AUA. We have gathered strength from each other's strength. There is today, an increasing awareness of the heritages and contributions of each movement. We have not attracted other liberal religious bodies into the Association, but we ourselves have been strengthened by the merger.

3. How successful have we been in creating a new dynamic institution?

The key word in this question was "dynamic." While most of

those questioned felt that the new Association was functioning more effectively than the UCA or the AUA had functioned, none felt that today's UUA merited the word "dynamic." But some suggested that a number of early expectations, particularly those relating to growth of membership had been unrealistic. Some suggested that the state of sagging dollars and membership, which we have been afflicted with in recent years, were due less to internal weaknesses than to external circumstances beyond the denomination's control. The question of realism or lack of it in past or present expectations will be discussed later. We turn now to some of the external forces and circumstances which have influenced us since 1961.

## EXTERNAL FORCES AND THE MERGER

In looking back over the fourteen years since Merger, we are struck immediately by the accelerated pace of social change in our Society at large, and by the impact that changes have had on us. A partial listing of these changes would include: the growing number of older people in our society; the shift of the population out of the cities into the suburbs and the racial character of that shift; the increased mobility of our population; the ever growing influence of the media on our lives; the radical developments in our economy; the shifting of wealth among the nations of the world; changing life styles and increased sexual freedom; the growing numbers of singles; the trend to single parent families; the Vietnam War and the growth of the anti-war movement; Watergate; the apparent impairment of traditional American optimism; the widespread loss of faith in traditional institutions; the liberalizing of other church bodies; declining membership in the mainstream churches; the growing demand for participatory democracy; the movement toward more ecumenical cooperation; the tremendous interest on the part of the young, especially, in Eastern religions and in a wide variety of new cults and religious movements; the new feminism; The Civil Rights Movement which gave way to Black Empowerment which in turn led to many empowerment thrusts, for example, those of youth, women, Chicanos, gays, senior citizens, native Americans.

How can we assess the impact these movements and forces have had on the fledgling Association which we put together in 1961? Insofar as our goals, expectations and institutional life as a whole have changed, how much were we changed by our ability or our inability to react with wisdom and creativity to changes in the world around us. To what extent have we changed society? To what extent has society changed us? To what extent has there been creative interaction?

## CIVIL RIGHTS AND BLACK POWER

During the sixties, our Association and many of its member societies were highly involved in the civil rights struggles which swept across the United States. In the spring of 1965, with the murder on its streets of the Unitarian Universalist Minister, James Reeb, Selma, Alabama became the center of the civil rights storm. The great demonstrations led by Martin Luther King, coupled with the public's shock at the bloody violence, were major factors in the passage by Congress of important civil rights legislation. Martin Luther King's leadership was enthusiastically accepted by most Unitarian Universalists. But while most of our congregations were proud of the part played by the Association in the civil rights struggles, still, there was internal controversy. The Association appointed a Commission on Religion and Race following a rather bitter fight at the 1964 General Assembly over whether or not to impose sanc-

tions against churches which had discriminatory membership policies. The Commission worked for four years providing written materials and setting up conferences to help churches, fellowships and individuals to deal with the membership policy issue. In the summer of 1967, there were race riots in Newark, New Jersey and Detroit, Michigan. Our concern with race relations intensified. The Commission on Religion and Race, together with the UUA Department of Social Responsibility, sponsored an Emergency Conference on the Unitarian Universalist Response to the Black Revolution. The Conference was held in New York City in October of 1967.

It was at this conference that the Unitarian Universalist Black Caucus was formed, and the call was sounded for the empowerment of blacks to combat racism in both church and society. The Caucus expressed its needs as non-negotiable demands rather than as requests. The methods used by the Black Caucus in the ensuing controversy offended and shocked many Unitarian Universalists. The same scenario began to take place in other churches and institutions. Many Unitarian Universalists felt that their principles of due process and individual freedom were being abrogated. Nevertheless, substantial funds were voted to the Black Affairs Council by the General Assembly in 1968 and again in 1969. But in late 1969, the amount was cut in a drastic budget reduction stemming from a severe financial crisis.

