

Unitarian/Universalist Identities

Prof. Susan Ritchie

Spring 2010 (online), Starr King School for the Ministry

RevRitchie@aol.com; 740-657-8081

SYLLABUS

Course Description:

At different, numerable points in our history--one poignant example being right now--Unitarian Universalism has experienced extraordinary anxiety in relationship to its self-identity. This course will examine the historical and institutional currents that prompt such crisis, and the resultant attempts to articulate coherence for the movement. What do Unitarian Universalists share? We'll examine the suggested possibilities: theology, ethical principles, class location, culture, polity, history, demographics, racial identity, political alliances, covenantal community, national identity, geography, personality, statements of faith, and affirmations of common principles. Special attention will be paid to the history of the profession of liberal ministry in this context. Ministers have sometimes led, sometimes lagged behind, and oftentimes been in conflict with the larger movement's understanding of identity, especially as it is played out in changing definitions of a minister's role, responsibilities, and relationship to the congregation. The importance of an authentic and thoughtful negotiation of the connection between personal and collective religious identity for effective ministry will be developed throughout the course

Required Materials and Reading:

None! Well, none to purchase or otherwise acquire, but plenty to read. Everything will be posted online.

Rather than choose a few textbooks as required readings, I have made a variety of selections here from primary sources, articles, and parts of books. This diversity of sources is important. It allows us to explore only the very best writing in particular areas; to experience voices both supportive and responsibly critical of Unitarian Universalism; and to read non-fiction and fiction from many different eras and social positions.

Learning Outcomes:

At the conclusion of this course, the student will be able to:

*describe the historical origins and contemporary disposition of twelve different understandings of Unitarian Universalist common identity

*specify the historical and current cultural positionality of Unitarian Universalism with regards to race, class, gender; realize how that positionality informs, limits, and enables anti-oppression work

*articulate and locate their personal identification as a religious leader with reference to specific Unitarian Universalist gathered communities as well as the movement as a whole; understand their personal position and impact within that system of relationship

*ascertain key components of group identity as expressed in specific gathered bodies of Unitarian Universalists (i.e. congregations); be able to assess that identity in terms of healthy relationship to the larger movement.

Class Structure and Requirements for online Posting:

During each class we will take one proposed description of Unitarian Universalist identity (i.e., “we share the doctrine of congregational polity”) and examine it in terms of its historical roots, its contemporary expression in gather Unitarian Universalist communities, and in relationship to our personal identities as religious leaders.

There is required reading for each week, click on “Readings” from within the Unit Summary. There will be two opportunities to discuss the readings each week. One will be the “Question for Unit X” “forum” which will invite you to respond to a discussion type questions relating to the unit context, and which will allow you to see and respond to other people’s responses (this is an asynchronous forum—in other words, add to it whenever you feel like, and the discussion will accumulate throughout the week). The second “forum” (similar in format) is “Help with Reading.” Post here any questions of clarification or expansion you have regarding the materials you have been studying.

The requirement for on-line participation is that you make something that averages out to at least one posting for each unit, but these postings can be of any nature (a response to the discussion question, a response to someone else’s discussion, a question posed in the Help forum, or a response to someone’s question in the Help forum).

Please make a special note that I am moving away from a fairly standard online course technique of requiring everyone to write answers to questions each week that demonstrate that you have done the readings. It is my experience that this leads to rather dull and obligatory conversation, and I would like our virtual time together to be livelier than that, and consist of “real” engagement—hence, post when you are engaged, rather than out of obligation.

But to make sure you are getting what you need to out of the readings, check out each unit’s “Learning Outcomes for Readings.” You can self-test your comprehension of the reading against these, and, if you need any additional help, post your question or dilemma to the Help Forum.

Additional Requirements:

*Good class citizenship; this is defined as doing your best to be in good relationship with your classmates, the larger discussion, the material, as well as the course requirements itself.

*Evidence of preparation (I have very carefully chosen the readings to not be overwhelming in length so that responsible preparation is achievable).

***Final Project—Brief Proposals Due by the last day of the quarter (submitted to me by email)**

Either a traditional academic paper which in 1500-2000 words makes an analysis of your choice regarding any aspect of Unitarian Universalist identity; or, a proposal of the same length for a practical project. This would describe a proposed hypothetical (or not!) religious education course, welcoming literature, leadership training, worship service, etc... designed with the intention of bringing the intended audience in better relationship with some aspect of Unitarian Universalist Identity.

