

Unitarian Universalist Theology
Renaissance Module

ONLINE VERSION
PARTICIPANT GUIDE

By Lynn Ungar and Sara Lewis



UNITARIAN
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ASSOCIATION

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About the Authors

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Sara Lewis, unchurched in her early years, found Unitarian Universalism in her teen years and has served as Director of Religious Education at the Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Olympia, Washington since 2008. Sara earned a Masters in Teaching from The Evergreen State College and very briefly taught high school chemistry before realizing that was not the right fit for her. Fortunately, religious education was the perfect fit. She earned her RE Credential at the Master Level in 2014 and has served in chapter leadership and on various committees for LREDA. Sara joined the UUA's RE Credentialing Committee in June 2017.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful for the technical and editorial assistance of Alicia LeBlanc, Ministerial Credentialing Administrator, in producing the module documents and, especially, the online presence!

Overview of Sessions

Session 1: What Is Theology?

Activity 1: Opening	5 minutes
Activity 2: Introductions	20 minutes
Activity 3: Covenant	5 minutes
Activity 4: Orientation	10 minutes
Activity 5: What Is Theology?	25 minutes
Break	5 minutes
Activity 6: Our Theological Diversity	20 minutes
Activity 7: Our Theological House	20 minutes
Activity 8: Closing	10 minutes
Total Time:	2 hours

Session 2: Early Unitarianism and Universalism

Activity 1: Opening	5 minutes
Activity 2: Sharing	25 minutes
Activity 3: Early Unitarianism	25 minutes
Break	5 minutes
Activity 4: Early Universalism	25 minutes
Activity 5: On Religious Instruction	25 minutes
Activity 6: Closing	10 minutes
Total Time:	2 hours

Session 3: Expanding Beyond Christian Roots

Activity 1: Opening	5 minutes
Activity 2: Sharing	15 minutes
Activity 3: Transcendentalism	35 minutes
Break	5 minutes
Activity 4: Introduction to Humanism	35 minutes
Activity 5: Fahs as Theologian	15 minutes
Activity 6: Closing	10 minutes
Total Time:	2 hours

Session 4: More 20th Century Influences

Activity 1: Opening	5 minutes
Activity 2: Sharing	15 minutes
Activity 3: James Luther Adams	15 minutes

Activity 4: Clarence Skinner and Forrest Church	15 minutes
Break	5 minutes
Activity 5: Process Theology	15 minutes
Activity 6: Liberation Theology	25 minutes
Activity 7: Paolo Freire	15 minutes
Activity 8: Closing	10 minutes
	Total Time: 2 hours

Session 5: 21st Century UU Theology

Activity 1: Opening	5 minutes
Activity 2: Sharing	20 minutes
Activity 3: 21st Century Theologies	25 minutes
Break	5 minutes
Activity 4: The Prophetic Church	30 minutes
Activity 5: Where Are We Headed?	15 minutes
Activity 6: Final Projects	10 minutes
Activity 7: Closing	10 minutes
	Total Time: 2 hours

Session 6: Closing Session

Activity 1: Opening	5 minutes
Activity 2: Sharing	10 minutes
Activity 3: Final Projects Part 1	35 minutes
Break	5 minutes
Activity 4: Final Projects Part 2	35 minutes
Activity 5: Next Steps	20 minutes
Activity 6: Closing	10 minutes
	Total Time: 2 hours

Introduction to the Module

Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Theology Renaissance module. Theology is traditionally thought of as the study of the nature of God and religious truth, and in this program, we consider theology broadly to include the study of belief and meaning. A central task of any Unitarian Universalist religious education program is to help people of all ages develop their own understanding of central human questions such as *What am I called to do with my life? What is evil and how do I respond? What is the biggest thing to which I belong?* The answers a person gives to any of these big questions may change over time, and will be based not only in that person's experience, but also in wisdom gathered through the ages.

In this module, religious educators explore a number of key theologies and theologians from our Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist heritages, as well as influences from other traditions. It asks participants to engage with the views presented and offer their own considered viewpoints. This program, then, invites religious educators into both a deeper knowledge of our liberal religious heritage and a more profound understanding of their own beliefs, thereby equipping them to help others on their theological journeys.

Participant Requirements

This module is an online learning experience comprised of six two-hour live webinars with reading and assignments to be completed before each. Credit will be offered for full participation in the module. Full participation includes:

- Online attendance at all webinars
- Reading, reflection, and activities to prepare for each session, which will require about two or three hours' time per session. Purchase or borrow the book [*A People So Bold*](#), edited by John Gibb Millspaugh, available from the UUA Bookstore (also as an e-book).
- Discussion. Each session's preparation includes questions for reflection on the readings which will form the basis for discussion. Participants are expected to be fully

prepared to participate in online discussions after reflecting on the questions, perhaps in a journal.

- Written assignments. After each webinar, participants are to reflect on the readings and discussions and think of a way you might share in your professional work what you have learned. You need not actually carry out this plan before the next session, but are asked to share it with the group in written form (roughly 250 words) in the session's online discussion forum. Assuming two weeks between webinars, the written sharing should be posted in the week after the webinar so that you can devote the following week to the reading and preparation for the next session.
- A final project and presentation that shows a way to use in your professional work what you have learned about Unitarian Universalist theology.

Technical requirements

Participants and leaders must have a computer with reliable Internet connection and a video camera to fully participate in online sessions. Headsets provide better audio quality; tablets and smart phones are not recommended. The module also requires the use of a shared document program such as GoogleDocs or Dropbox.

This module requires the use of a videoconferencing platform that includes the ability to screen-share audio, video, and document files from one's computer and the Internet. Zoom is highly recommended (www.zoom.us) as it allows for breakout rooms within webinars. However, module leaders may have chosen to use a different platform. The Renaissance Office can provide information about how other online modules have worked; email renaissance@uua.org with questions.

Module Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Develop a sense of the broad scope of Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist theology and become familiar with some of the theologians and thought leaders, historical and modern, who have contributed to Unitarian Universalist thought

- Understand some of both Unitarian and Universalist theological foundations of Unitarian Universalism
- Understand significant theological movements such as Transcendentalism, Humanism, Process Theology, and Liberation Theology that have shaped our contemporary religious movement
- Develop and articulate their own point of view on key theological questions
- Apply theological understandings to real-life liturgical and educational forums to help people of all ages explore theological questions
- Nurture a theology of justice and service in individuals and congregations.

Reading

Each session features several readings, as well as a variety of brief quotations. Most readings for this module are included in this Participant Guide. However, essays assigned for Session 5 are found in [*A People So Bold*](#), edited by John Gibb Millspaugh, available from the UUA Bookstore (also available as an e-book). Each participant is responsible to obtain a copy of the book. Note: [Video](#) excerpts from the *A People So Bold* conference are available on YouTube and a study guide is available [here](#).

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Use these reflection questions to guide your reading. They will provide the basis for the session discussions.

Session 1: What is Theology?

Reading 1: What is Theology?

- What is your most important theological question right now? Has it been different at other times in your life?
- Discuss the theological statements shared in the discussion forum.
- What are some instances in which you have engaged children and youth in theological learning?

- What are some instances in which you have engaged in theological learning with adults?

Reading 2: Our Theological Diversity

- A common fallacy about Unitarian Universalism is that “we can believe anything we want to”. What theologies do you think are incompatible with Unitarian Universalism? (e.g., would a sign saying “God hates fags” be compatible?)
- Which do you think is most vital to Unitarian Universalism: our differences or our similarities? Why?

Reading 3: Our Theological House

- Rebecca Parker first introduced the metaphor of the theological house at the October 2003 Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA) Fall Conference “The Theology of Religious Education”. How does this “hope-filled religious framework” resonate in today’s political and cultural climate?

Session 2: Early Unitarianism and Universalism

Reading 1: Unitarianism

- Who is your role model as the highest example of human morality?
- How does your theological understanding of the nature of humans (good/bad/nature/nurture/flawed/perfectible) ground your vision of religious education?
- What is the social and theological context in which you are leading religious education?

Reading 2: Universalism

- How would you define “salvation”? What are we saved *for* or *from*? Does the notion of salvation hold any theological weight for you? Do you see salvation as something that people create for themselves, something that people create for one another, or something that is granted by God?
- What is your definition of evil? What does universal love mean to you? Are these concepts related to our seven Principles?

Reading 3: On Religious Instruction

- How would you describe the “chief end of religious instruction?” What, at heart, do you think religious education should do?
- Compare and contrast Channing’s and Sargent Murray’s methods of religious instruction. What might it reveal about their theology?

Session 3: Expanding Beyond Christian Roots

Reading 1: Transcendentalism – Margaret Fuller

- With whom do you have conversations that expand your thinking?
- What is an example of an educational moment that you have shared with students in which everyone present learned through conversation and exploration, rather than a teacher dispensing knowledge?

Reading 2: Transcendentalism – Theodore Parker

- In his time, Parker was “shunned” by most Unitarians. How might contemporary UU’s respond to his theology?
- To what present-day issues and concerns might Parker’s ideas apply? Can you imagine sermon topics that would draw thousands?

Reading 3: UU Spirituality by Barry Andrews

- How would you say that Transcendentalism connects with contemporary Unitarian Universalism? Do you think there are ways in which Transcendentalist spirituality does not mesh with contemporary experience? What, if anything, is lacking, or off the mark?

Reading 4: Humanism

- What do you think is lost or gained when God is removed from religion?
- How do these readings resonate with you in the context of your own congregation? Your own beliefs?
- What impels you to do good? What is the theological or philosophical grounding that pushes you to work for justice and to care for others?
- How would you describe human nature? Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the ability and desire of human beings to create a better world?

- How would you define humanism? What resonates within humanism for you? Your congregation?

Reading 5: Fahs as Theologian

- In what ways do you see the influence of Fahs' *theology* at work in faith development in your setting?
- What aspects of Fahs educational philosophy are still relevant today? Are there ways in which liberal religious education has moved beyond the ideas Fahs espoused?
- In her article about Fahs, Lucinda Nolan described reaction to Fahs as "prophetic theology politely ignored" because she was a woman and she worked with children. Does this have any resonance today?