The issue of Black Power continued to be debated at subsequent General Assemblies with much bitterness and rancor. The Association found itself almost torn apart as it tried to resolve issues which for many represented severe tests of Unitarian Universalist social conscience and prophetic vision. It was a difficult time for our Canadian members to find the Association so embroiled over an issue not directly relevant to their churches and fellowships. The issues are still divisive though the controversy has become more muted. However, the Black Caucus had created a new model for the empowerment of minorities. Many Unitarian Universalists accepted the model as a legitimate way of influencing decision, and relating Unitarian Universalists to the struggles of oppressed groups. Many felt that it had given them an understanding of the depth of the oppression that they had not known before.

#### THE ANTI WAR MOVEMENT

In the early 1970's the Vietnam War replaced Black Empowerment as a primary social issue confronting the Association and the denomination as a whole. As in the Civil Rights struggle in the early 1960's the leadership of the Association as well as the membership of many of the local congregations identified themselves strongly with the anti war forces. Anti war and civil rights issues came together when in 1972 our Beacon Press published the Pentagon Papers and as a result the

Internal Security Division of the U. S. Justice Department attempted to obtain copies of contributors' checks to the UUA. The leadership of the Association was firm and unequivocal in its defense of civil liberties. In 1973, it organized a National Conference on American Freedom which brought together leaders of businesses, educational institutions, religious bodies, and civic associations concerned about the developing pattern of threats to basic constitutional liberties by governmental abuses of power. In 1974 the UUA Pentagon Papers Case was dismissed by a federal judge without prejudice after the U. S. Attorney's statement that the investigation of UUA bank records would not be resumed.

#### CHANGING LIFESTYLES

Like most religious bodies, we have been much influenced by what can be described as changing lifestyles in society. Whatever the earlier roots of this phenomena, it became increasingly visible about the time of Merger in the lives of the many young people who were in revolt against the traditional lifestyles of the "older generation". The long hair, the beards, the rock music, the shift both in the direction of less formal dress and less formalized relationships have affected us. They have tended to make us less formal. Since our young people are often in the vanguard, they have caused us to look at ourselves anew. Often they have shaken up traditional patterns of mar-

riage, sexuality, family, dress, music, etc. They have also had an effect, along with other social factors, on traditional parish and church styles of organization. We have been forced to take seriously Josia Bartlett's observation: "We no longer live in a 'Martin and Judy' world and we have to accommodate our churches to that new world."

The fact that the world is changing so rapidly in ways that affect us at every point, creates tensions. All this is particularly hard on those of us who would like to hold on to the status quo. Yet, for so far ahead as we can see, our society is going to be characterized by a tempo of rapid change. Society will continue to change in relation to all of the issues mentioned above and many more. Our task is to find ways of being open and flexible to change without embracing change for its own sake. Let us change the three questions we asked above in the past tense. To what extent will we change society in the years ahead? To what extent will society change us? To what extent will there be creative interchange?

## WHERE ARE WE NOW?

We have briefly sketched our historical backgrounds, and our goals, purposes, and expectations at the time of Merger. We have touched on the changes in our society and culture which have had a potent influence on us in the first fourteen years of our existence.

Narrowly defined, the goals of Merger have been accomplished. Today we are one denomination. Indeed, once Merger became a legal fact, many of us were astonished that so little change took place. Once initial personnel changes were effected, life went on as usual. True, two important Universalist institutions have ceased to exist, the theological schools at Tufts and Saint Lawrence Universities, and a few others remain outside the UUA. The overly long name Unitarian Universalist, tends to give way to the word, Unitarian. The two traditions increasingly reinforce one another, and some of our scholars feel that the complementary relationship between the Universalist and Unitarian traditions will become more important in the future.