SCHEDULE OF READING AND TOPICS:

Unit One

Freedom, Reason and Tolerance: Is Unitarian Universalism a Shared History?

“Unitarian Universalism is a peculiar religious tradition in that what binds it is not so much a shared theology or even a shared response to the experience of the sacred, as it is a shared history. We are one people because of our inchoate understanding of the journey through time which we share. This is not to suggest that we are always accurate about the history we claim, or that we always understand the motives, the behaviors, the attitudes of those who have proceeded us, but that rather we are enraptured by a mythic sense of having shared a journey which began by rejecting conventional views and has been defined by a continuing struggle toward a personally satisfying understanding of self, of the nature of the human venture, of the meaning of existence.” David E. Bumbaugh, *Unitarian Universalism: A Narrative History* (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Press, 2000): 5.

Reading:

Earl Morse Wilbur, “The Meaning and Lessons of Unitarian History,” *Unitarian Historical Society Transactions* 3:4 (1923/1926): 350-360.

Unit One

Congregational Polity and Covenantal Theology: A Common Unitarian Denominat(or)(ion)?

“We North American Unitarian Universalists, in all our diversity, share one doctrine everywhere in common, with each other now and with our earliest church ancestors on this continent. We call it the doctrine of congregational polity. We would better call it the doctrine of covenantal organization.”—Alice Blair Wesley, *Minns Lectures*, 2000.

Getting Started:

If you have little background in early American and/or Unitarian American religious history, this internet article will get you up to speed before you start the reading: “The Unitarian Controversy and its Puritan Roots” by Alice Blair Wesley at:

<http://www.25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/unitariancontroversy.html>

Required Reading:

Alice Blair Wesley, “The Lay and Liberal Doctrine of the Church: The Spirit and Promise of our Covenant,” Minns Lectures, 2000. Available at this website:

<http://minnslectures.org/archive/wesley/wesley.htm>

Perry Miller, “Church Covenant,” *The New England Mind: The 17th Century* (1953; Harvard: University of Harvard Press, 1998): 432-462.

Additional Non Required Reading for the Interested:

Conrad Wright, “A Doctrine of the Church for Liberals” in *Walking Together* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1989): 1-24.

Marlin Lavanhard, “Shriveled Beneath the Clods: The Use and Misuse of the Principles and Purposes Statement 1985-2007,” *The Journal of Liberal Religion* 8:1 (Winter 2008), at the website: http://meadville.edu/LL_JLR_v8_n1_Lavanhar.htm

Unit Two

Conflicts between Ministerial and Congregational(ist) Identities

“By considering themselves to be a self-perpetuating body of sacred religious leaders, the Congregationalist clergymen suggested that they did not depend upon laymen for the validity of their ministry. The price that they paid for this exalted view of their status was an uneasiness about their relationship to their congregations.”—William Youngs.

Required Reading:

William Youngs, “Congregational Clericalism: New England’s Ordinations before the Great Awakening,” *William and Mary Quarterly* (July 1974): 481-409.

Donald M Scott, “The Office of the Minister in 18th Century New England,” “The Crisis of the Pastoral Clergy,” *From Office to Profession, The New England Ministry 1750-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1978): 1-17; 112-132.



Additional Non Required Reading for the Interested:

Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Minister's Black Veil," Originally published in 1836 in *The Token and Atlantic Souvenir*, republished in the short story collection, *Twice-Told Tales*, in 1837. Etext of the story available online at:

<http://www.americanliterature.com/Hawthorne/SS/TheMinistersBlackVeil.html>

Josiah Bartlett "The Concept of Leadership," 150-154; "Appendix 17: The Place of Laymen in the Church." 210-215 *Bright Galaxy, Ten Years of Unitarian Fellowships*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960): 150-154; 210-215.

Unit Three

Church of the Pilgrims: Unitarians and Universalists as Puritans

The ideal of decorum, of law and self-control, was institutionalized. Though Unitarianism was "liberal" in theology, it was generally conservative in its social thinking and its metaphysics....the words "New England tradition" and "Puritan heritage" can be shown to have some concrete meaning when applied to the gradual evolution of Unitarianism out of the seventeenth century background. –Perry Miller, "From Edwards to Emerson."