Session 4: More 20th Century Influences

Reading 1: James Luther Adams

- Do you think that Adams's criticism of liberal religion is justified? Thinking of James Luther Adams' experience in Nazi Germany as described in the UU World article, does Unitarian Universalism do an adequate job of standing up to evil and injustice? Does your congregation? How does your religious education program lead children, youth and adults, in the words of our second Source, "to confront powers and structures of evil"?
- What five characteristics do you think best define religious liberalism? What differences do you see between the five smooth stones and the UUA's Principles and Sources?
- Are individualism and communal responsibility opposite poles? What is the proper relationship between the two? How does this tension between individualism and community play out in your congregation? In your religious education classrooms?

Reading 2: Clarence Skinner and Forrest Church

- According to Rev. Taves, for Clarence Skinner, what Rebecca Parker calls "love first" was city infrastructure, labor legislation, birth control, and building codes. What is "love first" for you? What is "love first" in your setting?

- In what ways do you engage children, youth and adults in creating the “kingdom on earth?”
- Forrest Church uses the image of the “Cathedral of the World” to describe his understanding of how universal truth is expressed through different religious points of view. What image or metaphor would you use to describe your own understanding of how diverse people find religious truth?
- Church says that: “Religion is our human response to the dual reality of being alive and having to die.” What does that statement mean to you? How does the knowledge that you will one day be gone affect how you live your life? How does it affect the religious beliefs that matter to you?

Reading 3: Process Theology

- Whitehead was a mathematician, other process thinkers were scientists – how does this theology agree with what you understand of the scientific worldview, and how does it differ from it?
- What do you think of this conception of God? Is this understanding of God reflected in our humanist/atheist vs. theist debates? Would lifting up this understanding be of benefit to Unitarian Universalism, and why?

Reading 4: Liberation Theology

- In what ways do you find your personal theology to be in sympathy with liberation theology?
- In what ways do you find liberation theology compatible with Unitarian Universalism?
- What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of liberal theology? Where might it fall short?
- How can Unitarian Universalists engage authentically with Liberation Theology? Are there systemic or cultural norms within Unitarian Universalism that would have to change if we took Liberation Theology seriously?
- Can you point to examples of Freire’s influence on Unitarian Universalist religious education? How are we engaged in a pedagogy of the oppressed or a pedagogy of

hope? And, if you don't think we are engaged in such a pedagogy, what would we need to change in order to be so?

Session 5: 21st Century UU Theology

Reading 1: 21st Century Theologies

- Thandeka describes Unitarian Universalists as having a common emotional experience with the mental space to explain it in different ways theologically. What have you found to be a common emotional experience in Unitarian Universalism?
- Thandeka says we “love beyond belief”, but Rebecca Parker identifies limits to what we can believe as UU's. Are the limits described by Parker true for you, and do you see any other limits to belief besides those she describes?
- How do you answer the question “What do UU's believe, anyway?” How would you explain UU belief/theology to children? Youth? Adults?
- How could the work of religious educators promote an ethic of risk in our Unitarian Universalist communities? How can we work toward becoming communities of resistance?
- Welch states that “we cannot be moral alone.” How do you react to that statement, and how might it ground your work as a religious educator?

Reading 2: The Prophetic Church

- What theology grounds the justice work of your congregation? What theology grounds your own work for justice?
- How does your congregation embody radical caring? What makes those acts of caring radical?
- How is your congregation oriented toward the future? How does it serve those you hope to have as part of your community and not just those who have participated in the past?
- How is your congregation engaged in “facing the truth” about racism?
- Do you agree with Rasor's principles? Are there others you would add?

- How do you provide opportunities for participants in your religious education program to unlearn limiting assumptions and world views?
- How do you stay engaged in social change efforts?
- Describe an environment that you have experienced as teacher and/or learner that promoted engagement in a cultural shift.

Assignments

In addition to completing the reading assigned for a session, participants are to reflect on the readings and discussions after each session and think of a way to share, in their professional work, what they have learned. Participants need not actually carry out this plan before the next session, but are asked to share it with the group in written form (roughly 250 words) in the session's online discussion forum. At the end of the module, each participant will have generated a variety of ideas for sharing UU theology in their work. Assuming two weeks between webinars, participants should post in the discussion forum during the week after each session so that they can devote the following week to reading and preparing for the next session.

Find Out More

Each session concludes with a list of books, articles, and websites for further exploration. These may be particularly helpful for your final project.

Final Project

Participants will prepare a final project that shows a way to use what they have learned about Unitarian Universalist theology in their professional work, working alone or as a group of up to four people. An individual project should take eight to ten minutes to present; a group project should take 15-20 minutes.

To seek ideas for the final project, participants may review ideas for applying learning that have been shared over the course of the module and review the resources in each session's "Find Out More" section. The project can be a development of an idea from the group's

collection or something entirely new. Any electronic format may be used in presentation, for example, a slide show/PowerPoint; uploaded or screen-shared documents or flyers; video; audio; and shares from Pinterest, Tumblr, or a blog site are all possibilities. Participants should submit a project proposal to the module leaders for approval two weeks before the final session. Leaders may offer suggestions or request revisions in your plan. Participants will be asked to post their final projects in a shared folder by a date before the start of the final session.

Pre-Module Assignment

Introductions

“We arrive out of many singular rooms,” writes Unitarian Universalist minister Kenneth Patton in a frequently used responsive reading, Reading 443 in *Singing the Living Tradition*. Each person in this group brings a unique set of experiences, skills and interests to our common endeavor. A week before the first meeting, post a self-introduction in the Session 1 Discussion Forum, including your current involvement with religious education, their location, and anything else that will help the group to get to know you better. Additionally, participants should share a brief statement of their own (current) theology.

Opening and Closing Words

Leaders will select opening and closing words for Sessions 1 and 6. For the remainder of the sessions, participants are asked to volunteer to share opening or closing words of their choosing, preferably related to session themes. The leaders will post a sign-up sheet online, in the folder designated for shared documents. Two helpful resources are the UUA’s online [Worship Web](#) and [Lifting Our Voices: Readings in the Living Tradition](#), published in 2015.

Session Preparation

Complete the reading for each session. Prepare to participate in online discussions by reflecting on the questions, perhaps in a journal.

Session 1: What Is Theology?

Introduction

What is theology, and why might a person want to do it? In particular, why might a Unitarian Universalist religious educator want to do it? At its most literal, theology is words (*logos*) about God (*theos*). More broadly, theology is how we talk about the distinctly religious questions of life:

- What, if anything, is God?
- What is our purpose on this earth?
- Why do bad things happen?
- Where are we headed?
- What is the nature of humanity?
- What do we owe to one another?
- How are we connected?
- How do we know right from wrong?

The usefulness of these kinds of questions for religious educators would seem obvious. If we are going to help children, youth, and adults in their lifelong journeys toward spiritual maturity, our work will address these questions. If we are doing this work as Unitarian Universalists, we need to understand how our faith tradition has grappled with these questions over time.

It is common for children and newcomers to Unitarian Universalism to ask, *What do UUs believe?* Of course, there is no single answer, but this question deserves a thoughtful, informed response. As a non-creedal religion, we have a rich, dynamic liberal faith tradition. There are significant ways in which Unitarian Universalists have parted company with our religious siblings, and there are beliefs and values that have become strong and colorful threads in the tapestry of our common religious life. Familiarity with these significant threads is an important part of the complicated answer to the question of what Unitarian Universalists believe.

But UU theology is not only about what has come down to us from the past. Unitarian Universalist theology is fluid, and is informed by each one of us. Consequently, it is important for religious educators not only to be comfortable explaining the significant threads of our history, but also to have grappled with the questions and found some answers, however provisional.

The Theology Renaissance Module, then, both shares some theological threads of our Unitarian and Universalist heritages and weaves into our faith tapestry the strands of each participant's own insights, struggles, and lived experience. Participants read words by and about some of the people who have significantly shaped Unitarian Universalism, explore influences from other traditions, share their own thoughts and beliefs, and develop opportunities to contribute to the theological growth of the children, youth, and adults they serve.

Reading 1: Understanding Theology

Excerpted from "Understanding Theology," a sermon by Rev. Jenn Crow from the Wellspring program of First Unitarian Church of Rochester, NY, October 2006

Taken from the Greek words, *theos*, meaning "god," and *logos*, meaning "word" or "reason," the word *theology* is generally understood to be any reasoned discourse concerning religion, spirituality, or god. Some define theology as talk of "that which is of ultimate concern," others call it "god-talk," and still others term it "meaning making." For Unitarian Universalists, theological discussions tend to include reflection upon our own personal life experiences, the use of our conscience and reason, appreciation of the beliefs of others, and a commitment to the revelation of truth as an on-going phenomenon. I view theology as the individual system of meaning making we each develop throughout our lives. Largely dependent upon our own individual contexts, our theology helps us to make sense of the world and the events that take place in it, and it becomes the framework upon which we tell our stories.

Theological statements tend to grapple with at least five primary areas of concern, including:

- Human nature and purpose
- The nature of God

- Death and what happens next
- The role of the church
- The source of religious authority

In addressing these five areas, many questions arise, including:

Are our lives predestined or do we have free will to make our own decisions?

Are all people inherently good?

What is evil? How does evil come about?

What about punishment and reward? Do they happen in this lifetime? Do they happen fairly?

What is salvation and how do we attain it?

How did our world come into being?

Why are we here?

What is the nature of God?

What is the role of the church in the world? In your life?

What is the source of religious authority? How do you know that something is true? Is it an internal feeling, a calling, a book or scripture or teacher? How do you know that something is true and valuable in your theology?

