

Unitarian Universalist Theology
Renaissance Module

ONLINE VERSION
PARTICIPANT GUIDE

By Lynn Ungar and Sara Lewis



UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST
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!

A Note from the Recent Editors

Kimberly Quinn Johnson and Emily DeTar Birt

As the Unitarian Universalist Association continues to confront white supremacy within the systems and structures of our denomination and faith, an examination of how we talk about our Unitarian Universalist theology is vital. We have historically been similar to other faiths or denominations, by mostly lauding white cisgender male voices as the heroes or writers of our shared Unitarian Universalist history and theology. Black and indigenous people of color have always been molders and shakers of our Unitarian Universalist faith, including our theologians. With new editions to this curriculum, it is our hope as editors that we not only showcase the diverse voices that have made up the threads of our theologies, but also expand our definition of theology itself. We attempt to shift the focus away from singular heroes or heroines of theology, to looking at the wider context from which our faith emerged. As you will read in “Widening Our Circle of Concern”, “Because we have not updated our theology, the history we know privileges the dominant culture and those voices that were preserved in our history and written record. We now have a chance to embrace a more inclusive and accurate history.” We hope that these changes are a small start for a more accurate and inclusive history.

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: Faith 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.
- 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. Tell us what stood out to you, and 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.
- Participants will understand the context of theology within an anti-racist and multi-cultural lens, as well as be able to unpack some of the white cis-heteronormative structures that have been passed down through different theologies.

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 in theological learning with your community or with yourself?

Reading 2: Our Theological Diversity

- Which do you think is most vital to Unitarian Universalism: our differences or our similarities? Why?

Reading 3: Widening Our Circle of Concern

- Do you believe freedom and individuality are our most important aspects to offer as a religion? What else do we have to give?
- Where is your faith calling you towards empathy and healing?

Reading 5: 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

- Unitarians value the human ability to do good, William Ellery Channing goes so far to write an essay called “Likeness to God.” How do you view human nature, and how does that factor into your faith? .
- In “Unitarian Christianity”, the first point made is the importance and free use of reason to interrupt the scriptures and religious truth. Do you believe our human ability to reason is an important part of faith? Are there other aspects of the human experience that are important to faith?

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?

Reading 3: On Religious Instruction

- How would you describe the “end of religious instruction?” What, at heart, do you think religious education should do?
- How might Joseph Jordan’s Universalist school have differed from the other schools emerging in Norfolk during the time of the Reconstruction?
- In what ways does Judith Sargaent view children in her catechism?

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 and Religious Liberalism

- 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 the Social Gospel Movement

- 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 Unitarian Universalists in creating the “kingdom on earth?”
- In Clarence Skinner’s “Social Implications of Universalism”, he says that the Church is dying? Does that resonate today? How did Skinner try to make Universalism relevant? How do UUs do that today?

Reading 3: Process Theology

- 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 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?
- In “Jesus is Black”, Dr. Cone address his white counterparts concerns about the “universalism” of his theology. He says, “I contend that there is no universalism that is not particular.” Do you agree?
- Reading Freire’s work, 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 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 professionals 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.

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 professionals 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.

Unitarian Universalist theology, like all theology, is both a system of thought and a system of teaching. In this course, we will not only be exploring different theological resources, but also different ways faith has been taught over time. The pedagogy we use to teach faith, has theological assumptions and structures within it. As you read of new ways of doing religious education and of teaching religion, notice the theology behind it. We will talk more about this as we explore famous theologians and educators, like William Ellery Channing, Sophia Lyon Fahs, Joseph Jordan, and Paolo Friere.

This Theology Renaissance Module 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 people they serve.

[All Readings for Session 1](#)

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

Quotes from famous Unitarian and Universalist theologians are also included.

Reading 2: Our Theological Diversity

Please read the section, “The Ground on Which We Meet” (pp. 90-94), in the 2005 Commission on Appraisal report [Engaging Our Theological Diversity](#).

Reading 3: Theology from Widening Our Circle of Concern

Please read the section, “Theology,” in the 2020 Commission on Institutional Change report [Widening The Circle of Concern](#).