Getting Started:

If you are not familiar with Johnathan Edwards and the Great Awakening period in American religious history, you might find the Bressler and the Miller readings a little hard to jump into. You can catch up to speed in no time with Prof. Matthews' (of Wake Forest University) amusing and clear lecture on the topic: <http://www.wfu.edu/~matthetl/perspectives/four.html>

Required Reading:

Daniel Buchanan, "Tares in the Wheat: Puritan Violence and Puritan Families in the Nineteenth Century Liberal Imagination," *Religion and American Culture* 8:2 (Summer 1998): 205-236.

Ann Lee Bressler, selections from "Calvinism Improved," *The Universalist Movement in America 1770-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 9-23.

Further Reading for the Deeply Interested:

If you liked the Daniel Buchanan article, try his book length argument under his new name of Dan McKanan, *Identifying the Image of God: Radical Christians and Nonviolent Power in the Antebellum United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Catherine Sedgwick, *A New England Tale* (George Putnam, 1852): 17-73. Available at google books:
http://books.google.com/books?id=ihFihkNLEUEC&printsec=frontcover&dq=intitle:a+intitle:ne+w+intitle:england+intitle:tale&lr=&as_brr=0#PPA17,M1

Perry Miller, "From Edwards to Emerson," *The New England Quarterly* 13 (December 1940): 589-617.

Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975). "For both Edwards and Emerson, the image of the New World invests the regenerate perceiver with an aura of ascendant millennial splendor; and for the both of them, the perceiver must prove his regeneration by transforming himself in the image of the New World." Page 157.

Unit Four

The Invention of Class Identity: Unitarians as Cultural Capitalists/Brahmins & Problems in Unitarian Aesthetics

(Unitarianism was the) "creedless stance of the Brahmins, who came together in the first decades of the nineteenth century as a powerful alliance of grand bourgeoisie and liberal ministers, they constituted as Henry Adams observed, " a social hierarchy ofrespectability, education, property, and religion."— Peter S, Field, *The Crisis in the Standing Order*.

*"Unitarianism was a pure, white dry claret that went well with dinners served by the Harvard Corporation, but it was mild and guaranteed not to send them home reeling and staggering"—*Perry Miller, *"From Edwards to Emerson"*

Required Reading:

Peter S. Field, "The Birth of the Brahmins" and "Towards a Secular High Culture" in *The Crisis of the Standing Order: Clerical Intellectuals and Cultural Authority in Massachusetts 1780-1833* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998): 47-110.

Further Reading for the Deeply Interested:

William Channing, "On the Elevation of the Laboring Classes," *The Works of William E. Channing* (1840; Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1890): 36-66. Available at google books:
http://books.google.com/books?id=c18PAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=inauthor:William+inauthor:Channing&lr=&as_brr=0&ie=ISO-8859-1#PPA36,M1

Lawrence Buell, "Unitarian Aesthetics and Emerson's Poet Priest," *American Quarterly* 20:1 (Spring 1968): 3-20.

James Luther Adams, "The Political Responsibility of the Man of Culture," *Comprendre* 16 (1956): 11-25.

Unit Five

Ambivalences in Association and Complications in Common Institutional Purpose & Identity

What, then, is the present condition of our Unitarian body?...spite of increasing numbers and moral vitality, of growing earnestness and activity, of larger acceptance and easier advance, there is an undeniable chill in the missionary zeal, an undeniable apathy in the denominational life of the body; with general prosperity, in short, there is dependency, self-questioning, and anxiety. —Henry Whitney Bellows, 1859.

Required Reading:

William Channing, "Remarks on Associations," *The Works of William E. Channing* (1829; Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1890): 36-66. Available at google books: http://books.google.com/books?id=cl8PAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=inauthor:William+inauthor:Channing&lr=&as_brr=0&ie=ISO-8859-1#PPA138,M1

Ann Lee Bressler, "Controversy and Identity," *The Universalist Movement in America 1770-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 54-77.

Further Reading for the Deeply Interested:

Bellows, Henry Whitney. "The Suspense of Faith, A Discourse on the State of the Church," in *An American Reformation: A Documentary History of Unitarian Christianity*, Sydney Ahlstrom and Jonathan Carey, eds. (1859; Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1985): 371-398.

Commission on Appraisal, American Unitarian Association (1936), *Unitarians Face a New Age* (focus on "Values" and "Institutional Organization and Function"): http://www.uua.org/documents/coa/36_unitariansfaceanewage.pdf

Unit Six

Crises in Christian Identification, Unitarian and Universalist

We have a creed if to hold that Unitarianism is necessarily theistic and Christian is a creed!—Jabez Sunderland.

