

Spring 2011  
**Our Theological House:**  
**An Introduction to Unitarian Universalist Theologies**  
Darcy Baxter M.Div, Course Instructor

Our Theological House was developed by Rebecca Parker and Lauren Smith.

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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The purpose of this course is to introduce the student to distinctive thea/ological perspectives present within primarily 19th and 20th century US American Unitarian Universalist traditions and congregations, and to equip students to begin to think and write thea/ologically in the context of post-modern religious communities and culture. Unitarian Universalism will serve as a case study in post-modern religious community and as a specific location for thea/ological reflection. Especially oriented to students who identify as Unitarian Universalists, participants in this course will be encouraged to form a practice of engaged thea/ological thinking within the context of Unitarian Universalism's particular perspectives, resources, limits, and possibilities. Students who do not identify as Unitarian Universalist will be encouraged to become acquainted with this expression of American progressive post-Christian Protestantism as a site in which thea/ological issues critical to post-modern religious community can be engaged.

### **REGARDING PRE-REQUISITES:**

There are no pre-requisites for this course. However, thea/ological studies (like any other discipline) is a conversation occurring over hundreds and hundreds of years and experience with the broader context will greatly enrich your work in this class.

STUDENTS WITH NO PREVIOUS thea/ological studying experience are STRONGLY ENCOURAGED to do the suggested readings for each unit. Please take into account that this course will likely require more reading and effort on your part in order to grasp the context and history of the ideas we will be studying.

### **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Participants who successfully complete the course will be able to identify distinctly Unitarian Universalist thea/ological perspectives present within 19th and 20th century US American UU traditions and congregations, and to describe features of modernity/post-modernity in these perspectives. They will be able to think critically about the limits and possibilities of these thea/ological perspectives, and to assess their relevance for contemporary Unitarian Universalism. They will be able to engage these thea/ological perspectives in their own thea/ological reflection and writing.

## **FORMAT AND APPROACH**

Each week, students in this online course will read assigned texts and be asked to converse with the texts with a short reflection paper. The student's "Reflection" will be posted online for classmates to read and respond to by posting a "Response" to the original "Reflection." The instructors will also read all the student's Reflections and all the classmate's Responses. S/he will thread her own perspective into some of the Units and her own responses to the ongoing student discussion – as seems appropriate. At the conclusion of the course, each student will prepare a thea/ological reflection in the form of an academic paper submitted in hard-copy directly to their section instructor.

## **COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND REQUIREMENTS**

Regular weekly participation in the course is not optional; engagement is required.

- Read the assigned texts each week.
- **Post 2 questions you have regarding the required readings each week**
- **Write and post assignments each week**
- **Regularly read weekly reflections by classmates and respond to two.**
- Communicate concerns, questions, and anticipated periods of absence to your Instructor. Report any technical difficulties immediately.
- **By the end of week 3, please select an ethical-thea/ological issue on which you would be interested in engaging/reflecting. You are encouraged to tie this issue into some of your weekly reflections during the semester. For example, given my interest in reproductive justice, I could thea/ologically reflect on abortion decisions/circumstances. Other examples could include global warming, environmental justice, euthanasia of animals, doctor assisted-suicide, funding of public education.**
- **Select your own thea/ological topic for a brief (5-10 page) final research paper and email a one-page summary to your section instructor by March 22 for comment. The topic can be the ethical-thea/ological issue you have been engaging throughout the semester or a different one.**
- Email the final paper to your section instructor by May 15 in the required format.

## **TEXTS**

*Required:* All articles/chapters are online that are required reading.

*Recommended (PARTICULARLY IF YOU HAVE NOT ENGAGED IN THEA/OLOGICAL STUDY BEFORE):*

Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion 1805 – 1900*. (Westminster John Knox Press)

Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity 1900 – 1950*. (Westminster John Knox Press)

Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Crisis, Irony, & Postmodernity 1950 – 2005*. (Westminster John Knox Press)

Paul Raser. *Faith Without Certainty: Liberal Theology in the Twentieth Century*. (Skinner House Books)

### **COURSE OUTLINE (*SUBJECT TO CHANGE/ADJUSTMENT!!!*)**

#### **UNIT 1. The Unitarian Universalist thea/ological House: Overview and Assessment (Week of Jan 31, 2011)**

Rebecca Parker's "Under Construction" offers an overview of Unitarian Universalist theologies from the 19th century to the present and introduces the traditional categories of systematic theology: thea/ological anthropology, the doctrine of God, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, missiology, eschatology, and pneumatology. Elaborating a model of "Our thea/ological House," she also introduces the structure and scope of this course. The readings from Gordon McKeeman and Paul Raser help to contextualize Unitarian Universalist theologies. McKeeman, reflecting on the mistakes and missed opportunities of the institutional merger of Unitarians and Universalists, argues that our thea/ological house "is in serious need of remedial attention" and articulates core issues that require our attention. Examining the central features of modernity, postmodernity, and those of liberal theology, Paul Raser discusses the cultural turn from modernity to postmodernity and its implications for liberal theology.