A more inclusive entity has been formed with the bringing together of two free church traditions. Whether it will command a higher degree of emotional loyalty and financial support is yet to be proven. So far it has not. The denomination is more process-oriented and more open to change. It is doubtful that the act of union in itself has as

yet released fresh creative forces, though the currents of innovation run high. Neither the theist or the humanist groups among us have been weakened by the Merger though the major thrust in the denomination appears to be humanistic. But the humanism is more broad and inclusive and perhaps more modest than the humanism of the 1930's. The new Association has not proven to be the rallying point for other liberal religious bodies. In regard to some of the other expectations held at the time of Merger, more detailed comments are in order.

## GROWTH EXPECTATIONS

Many of us were confident in 1961 and in the years immediately following that the young, new denomination would grow rapidly. Thus, a denominational Committee on Goals declared in 1967 that while it was possible that we would be static on the growth front, it was also possible that if the Association were to adopt certain proposals which it submitted, we could achieve a membership of 500,000 persons by 1980. The proposals were not adopted. Whether the anticipated growth would have occurred if they had been adopted is highly debatable. However that may be, our recorded adult membership at the time of Merger was approximately 152,000 and our adult membership thirteen years later was approximately 150,000. Church school enrollment at the time of Merger was approximately 78,000 and in 1974 approximately 49,000.

In the 1960's we were confident that we would grow rapidly and that as we grew our human and financial resources would also grow. The process would be cumulative. We primed the pump and embarked on new programs confident of growth. But it did not happen. So far as growth was concerned, we took the "Great Gamble" and we lost.

Many different reasons have been ascribed for our failure to grow. Many say we lost our uniqueness when others emulated our liberal theological stance or perhaps even surpassed us in some areas of social action. Others say we forgot, or no longer understood, and so failed to project the theological differences between us and other religious bodies.

Others believe that in the years immediately following Merger, we paid too little heed to building the church as an institution and to assuring the continuing strength of our ministry. There are those who feel that at first in social activism, and later in the acknowledged need to devote so much time and energy to our financial plight, we failed to give attention to developing the church and its professional leadership.

There were other factors in the 1960's. Along with other religious bodies, our concept of the function of a church and the role of the minister were undergoing simultaneous modifications. We tended to hold ministers accountable

while stripping them of much of the authority formerly accorded to them. Under the influence of the lay led Fellowship Movement and the lessening of emphasis on the minister as preacher and teacher, motivations of those entering the ministry were shifting. "Celebrations" were becoming more important than sermons and encounter and sensitivity groups were replacing some of the traditional church and parish organizations. At the same time, the environment of many of our churches was changing radically due to forces beyond their control. Many of our larger metropolitan churches, for example, found their strength sapped by their struggles to counter the effects of urban decay, the flight to the suburbs, and the extremely heavy costs of maintaining church plants built in more stable times by a more affluent constituency.

#### ARE WE CHRONICALLY UNREALISTIC ?

As already indicated, it is certainly true that some of the expectations with which Merger was undertaken have been affected by external circumstances over which we had little or no control. These have altered the course of other church bodies as well as our own. Yet, all too readily we look back now and say our expectations were unrealistic, but at the same time act as though we are still motivated by the same expectations. We still wonder if those early extravagant expectations of the



sixties are inevitably doomed to failure, or whether we are just experiencing an institutional lag in dealing with precipitous societal change, a lag we can overcome with a little more luck and a little more effort.

If our expectations were unrealistic then, are they still unrealistic? Are we still clinging to them in spite of realities? Indeed, are we even hiding from the realities - unable or unwilling to ask ourselves in any profound sense what the realities are? Where are we now? Are our old expectations valid? If not, then what new expectations should we nourish for the future? It may be comforting to look at other denominations facing similar problems, or even at the whole of society, and think that we are but common participants caught in a discouraging cycle through which we all will eventually pass. Or we may say that in times like these, more conservative religious groups have an edge on us, but not permanently.