The following are examples of Unitarian Universalist theological statements:

Rev. William Channing Gannett (1840-1923), minister, First Unitarian in Rochester, NY; from *The Things Most Commonly Believed To-Day Among Us* (1886):



We believe that to love the good and live the good is the supreme thing in religion:

We hold reason and conscience to be final authorities in matters of religious belief:

We honor the Bible and all inspiring scripture, old or new:

We revere Jesus and all holy souls that have taught me truth and righteousness and love, as prophets of religion:

We believe in the growing nobility of Man:

We trust the unfolding Universe as beautiful, beneficent, unchanging Order; to know this Order is truth; to obey it is right, and liberty and stronger life:

We believe that good and evil inevitably carry their own recompense, no good thing being failure and no evil thing success; that heaven and hell are states of being; that no evil can befall the good man in either life or death; that all things work together for the victory of the Good:

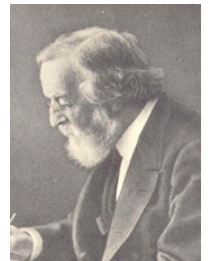
We believe that we ought to join hands and work to make the good things better and the worst good, counting nothing good for self that is not good for all:

We believe that this self-forgetting, loyal life awakes in man the sense of union, here and now, with things eternal, - the sense of deathlessness; and this sense is to us an earnest of a life to come:

We worship One-in-All, - that Life whence suns and stars derive their orbits and the soul of man in Ought, - that Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world, giving us power to become the sons of God, - that Love with whom our souls commune. This One we name, - the Eternal God, our Father

Rev. James Freeman Clarke (1810-1888), Unitarian minister; in *Five Points* (circa 1850):

We believe in the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man, the Leadership of Jesus, Salvation by Character, and the Progress of Mankind Onward and Upward Forever.



Rev. Dr. James Luther Adams (1901-1994), Unitarian minister and professor; in *Five Smooth Stones of Religious Liberalism, a summary of beliefs which hold us in common* (1976) [Note: While the reference to “five smooth stones,” from the biblical David and Goliath story, was editor Kim Beech’s way of organizing Adams’ essays and thoughts, Adams did approve of the metaphor.]

Revelation is continuous.

Relations among persons should rest on consent, not coercion.

*Religious people have a moral obligation to establish a just and loving community.
Good things don't just happen, people make them happen.
The resources available for change justify an ultimate optimism.*



Rev. Dr. Paul Rasor, Unitarian Universalist minister and Director of the Center for the Study of Religious Freedom at Virginia Wesleyan College, in *UU World* magazine, [Fall 2005](#)

Liberal theology is not for the faint of heart. It points us in a general direction without telling us the specific destination. It refuses to make our commitments for us, but holds us accountable to the commitments we make. . . . It invites us to live with ambiguity without giving in to facile compromise; to engage in dialogue without trying to control the conversation; to be open to change without accepting change too casually; to take commitment seriously but not blindly; to be engaged in the culture without succumbing to the culture's values.

Reading 2: Our Theological Diversity

Please read the section, "Theological Challenges" (pp. 82-94), in the 2005 Commission on Appraisal report [Engaging Our Theological Diversity](#).

Reading 3: Our Theological House

From *A House for Hope* by Rebecca Parker, John Buehrens, copyright © 2010 by John Buehrens and Rebecca Ann Parker, reprinted by permission of Beacon Press, Boston

Hope is rising. The political tide in the United States has turned, and many are hoping for progress on issues such as global warming, health care, marriage equality, and international conflict. But religious fundamentalists of many varieties continue to promote frameworks of meaning that put earth's global community, its diverse peoples, and its ecological systems at profound risk. More than political change is called for; America's liberals and progressives need greater awareness that at the core of social and political issues lie competing

responses to the classic questions posed by theology. Effective work for social change requires people of faith who are theologically literate and engaged. To that end, this book provides a primer in progressive theology. It recovers and reconsiders the hope-filled religious frameworks that inspired generations of activists to work for women's rights, racial equality, economic justice, and peace. These frameworks embody reverence for the sacred, nourish community life, carry forward the aspirations of our forebears, and respond to legacies of violence and injustice that harm our bodies and souls. They hold promise for our time. As Sara Robinson, blogging in 2008 for the Campaign for America's Future, argued:

Secular progressives don't seem to understand that while politics is all about how we're going to make the world better, progressive religion tells us why it's necessary to work for change... Liberal faith traditions offer the essential metaphors and worldview that everything else derives from – the frames that give our dreams shape and meaning. It has an invaluable role to play in helping our movement set its values and priorities, understand where we are in the larger scheme, and gauge whether we're succeeding or not.

The conservative movement knew from the get-go that it would not succeed unless it could offer people this kind of deeper narrative. Providing that was one of the most important things the religious right brought to their party. Progressivism will not defeat it until we can offer another narrative about what America can and should be – and our liberal churches have longer, harder, better experience than anyone at developing and communicating those stories, and building thriving communities around them.

This book uses the metaphor of a theological house to articulate the “frames that give our dreams shape and meaning.” Through this metaphor we explore the classic topics of theology from a progressive vantage point – reminding the reader that liberal religion has a long history, and inviting reconsideration and reimagining of its key concepts. We write as coauthors because we recognize that no one authoritative voice can claim to speak to all of

liberal and progressive religion. Dialogue that opens up further conversation is integral to progressive theological method. We have been in dialogue with each other for a number of years about many issues in progressive religion today. We have much in common as a result, but we do not always agree about every issue or formulation. To invite the reader into dialogue as well, in each section of this book there are two or more chapters: one by Rebecca introduces the theological theme and identifies distinctive liberal perspectives on the topic; one by John offers further historical perspective, counterpoints, and reflections on the theme.

Each dimension of the house – including its setting within the natural world – corresponds to one of the classic issues of systematic theological reflection. Theology, we suggest, is architectural – it provides a framework for human life. It is also ecological – it creates an interactive system in response to a specific environment. And it is archeological – it unearths artifacts from the past that can inspire our imagination and understanding now. Here are the basic dimensions and coordinates of this theological house for hope, and the questions that each represents.

I. The Garden

Earth is our habitation – the home that gives us birth and is our final resting place. Building on the liberal theological heritage, which affirms that salvation belongs in this world, how do progressive people of faith regard the earth itself, the reality of death, and the hope for life that is just, abundant and sustainable for all? Given that earth itself is threatened by global warming, and its ecologies damaged by humanity's failure to establish just and sustainable economic systems, what constitutes a progressive eschatology? Eschatology is the topic in theology that deals with the ultimate "end" of life and of the earth, from the Greek *eschaton*, the last or final things. This is where we begin.

II. The Sheltering Walls

Western society has succumbed to an individualistic set of responses to the gift of life, easily forgetting questions of the common good. Religious community acts to bind us in covenant to

one another and to purposes greater than ourselves – not merely as an agreement among mortals but as a shared human response to a sense of grace, interdependency, and responsibility. Put in theological terms, what constitutes a progressive ecclesiology (from the Greek *ekklesia*, which means “gathering together,” “assembly,” “congregation”)? And how can we approach religious community in ways that promote not competitive parochialism but authentic interfaith engagement and cooperation?

III. The Roof

Given the realities of tragedy, oppression, injustice, evil, failure, and sin in the world, what can protect life from harm and repair or restore lives and communities? This is the theological topic of soteriology – from the Greek *soteria*, which means salvation, deliverance, preservation, or release. Religion, at its best, provides shelter for people and communities in need of healing, transformation, or sustenance in difficulty. How might the Bible contribute to the struggle for “deliverance from evil?” What constitutes progressive religion’s understanding of what we need to be saved from – and how?

IV. The Foundations

What about God? How can we, or do we, speak of the ultimate mystery that is the source and sustenance of our lives – the source that some call God? Who or what do we most deeply trust? What do we rely on as the foundational given, in relationship to which our lives find their meaning, purpose, and hope? The philosophical foundations of religion have changed over the past two hundred years. Here in America in the early-twenty-first century, a progressive doctrine of God – a theology per se, from *theo*, God, and *logos*, word – must speak adequately both of ultimate reality as creative process and of the hope for liberation and wholeness of all God’s children, not in the next life, but in the midst of earthly existence.

V. The Welcoming Rooms

How do we understand not only the nature of God but the nature of our being human together? In the liberal heritage, the notion that humanity is created in the image of God is

foundational, making reflection on human experience a primary source of theology, and setting ethics and spiritual practice in the context of an affirmation of human powers and capacities. How do we use our powers for good – including our capacity for sexual intimacy and pleasure, our economic productivity, and our capacity to love, to forgive, and to live as interconnected beings? How do we honor our limitations and need for one another, as well as respect our power and strength? What ideas of relationality, co-creativity with God, agency, and self-transcendence can promote a valid, contemporary form of theological anthropology – a religious understanding of the meaning of being human?

Despite the secular hope that religion might simply vanish, humans continue to be religion-making beings. Within any house of hope, of whatever tradition, there breathes a sense of the Holy, a response to the Sacred Spirit or Spirits present in life, inspiring creativity, compassion, and social action. Worship, art, ritual, and music shape religious community, infusing the atmosphere of its environment, making space for people to breathe. How might liberal religion reclaim a doctrine of the Spirit – a pneumatology (from the Greek *pneuma*, “breath” or “wind”) – that affirms the importance of ritual and art?

VI. The Threshold

Finally, without pretending to any messianic powers, what is the mission of a liberal or progressive religious community? If it is not to bring others into one’s house to convert them to one’s own way of thinking, how can dialogue and partnership with others advance efforts to promote justice and compassion in this world? What constitutes a progressive missiology today – one that offers an open door to hospitable interchanges as essential to the flourishing of life? What thresholds do we need to cross to establish peace? The word “missiology” is from the same root as missive and message – the calling to bring something to others, to the world – and to receive, as well, what others bring to us.

We write in a time of hope – hope that the tragedies of torture and war might be eased, that threats to the earth’s environment might be turned around, that economic systems might be converted to better support all earth’s peoples and cultures. We also write with the

awareness that hope began before we were born. It began with generations of people who lived before us and devoted their lives to what they hoped for their children and grandchildren. We have benefited from their labors, and we take up the tasks of our own time indebted to them for what has been accomplished and mindful of new challenges, as well as perennial ones that remain. Hope will go on after us, through those who will continue the struggles for justice, equity, and compassion, and will form and reform communities that embody love for life.

“In a house that becomes a home,” Antoine de St.-Exupéry writes, “one hands down and another takes up the heritage of mind and heart.... It is needful to transmit the passwords from generation to generation.” Such transmission does not always happen. In every generation, rediscovery is needed if the thread of hope is to remain strong. Such rediscovery began for Amy Moses-Lagos at a protest rally. She was at Fort Benning, Georgia, on a weekend before Thanksgiving, along with thousands of others. They were pushing to close the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, previously known as the School of the Americas. For decades, graduates of this U.S. Army school have been implicated in human rights violations in many parts of Latin America – including torture, assassinations, and mass murder. Amy joined the solemn procession of protesters. Some were shrouded in black, wearing white death masks and shouldering symbolic coffins – full-sized ones in memory of the adults and small ones for the children. Others – including Amy – carried crosses bearing the names of those killed or “disappeared.” As they moved, the names of victims of the School of the Americas were read aloud.