#### **Reading Assignment:**

Parker "Under Construction: Knowing and Transforming Our Unitarian Universalist thea/ological House" [SB 1-20]

McKeeman "2004 Starr King President's Lecture" [SB 22-31]

Raser "The Postmodern Challenge to Liberal Theology" [SB 32-57]

#### **Suggested Reading:**

Gary Dorrien. Introductory chapters to Vol's I, II, and III of *The Making of American Liberal Theology*. These chapters briefly situate Unitarian Universalism within the larger context of American liberal theology.

### **Writing Assignment:**

1. Write a letter (250ish words) introducing yourself to your course-mates. Tell us something about where you are located – geographically and religiously – and what prompts your interest in this course. Have you participated in online learning offerings before this? What do you hope to bring to it and take from it? Is this course related to your professional goals or your ministry-plans and/or congregation-related plans?

Tell us what your relationship is to Unitarian Universalism. What can you identify as central thea/ological affirmations/perspectives of Unitarian Universalism?

### **UNIT 2. The Unitarian Universalist thea/ological House: Context (Week of February 7)**

This week's readings provide further historical context, which will help us to situate, understand, and think critically about the Unitarian Universalist theologies which follow. Robinson gives us a succinct overview of Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist history in US America through the 1980's. Livingstone's first reading discusses the major themes of the Enlightenment and their influence on religious thought; the second introduces the Romantic movement and its central religious expressions, in particular the work of Coleridge and Schleiermacher. Moore's excerpt identifies trends in post-Darwinian liberal theology, distinguishes two major divisions, evangelical and modernistic, and accents the unique contributions of African and African-American liberal theologians, in particular that of Orishatukeh Faduma. Wilber articulates central assertions of postmodernity and critiques their extreme expressions.

### **Required Reading Assignment:**

Robinson, "The Unitarians and the Universalists: A Summary Overview" [SB 72-75]

Livingstone, "The Enlightenment and Modern Christianity" and "Christianity and Romanticism" [SB 96-135]

Moore, "Faduma and the New Theology" [SB 85-95]

Wilber, "Postmodernism: To Deconstruct the World" [SB 141-151]

### **Suggested Reading:**

Paul Razor. Faith Without Certainty: Liberal Theology in the 21st Century. The introduction and first three chapters offer a helpful framework for much of the assigned contextual readings.

### **Writing Assignment:**

Post a brief essay (250– 750 words) on what Unitarian Universalism has to offer in response to the following questions:

What do we most deeply trust?

Who are we?

What will get us through the night?

What holds us together in religious community?

Where are we going?

### **UNIT 3. Foundations: God and Humanity I: The 19th Century: Re-imagining Humanity (Week of February 15)**

Unitarian and Universalist theological views on the nature of being human were formed within the ethos of the Enlightenment, in reaction to Calvinism, and express modernity's focus on the authority of individual conscience, reason, and experience.

The excerpt from Elizabeth Cady Stanton's autobiography illustrates the dismal character of New England Calvinism and shows how welcome the new ideas of liberal religion were. In "Likeness to God" William Ellery Channing, the great spokesperson of Unitarianism during the first half of the nineteenth century, introduced a new vision of the goodness – even divinity – of humanity. In the following readings, Channing develops and applies that vision. Earnestly adopting that vision, Lydia Maria Child, as you'll read, helped to persuade Channing "to make his controversial public antislavery statement." Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, a Channing disciple, introduced the German concept of the kindergarten to America – and a distinctly Unitarian pedagogy.