We sometimes scoff at our forebears for their simplistic "faith in the progress of Mankind onward and upward forever." Yet, surely as they, we must have dreams that motivate and sustain us in our common undertaking. But we repeat their error unless we are able to build our dreams on a foundation of fact.

## MONEY

Many factors make it difficult to compare where we are now financially with where we were when Merger was initiated. It is not only that inflation makes comparisons difficult. Before Merger the UCA and the AUA raised and held their funds in a complex of different ways. Since Merger, changing affiliated and related groups have greatly altered the giving patterns of our constituency. Vastly larger sums have been raised by a variety of programs and personnel. By the same token, vastly larger sums have been spent. Capital funds were drastically and dangerously reduced. We have been saved from financial disaster only by the most stringent budget cuts, undertaken with persistence and intelligence. Fortuitous receipts of timely bequests have helped. We have been greatly aided by the benefactions of the Plandome Congregation through its Veatch Program. Indeed, the chief reason that our Association has been able to undertake innovative, outreach programs is because of that support. The hard truth is that there is a very painful disparity between what we expect our Association to provide and what we are willing to pay. Is Voluntary giving too thin a reed to support the Association adequately? Could it be that the Association is too far removed from us to command our loyalty? Could it be that we have entered a period where all institutions dependent on Voluntary giving will have to operate indefinitely on skeleton bud-

gets because of such external circumstances as world-wide inflation, the shifting of wealth among the nations, political and economic instability and other external conditions? How does a liberal religious movement make its expectations mesh with the wallets and pocketbooks of its members? In its first fourteen years, there has not been much correlation between financial support of our Association and our individual or local church and fellowship financial resources. We Unitarian Universalists are one of the most affluent of religious groups, and one of the least generous supporters of our continental Association. Why?

#### UNITY AND DISUNITY

Evaluation of more subjective characteristics of our present denominational scene defy precise measurements. Elsewhere in this report there is a discussion of the effects upon us of societal factors beyond our control. The caucus form of advocacy of specific causes has sprung up among us since Merger. Given the low threshold we present to currents of social change, given our prophetic activist traditions, and our traditional individualism, strong and even turbulent differences among us are endemic. There are some among us who feel that we may become an agglomeration of caucuses. There are some among us who are made very uneasy by organized political groups bitter debates and radical pressure tactics at General Assemblies. Yet theological de-

bates, strongly held differences of conviction on social issues, bitterness and instances of ostracism are part of our joint Unitarian Universalist history, even premerger history. While there is a point at which internal divisions can run so deep that they can destroy the fabric of the institution, many of us believe that the struggles we have gone through are, on the whole, more a testimony to our aliveness and moral sensitivity than to our impending demise. Many of us believe that our openness to change, respect for persons, respect for participatory democracy, belief that great truths prevail ultimately are vital forces among us, holding as firm today as they ever have in the past. However, those among us who are deeply anxious over trends to politicalization and those who regard these trends as a natural part of the life of an Association with our goals and traditions, would surely agree that the best answer to the Association's problems is more widespread participation in its life at all levels of our denominational activity.

#### CHANGING THE WORLD FOR THE BETTER

One early expectation was that the UUA would have a great impact on society for its betterment. Here again we differ as to how successful we have been. Some of us think that we merely take on the characteristics of our surrounding social environment. Others feel that our religious movement has an

impact for social betterment far out of proportion to its size and resources.

We now have a few Black ministers in pulpits of their own and a growing number of women in the ministry. But the discrepancy between our expectations and our accomplishments are real. It is doubtful, for example, whether there is any noticeable increase in participation by minority persons in the life of our churches and fellowships. The advancement is minimal.