“Mirna Chicas,” the speaker called. “*Presente!*” – meaning “she is here” – the chorus of protestors responded. The call-and-response continued for hours before the long list of names was completed. “Maria del Carmen Idarrago de Gómez ... *Presente!* ... Ignacio Ellacuria ... *Presente!* ... Cristino Amaya Claros ... *Presente!* ... Oscar Romero ... *Presente!*” Torture had crucified thousands, but the ritual countered the power of death to obliterate the lost. The protesting community embodied their resurrection, following a practice used in Catholic masses in Latin America that invokes the presence of the dead when the community gathers to break bread and share wine.

“I had never participated in anything like this before,” Amy said. “The ritual made me realize that my liberal religious upbringing had taught me to work for social justice, but it hadn’t connected activism to theology, to spiritual practice, or to ritual.” The ache of a strange absence – a blank theological mind – disturbed Amy. “I wanted to discover whether my liberal religious heritage could offer such grounding,” she resolved.

Amy’s longing for a religious foundation to her activism brought her to seminary, searching for origins, for identity, and for spiritual sustenance. She knew seminary would be a seed-bed that tended the sources she was missing, a place to return to roots and from which to make a beginning. At Starr King School for the Ministry, Amy told the story of her experience at the School of the Americas’ protest, in a class taught by one of us. As president of the school and professor of theology, Rebecca has worked for nearly twenty years with students searching for renewed grounding in theology, spiritual practice, and religious community. She has learned from their struggles and been moved by their discoveries and subsequent activism.

This book is for Amy Moses-Lagos and for readers like her: people committed to resisting injustice and acting in hope, but unaware of the theological perspectives that support their activism or missing a spiritual practice and structure that holds their hope. In response to concerns like Amy’s, Rebecca developed the metaphor that we use in this book – theology as a habitation. First introduced in a series of lectures for the Liberal Religious Educator’s Association and then developed into a popular course, the image conveys that “theology” – whatever else it may connote – is about the structures of meaning that shelter and shape our way of living. The image counters the common notion among liberals that every person must build his or her own theology from scratch – as if religion were only a private matter of personal belief, without history or community. In fact, liberal and progressive people of faith inherit a communal theological house, built by those who lived, labored, and loved before us. Rebecca knows this firsthand; her family heritage includes four generations of liberal Christian ministers and progressive churchwomen. Her friend and colleague John grew up as a Roman Catholic in the Midwest. After leading liberal congregations in Tennessee, Texas, and New York City, and serving as president of the Unitarian Universalist

Association for eight years, he is now minister of the First Parish in Needham, Massachusetts, a congregation first gathered in 1711. At Andover Newton Theological School, John has taught a course based on Rebecca's ideas. Both of us have long been engaged in interdenominational and interfaith cooperation – praying, hoping, and working for justice and peace; we are keenly aware of how often people motivated to lives of service are missing an adequate framework for their commitments – one that moves beyond rhetoric, platitudes, and isolated individualism into a sphere of deeper spirituality and shared life with others.

Amy's search is not unlike that of many. A similar struggle with an absence of spiritual grounding troubled the young Barack Obama as a community organizer in Chicago after college. In his early memoir, *Dreams from My Father*, written before he'd ever run for public office, he traces his own uneasy journey to ground his activism in something other than despair and outrage, something abiding and shared, that would alter his sense of an isolated and transient existence. Obama and Amy both reflect a postmodern struggle to regain access to spiritual roots that modernity, mobility, and higher education, with its important commitments to critical analysis, have in one way or another disrupted.

Obama found religious grounding at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, a progressive congregation centered in African American spirituality, theology, and worship. Listening to Dr. Jeremiah Wright preach about "the audacity of hope," he had an awakening:

In that single note – hope! – I heard something else.... I imagined the stories of ordinary black people merging with the stories of David and Goliath, Moses and Pharaoh, the Christians in the lion's den, Ezekiel's field of dry bones. Those stories – of survival, and freedom, and hope – became our story, my story; the blood that had spilled was our blood, the tears our tears; until this black church, on this bright day, seemed once more a vessel carrying the story of a people into future generations and into a larger world.

Another narrative of rediscovered religious roots and a wider hope is told by Eboo Patel in his book *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim*. He describes being adrift in the currents of assimilation to the dominant white society that surrounded him as a young Muslim American. Finding inspiration in the social activism of Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King Jr., and Gandhi, he struggled for identity and meaning to match theirs. Gradually, he came to recognize that his Islamic heritage offered him a rich and sustaining religious practice. He embraced his own roots with a transformed understanding of their value and values, while remaining pluralistic in his outlook and interactions. In *Acts of Faith*, Patel demonstrates that interfaith social action can enable people simultaneously to build community with those different from themselves and deepen their grounding in a particular religious heritage.

Our shared hope in this book is that, by reintroducing people to the forgotten theological resources of progressive religion in North America readers will gain some of the resources that a seminary education can provide and will strengthen their social activism by becoming more firmly rooted in community, ritual, and faith.

It is often forgotten that religion in America has more often than not been liberal in its spirit and progressive in its social impact. The United States was born in an era of Enlightenment religion and increasing concern about human rights. During the early nineteenth century, religious people were at the center of efforts to redress the wrongs of slavery and establish equal rights for women. After the Civil War, and in reaction to the Gilded Age of economic inequality created by rapid industrialization, the reforms of the Progressive Era were inspired in no small part by the Christian Social Gospel movement. Franklin Roosevelt's development of a social safety net in the midst of fighting the Depression, while opposing totalitarianism, found broad religious support in public theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr. In the 1950s and '60s, Martin Luther King Jr., a progressive Baptist, drew on, critiqued, and applied the liberal theological heritage to galvanize the civil rights movement, which found its strongest support among religious people, both people of color and whites, both Christians and Jews. And there has long been far more religious support in America for peacemaking, for lesbian and gay rights, for

environmental stewardship, and for women's rights than is often recognized. Few remember, for example, that *Roe v. Wade*, which established abortion as a legal option for women, came to the Supreme Court through the activism of liberal churchwomen.

For nearly three decades now, however, politics and media in the United States have focused on the Religious Right. Starting with the Moral Majority (which was never either) and, later, the Christian Coalition, religious social conservatives have attempted to speak for all of America's diverse religious people. They have been aided and abetted in this by politicians and pundits. The secular media have often found it convenient to frame issues as conflicts between religious conservatives on the one hand and secular individualists on the other. What disappears in such debates is the vast majority of America's diverse people of faith who are not fundamentalists and who care deeply about the common good.

Admittedly, the old mainline and liberal Protestant establishment in America has been in some disarray and has lost the cultural dominance it enjoyed in the 1950s. The liberation and antiwar movements of the 1960s were advanced by many Christians but resisted by others. Unresolved divisions weakened the voice of mainline Protestantism on social issues related to race, gender, sexual orientation, and peacemaking. American Catholicism became divided between the Vatican II-inspired hopes of many laity, religious women, and some priests, and an increasingly defensive stance on the part of the hierarchy. Changes in immigration policy, cultural globalization, the growth of Islam among African Americans and through immigration, and Western interest in Eastern religious traditions have transformed the dominant culture of America to be no longer just Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and secular but diverse enough to include significant Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim populations.

Right-wing forces, with divisive political motivations, have eagerly exploited such tensions within the U.S. religious culture. The same reactionary millionaires who funded the conservative wing of the Republican Party funded organizations with such benign-sounding names as the Institute on Religion and Democracy. The IRD then funded many conservative groups within the mainline denominations. The clear goal was to intimidate, distract, and silence the more progressive and prophetic leaders within American religion so that only religious conservatives would be heard. It worked to a distressing degree: the light of

progressive religion has been in some eclipse. Within the U.S. Episcopal Church, for example, an investigation by the Diocese of Washington called “Following the Money” found that half a dozen conservative foundations with political agendas were important sources of funding not only for the conservative breakaway Anglican groups within the United States but also for many of the African Anglican bishops they persuaded to help foment theological division. In many instances, the tactics of these conservative groups—attempting to tag anyone of even moderate religious views as “pro-communist,” or as “advancing the homosexual agenda” —have amounted to a kind of religious McCarthyism.

In reaction, many liberal people of faith moved away from religious language and religious frameworks to advance their social justice hopes, forgetting that those hopes had their origins in the ethical teachings of their own religious traditions. This progressive abandonment of religious language and, often with it, religious ritual contributed to the loss of foundations that Amy experienced while retaining a strong social conscience. But recent reaction to the Religious Right is only a part of the story. The liberal religious home and church in which Amy was raised began to erode its own foundations long ago. It introduced important reforms, but in the process it emphasized individual dissent over community building, the primacy of reason over the importance of relationships, and progress toward an idealized future over stewardship of its own heritage.

Amy’s religious forebears were liberal Christians, descendants of New England Puritanism who became Unitarians. Beginning in the nineteenth century, many thoughtful Christians—Unitarians among them—began to reject literal interpretations of the Bible as incompatible with science, history, reason, and their ethical sensibilities. They abandoned literal readings of the Bible when they found them to be an insult to reason. They let go of dogmas that didn’t make rational sense—such as the Virgin Birth and other miraculous, supernatural acts of God; they critiqued views of God that sanction unjust social arrangements—such as the paternalistic old white man in the clouds who reinforces male dominance. They dissented from notions of God as a controlling and wrathful deity who demands obedience, threatening them with eternal torments or seducing them with heavenly blessings if they obey his will, freeing themselves from being condemned to eternal torment

for dancing or playing cards. They questioned exclusivist claims that Christianity was the one and only true religion. They rejected the idea that Jesus's execution atoned for humanity's sins, requiring nothing more of us.

Liberals offered soul-stirring and life-giving alternative theological affirmations in place of the theological stances and pieties they rejected. They placed religion on new foundations: reason, experience, and ethical insight. But too often they taught their children to turn their sights to the new, as if salvation could exclusively be found by leaving the past behind. As a result, their life-giving theological alternatives are what have now largely been forgotten. This book aims to recover those affirmations, update them, and then build on them with a fresh design for the house for hope that is needed in our time.