### **Reading Assignment:**

Stanton, *Eighty Years and More: Reminiscences 1815-1897* [SB153-160]

Channing, "Likeness to God" [SB161 -172]

Channing, "Self Culture," "A Discourse on the Life and Character of The Rev. Joseph Tuckerman," "An Address Delivered at Lennox On the Anniversary of Emancipation in the British West Indies" [SB 173-192]

Channing, "The Immitableness of Christ's Character" [SB 193-202]

Child, "Appeal to End Slavery" [SB203-210]

Peabody, "Thoughts on Kindergarten Education," "Spiritual Aspects of Early Childhood

Education” [SB 211-217]

**Suggested Reading:**

Gary Dorrien. *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion 1805 – 1900*. Section I. Unitarian Beginnings: William Ellery Channing and the Divine Likeness (pp 1 – 57); Section 4. Victorianism in Question: Henry Ward Beecher, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and the Religion of Reform (pp 179 – 260)

**For Further Inquiry:**

Catherine Clinton. *Fanny Kemble’s Civil Wars*. (Simon & Schuster)

Catherine Clinton, ed. *Fanny Kemble’s Journals*. (Harvard University Press) An acclaimed actress and member of the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia, Kemble married a (Unitarian, also) slaveowner. Her painful, personal awakening to the connections and contradictions of slavery and marriage led her to publish *Journal of Residence in America*, which influenced abolitionist sentiment here and in Britain.

**Writing Assignment:**

Post a 250-word reflection on these questions:

What aspects of Channing’s, Child’s, and Peabody’s thea/ological views of human nature do you see reflected in contemporary Unitarian Universalism? What resources do they provide? What limits need to be recognized or addressed?

After you have posted your assignment: review your classmates’ posts, and respond substantively (100-250ish words) to two of them.

**UNIT 4. Foundations: God and Humanity I: The 19th Century: Re-imagining Humanity**

(Week of February 23)

While drawing much from Channing, Ralph Waldo Emerson was the pre-eminent voice among the Transcendentalists in revolt against first-generation Unitarians. Greatly influenced by Coleridge as well, Emerson exalted the intuitive faculty of the individual. Transcendentalist Margaret Fuller’s essay appeared in an 1843 edition of *The Dial* and in 1844 as the book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. It was the first American feminist manifesto, which, as Madeleine Stern wrote, “helped clear the ground for the first woman’s rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848.” A forerunner of womanist theology, Francis Ellen Watkins Harper was the first Unitarian writer to “demonstrate how racism, sexism, and classism are intricately intertwined in American culture. . . [calling] for a spiritual resurrection within people and in their actions as moral beings.” (Melba Joyce Boyd) The capture and trial of escaped slave Anthony Burns was a

signal event in the anti-slavery movement, engaging many Transcendentalist activists. Henry David Thoreau's commentary on this event expresses the social implications of Transcendentalist ideas.

**Reading Assignment:**

Emerson, "Self-Reliance" [SB 218-230]; Emerson, "The Over-Soul" [SB 231-242]

Fuller, "The Great Lawsuit: Man versus Men. Woman versus Women" [SB 243-266]

Harper, "The Colored People in America," The Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Colored Woman," "Woman's Political Future" [SB267-274]

Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts, Remarks Delivered July 4, 1854" [SB 275-282]

**Writing Assignment:**

Post a 250-word reflection on these questions:

What aspects of Emerson's, Fuller's, Harper's, and Thoreau's theological views of human nature do you see reflected in contemporary Unitarian Universalism? What resources do they provide? What limits need to be recognized or addressed?

After you have posted your assignment: review your classmates' posts, and respond substantively (100-250ish words each) to two of them.

**Suggested Reading:**

Gary Dorrien. *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion 1805 – 1900*. Section 2. Subversive Intuitions: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Theodore Parker, and the Transcendentalist Revolt. (pp 58 – 79)

**For Further Inquiry:**

*The Trials of Anthony Burns: Freedom and Slavery in Emerson's Boston*. Albert J. Von Frank. Boston. (Harvard University Press) A vivid telling of the story, this book is also a study of how Transcendentalist ideas related to social change.

**Bibliography :**

Melba Joyce Boyd. *Discarded Legacy: Politics and Poetics in the Life of Frances E.W. Harper 1825 – 1911*. (Wayne State University Press)

Madeleine B. Stern. *Introduction to Woman in the Nineteenth Century: A Facsimile of the 1845 Edition*. (University of South Carolina Press)

## **UNIT 5. Foundations: God and Humanity I: The 19 th Century: Re-imagining Humanity**

(Week of March 2)

Theodore Parker, writes Gary Dorrien, “was the first American to approach theology from a standpoint deeply informed by German theology, philosophy, and historiocritical scholarship. He was the first American to present a nearly full-orbed liberal view of Christianity in the nineteenth-century sense of the term; and he is the pivotal figure of the Unitarian tradition, the one from whom its neo-Christian and humanistic traditions both derive.” (Dorrien, 2001: xvii)

Parker s essay provides a summary of his theology as well as “a philosophical history of a whole generation.” It will give you a sense of how thea/ological questions and commitments shaped one modern Unitarian s life and work, and will provide a context for you to reflect on your own life s deepest questions, thea/ological convictions, and formative influences.