We should not neglect favorable developments in the years since Merger. While the final results of the civil rights struggles of the period were disappointing, we were often in the forefront of those struggles. The Black Caucus and the Black Affairs Council tested us severely. It gave many of us a sense of the urgency of the struggle for racial equality that we had not had before. It exposed a few of the hypocrisies of liberalism. The Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation has been a leader in the latest twentieth century manifestation of feminism. In 1968, the same year that our General Assembly voted support for the Black Affairs Council, the UUWF chose "woman power" as its Cleveland conference theme. As already indicated in this report, our denominational leadership and the leadership in many of our churches and fellowships were in the forefront of the anti-Vietnam War protest movements. Our Beacon Press and our denominational

leadership were outstanding in both publishing the Pentagon Papers and in successfully fighting the Federal government's attempt to obtain UUA financial records.

There is a wide discrepancy between some of our expectations in the sixties and the realities which followed. We need to look hard at present expectations. Although the actions of our continental organizations are of value, the greatest impact for betterment in society is through activities of local congregations and individual members. Our social action is more effective and our denomination is healthier when our expectations are realistic.

#### OUR THEOLOGICAL STANCE

We noted earlier that since the 1961 Merger, our conceptions of both the function of the church and the role of the minister have been changing. Many of our churches and fellowships conceive of themselves as extended families. Our culture has become increasingly enamored of group-oriented procedures and programs. Increasingly, churches seek to become "caring communities" and use group processes and dynamics to accomplish this end. Many people look to church "groups" to meet deficiencies and to improve the quality of their personal lives. What is new here is not so much the objective as the use of techniques born largely of contemporary psychology. The result is an increasing emphasis upon the per-

sonal. Sermons, discussion and lay led activities, conferences and seminars focus increasingly on personal problems. There is a marked tendency to look inward and to emphasize personal growth more than social change.

What has this to do with theology? All generalizations in this area are subject to a host of qualifications, but it appears that the trend strongest among us at the present time is toward a religion of the heart rather than a religion of the mind. The emphasis is more on the emotional rather than the rational. There is a fresh interest in mysticism in all its manifestations. The historical identification is with the transcendental currents which flowered in the first half of the nineteenth century. There are no really sharp humanist-theist controversies among us such as characterized us in the second quarter of this century. The criticism leveled at us in the early 1960's by the psychologist, Abraham Maslow: "Thus, average, liberal religionists try to rest all their efforts on knowledge of the impersonal world rather than on the personal sciences" no longer holds.

We are unwilling to set forth a consensus which can be construed as an official denominational theological position. From time to time we do appoint ad hoc commissions, as in 1964, to stimulate our thinking on "theology and The Frontiers of Learning." Some of us have the feeling that if we could

only achieve a consensus on our "core beliefs" this would help to pull us together and enable us to present our case to the world. Some feel that our inability to state where we are theologically is the root cause of our failure to meet the high aspirations with which our Association was founded. They ask us to rediscover our "identity" or at least work toward a consensus on the fundamentals of our faith, else we have no rallying point. Unless we are at first willing to wrestle seriously with this problem, they maintain, we will always flounder - a fractionated, amorphous group, uncertain where we are going, split apart by any controversy, with no rallying ground for numerical growth or financial support. In such condition (this is their argument) we remain unable to attract others, since we can neither explain to them who we are or persuade them that we are indeed different. However, we may confuse a healthy pluralism with inertia.

Many believe that a healthy creative pluralism speaks for itself. They assert that we are bound together by shared attitudes rather than by any statement embodying a theological consensus. It is significant that we consciously eliminate theology as a component of the Commission on Appraisal. At this writing only three of our members are theologically trained. As a denomination we take it for granted - at least we seem to want to take it for granted - that the faculties of our

theological schools, our most thoughtful ministers and lay people are working on their own in this theological area, trying to enunciate our essence and to help us think through the largest and deepest of questions.

In recent years the trend has been to move away from specific doctrinal issues toward a growing concern for appreciating and articulating religious experience.

The ad hoc Commission on Theology asserted in 1964 that "the vitality of any religion or religious innovation is dependent upon the intensity of the experiences it evokes within the group and by the creditability of its theology to the believers." We believe this to be true. The task of bringing to bear upon theology the best resources we have is as formidable as it is necessary.

