But as Channing might say: For heaven's sake do not suppose that when we speak of the appearance to human minds of any such FRUITFUL paradigm of ordinary, yet extraordinary human character, we are talking about anything less than — the MOST marvelous and holy thing we can ever know! For what is more wonderful in heaven or earth! than the ways of human character and mind in time! For these human ways are also the ways of — not omnipotent, and yet — Almighty God.

Channing said of the system of faith of the generations who built this church, "We have embraced this system not hastily or lightly, but after much deliberation; and we hold it fast not merely because we believe it to be true, but because we regard it as purifying truth . . . able to 'work mightily' and to 'bring forth fruit' in them who believe."

May it be said of us, their heirs: The faith we hold fast has also been able to work mightily and to bring forth fruit in us who believe. Amen.

THEOLOGICAL DIRECTIONS OF UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM FOR THE NEXT 25 YEARS

DAVID B. PARKE

Through the years my UU faith has sustained me in numerous moments of pain and loss. I have been consoled by our dissenting tradition of courage and sacrifice. I have been inspired by the spiritual vision of preachers, poets, and mystics who cherished freedom. I have taken strength from forebears and contemporaries who put defeat behind them and won new victories of the spirit.

I SPEAK as a historian, not as a theologian. Yet I am a historian who loves theology, who thinks theologically, and who at every opportunity invites friends and colleagues to engage in theological work. We are doing theological work tonight. I hope you enjoy it.

My presentation has three parts.

In Part I, I offer a definition of theology and invite you to consider several theological problems drawn from our recent history.

Having engaged you in theological dialogue, I will discuss in Part II the historical development of Unitarian Universalist theology in the twentieth century.

In Part III I will propose theological directions of Unitarian Universalism for the next 25 years.

We begin with Part I. The three problems I present for discussion are the sacred and the secular, the status of evil, and the structure of faith.

I

By theology I mean life in depth. Theology invites us into the depths of whatever question, task, or relationship we are involved in. Without depth, or at least openness to depth, there is no theological engagement or promise. In the depths, conversely, everything is theological.

At times we choose life in depth. At other times it is forced upon us by adversity. Illness, conflict, rejection, the prospect of death — these draw us into depth, often against our will. The poor, the homeless, victims of famine and

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David B. Parke is a Unitarian Universalist minister, teacher, author, and editor. This essay was delivered as the 1988 Eugene Pickett Lecture at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta, Georgia. Reprinted from Vol. 44: 3–4 (Fall/Winter, 1989).

war, of accident and torture. know depth. They are involved theologically, whatever language they speak, whatever landscape they survey.

In contrast to depth there is life spent on the surface of things, the culture of commercial television and cocktail parties. To choose depth is, in the words of Teilhard de Chardin, to "plunge into God." One feels better, but there are risks. One may be thought a bore, a party-pooper, or a nerd if one persists in raising questions of depth. What are you reading? What idea has taken hold of you recently? What principle underlies this policy, this program? Questions like these move us from the surface of things to the depths. They are not theological questions, but they press toward other questions that are theological. They create space in the mind for what is important.

Theological inquiry takes the form of a question, a problem, an issue. Something is unsettled. Something is being decided. Something is happening. One is involved. If you want to be theologically active and don't know how, just ask a question. It doesn't matter what question you ask, because one question leads to another and soon you find yourself in the depths of theological reflection and dialogue.

Try it.

The sacred and the secular. The Humanist Manifesto of 1933 contains the statement, "The distinction between the sacred and the secular can no longer be maintained."

Affirming that "the complete realization of human personality [is] the end of man's life" and that "nothing human is alien to the religious," the religious humanists deny the existence of an independent realm of the sacred, electing to subsume the realities traditionally regarded as sacred into the natural order. "The nature of the universe depicted by modern science," they argue, "makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values." Holding "an organic view of life," humanists abandon the traditional dualism of sacred and secular, also of mind and body.

The humanists are not, however, contemptuous of the religious impulse. "Through all changes," they write, "religion . . . remains constant in its quest for abiding values, an inseparable feature of human life."