### **Reading Assignment:**

Parker, “Experience as a Minister” [SB 283-316]

### **Writing Assignment:**

Post your own thea/ological autobiography (500-750 words), responding to the following questions:

What key influences, experiences and relationships have shaped your thea/ological perspective and what do you see as the goals or purposes of ministry in light of your thea/ological perspective.

After you have posted your assignment, review your classmates posts, and respond substantively (100-250ish words each) to two of them.

### **Suggested Reading**

Gary Dorrien. *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion 1805 – 1900* . Section 2. Subversive Intuitions: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Theodore Parker, and the Transcendentalist Revolt. (pp 80 – 110)

### **For Further Inquiry:**

Dean Grodzins. *American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism* . (The University of North Carolina Press)

**UNIT 6. Foundations: God and Humanity II: 20 Century Humanistic th  
Theism/Atheism  
(Week of March 9)**

Nineteenth-century Unitarian and Universalist thea/ological anthropology was optimistic and essentialist about human nature and uncritically regarded white male experience as normative for all humanity. This unit will begin to explore how these perspectives shifted in the 20th century. The nature of being human came to be understood in new ways as gender, race, culture and class increasingly informed the Unitarian and Universalist thea/ological conversation. Liberal optimism was shaken by the devastations of World War

I and II, and liberal theologians began to grapple with the limits of reason, the need for grace, and the vulnerability of human beings as well as our power and responsibility.

This week s readings illustrate these shifts. In the excerpt from “His Religion and Hers,” Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a 20th century Unitarian feminist writing just after World War I, calls for religion to be informed by women’s experience. Religious humanism, with its deep roots in the values of modernity, is carried forward into the 20th century in the Humanist Manifesto; unfettered from “likeness to God,” 20 th- century religious humanism affirms humanity s power and responsibility on its own terms. William R. Jones, a black humanist theologian and Unitarian Universalist minister, probes the ways concepts of God can function to sanction racism and oppression or to resist them. Marilyn Sewell s introduction to *Cries of the Spirit*, a collection of poetry by women, suggests how poetic language that arises from the body of our lives speaks of the divine. Rebecca Parker reflects on the meanings for religious humanism of the feminist insights of embodiment, interdependence, and vulnerability. Shirley Ranck argues for a Goddess-feminist theology, a pagan spirituality. Sean Parker Dennison develops Rita Nakashima Brock s notion of interstitial integrity in explicating the transgendered, in-between experience. Nancy Mairs, in her excerpt and in the interview with Susanne Skubik, parses the thea/ological and moral values of embodiment from the perspective of a “troubled body.”

**Reading Assignment :**

Gilman, “Preface,” “Introductory,” “Suggested Causes” [ SB 318-341]

Humanist Manifesto I [SB342-346]

Jones, “An Overview of Divine Racism,” “White God – Black Protest,” “Humanocentric Theism: A Theistic Framework for Ethnic Suffering” [SB358-394]

Sewell, *Cries of the Spirit: A Celebration of Women’s Spirituality* [SB 411-430]

Parker, “Vulnerable and Powerful: Humanism from a Feminist Perspective” [SB431-438]

Ranck, Shirley Ann, "Born of Woman, Born of Earth" [SB439-445]

Dennison, "The Integrity of the In-Between" [SB 474-478]

Mairs, "Body in Trouble" [ SB 479-482]

Skubik, Susanne. "Body, Mind, and Soul: An Interview with Nancy Mairs" [SB 483-487]

### **Writing Assignment:**

Post a 250-word reflection on this week's readings, in response to the following questions:

How are they or might they be important for contemporary Unitarian Universalism? What resources do they provide? What limits need to be recognized or addressed?

After you have posted your assignment, review your classmates' posts, and respond substantively (100-250ish words) to two of them.

### **Suggested Reading :**

Paul Razor. Faith Without Certainty , chapters 4 – 7.

## **UNIT 7. Foundations: God and Humanity II: Process/Relational Humanism and Theism (Week of March 16)**

Rooted in modernity's high regard for reason and science, Unitarian Universalist theologians have approached God through the disciplines of philosophy and the natural sciences. In this unit, we will focus on process theologians who seek reasonable, ethical, and scientifically grounded ways of conceiving of God and humanity.