#### AT THE GRASS ROOTS LEVEL

We are concerned in this report primarily with the Unitarian Universalist Association rather than with the particular state of individual churches and fellowships. Of course, there is a sense in which the local congregations are the Association. This is true even though there is a tendency among us to speak of "we" and "they" as though the local societies and the continental organization were in a state of opposition to one another, natural enemies. We should be aware of the continuing

difficulties posed at all levels by the unresolved authority problems of many of our members. It may be that to view the denominational organization with suspicion is part of our heritage as "come outers." Only ten percent of our membership is made up of "birth-righters." Most of us may still be relating to the UUA as though it was the church we wanted to leave behind us.

For the past four years the Commission on Appraisal has held open hearings around the continent to tune in to local situations, to hear what people think and feel about their local societies as well as about the Association. We have been delighted as well as somewhat surprised by the high degree of satisfaction that most of those we heard experienced in their local societies. We have asked about needs and how well they were met. The need most often expressed by individual church and fellowship members was the need for fellowship and the caring community. The need for intellectual stimulation and adding a "spiritual dimension" to life were also high on the need list. Problems most often mentioned were the following:

New members difficulties in "breaking into the group"

Need by the over-60's group for more involvement

Need for help to meet the "tunnel phenomenon", i.e.,

the use of the Unitarian Universalist experience as a stage which many people go through on their journey toward other religious destinations

The trend to turn inward at the expense of social-action involvement

Relations between adults and young people; and tensions occasioned by the wide diversity of life styles which sometimes put a severe strain on institutional survival.

As contrasted with our expectations of the UUA, the expectations we have of our local churches and fellowships are clearer, and while they have their serious problems, they bring a much higher degree of personal satisfaction. Because of the personal nature of the relationship, and the much higher degree of involvement there is a much higher degree of positive identification.

## CONCLUSION

We have been asking ourselves where we are now in the light of some of the expectations we held at the time of Merger. We have found that some of our goals and expectations were realized and some were not. Under the impact of societal changes and pressures which

developed within our own Association new expectations have emerged. Necessarily, we have been preoccupied with setting our own house in order. After some years of spending our unrestricted capital, we decided to live carefully within our means and to build a sound financial structure. To that end we have been willing to accept curtailment of services and activities. We have sought to become more inclusive of all ages, all social and economic backgrounds, all minorities, all life styles, and to be more attentive to geographic areas. We have also sought to become more democratic in our operations and more representative. We have sought to make our individual churches and fellowships a more meaningful force in our lives. We expect from them a higher degree of mutual caring and sharing, more programs that encourage personal growth.

In our meetings as a Commission, we have often found it easier to enunciate the expectations we have for the particular congregations of which we are members than for our Unitarian Universalist Association. But we have found our project to look at Merger expectations and what has happened to them over the past fourteen years, a helpful discipline. Among other things it has heavily underscored our need to bring our resources - both human and financial - and our expectations closer together. Our expectations today are changed; we should work together to articulate them. Thus, we can achieve

a new sense of purpose and relieve ourselves of the numbing anxieties and regrets that stem from clinging to unrealistic hopes and continually failing in what we think we are trying to do. It is not a matter of being optimistic or pessimistic. It is a matter of being, at the same time, honest, imaginative, and committed.

## EPILOGUE:

### MODELS AND IMAGES FOR THE FUTURE

In its statement of philosophy, The Coordinating Committee on Consolidation asserted, "A viable organization requires a tradition, a corporate personality, clear goals, clear assignments of responsibility, effective coordination through constant communication, and a vast amount of goodwill." Our Commission is convinced that this philosophy is equally valid today. Implementing it is a shared responsibility which should involve all those who are committed to the assumption that a continental association of some sort is vital to the enhancement and expression of our religion. We hope to engage you in that process.