This book, like our experience as its authors, is rooted in particular streams of religious tradition that are deeply implicated in progressive social movements in America: liberal Christianity and Unitarian Universalism. The latter embraces multireligious life and learning found at the intersections of Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, and other sources of spirituality. We share our reflections on these particular traditions as a gift, not a limit. Following the lead of Eboo Patel, we affirm religious pluralism, collaboration, and interchange while simultaneously being grounded in our particular heritages of faith and practice. We seek to extend the welcome and the resources of progressive theology to people who are searching for a religious home that can support their aspirations for a just and sustainable world. At the same time, we are grateful for the opportunity to be guests at the tables of religious fellowship with others and to join with them in mutual learning and transformation.

Hope rises. It rises from the heart of life, here and now, beating with joy and sorrow. Hope longs. It longs for good to be affirmed, for justice and love to prevail, for suffering to be alleviated, and for life to flourish in peace. Hope remembers the dreams of those who have gone before and reaches for connection with them across the boundary of death. Hope acts—to bless, to protest, and to repair. Hope can be disappointed, especially when it is individual rather than shared, or when—even as shared aspiration—it encounters entrenched opposition. To thrive, hope requires a home a sustaining structure of community, meaning,

and ritual. Only with such habitation can hope manifest the spiritual stamina it needs to confront evil, endure through trouble, and “hold fast to that which is good.”

A renewal of progressive religion is under way in the United States—arising from many quarters. May this volume inspire religious communities in which hope abides, nourished by the Communion of Saints and made strong by theologies that embrace this world in love and struggle.

Find Out More (Session 1)

2005 Commission on Appraisal report [Engaging Our Theological Diversity](#)

[What Moves Us?](#) Tapestry of Faith curriculum for adults by Thandeka

The New UU, Tapestry of Faith curriculum for adults, [Workshop 1, Theology and Worship](#)

[Place of Wholeness](#), Tapestry of Faith curriculum for youth

[Articulating Your UU Faith](#) by Barbara Wells and Jacob B. ten Hove

[Soul Work: Anti-Racist Theologies in Dialogue](#) edited by Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley and Nancy Palmer Jones

Parents as Resident Theologians, part of [The Parent Trilogy](#), by Roberta and Christopher Nelson

[A House for Hope: The Promise of Progressive Religion for the Twenty-first Century](#) by John Buehrens and Rebecca Parker

[Discussion Guide](#) for *A House for Hope*

Sermon series by Rev. Christine Brownlie:

- [Our Theological House: A Tour of the House](#)
- [Our Theological House: Human Nature](#)
- [Our Theological House: God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit](#)
- [Our Theological House: Sin and Salvation](#)
- [Our Theological House: Eschatology: Are You Ready for the End of Time?](#)

[“There’s No Place Like Home”](#) blog post by Jessica Zebrine Gray

Session 2: Early Unitarianism and Universalism

Introduction



If the Father begat the Son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence: and from this it is evident, that there was a time when the Son was not. It therefore necessarily follows, that he [the Son] had his substance from nothing. —Arius, (c. 250 CE-336 CE), Presbyter of Alexandria and founder of the heresy known as Arianism

I do not separate Christ from God more than a voice from the speaker or a beam from the sun. Christ is the voice of the speaker. He and the Father are the same thing, as the beam and the light, are the same light. —Michael Servetus (Miguel Serveto) (c.1506-1553) Spanish physician, theologian and martyr



Q. *What is the rule of conduct for Christians?*

A. *They will endeavour that benevolence should guide their every action, virtue will be the principle of their lives, betwixt man and man, they will deal with equity, they will not judge, they will not set at nought their brother, but they will do unto others, as they would they should do unto them, and they will be solicitous, at all times, to set a guard upon the door of their lips.*

Q. *Who will they consider as their brother?*

A. *They cannot avoid considering all mankind as brethren, for the same breath of God animates them, they are descended from the same stock, and redeemed by the same Emmanuel.*

—Judith Sargent Murray, Universalist Catechism, 1782



The spirit of Love will be intensified to Godly proportions when reciprocal love exists between the entire human race and each of its individual members. That love must be based upon mutual respect for the differences in color, language and worship, even as we appreciate and accept with gratitude the differences that tend to unite the male and female of all species. We do not find those differences obstacles to love. —George de Benneville

We are able to discern not only what we already are, but what we may become, to see in ourselves germs and promises of a growth to which no bounds can be set, to dart beyond what we have actually gained to the idea of perfection as the end of our being. —William Ellery Channing (1780-1842), Unitarian minister, from the essay "Self-Culture"



If we agree in love, there is no disagreement that can do us any injury, but if we do not, no other agreement can do us any good. Let us endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace. —Hosea Ballou (1771-1852), most influential of the preachers in the second generation of the Universalist movement in America



We have all of us, whether rich or poor, whether high or low, of whatever nationality and religious conviction, the same supreme necessities and the same great problem and infinity of love. This old world has rolled on through countless stages and phases of physical

progress until it is the home of humanity, and it has, through a process of evolution or growth reached an era of intellectual and spiritual development where there is 'malice toward none and charity toward all,' and when, without prejudice, without fear, and in perfect fidelity, we may clasp hands across the chasm of our differences and speed and cheer each other on in the ways of all that is good and true. —Augusta Jane Chapin (1836-1905), Universalist minister and educator



To determine the beginnings of a Unitarian theology is no simple matter. Some people would claim Jesus as a Unitarian, in the sense of believing in the unity of God, as opposed to the trinity. Certainly European theologians such as Arius, Socinus and Servetus held views counter to those of the Trinitarian Christians. However, Unitarianism in the United States developed out of a liberalizing movement within the Standing Order Congregational churches in New England. This liberal movement was clearly articulated for the first time in 1819, in William Ellery Channing's famous sermon given in Baltimore for the occasion of the ordination of Jared Sparks, an address often referred to simply as the Baltimore Sermon. Channing is frequently referred to as "the father of American Unitarianism."

Universalism, the belief that all souls will attain salvation, was the foundational belief for the Protestant group that became known as the Universalists. John Murray was not the first to promote the belief in universal salvation in the United States, but his influence as a preacher and institution builder was foundational in the creation of the Universalist church. Hosea Ballou's Universalist theology branched out from Murray's belief in the redemption of Christ for all people to a broader faith that a loving God would want to "happify" all of God's beloved children. The official denominational organization, the Universalist Church of America, was founded in 1825, the same year as the American Unitarian Association.

Reading 1: Unitarianism

[Sermon: God is One: William Ellery Channing](#) by Rev. Dr. Frank Schulman, Unitarian Universalist minister (1927-2006)

The [context of the Baltimore Sermon](#) from Workshop 9 of the Tapestry of Faith adult program on UU history, Faith Like a River

[Excerpts](#) from the Baltimore Sermon

Reading 2: Universalism

[“Turnings: The Amazing Story of John Murray.”](#) a sermon by UU minister Rev. Anthony Makar about John Murray and “the ever-present possibility of restoration and healing, of turning back to the hope-filled vision-all.”

[“Universalist Manifesto.”](#) a *UU World* article by Charles Howe on the 200th anniversary of the publication of Ballou’s *Treatise on Atonement*

Reading 3: Religious Instruction

In 1811, Unitarian ministers and lay leaders in Boston began to establish "Sabbath" schools meeting on Sundays for poor children. By 1826, several such schools had been established by them in Unitarian churches and in separate chapels. On December 16, 1826, the teachers of the Franklin Sabbath School urged J.F. Flagg to organize a meeting of leaders from the various Unitarian parishes who sponsored such schools so that they could coordinate their outreach efforts. The group became known as the [Unitarian Sunday School Society](#) and continues today providing grants in support of religious education.

Please read [The Sunday School: A Discourse pronounced before the Sunday School Society](#), an address given by William Ellery Channing to the Unitarian Sunday School Society. In particular, read (1) pp. 449-450, the source for Reading 652 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, “The Great End in Religious Instruction,” and (2) pp. 456-457 on the qualities of a Sunday School teacher.

Another early effort in religious education was Judith Sargent Murray’s Universalist catechism, which clearly explains Universalism in a question/answer format meant to be memorized by children; note that in the Universalist catechism, it is the children who ask the questions of adults. Catechism by Judith Sargent Murray:

<http://www.jsmsociety.com/Catechism.html>

Find Out More (Session 2)

Recommended for further reading:

[*Out of the Flames: The Remarkable Story of a Fearless Scholar, A Fatal Heresy and One of the Rarest Books in the World*](#) by Nancy and Lawrence Goldstone

[*Channing, the Reluctant Radical*](#) by Jack Mendelsohn

[Brief excerpts](#) from several of William Ellery Channing's most famous works including "Unitarian Christianity" (1819), "The Moral Argument Against Calvinism" (1820), and "Likeness to God" (1828)

A [biography](#) of John Murray

An [article](#) on George de Benneville

A brief [biography](#) of Hosea Ballou

"[A Short Essay on Universalism](#)" by Hosea Ballou, circa 1849

[*The Epic of Unitarianism: Original Writings from the History of Liberal Religion*](#) by David B. Parke

[*For Faith and Freedom: A Short History of Unitarianism in Europe*](#) by Charles A. Howe

[*Racovia: An Early Liberal Religious Community*](#) by Phillip Hewett

[*A Stream of Light: A Short History of American Unitarianism*](#) by Conrad Wright

The complete [text](#) of Ballou's *Treatise on Atonement*

[Lengthy biography](#) of Judith Sargent Murray from the Judith Sargent Murray Society

[Biography of Augusta Jane Chapin](#) from the UU Biographical Dictionary

[New York State Convention of Universalists \(quotes\)](#)

[Christian Universalist Association](#), "Where Have the Universalists Gone"?

[Universalist Heritage Society](#)

UU World article "[John Murray's Conversion to Universalism](#)" by Kimberly French

[Full text of the Universalist Catechism 1782](#)

[Universalism 101](#) by Richard Trudeau. The author writes, "Few Unitarian Universalists, ordained or not, know much about Universalist theology. A related problem is that few UUs know much about Universalist history or culture, which is relevant because Universalist theology was shaped by Universalist experience. With the loss of Universalist perspective,

our combined Unitarian Universalist religious movement is being impoverished. Universalism was different from Unitarianism. It originated among laypeople, not clergy. It drew on the experience of a less privileged social class. Its message was more radical, its scope was larger, and its taproot went deeper into the heart.”