Charles Hartshorne, a distinguished 20th century American philosopher upon whose work a great deal of process theology is based, identified his theaological commitments with Socinianism (a Unitarian perspective dating from the Renaissance) and attended a Unitarian Universalist congregation. In "Beyond Enlightened Self -Interest," he offers a process view of human identity, as well as glimpses of a process God. In "Intellectual Autobiography" Henry Nelson Wieman, a process theologian active in the mid-20th century, traces the influences and development of his thought about God and humanity. In "The Human Predicament," he writes more specifically about his central concept of creative interchange, and Jesus. Unlike Wieman, who also attended a Unitarian congregation, Bernard Loomer became a member of one. Loomer wrote little, but his influence on process theology, as Dean of the Divinity School at the University of Chicago, was great. "S -I-Z-E" is a statement of process values. Contemporary Unitarian Universalist minister Gary Kowalski introduces a process view of God in language that is

accessible to general readers. John Jungerman, a Unitarian Universalist lay person and physicist, discusses how God can be re-imagined in process thea/ological terms in light of the theories of post-Newtonian physics.

**Reading Assignment:**

Hartshorne, “Beyond Enlightened Self Interest: The Illusions of Egoism” [SB499-508]

Wieman, “Intellectual Autobiography” [SB 509-517]

Wieman, “The Human Predicament” {SB 518-524]

Loomer, “S-I-Z-E is the Measure” [SB525-531]

Kowalski, “God is a Verb” [SB532-542]

Jungerman, “Cosmology and Divinity” [SB 543-563]

**Writing Assignment:**

Post a short paper (500-750 words) on the question:

How Can We Speak of God Now?

After you have posted your assignment, review your classmates posts, and respond substantively (100-250ish words) to two of them.

**Suggested Reading:**

Gary Dorrien. The Making of American Liberal Theology, Crisis, Irony, & Postmodernity 1950 – 2005. Section 2. The New Metaphysics and the Divine Relativity: Charles Hartshorne, Bernard M. Loomer, Daniel Day Williams, Bernard E. Meland, and the Religion of Creative Process. (pp 58 – 132)

**READING WEEK: March 23 – 27. No class.**

**UNIT 8. The Sheltering Roof: The Search for What Saves Us I: Liberalism and the Problem of Suffering and Evil  
(Week of March 30)**

This unit and the following three units will focus on Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist perspectives on the problem of evil, the understanding of sin, and the search for what saves us – soteriology. Classic doctrines of the atonement – the idea

that humanity was saved by the death of Jesus on the cross – have long been rejected by Unitarians and Universalists. So have ideas that salvation should be identified with an afterlife in heaven and escape from the fires of hell.

Critics of liberal theology say liberals do not take evil seriously enough. Some Unitarian Universalists wonder as well: Is our theology only meaningful for the comfortable? The privileged? Those who do not have to struggle to survive the devastating effects of sin or evil? These questions came to the fore in new ways for some religious liberals in the aftermath of September 11, 2001.

William Wallace Fenn, Unitarian minister and Bussey Professor of Theology at Harvard Divinity School (1900 – 1932), examines these questions with respect to World War I. Post 9/11, Warren Ross poses these questions to a number of Unitarian Universalist religious leaders in an article for the UU World. Unitarian Universalist minister and author Rosemary Bray McNatt raises questions about Unitarian Universalism's capacity to address racial justice issues unless we can embrace humanity's limitations and need for God. Fredric John Muir, also a Unitarian Universalist minister and author, employs insights from Latin American Liberation Theology in arguing for a saving move toward pluralism and away from the ideology of individualism among Unitarian Universalists.

### **Reading Assignment:**

Fenn, "War and the Thought of God" [SB 1-7]

Ross, "Confronting Evil: Has Terrorism Shaken Our Religious Principles?" [SB 8-16]

McNatt, "The Problem of Theology in the Work of Anti-Racism" [SB 17-24]

Muir, "Liberating Religious Individualism" [SB 25-32]

### **Writing Assignment:**

Post a brief essay (250-750 words) on the following questions:

What has most challenged your faith and hope? What thea/ological resources were you able to draw upon?

After you have posted your assignment, review your classmates' posts, and respond substantively to two of them.

