

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST HISTORY, HS-8423

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Starr King School for the Ministry

Online course, Fall 2009

Course Description:

The course begins with an examination of the (alleged) antecedents to Unitarianism and Universalism in pre-Reformation Europe. We move on to trace the theological and then institutional emergence of Unitarianism out of the Radical Reformation. The Unitarian churches in Poland, Transylvania, and England will be considered in detail with attention to issues of sameness and difference in their development and declines. Special focus will be given to the relationship of these communities to their Jewish and Islamic contemporaries. We will also look at the universalism of 18th century England, and the current state of Unitarianism in Europe. Then we cross the ocean to examine the emergence of Unitarianism from developments within Puritan Congregationalism. We explore the uniquely North American institution of Universalism as response to the same cultural setting. Next: the major themes and developments of North American Unitarianism through its classical age, the Transcendentalist development, and the various crises of identity and purpose that develop into and through the late 19th and 20th centuries. Then we turn our attention to Universalist ascendancy, decline, and then consolidation with Unitarianism (perhaps the most misunderstood aspect of Unitarian/Universalist history). Careful attention will be paid throughout to the Unitarian/Universalist social location in relationship to class, race, and gender identities, and how these sometimes enabled and sometimes impaired social justice advances.

Required Readings

To be honest, there is quite a bit of required reading for this course. And yet, as a hopefully humane gesture, every effort has been made to coordinate readings for this class to the Required Reading List of the UUA's Ministerial Fellowship Committee (which was co-authored by Paul Razor and myself, so be cautious in your complaints about it!).

Books to acquire and read (that are a part of the MFC required reading list):

David Robinson, The Unitarians and the Universalists (1985).

Charles Howe, For Faith and Freedom: A Short History of Unitarianism in Europe (1997)

Ross, Warren, The Premise and the Promise (2001)

Primary documents we will read that are on the MFC website:

Edict of Torda (1568)

Hosea Ballou, "Treatise on Atonement" (1805) (selections)

William Ellery Channing "Likeness to God" (1828)

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Divinity School Address" (1838)

Theodore Parker "The Transient and the Permanent in Christianity" (1841)

William Channing Gannett, "The Things Most Commonly Believed Today Among Us."

UUA Commission on Appraisal, "Empowerment," 1983).
John Dietrich, "Unitarianism and Humanism," (1927).
James Luther Adams, "The Liberalism that is Dead" (1940)
James Luther Adams, "The Changing Reputation of Human Nature," (1942-43)

And some short additional assignments

Assignments

Will include vigorous and appropriate participation in class discussions and postings, and one final project which is your choice of the following:

The Gifts of History

In eight to ten pages of double spaced type, describe a problem or controversy currently experienced within the Unitarian Universalist movement and what historical influences inform that controversy. First outline your problem or controversy. Then describe the historical background that leads to the current situation. Finally: suggest a historical resource that might help alleviate the problem. For example, your current controversy might be Unitarian Universalist congregations that are reluctant to grow. You might trace this to the anti-evangelical roots of American Unitarianism. You could then suggest the growth strategies of the Eliot administrations as a corrective. The goal of this paper is to demonstrate that you can apply historical information to a current problem in a constructive fashion.

Your Personal Ministry

In eight to ten pages of double spaced type, demonstrate that you understand how it is that history informs the religious leadership that you would chose for yourself. First describe your ministry: either the ministry in which you engage now, or the ministry to which you aspire. Then explain what historical precedence there is for your chosen form of ministry in our Unitarian Universalist tradition. For example, perhaps you see your ministry to be work with the mentally ill. What precedence is there for this in our history? How is that history helpful? What are the historical barriers to working with that population as a Unitarian Universalist? Perhaps you want a traditional parish ministry. In that case, what kind of a parish minister will you be? Will you be an Emersonian—someone who see the job of minister as interpretation? Or are you closer to Theodore Parker, and his ministry of social justice? Upon which historical influences will you draw in your ministry?

Or, A Traditional Academic Paper of Your Choosing on a Related Topic