The celebration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the American Unitarian Association has nurtured our growing awareness of a need to reconnect with our own traditions. The recent celebration of the 200th anniversary of Universalism has also helped in this process. While some of our present uneasiness centers on uncertainty about our goals, much of it is also related to a lack of clarity or even conflict about our corporate personality.

In recent years our Association has experienced great tension, frustration and controversy. As with most institutions, what has happened among us re-

flects concerns, perplexities and changes within the larger society. However, it is not simply differing viewpoints on specific issues which have separated us. Varying attitudes and expectations about what the Unitarian Universalist Association ought to be are at the base of many of our difficulties.

The differing words we use to describe the UUA reflect our diversity: the movement, our church, Boston, the association, our religious community, the institution, continental, are a few examples.

Some are very conscious of the UUA being a voluntary association of independent churches and fellowships and want the organization to perform only those service functions which local congregations cannot accomplish on their own. Others see the UUA as a potentially powerful movement for transforming society towards exemplifying the religious and ethical values which we believe to be paramount. Some see us as a galaxy of groups and individuals in a creative relationship with one another where the interaction and support are more important than reaching agreement. Others feel that we can only be united if we are able to achieve consensus on the fundamental issues of life. Some look for a nurturing community of caring individuals scattered across the continent - and beyond. Others believe that it is our task to celebrate and transmit the values which

are at the center of our history and tradition. The images reflected in these and comparable statements are an expression of the diversity which makes some concerned about the degree of our unity.

We have not felt it our function to make specific recommendations for the future of the UUA either in terms of stating a theological consensus which should guide us or devising an organizational structure to represent and serve us.

Numerous committees and commissions have made impressive studies and surveys during the years since Merger. While their work has been very helpful to the Commission on Appraisal, our present focus is on understanding better your feelings about where we presently are at as an Association and where you want us to be going. Any structural modifications should come only in response to your present perceptions of our situation and needs.

We hope to begin at the 1975 General Assembly a process which will enable you to communicate to other Unitarian Universalists your attitudes, expectations and hopes in relation to our Association - and to have them heard. At the present time we see our responsibility more as to listen than to prescribe.

The Association, remember, is not simply our headquarters staff in Boston.



It begins with you and every other individual who identifies with a Unitarian Universalist group. It includes clusters, area councils, districts, interdistricts, myriad associate and affiliate organizations, and a variety of caucuses. Our galaxy is very wide. Your reflecting should focus not on what some they should be doing to serve us but rather what we together will choose to be and do.

Your feelings are very important. No individual Unitarian Universalist can be fully and accurately informed about everything which happens within the Association. For better or worse, your responses to the larger movement are largely determined by a variety of experiences and impressions. These responses have important consequences. If you and your local congregation or other UU group care enough and are able to give generous personal and financial support, it prospers; if you're angry or indifferent, it wanes.

Do you feel that the UUA through our people and programs give you and your local congregations the help you need? Do the institutional priorities determined by the General Assembly and the Board of Trustees reflect your own? How does the image which you perceive the UUA to have make you feel about being a Unitarian Universalist - proud, angry, ashamed, delighted, fulfilled, indifferent? What character should it have in order to fulfill the expectations of you and the Unitarian Univer-

salist groups which are important to you.

The more open we are, the more aware we become of the diversity which exists among us. Often we are tempted to reject or condemn what is strange or unfamiliar without attempting to give it an appreciative understanding. Our tensions cannot be resolved by tuning out those persons and viewpoints which distress us. We need to attempt trust and to seek within ourselves the quality of goodwill which enables us to relate authentically to others - ideas, groups, programs, individuals. Calling anew for what the Co-ordinating Committee stated as a need for "a vast amount of goodwill" is not a demand for conformity; it is an affirmation of our continuing tradition of caring, communicating and community. Creative interchange now as always is what gives our Unitarian Universalist Association life.

By communicating your personal and group attitudes, expectations, and hopes to your fellow Unitarian Universalists through the Commission on Appraisal which you have elected you share in the renewal of our common life.