### **For Further Inquiry:**

Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker . Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us. (Beacon Press)

**UNIT 9. The Sheltering Roof: The Search for What Saves Us II: The Universalists:  
Re-imagining Sin and Salvation  
(Week of April 6)**

This week we will read excerpts from the 19th century Universalist Hosea Ballou's critique of the doctrine of the atonement. Clarence Skinner's *The Social Implications of Universalism*, written at the beginning of the 20th century, presents an optimistic vision in which both hell and salvation are to be found in human social relations and institutions. Ibrahim Farajaje, professor of cultural studies at Starr King School, draws on connections between Unitarian Universalism and Islam in a sermon preached for a new Unitarian Universalist minister.

**Reading Assignment:**

Ballou, excerpts from *A Treatise on Atonement* [SB 34-72]

Skinner, *The Social Implications of Universalism* [SB 73-122]

Farajaje, "Lighting Fires in Paradise, Pouring Water on Hell" [SB 123-126]

**Writing Assignment:**

Post a brief paper (250-750 words) proposing a way to speak of evil, sin and salvation from a Unitarian Universalist perspective. After you have posted your assignment, review your classmates posts, and respond substantively to two of them.

**UNIT 10. The Sheltering Roof: The Search for What Saves Us III: Resisting  
Oppression, Restoring the Soul, Healing the World  
(Week of April 13)**

In an excerpt from *Black Pioneers in a White Denomination*, Unitarian Universalist minister and author Mark Morrison-Reed contrasts the central images of black religion with those of Unitarian Universalism, focused through the class-sensitive lens of H. Richard Niebuhr. Howard Thurman, a theaological Universalist and friend of Unitarian Universalism, author of *Jesus and the Disinherited*, evokes the radical significance of Jesus for the oppressed. Jack Forbes, a Native American scholar and activist with ties to Unitarianism and Buddhism, speaks in a late-20th century voice that critiques the "whiteness" of earlier optimistic views of human nature and progress. Sharon Welch, a Unitarian Universalist ethics professor and Provost of Meadville-Lombard theaological School, articulates the power of love in the work of healing, liberation and justice, drawing on black women's literature as a source for theology. Rebecca Parker illustrates the education of white people into ignorance and denial, exposes the theology of innocence which sanctions it, and offers strategies of remedial education, healing, and engagement. "Educating to Create Just Communities that Counter Oppressions" is a document that guides the work of Starr King School.

**Reading Assignment:**

Morrison-Reed, "Two American Faiths" [SB 128-142]

Thurman, "Jesus – An Interpretation" [SB 143-156]

Forbes, "If Jesus Were to Return" [SB 157-167]

Welch, "Introduction," "A Theology of Resistance and Hope," "The Healing Power of Love" [SB 168-209]

Parker, "Not Somewhere Else But Here" [SB 219-233]

\*\*\*"Educating to Create Just Communities that Counter Oppressions"

**Writing Assignment :**

Post a brief paper (500-750 words) proposing a UU thea/ological basis for the work of Educating to Counter Oppressions. After you have posted your assignment, review your classmates' posts, and respond substantively (100-250ish words) to two of them.

**For Further Inquiry:**

Sharon Welch. *Sweet Dreams in America: Making Ethics and Spirituality Work*. (Routledge)

Sharon Welch. *After Empire: The Art and Ethos of Enduring Peace*. (Fortress Press)

**UNIT 11. The Sheltering Roof: The Search for What Saves Us IV: Renewing Liberalism: James Luther Adams (Week of April 20)**

"James Luther Adams," writes Gary Dorrien, "was a twentieth-century champion of a liberal tradition that the twentieth century nearly left behind, Unitarian Christianity. Though rather isolated as a Christian theist in the Unitarian (later Unitarian Universalist) denomination, he was the most connected, ecumenical, activist-oriented, and least lonely of its theologians." Referred to widely and fondly as JLA, Adams taught at Meadville Lombard thea/ological School for twenty years, as well as at the University of Chicago Divinity School, Harvard Divinity School, and Andover Newton thea/ological School.

In "Taking Time Seriously," Adams traces the development of his understanding of salvation as occurring in time, in history and introduces the themes of socially effective

institutions and a critique of liberal religion which recur throughout his writings. In “Guiding Principles for a Free Faith,” he offers a critique of and five “essential elements of a genuine and vital religious liberalism.” In “The Changing Reputation of Human Nature,” Adams works with two ancient Greek views of human nature, the rationalistic Apollonian and the “voluntaristic” Dionysian, to propose a more holistic integration of the two for liberal religion. “The Prophethood of All Believers” calls for a radical laicism, a “church in which persons think and work together to interpret the signs of the times in light of their faith.” “thea/ological Bases of Social Action” provides an analysis of power in various forms. In “The Prophetic Covenant and Social Concern,” Adams furthers his discussion of historical religion, focusing on the nature and meanings of covenant. “In the Beginning Is the Word” treats a topic of ongoing controversy for Unitarian Universalists, religious language, and “The Church That Is Free” is Adams classic statement, his understanding of the free church.