Reading 4: Our Theological House

Excerpts 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

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 [Creating Theology Together](#)

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

[Tending the Flame: The Art of Unitarian Universalist Parenting](#) by Michelle Richards

[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*

[After the Good News: Progressive Faith Beyond Optimism](#) by Nancy McDonald-Ladd

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?](#)

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

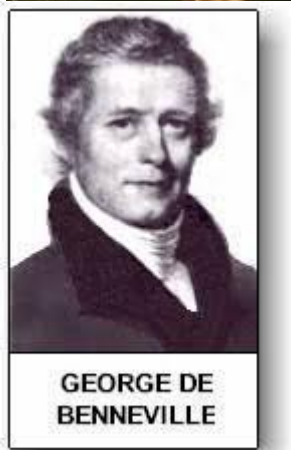


Q. *What is the rule of conduct for Christians?*

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. Both of these

theological traditions have had leaders of color since their inception. We lift up some of their founding voices here, as we consider the breadth of our theological heritage.

[All Session 2 Readings](#)

Reading 1: Unitarianism

William Ellery Channing

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

The Baltimore Sermon**, reprinted from William Ellery Channing, as a course material for a class at Boston University taught by Professor Deena Klepper. [Original link found here.](#)

****Editor's note for reading:** You do not need to read the full text of the excerpts. Read the first few sentences of every numbered section in this text.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

Excerpt from [Darkening the Doorways: Black Trailblazers and Missed Opportunities in Unitarian Universalism](#), by Mark Morrison-Reed - Chapter on Frances Ellen Walkins Harper

["We Are All Bound Up Together"](#) - Speech by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, posted to Blackpast

Reading 2: Universalism

["John Murray's conversion to Universalism"](#) a *UU World* article by Kimberly French.

["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 formed a group that would become the [Unitarian Sunday School Society](#).

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. Read the first five questions and answers [of her catechism](#), especially the line starting with "many obvious questions..."

Another example is in the efforts of the first black Universalist minister, Joseph H. Jordan who founded one of the Universalist day schools in Norfolk.

[The Sunday School: A Discourse pronounced before the Sunday School Society](#), an address given by William Ellery Channing to the Unitarian Sunday School Society.

Judith Sargent Murray's Catechism as reposted to MercyUponUsAll.com ([original link here](#)).

Read [Building Respect Reverend Joseph Jordan 1842-1901](#) from Virtue Ethics Tapestry of Faith Curriculum

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*

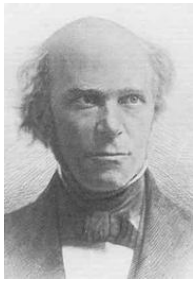


The little flower that opens in the meadows lives and dies in a season; but what agencies have concentrated themselves to produce it! So the human soul lives in the midst of heavenly help. —Elizabeth Palmer Peabody (1804-1894), Unitarian Transcendentalist author, publisher, educator, and founder of the 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. *Theirs is a legacy not only of historical significance, but also of contemporary relevance.*

[All Readings for Session 3](#)

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](#)

Reading 3: Roots of UU Spirituality

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

**[Editor’s note for reading:](#) You do not need to read the full text of the excerpts. Read the first few sentences or paragraph of every subsection.

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 *UU World* article by the 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 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. 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, Entelexy 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 [Transcendentalism](#)

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

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

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

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: 20th Century Theological Movements

Introduction

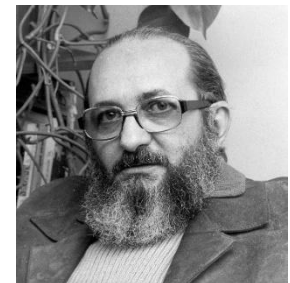
I call that church free which responds in responsibility to the Spirit that bloweth where it listeth. The tide of the Spirit finds utterance ever and again through a minority. It invites and engenders liberation from repression and exploitation, whether of nation or economic system, of race or sex or 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



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 both Unitarian and Universalism meet up with contemporary challenges such as the Second World War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the challenge of a truly inclusive multicultural society. They are also discovered in a contact of emerging theological movements that are led by leaders both within and outside of Unitarian and Universalism.

[All Readings for Session 4](#)

Reading 1: Religious Liberalism and James Luther Adams

Growing from our Unitarian roots and its focus on the use of reason, the 20th Century movement of Religious Liberalism found threads and ties to Unitarianism. Religious Liberalism (liberal as in religious liberty, not the political party) is a movement of theology which emphasizes personal and group liberty and rationality, and it is directly opposed by trends of religious fundamentalism. Some famous religious liberals are Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhur, and Unitarian theologian James Luther Adams.

[James Luther Adams: The Five Smooth Stones](#), in the Tapestry of Faith program, *A Place of Wholeness*.