In Tapestry of Faith:

[Faith Like a River, adult curriculum](#)

Amazing Grace, children’s curriculum, [Session 7, The Second U](#)

What Moves Us, adult program, [Workshop 1, George DeBenneville](#)

Resistance and Transformation, adult program, [Workshop 3, Response to Slavery](#)

More on John Murray in these Tapestry of Faith programs:

[Faith Like a River](#), [Place of Wholeness](#), [Creating Home](#), [Love Connects Us](#)

Session 3: Expanding Beyond Christian Roots

Introduction to Transcendentalism

All around us lies what we neither understand nor use. Our capacities, our instincts for this our present sphere are but half developed. Let us confine ourselves to that till the lesson be learned; let us be completely natural; before we trouble ourselves with the supernatural. I never see any of these things but I long to get away and lie under a green tree and let the wind blow on me. There is marvel and charm enough in that for me. —Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), feminist, author, editor; from *Summer on the Lakes*

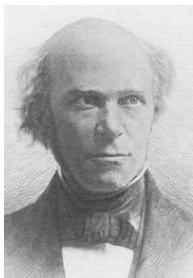


The little flower that opens in the meadows lives and dies in a season; but what agencies have concentrated themselves to produce it! So the human soul lives in the midst of heavenly help. —Elizabeth Palmer Peabody (1804-1894), Unitarian Transcendentalist author, publisher, educator, and founder of the kindergarten in the U.S.



The Transcendentalist adopts the whole connection of spiritual doctrine. He believes in miracle, in the perpetual openness of the human mind to new influx of light and power; he believes in inspiration, and in ecstasy. —Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Unitarian minister, essayist, lecturer, Transcendentalist

But there is only necessary a moment's sanity and sound senses, to teach us that there is a nature behind the ordinary, in which we have only some vague preemption right and western reserve as yet. We live on the outskirts of that region. Carved wood, and floating boughs, and sunset skies are all that we know of it. —Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), Transcendentalist author, poet, philosopher



I come now to the other school. This is distinguished by its chief metaphysical doctrine, that there is in the intellect (or consciousness), something that never was in the senses, to wit, the intellect (or consciousness) itself; that man has faculties which transcend the senses; faculties which give him ideas and intuitions which transcend sensational experiences; ideas whose origin is not from sensation, nor their proof from sensation. This is the transcendental school. —Theodore Parker (1810-1860), American Transcendentalist and reforming minister of the Unitarian church.

The Transcendentalists brought shocking new theology to the Unitarians of the 19th century, beginning in the 1820s and continuing through the Civil War. They suggested that we should study “foreign” religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism for insight, that God could be found just as well in nature as in a church, and that truth dwelt as much within the human soul as in any religious text. They were individualists, iconoclasts, and the basis of what is now mainstream Unitarian Universalist theology. As the Rev. Dr. Barry Andrews writes:

Contemporary American spirituality is largely a product of Unitarianism and liberal religion. Beginning with the Transcendentalists, Unitarians offered an alternative to traditional notions of religious authority and organized religion. They gave currency to the notion of “seeker spirituality,” characterized by spiritual eclecticism, mystical yearning, religious cosmopolitanism and concern for social justice. They interpreted spirituality and mysticism in a new way, viewing religion’s locus in the experience of

the individual, as well as the ability to appreciate other faith traditions as spiritual resources. There is a legacy not only of historical significance, but also of contemporary relevance.

Reading 1: Margaret Fuller

[*Radiant Genius and Fiery Heart*](#) A 2010 *UU World* article written for the bicentennial of the birth of Margaret Fuller. “Reclaiming the legacy of Margaret Fuller, the forgotten intellectual at the heart of the Transcendentalist movement and the first American theorist of women’s equality.”

Reading 2: Theodore Parker

A *UU World* article, [“Theodore Parker, Radical Theologian” by Dean Grodzins](#)
Excerpts from Parker’s essay, “The Transient and the Permanent,” in the adult Tapestry of Faith program [*Faith Like a River, Workshop*](#)

Reading 3: Roots of UU Spirituality

[*The Roots of Unitarian Universalist Spirituality in New England Transcendentalism*](#) by Rev. Dr. Barry Andrews

Introduction to Humanism

Whether we grow more gross, more selfish, more grasping, more vulgar, more dishonorable, or whether we grow more delicate, more tender, more sympathetic, more aspiring, or more affectionate does not depend on whether we think the mind quantitative or qualitative. It depends on what we think of the values of those qualities. And I for one choose so-called spiritual qualities of mind and character because for me they contain the most enduring and highest joys of earth. Therefore, in this practical sense I am a firm believer in the spiritual life. And when I use the term as I frequently do, it is in this sense that I use it. —

John Dietrich (1878-1957), humanist Unitarian minister, signer of the Humanist Manifesto I



We believe in the human capacity to solve individual and social problems and to make progress. We believe in a continuing search for truth and hence that life is an adventurous quest. . . . We believe in the creative imagination as a power in promoting the good life. —Rev. Lewis McGee, one of the first African Americans to be ordained a Unitarian minister and founder of the Free Religious Fellowship, an intentionally interracial Unitarian religious community on Chicago’s South Side



Some beliefs are like walled gardens. They encourage exclusiveness, and the feeling of being especially privileged.

Other beliefs are expansive and lead the way into wider and deeper sympathies.

Some beliefs are divisive, separating the saved from the unsaved, friends from enemies.

Other beliefs are bonds in a world community, where sincere differences beautify the pattern.

Some beliefs are rigid, like the body of death, impotent in a changing world.

Other beliefs are pliable, like the young sapling, ever growing with the upward thrust of life.

—Sophia Lyon Fahs (1876-1978), Unitarian religious educator and author

“...a new model for treating black suffering must be sought. I suggest that what I term humanocentric theism and “secular” humanism are the best candidates. The essential feature of both is the advocacy of the functional ultimacy of man. Man must act as if he were the ultimate valuator or the ultimate agent in human history or both. Thus God’s responsibility for the crimes and errors of human history is reduced if not effectively eliminated.

—from *Is God a White Racist?* by Rev. William R. Jones, UU minister and theologian





In the end, Humanism is not a faith for the mindless or the heartless, nor for those without integrity, nor those who are merely cynical in their skepticism. It is not a featherbed for the spiritually lazy who want to believe and do as little as possible with their all-too-brief, mortal lives. Humanism calls upon those who embrace it to live as fully as we can, in all the authentic wonder and curiosity of which the human spirit is

capable. It summons us to a persistent obedience to evidence and reason, to recognize in our deepest and most beautiful longings not the world that is, but the world that might be, if we, by our courage, intelligence, and dedication, will make it so. —Rev. Dr. Kendyl Gibbons, Unitarian Universalist minister

Humanism was in many ways a natural outgrowth of the ongoing Unitarian (and to a lesser degree Universalist) desire to push at theological boundaries. If God is to be found outside the pages of the Bible, known to each person in their own way, why not consider a religion which sets aside entirely the idea of God as a supernatural entity in favor of a religion grounded in science, nature and reason? Why not a religion rooted in faith in human possibility and responsibility and a sense of wonder and reverence for the commonplace things of the real world? In 1933 a group of people led by Raymond Bragg, the Secretary of the Western Unitarian Conference, published *A Humanist Manifesto*, which set forth the central tenets of humanism, including the assertions that “that the nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values” and “that humanism will: (a) affirm life rather than deny it; (b) seek to elicit the possibilities of life, not flee from them; and (c) endeavor to establish the conditions of a satisfactory life for all, not merely for the few.” Both Unitarian and Universalist ministers were prominent among signatories of the document.

This session’s readings address the development and impact of humanism within 20th century Unitarian Universalism, the “revolution” in liberal religious education, and the ethics and social justice implications of contemporary humanism.

Reading 4: Humanism

[The Essentials of Humanism](#), a sermon by Rev. Kendyl Gibbons

["Sources from Our Living Tradition: Humanism,"](#) an article from the *Journal of Religious Humanism* (2006, v38) by Rev. Christine Robinson

["On Becoming Humanist – A Personal Journey"](#) by Anthony Pinn in Workshop 8 of the adult Tapestry of Faith program, What We Choose: Ethics for Unitarian Universalists

Reading 5: Sophia Fahs

Read Chapters 1, 2, and 12 of Fahs' foundational work, [Today's Children & Yesterday's Heritage](#). Sophia Lyon Fahs' revolutionary liberal religious education philosophy and progressive theology greatly influenced 20th century liberal religion. Her legacy continues to this day.

When Shirley Ranck wrote a commemorative article for Religious Education on the occasion of Sophia Lyon Fahs' one-hundredth birthday, there were more than a few readers who were startled to find that it centered not on Fahs' exceptional editing of religious education materials, nor on her work with children, but on the "prophetic theology" implicit in her work and writing (Ranck 1976, 604). Only a few writers have acknowledged the distinction of Fahs' theology. These include her biographer, Edith Hunter, and Emil Gudmundson, who had written and delivered a talk entitled, "The Theology Implicit in the Writings of Mrs. Sophia Lyon Fahs" to a group of Unitarian ministers in 1956. Both Hunter and later Ranck attributed the lack of attention given to Fahs' theology to the fact that she was "a woman in a theological drama, a drama in which women were not usually given roles" and that "her consuming interest was children and religion, a combination that most theologians would prefer to avoid." —from "Seeing What Is Not There Yet: Sophia Lyon Fahs, Entelechy and the Religious Education Association" by Lucinda A. Nolan (REA journal, Volume 99, Number 3, 2004)

Find Out More (Session 3)

A website created for the [Margaret Fuller bicentennial](#), containing a variety of information and resources

[American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism](#) by Dean Grodzins (University of North Carolina Press, 2002)

Full text of [A Discourse on the Transient and Permanent in Christianity](#) by Theodore Parker

A website with an enormous variety of materials on the [Transcendentalists](#), including some lesser known members

[Transcendental Spirituality](#), Rev. Dr. Barry Andrews' website

[American Transcendentalism Web](#)

[Henry David Thoreau: Transcendentalist or Unitarian?](#) A sermon by UU minister Rev. George Wolfe at the UU Church of Muncie, IN

[Transcendentalist Women Part 1](#) by Jone Johnson Lewis (About.com Women's History)