Getting Started:

If you are not familiar with the Transcendentalist and Western controversies, you'll want to catch up before you do this more specific reading. One brief sketch is; David Bumbaugh, "The Transcendentalist Challenge" and "Organizing a National Movement," *Unitarian Universalism: A Narrative History* (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Press, 2000): 119-136.

Required Reading:

Frederic Henry Hedge Antisupernaturalism in the Pulpit (1864 sermon) in Sydney E. Ahlstrom and Jonathan S. Carey, *An American Reformation: A Documentary History of Unitarian Christianity* (Middletown, CT: 1985): 419-431.

Charles H. Lyttle, "The Western Issue: Is Unitarianism Only Christian Theism?" in *Freedom Moves West: A History of the Western Unitarian Conference 1852-1952* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952): 163-191.

Russell E. Miller, "Beyond Christianity" and "Toward a World Religion," *The Larger Hope: The Second Century of the Universalist Church in America 1870-1970* (Boston: UUA, 1985): 633-647.

Further Reading for the Deeply Interested:

Dean Grodzins, "Theodore Parker's Conference with the Boston Association Jan. 23, 1843," *Journal of Unitarian Universalist History* 23 (1995): 66-101.

Jabez Sunderland, "The Issue in the West: Is Unitarianism Ready to Give Up its Christian Character?" 1886. Available at the website:
<http://www.americanunitarian.org/sunderlandissue.htm>

William Channing Gannet, "Thing Commonly Believed Among Us," 1887. Available at the website: http://www.famousuus.com/writings/things_commonly_believed.htm

A.D. Mayo, "Prophecies of the Hour Concerning the Liberal Christian Church," *Universalist Quarterly* 36 (October 1879): 409-424.

Visit and Browse Should It Amuse You:

The American Unitarian Conference website: <http://www.americanunitarian.org/>

The UU Christian Fellowship website: <http://www.uuchristian.org/>

Unit Seven

The Body of Unitarian Universalists: Cultural Identity through and as Embodiment

...figurations of proper form...have supplied supremacy over other bodies viewed out of bounds while yet compelling proponents of such standards to scrutinize, ever more ruthlessly, their own flesh. The faithful may balk at this proposition that many of their own have upheld stringent bodily standards, but the data bear witness to this reality time and again.—R. Marie Griffith



Required Reading:

R. Marie Griffith, “Introduction, Perilous Body Gospels,” in *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (California Studies in Food and Culture; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004): 1-18.

Ann Douglas, “the Rural Cemetery Movement,” in *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977; New York: Noonday Press, 1998) 208-213.

Recommended Reading:

Laura Shapiro, “Whoever Knew a Dyspeptic to Be a Christian?” *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (1986; New York: Modern Library, 2001): 120-159.

Visit:

..the Mount Auburn Cemetery website (do NOT miss the photo gallery!):

<http://www.mountauburn.org>

Unit Eight:

Early Conflicts between Competing Identities of Spiritual Idealism and Political Caution: Unitarian, Universalist, and Transcendentalist Involvements in Anti-Slavery; Early Universalist Involvement in Reform Movements

“(The 19th Century Unitarians moralists were) men of many paradoxes. Religious liberals and social conservatives, at once optimistic and apprehensive, nationalistic and cosmopolitan, they were elitists in a land dedicated to equality, proponents of freedom of conscience who supported a religious establishment, and reformers who feared change” – Daniel Walker Howe.

Required Reading:

Howe, Daniel Walker. "Introduction" and "The Slavery Question," in *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy 1805-1861* (1970; Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988): 1-26; 270-308.

Ann Lee Bressler, "Universal Redemption and Social Reform," *The Universalist Movement in America 1770-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 77-96.

Listen to:

David Pettee and Patricia Mann, "Children of the New England Slave Trade," "On Point" radio show with Tom Asbrook (Boston NPR: May 16, 2008).

http://www.onpointradio.org/shows/2008/05/20080516_b_main.asp

Further Reading for the Interested:

Phillip Gura. "The Inward Turn" In *American Transcendentalism: A History* (New York: Hill and Wang: 2007): 240-266.