[Read this paragraph](#) from George Kimmich Beach's General Assembly talk about his book *Transforming Liberalism: The Theology of James Luther Adams*.

[Five Jagged Rocks](#), is a contemporary response to James Luther Adams Five Smooth Stones by Karishma Gottfried.

Reading 2: The Social Gospel Movement and Clarence Skinner

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. This made Universalist theology join a larger Christian theological movement, called the Social Gospel movement. The Social Gospel Movement was a Protestant theology that applied Christian ethics to social problems, especially issues of social justice. Famous theologians were people like Walter Rauschenbusch, Howard Thurman, and Universalist Clarence Skinner.

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

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

[Social Gospel with Universalist Eyes](#) by Kimberley Debus, from [Notes from the Far Fringe](#).

Reading 3: Process Theology

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. Process theology heavily influenced eco-theologies, or theologies focused on the Earth and our human relationship with the environment. Famous theologians were Charles Hartshorne, John Cobb, and more recently Monica Coleman.

The Reverend Elizabeth Stevens describes Process Theology in a sermon, [“Pancakes and Process Theology”](#) (audio and text)

A Statement from [Monica Coleman](#) about Process Theology

Reading 4: Liberation Theology

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.

Read [“Gustavo Gutierrez and the preferential option for the poor”](#) by John Dear SJ in the National Catholic Reporter

Read the excerpt called [Jesus is Black](#) from [Dr. Jame Cone’s “God of the Oppressed”](#)

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)

“[James Luther Adams](#),” an article from the UU Biographical Dictionary

This [five-minute video](#) provides a creative interpretation of Luther Adams’s Five Smooth Stones.

“[The Five Smooth Stones of Religious Liberalism.](#)” sermon by the Rev. Leslie Takahashi, March 2013

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

[Our Lucha](#), blog by Rev. Dr. Miguel A. De La Torre

[“Pope Embraces Liberation Theology.”](#) by Paul Vallely, for Al-Jazeera-America

[“The Cry for Freedom.”](#) by Rev. Fred Hammond from the blog *A Unitarian Universalist Minister in the South*

[“Be Inspired to Disrupt.”](#) a speech given at the 2020 UUA General Assembly by Elandria Williams, former UUA Co-Moderator

[“A Theology of Liberation to Inspire White Anti-Racist Organizing.”](#) by Chris Crass, *Truthout*.

[“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

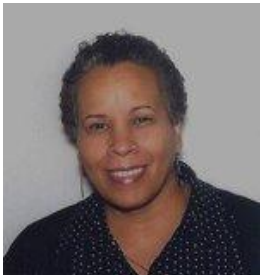
Introduction

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, LGBTQIA+ 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.

All Readings for Session 5

(Please note, these do not include the videos of Paula Cole Jones or BLUU Symposium listed below. Please watch the videos.)

Reading 1: 21st Century Voices

- [“Thandeka’s Theology of Personal Experience,”](#) in the Tapestry of Faith program, What Moves Us
- [“Sharon Welch and an Ethic of Risk,”](#) in the Tapestry of Faith program, What We Choose: Ethics for Unitarian Universalists
- [“The Challenge of Unitarian Universalist Theology”](#) by Rebecca Parker

Reading 2: The Prophetic Church

- [“Ethical Implications of Environmental Justice”](#) by Sofia Betancourt in [Justice on Earth: Identity, Covenant, and Commitment](#) by Paul Razor in [A People So Bold: Theology and Ministry for Unitarian Universalists](#)
- [People of Faith Working at the Intersections of Race, Class, and the Environment](#)
- “Educating for Social Change” by Mark Hicks in [A People So Bold: Theology and Ministry for Unitarian Universalists](#)

Videos: The Prophetic Church

- [“Building a Community of Communities”](#) by Paula Cole Jones, 2019 FAHS Lecture
- BLUU Harper Jordan Memorial Symposium, last plenary session recapping experiences and theologies discussed. Video on Facebook, start at 8:14
<https://www.facebook.com/BlackLivesUU/videos/368641990550203/>

Find Out More (Session 5)

[After the Good News: Progressive Faith Beyond Optimism](#) by Nancy McDonald Ladd

[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](#)

[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*.

[“Don’t Sleep Through the Revolution,”](#) the 1966 Ware Lecture by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

[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 video recordings of 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.”](#)

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.

The UUA’s [Widening the Circle of Concern: the 2020 Commission on Institutional Change report](#) will set the scene for the next decade.

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.