### **Reading Assignment:**

Adams, “Taking Time Seriously” [SB 235-241]

Adams, “Guiding Principles for a Free Faith” [SB 242-251]

Adams, “Root Ideas of Human Freedom: The Changing Reputation of Human Nature” [SB 252-264]

Adams, “The Prophethood of All Believers” [SB 265-267]

Adams, “thea/ological Bases of Social Action” [SB 268-282]

Adams, “The Prophetic Covenant and Social Concern” [SB 283-288]

\*\*\*Adams, “In the Beginning Is the Word” and “Postscript: The Church That Is Free” [SB 289-295, 297]

### **Writing Assignment:**

Post a 250-word reflection on this week's readings, in response to the following questions:

How are they or might they be important for contemporary Unitarian Universalism? What resources do they provide? What limits need to be recognized or addressed?

After you have posted your assignment, review your classmates' posts, and respond substantively (100 to 250ish words) to two of them.

### **Suggested Reading:**

Gary Dorrien. *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Crisis, Irony, & Postmodernity 1950 – 2005*. Section 3. *Visions of Liberation: James Luther Adams, Martin Luther King, Jr., J. Deotis Roberts, Valerie Saiving, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and the Rhetoric of Emancipation* (pp 133 – 142)

### **UNIT 12. The Embracing Walls I: Church as Redemptive Community (Week of April 27)**

Rebecca Parker writes, “Our distinctive ecclesiology, rooted in the radical reformation, says every member of the church has a say in what the church’s purpose is and why we come together. This places the democratic process and human promise-making at the center of church life.” This week’s readings explore a variety of interpretations of UU ecclesiology, both historical and contemporary.

Thomas Starr King, Universalist, and Unitarian minister in San Francisco, preached that the purpose of the church is “to train and feed the spirit of worship.” James Freeman Clarke invoked the image of “leaven” and “mustard seed” in calling for a church of disciples active in the world. Cynthia Grant Tucker, UU historian, shows how, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century the Unitarian women ministers of the western frontier enacted an ecclesiology of “church as home” in architectural, congregational, and community programs. The readings from the UUA Commission on Appraisal, Rebecca Parker, and Conrad Wright will introduce you to our distinctive covenantal ecclesiology. Both Thandeka and Jen Harrison lift up the religious experience of small group ministries as a new center of congregational vitality; Thandeka drawing on Schleiermacher, Harrison on UU youth groups.

### **Reading Assignment:**

King, “Christian Worship” [SB 299-309]

Clarke, “The Christian Church” [SB 310-316]

Tucker, “The Church Home” [SB 317-329]

Wright, “Congregational Polity and the Covenant” [SB 330-334]

Parker, “What They Dreamed Be Ours to Do: Lessons from the History of Covenant” [SB 335-342]

“Theologies of Membership,” *Belonging: The Meaning of Membership: A Report by the Commission on Appraisal* [SB 343-368]

Thandeka, “The Spiritual Life of Unitarian Universalists, Lost and Found” [SB 369-386]

Harrison, "Youth Groups as a Model for Transformative Ministry" [SB 387-395]

**Writing Assignment:**

Post a brief paper (100-250ish words) proposing a covenant of membership for a UU church.

After you have posted your assignment, review your classmates' posts, and respond substantively (100-250ish words) to two of them.

**For Further Inquiry:**

Octavius Brooks Frothingham. *Transcendentalism in New England: A History*. (University of Pennsylvania Press) Chapter VII. *Practical Tendencies* includes the Constitution of Brook Farm and commentary on that communitarian experiment, an alternative configuration of religious community representing a radical Unitarian ecclesiology.

Carl J. Guarneri. "Brook Farm, Fourierism, and the Nationalist Dilemma in American Utopianism." in *Transient and Permanent: The Transcendentalist Movement and Its Contexts*, Ed s Charles Clapper and Conrad Edick Wright. (Massachusetts Historical Society)

**UNIT 13. The Embracing Walls II: Church as Cathedral of the World  
(Week of May 4)**

Rebecca Parker writes "Missiology: How do we relate to our religious neighbors? We know there are other religious houses. We are one among many. Our missiology does not call us to convert our neighbors, but to embrace them, learn from them, and support them." This unit explores several Unitarian Universalist models regarding religious pluralism.