[Transcendentalist Women Part 2](#)

Books by UU minister, religious educator and 2011 MacLean Award for Excellence in Religious Education Rev. Dr. Barry M. Andrews:

- [*A Dream Too Wild: Emerson Meditations for Every Day of the Year*](#)
- [*Emerson as Spiritual Guide: A Companion to Emerson's Essays for Personal Reflection and Group Discussion*](#)
- [*Thoreau as Spiritual Guide: A Companion to Walden for Personal Reflection and Group Discussion*](#)
- [*True Harvest: Readings from Henry David Thoreau for Every Day of the Year*](#)
- [*The Spirit Leads: Margaret Fuller in Her Own Words*](#)

[Civil Disobedience and Our Radical Moment](#) by Wen Stephenson, blog post, Thoreau Society

[Tapestry of Faith programs](#) are rich with information about the Transcendentalists, both collectively and individually:

[Henry David Thoreau](#)

[Ralph Waldo Emerson](#)

[Margaret Fuller](#)

[Transcendentalism](#)

[Humanist Manifesto I](#), [Humanist Manifesto II](#), [Humanist Manifesto III](#)

[Making the Manifesto: The Birth of Religious Humanism](#) by William Schulz

[Unitarians Face a New Age](#), 1936 report of the AUA's Commission on Appraisal

An article on [Sophia Lyon Fahs](#) in *UU World*

["Our Humanist Legacy,"](#) a 2003 article for *UU World* by William F. Schulz, 2000 Humanist of the Year, for the 70th anniversary of the Humanist Manifesto I

[The Faith of a Humanist](#), a UUA pamphlet by Sarah Oelberg

[Reason and Reverence: Religious Humanism for the 21st Century](#) by Rev. William Murry

["Pete Stark's Untroubled Humanism,"](#) a *UU World* article by Doug Muder

[The End of God-Talk: An African American Humanist Theology](#) by Anthony Pinn

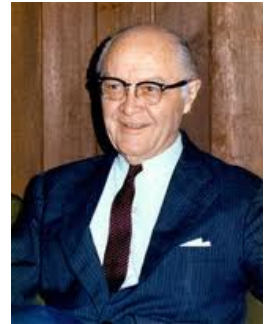
["William R. Jones: a brief appreciation"](#), blog post from Rev Dan Harper. August 2012

["Black Humanism's Response to Suffering,"](#) a *UU World* article by Colin Bossen

Session 4: More 20th Century Influences

Introduction

I call that church free which responds in responsibility to the Spirit that bloweth where it listeth. The tide of the Spirit finds utterance ever and again through a minority. It invites and engenders liberation from repression and exploitation, whether of nation or economic system, of race or sex or class. It bursts through rigid, cramping inheritance, giving rise to new language, to new forms of cooperation, to new and broader fellowship. —James Luther Adams (1901-1994), Unitarian minister and theologian

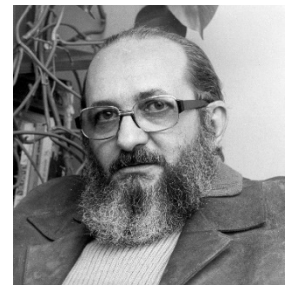


[Faith] is an expression of unconfined zeal of spirit. It is for unsundered persons. Faith tries wings, follows illusions, challenges, urges, fails, conquers. It is more than the assurance of things not seen — it is an adventure after them. Belief digs itself into the trench of creed. Faith knows no horizons, cannot live in crypts, behind padlocks. Faith is for eager and audacious persons. When belief takes the place of faith, creeds become paramount. When faith is dominant, deeds become the test. —Clarence Skinner (1881-1949), Universalist minister, educator, writer, and social activist



God language can tie people into knots, of course. In part, that is because 'God' is not God's name. Referring to the highest power we can imagine, 'God' is our name for that which is greater than all and yet present in each. For some the highest imaginable power will be a petty and angry tribal baron ensconced high above the clouds on a golden throne, visiting punishment on all who don't believe in him. But for others, the highest power is love, goodness, justice, or the spirit of life itself. — Forrest Church (1948-2009), Unitarian Universalist minister, author

The radical, committed to human liberation, does not become the prisoner of a 'circle of certainty' within which reality is also imprisoned. On the contrary, the more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side. —Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed



In developing a method to do theology that uses religion of grassroots Latinas as its source, mujerista theology puts into practice a preferential option for the oppressed. It insists that liberation is not something one person can give another but that it is a process in which the oppressed are protagonists, participants in creating a reality different from the present oppressive one. —Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, in her book, Mujerista Theology

Moving into the 20th century, the Unitarianism of Channing's theology, in which we are called to respond to the world in the model of Jesus and in the likeness of God, meets up with contemporary challenges such as the Second World War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the challenge of a truly inclusive multi-cultural society.

While Universalism in the late 18th and early 19th centuries referred to a belief that all souls would eventually find salvation, and none be damned to eternal torment, in more recent years Universalism has come to embrace broader implications of that saving message: that we must work for the salvation of all people from social sins such as poverty, and that we must learn how to include all people within the embrace of our compassion, knowing that there is a universal source of light and life which we see through different lenses but which illuminates all. The UUA's Side with Love campaign, an interfaith public advocacy campaign

that seeks “to harness love’s power to stop oppression,” is an example of Universalist faith in action; the campaign takes on issues such as immigration reform and marriage equality. Meanwhile, theological threads from outside our traditions, such as Process and Liberation Theology, have sometimes been woven into our theological tapestry and influenced modern UU theologians.

Process theology, which developed out of the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, has intersected with Unitarian Universalism and influenced our ongoing theological conversation. Process theology holds that reality is unfolding in time, and emphasizes ‘becoming’ over ‘being,’ and relationality.

Emerging during the 20th century as a response to oppression, Liberation theology is most often associated with Latin America but has different expressions in oppressed communities around the world, including in the United States. Liberation theologians interpreted Christian scripture as pointing to a “preferential option” for the poor, and the call for Kingdom of God as meaning a transformation of society for the liberation and humanization of all.

Liberation theology is an umbrella term for many more specific theologies: feminist, Latina, womanist, African American, Latin American, Asian American, LGBT, Native American, and more. What all of these theologies have in common is that they are grounded in the real lived experiences of people and the real needs of communities, and so these theologies are always contextual. In contrast to liberal theology, personal freedom is de-emphasized and the creation of communities of liberation and wholeness is emphasized. Liberation Theology is an important dialogue partner and theological strand for Unitarian Universalism.

Reading 1: James Luther Adams

James Luther Adams: The Five Smooth Stones, in the Tapestry of Faith program, *A Place of Wholeness*: <http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/youth/wholeness/workshop1/167560.shtml>

And:

Unitarian Universalist minister George Kimmich Beach writes in his book, *Transforming Liberalism: The Theology of James Luther Adams*, “Adams holds that liberalism must no longer be confused with lax, uncritical, or mere broad-minded attitudes, least of all in an age of rising tyrannies of the Right and the Left. The aim of religious awareness, religious faith, religious community, and religious life must be radical change.”

In the tradition of James Luther Adams, [*Faith Without Certainty*](#) by Paul Rasor explores the dynamic tensions of liberal theology, committed to individual freedom on the one hand and community on the other. Read this book review:

<https://hoppinghadranswall.com/2012/06/20/religious-liberalism-101-a-book-review-of-paul-rasors-faith-without-certainty/>

Reading 2: Clarence Skinner and Forrest Church

[*“A Religion for Greatness”*](#) by Clarence Skinner (excerpt)

[Sermon](#) by Krista Taves on Clarence Skinner

[*A Theology for the 21st Century*](#), a *UU World* article adapted from Forrest Church’s address to the 2001 UUA General Assembly

Reading 3: Process Theology

The Reverend Elizabeth Stevens describes Process Theology in a sermon, “Pancakes and Process Theology:” <http://www.questformeaning.org/quest-article/pancakes-and-process-theology/>

Children’s book: *God In-Between* by Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso (Jewish Lights, 1988). A beautifully illustrated and told story of the search for God to fix the problems that plague a small town. After much searching, the wise people of the village discover that God is found in the in-between places, within individuals, to be sure, but especially in the relationships between people. It is a very simplified version of process theology, where the creative interchange between people is where we find God, and where we find the creativity to make new pathways and untangle the vines, rocks, and hidden obstacles that keep us locked in place.

Reading 4: Liberation Theology

Listen to “Religious Scholars Discuss Liberation Theology” on NPR: (audio file; 13:34) or read the transcript. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=88744273>

Read “Liberalism and Liberation Theology” in the Tapestry of Faith program, A Place of Wholeness: <http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/youth/wholeness/workshop8/167858.shtml>

Read “Paulo Freire” by Roberta Clare, on the Talbot School of Theology website: http://www.talbot.edu/ce20/educators/catholic/paulo_freire/#contributions

Find Out More (Session 4)

An [article](#) from the UU Biographical Dictionary on James Luther Adams and his theology
In this [five-minute video](#) on Unitarian Universalism TV, the Rev. Naomi King gives an introduction and interpretation of James Luther Adams's Five Smooth Stones.