Lewis Perry and Matthew C. Sherman, "What Disturbed the Unitarian Church in This Very City: Alton, the Slavery Conflict, and Western Unitarianism," *Civil War History* 54:1 (March 2008): 5-34. Available on Course Reader CD.

Russell E. Miller, "We Are All Brethern: Universalists and the Abolition of Slavery," and "Brethren Once More," in *The Larger Hope: The First Century of the Universalist Church in American 1770-1870* (Boston: UUA, 1979): 574-630.

Unit Nine

Gender Instabilities in the Formation of Unitarian and Universalist Ministerial Identity

"The liberal minister was losing his role among his society's leaders; his place was increasingly in the Sunday School, the parlor, and the library, among women and those who flattered and resembled them....If the minister was like a woman, why shouldn't the woman be like a minister?" –Ann Douglas

Read:

Ann Douglas, "Clerical Disestablishment," "Feminine Disestablishment," "Ministers and Mothers" in *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977; New York: Noonday Press, 1998): 17-121.

Cynthia Grant Tucker, "Introduction"; "Tending Church Families"; "Woman's Place in a Manlier Ministry," *Prophetic Sisterhood: Liberal Women Ministers of the Frontier, 1880-1930* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990): 1-12; 63-73; 147-158.

Recommended Reading:

Eventually, you will definitely want to read all of *Prophetic Sisterhood*. The MFC wants you to, too.

Paula Nesbitt, “Structural Change in the Ministry,” and “Clergy Feminization: Controlled Labor or Liberationist Change?” in *Feminization of the Clergy in America*, New York Oxford 1997): 135-177.

Unit Ten

Issues of Race in Contemporary Unitarian Universalist Identity

“*The more things change, the more they stay the same*”—UUA Commission on Appraisal (Empowerment).

Required Reading:

Unitarian Universalist Association Commission on Appraisal, *Empowerment: One Denomination’s Quest towards Racial Justice 1967-1982*. Available at the uua website: http://www.uua.org/documents/coa/83_empowerment.pdf

View:

Mtangulizi Sanyika’s Starr King President’s Lecture and William Sinkford’s response, General Assembly 2003 Available at:

<http://archive.uua.org/ga/ga03/4029.html>

Resources on the UUA Truth, Repair and Reconciliation resolution:

<http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/araomc/104381.shtml>

Recommended Reading:

Marjorie Bowens Wheatley, “Cornrows, Kwanzaa and Confusion: The Dilemma of Cultural Racism and Misappropriation” available at the UUA website:

<http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/culturalmisappropriation/37852.shtml>

Thandeka: “What’s Wrong with Anti-Racism,” Meadville Lombard Lecture, General Assembly 1999. Available at:

<http://archive.uua.org/ga/ga99/238thandeka.html>

or

Unit Eleven

Unitarian Universalism: A Shared Theology?

“While we are open to many things, there remains a definite boundary of what we embrace and what we leave outside.”—Rebecca Parker

Required Reading:

Rebecca Parker, “Keep the Circle Whole: The Challenge of Unitarian Universalist Theology,” Sermon for the Pacific Central District Annual Meeting, April 29, 2006. Available on the Starr King website:

<http://www.skism.edu/research/sermons/unitariantheol.pdf>

Recommended Reading:

James Freeman Clark “Manual of Unitarian Belief”

Available at the website: <http://www.americanunitarian.org/manual.htm>

Commission on Appraisal, Unitarian Universalist Association, “Engaging our Theological Diversity,” 2005. Available at the UUA website:

<http://www.uua.org/documents/coa/engagingourtheodiversity.pdf>

Paul Razor and Susan Ritchie, Unitarian/Universalist Affirmations of Belief, 1790-1985, part of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee’s required reading list available on the UUA website:

http://img.uua.org/mfc/Faith_Affirmations_1790-1985.pdf

Unit Twelve

Unitarian versus Universalist Identity

Required Reading:

Henry Bellows, “Our Universalist Friends,” *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine* October 9, 1847: 65.

Thomas Whittmore, "Response to Rev. Bellows," *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, Oct. 9, 1847: 66

Russell E. Miller, "And Flow on Together: Universalist-Unitarian Consolidation, 1937-1961," *The Larger Hope: The Second Century of the Universalist Church in American 1870-1970* (Boston: UUA, 1979):648-665.

Last Two Weeks for Discussion of Student Generated Topics and Final Paper Topics.