W. Creighton Peden presents William J. Potter's early fashioning of a "Religion of Humanity." In his theology of a "religion for one world," Kenneth Patton proposes that the values of liberal religion – the testing of truth through reason and experience – can create a religion that will embrace the wisdom of the world's many religious traditions, while freeing them of superstition. He claims all the religious resources of the world belong to liberals – a vision that leads some to react to Patton's theology as a form of capitalist, colonialist appropriation. For rest Church offers a different image: Unitarian Universalism as a place that recognizes there is one light refracted through many windows, with implications for religious education and worship. Huston Smith, whose congregational home is the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Berkeley, CA, exemplifies a life-long practice of openness to all the world's religions through participation and respectful scholarship.

**Reading Assignment:**

Peden, “The Foundations of William J. Potter’s „Religion of Humanity ” [SB 397-402]

Patton, “The Temple” [SB 403-414]

Patton, excerpts from A Religion for One World: Art and Symbols for a Universal Religion [SB 425-435]

Church, “The Cathedral of the World” [SB 425-435]

Smith, “Point of Departure” [SB 435-441]

**Writing Assignment:**

Post a brief paper (500-750 words) proposing an ethic for relating to religious resources. After you have posted your assignment, review your classmates’ posts, and respond substantively to two.

**For Further Inquiry:**

Carol Christ. *She Who Changes: Re-Imagining the Divine in the World*. (Palgrave Macmillan) Christ draws on the work of Charles Hartshorne as a means of stimulating dialogue and forging stronger bonds of connection among feminists of all religious traditions, especially Jewish, Christian, and Goddess feminists.

**Unit 14. The Blessings of the Earth and Sky: Affirming the World as Sacred (Week of May 11) FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE THIS WEEK.**

Rebecca Parker writes: “...[P]neumatology is how we speak about our sense of the elemental forces that permeate all of our lives, as close as breath, as fiery as the sun, as transformative as the waters of the river. . .[O]ur particular perspective on spirit is our emphasis on the immediate presence of the spirit of life in all of life.

“Eschatology is the theology of where we came from and where we’re going.” Unitarian and Universalist theologies reject apocalyptic eschatologies that imagine that history will end in a final battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil, with this earth being destroyed and “a new heaven and a new earth” being born. We also reject other-worldly eschatologies that locate the ultimate “end” or final purpose of human life after death. The distinctive feature of Unitarian Universalist eschatologies is their emphasis on “realized eschatology” – the conviction that the ultimate end or purpose of life is to be found here and now, in this life, on this earth, or to be realized over time in a progressive evolution towards the establishment of heaven on earth – a heaven of justice, compassion and peace for all beings.

Our pneumatology converges with our eschatology in our affirmation of the world as sacred. The reading this week from the Universalist E.E. Guild shows how mid-19th-century Universalists carefully argued from the Bible that this world is not meant to come to an end – a theological argument directed against apocalyptic theologies popular in the 19th century and even more popular today. Thoreau's "Walking" reveals both his strong 19th-century reading of nature and a notion of progress or manifest destiny that some would reject as justifying the advance of European colonialism. Readings from Starr King and Jenkin Lloyd Jones show how liberal religion began to see divinity revealed in the natural world and in the farm. The excerpt from Hartshorne's "Do Birds Enjoy Singing?" offers a process philosophical view of the sacredness of all life. Carol Hepokoski, Unitarian Universalist minister and former Associate Professor of Liberal Religious Ethics at Meadville Lombard Theological School, points the way ahead for a Unitarian Universalist earth-focused theology.

**Reading Assignment:**

Guild, "On the End of the World" [SB 443-449]; Thoreau, "Walking" [SB 450-468]

King, "Living Water From Lake Tahoe" [SB 469-480]

\*\*\*Jones, "Concerning the Soil" [SB481-490]

Hartshorne, "Do Birds Enjoy Singing?" [SB 491-494]

Hepokoski, "Finnish American Unitarianism: A Study of Religion and Place" [SB 495-505]

**Writing Assignment:**

Post a proposed outline for a UU Theology for the 21st century.

**For Further Inquiry:**

Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker. *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire.* (Beacon Press)

Ralph Waldo Emerson. "Nature" in *Emerson: Essays and Lectures.* (Library of America)

John Gatta: *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion and Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present.* (Oxford University Press) The works of many Unitarian writers are treated in depth.