Blog post "[Five Smooth Stones](#)" by "Sunflower Chalice" May 2011

Many workshops [throughout Tapestry of Faith programs for children, youth, and adults](#) provide additional insight into James Luther Adams:

[A Place of Wholeness](#) Workshop 1, youth program

[What Moves Us?](#) Workshop 7, adult program

[Harvest the Power](#) Workshop 1, adult program

[Amazing Grace](#) Session 6, children's program

[Toolbox of Faith](#) Session 11, children's program

[An Examined Faith](#) by James Luther Adams

On Being Human Religiously: Selected Essays in Religion and Society by James Luther Adams, edited by Max Stackhouse (out of print but [available as used book](#) online)

[Transforming Liberalism: The Theology of James Luther Adams](#) by George Kimmich Beach

[Essential James Luther Adams, The: Selected Essays and Addresses](#) by George Kimmich Beach

[Being Liberal in an Illiberal Age](#) by Jack Mendelsohn

["What Torture Has Taught Me"](#) by William Schulz, from the adult Tapestry of Faith program

[What Moves Us, workshop 9](#) (also available as a [video presentation](#) from the University of Chicago)

[Before Clarence Skinner: Rediscovering Early Universalist Radicals](#) by Dan McKanan
[Resistance and Transformation](#), a Tapestry of Faith program for adults

[The Prophetic Imperative: Social Gospel in Theory and Practice](#) by Richard S. Gilbert

[American Universalism 4th ed.](#) by George Hunston Williams

[The Essential Clarence Skinner](#) by Charles Howe

[Full text](#) of "A Religion for Greatness" by Clarence Skinner

[Biography](#) of Clarence Skinner

[The Larger Message: Universalist Religious Education's Response to Theological and Cultural Challenges](#) by Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Strong

[UU World magazine articles and publications by Forrest Church](#)

Liberation Theologies in the United States: An Introduction by Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas and Anthony B. Pinn, editors

Mujerista Theology by Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz

The Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Freire

“Reconnecting and Hope(lessness)” by Elizabeth Nguyen, on the Blue Boat blog:

<http://blueboat.blogs.uua.org/2015/04/06/reconnecting-and-hopelessness/>

Articles by Rev. Dr. Miguel A. De La Torre: <http://www.drmigueldelatorre.com/Articles.html>

“Pope Embraces Liberation Theology”, by Paul Vallely, for Al-Jazeera-America:

<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/9/22/pope-embraces-liberation-theology.html>

“The Cry for Freedom,” from the blog, A Unitarian Universalist Minister in the South:

<https://serenityhome.wordpress.com/tag/liberation-theology/>

“Liberation Theology and UU,” a sermon by Rachel Carroll Rivas, on the website of Big Sky Unitarian Universalist Fellowship: <http://bigskyuu.org/2008/04/liberation-theology-and-uuism/>

“A Theology of Liberation to Inspire White Anti-Racist Organizing,” by Chris Crass, *Truthout*. <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/31032-a-theology-of-liberation-to-inspire-white-anti-racist-organizing>

“James Luther Adams’ Examined Faith,” an [article](#) by Christopher Walton in *UU World* magazine which describes Adams’ experience in Nazi Germany and his subsequent thinking on “conversion”

Session 5: 21st Century UU Theology

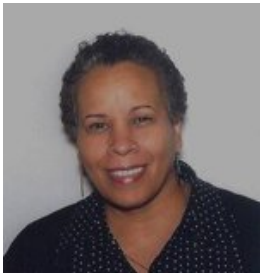
Introduction

I am a theologian because I believe that faith matters. I believe that what we believe about God, ourselves, and the world affects how we operate within the world. I believe theology should expand our world ... I am honored to join a conversation, hewn from tough academic rock, that asserts that black women's lives can be the center of theological activity.

—Monica Coleman, in her book, *Making a Way Out of No Way*



We have a compelling moral purpose that can direct our lives and our energies: We are about saving the world. So what is our part? The place to begin is at home – that is, with ourselves. Notice what is life-denying and resist it. Live with the moral authority that comes from compassion and nonviolence. Form communities of people who will sustain you in living as you wish to live, whether they are study groups or alternative living arrangements or socially responsible, sustainable businesses. Our congregations must be central gathering places for such community. —Rev. Dr. Marilyn Sewell, in *A People So Bold*



A prophetic leader does not make a prophetic congregation. While all ministers and congregations would like to be seen as prophetic, truly prophetic congregations build the collective commitment necessary to power personal and social transformation. There is a large gap between intellectually understanding the need to work for justice and transformation and actively working to do so. Until we face the truth about racism and about the social construction of identity – as well as systems that support social hierarchy and inequality – we will likely produce flawed social change that only reinforces white privilege. —Paula Cole Jones, in *A People So Bold*



*Those who critique liberal religion for having an inadequate theology of sin and evil are right, if that religion cultivates among the faithful a cloistered experience of the world that closes eyes to injustice, numbs senses to its impact and horrors, and preserves innocence – as if not knowing and not seeing means one is free from responsibility. —Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker, in *A People So Bold**

Over the course of these sessions we have looked at various strains of Unitarian and/or Universalist theology. Although there is considerable diversity of thought expressed from the 19th century Unitarians and Universalists and Transcendentalists through the 20th century humanists on up to 21st century Unitarian Universalists, **one thread runs through the centuries. We, and our theological ancestors, are people who believe in love.** “Faith is love taking the form of aspiration,” writes Unitarian *William Ellery Channing*. “There is nothing in heaven above, nor in the earth beneath, that can do away with sin, but love; and we have reason to be eternally thankful that love is stronger than death,” declares Universalist Hosea Ballou. The Second Humanist Manifesto states: “we are not advocating the use of scientific intelligence independent of or in opposition to emotion, for we believe in the cultivation of feeling and love.”

However, love, for Unitarian Universalists, is not merely an emotion—it is an imperative that calls us to act. Throughout their histories, Unitarians and Universalists have embraced the idea that loving your neighbor as yourself means that we must take action on a social and political level as well as a personal one. From Judith Sargent Murray advocating for the rights of women through Dorothea Dix campaigning for humane treatment of the mentally ill to the many UU ministers and laypeople who have worked for the civil rights of African Americans, GLBTQ folk, immigrants and others, justice in this life, rather than salvation in the next, has been at the core of our identity. As Unitarian Universalist theology continues to evolve, the imperative to build a more just, loving community remains at the heart of who we are.

Reading 1: 21st Century Voices

“Thandeka’s Theology of Personal Experience,” in the Tapestry of Faith program, What Moves Us: <http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/movesus/workshop10/282848.shtml>

“Sharon Welch and an Ethic of Risk,” in the Tapestry of Faith program, What We Choose: Ethics for Unitarian Universalists:

<http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/ethics/workshop9/192044.shtml>

“The Challenge of Unitarian Universalist Theology” by Rebecca Parker:

<https://www.questformeaning.org/quest-article/challenge-unitarian-universalist-theology/>

Reading 2: The Prophetic Church

Please read these essays in [*A People So Bold: Theology and Ministry for Unitarian Universalists*](#):

“Prophetic Congregations in the Twenty-First Century” by Meg Riley

“Identity, Covenant, and Commitment” by Paul Rasor

“Growing Our Souls” by Paula Cole Jones

“Educating for Social Change” by Mark Hicks

Find Out More (Session 5)

Making a Way Out of No Way by Monica Coleman

A Feminist Ethic of Risk by Sharon Welch

“Resisting Evil, Reverencing Life” by Rebecca Ann Parker in *A People So Bold: Theology and Ministry for Unitarian Universalists*

Paul Rasor offered this [perspective](#) on connecting with our Unitarian Universalist history, at the 2012 LREDA Fall Conference.

[UU World articles](#) by Paul Rasor

[Faith Without Certainty: Liberal Theology in the 21st Century](#) by Paul Rasor

[Reclaiming Prophetic Witness: Liberal Religion in the Public Square](#) by Paul Rasor, the 2014-2015 UUA Common Read

[Discussion Guide](#) for *Reclaiming Prophetic Witness*

“To pray without apology: What would have happened if Martin Luther King, Jr. had cast his lot with the Unitarian Universalists? A reflection on race and theology” by Rosemary Bray McNatt, published in *UU World*. <http://www.uuworld.org/articles/why-martin-luther-king-jr.-wasnt-uu>

“Don’t Sleep Through the Revolution,” the 1966 Ware Lecture by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. <http://www.uua.org/ga/past/1966/ware>

A People So Bold, John Gibb Millspaugh, editor. On YouTube, watch [video](#) excerpts from the *A People So Bold* conference which formed the basis for [the book](#) that is the source of this session’s readings. A study guide is available [here](#).

Session 6: Closing Session

Next Steps

Participants are strongly encouraged to continue to their exploration through continued reading and discussion, either as a group or individually. Begin with the 2017 Minns Lectures by Rev. Dr. Mark Morrison-Reed and Rev. Rosemary Bray McNatt, “Historical and Future Trajectories of Black Lives Matter and Unitarian Universalism.” A video recording is posted on the Minns Lecture website: <https://vimeopro.com/user9111141/spring2017minns>

Note: The lectures were given shortly after the former UUA President, Peter Morales, had announced his resignation.

Lecture 1, Mark Morrison-Reed (1:47:40)

Lecture 2, Rosemary Bray McNatt (2:16:49)

Morrison-Reed’s *UU World* magazine article, “The Black Hole in the White UU Psyche,” is adapted from his Minns lecture: <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/black-hole-white-uu-psyche>

Closing Reading

To close the session and module, all participants who wish to participate are invited to take turns reading a line from “Benediction” by Louise Green from *A People So Bold* (used with permission):

Benediction

Who is the prophet in these urgent times?

You are the prophet, for there may be no other who will speak and act now.

The prophet hears and responds to an insistent and urgent inner voice.

The prophet speaks from an internal fountain, giving voice to another’s silence.

The prophet sees and expresses in uncommon ways, upsetting the status quo.

The prophet sends the wake-up call in the present, to shape the future.

How do I develop a prophetic voice in these challenging times?

Observe nature and grow all parts of the tree: branches, trunk, and roots.

Branches are the many outspreading ways of acting on inner call.

Stay connected to the trunk, for fallen limbs are swept away by water or fire.

Be willing to pare away when too many branches grow.

Let leaves drop in their time, for the cycle will turn round.

Grow and let go to flourish, trusting other seasons will come.

The trunk is steady with circles of community, rings of support widening with age.

Witness strong branches supported by many layers.

Observe that when limbs are damaged, the trunk perseveres.

See small trunks grow light shoots, wisely testing support.

Believe that a trunk will mature over time, sending nourishment upward.

Roots are the grounding of the whole tree, the foundation for transformation.

Plant wisely in rich earth for substance.

Gather nutrients from a distance in unseen waters.

Sustain the roots through underground connections and keep the trunk standing.

Weather many seasons, drawing on multiple sources for food.

How will we hear the prophets in our complex era?

Follow the still, small voice, even when unpopular.

Offer inner knowing to the outer landscape.

Bear clear witness to the claims of many sacred traditions.

Cultivate strength and compassion.

Develop wisdom that is tenacious, and flexible when needed.

Watch, wait, and choose the strategic moment.

Disrupt or challenge when there is clarity of vision.

Send a startling message through crafted purpose.

Say what is not welcome, at the right time.

Speak boldly about what the majority wants to ignore.

Practice faithfulness, foresee consequences, make history.

Offer gratitude, for in oneness with other trees, a forest grows.