Is the distinction between the sacred and the secular useful today? I hold that it is. I acknowledge the force of the humanist argument that traditional dualisms obscure rather than clarify emerging truth — you and I both know that few complex questions can be answered today by simple polarities. I acknowledge also that all religions are obliged to come to terms with "new conditions created by a vastly increased knowledge and experience;" it is the challenge of new knowledge and experience that brings us together on occasions such as this. But my experience tells me that the sacred and the secular are different orders of existence and should be differentiated as such.

The humanist proposal to obliterate the distinction between the sacred and the secular would require that one realm be collapsed into the other. To collapse the sacred into the secular is to abandon the search for, and the celebration of, the holy, the numinous, the divine. It is to depreciate the mystery at the core of being, whether fearful or nourishing. It is to subordinate the larger realities, the sense of splendor, wonder, sovereignty, and inexhaustible power to finite human categories.

To collapse the secular into the sacred is, I hasten to add, equally misguided. If everything is sacred, the power to differentiate things different from each other is lost. If everything is infinite, the demand to acknowledge and the freedom to transcend our finitude is compromised. If the antinomies of historical existence are so readily brought to resolution, it is no wonder that most Unitarian Universalists would, according to a current shibboleth, spurn a road marked Heaven in favor of a road marked A Discussion of Heaven.

The end in view, I gather, is to secure the freedom of the spirit without subverting the unity of the world. So I ask, is this accomplished, as the humanists propose, by abandoning the distinction between the sacred and the secular? I invite your thoughts.

To overcome all evil. In 1935, two years after publication of the Humanist Manifesto, the Universalist General Convention (which, five years later, would rename itself the Universalist Church of America), meeting in Washington, D.C., adopted a new bond of fellowship, the first such since 1899. Known as the Washington Declaration, or avowal of faith, it served until the merger of the Universalist and Unitarian bodies into the Unitarian Universalist Association in 1961.

The text of the declaration reads as follows: "We avow our faith in God as eternal and all-conquering love, in the spiritual leadership of Jesus, in the supreme worth of every human personality, in the authority of truth known or to be known, and in the power of men of good-will and sacrificial spirit to overcome all evil and progressively establish the kingdom of God."

The most interesting clause in the statement is, "We avow our faith in . . . the power of men [today we add: and women] of good-will and sacrificial spirit to overcome all evil . . . " The most interesting word in this clause is "all."

Did the Universalists in Washington really believe that human effort could eliminate all evil from the world? I doubt that they did. (Incidentally the Washington Declaration was adopted without dissent.) It is likely that this wording was chosen to rectify several points of vulnerability in the Universalist message. Traditional Universalism promised universal salvation, the restoration of all souls with God, by an act of God to individual persons at the end of history. By this new language the denomination transferred the power to overcome evil from God to humankind, shifted the moment of decision from the future to the present, and expanded the arena of ethical activity beyond the individual believer to the people of God.

The phrase "to overcome all evil" plucked the strings of the old-time Universalists who regarded their faith as a warrant of salvation, and at the same time invoked the principle of social solidarity that inspired the utopian reformers, the labor movement, the social gospel, the Wilsonian coalition, and the New Deal. The phrase "the authority of truth known or to be known," it may also be noted, effectively swept away the biblical premise of traditional

Universalism and replaced it with the scientific method and humanistic scholarship.

The problem of evil has haunted and continues to haunt Unitarian Universalists. Affirming the goodness of God, as did traditional Universalists, and the virtuousness of human nature, as did traditional Unitarians, the people of the two denominations, later united, could pretend that the problem did not exist at all. The middle and upper class status of most Unitarians and Universalists reinforced the illusion. Economically comfortable, or at least not poor, they could avert their eyes from the underclass and act as if everyone was as healthy and secure as they themselves were. The concept of evil postulates a flaw, a brokenness at the core of being. Religious liberals tend to deny the existence of such a flaw. They extrapolate from the culture of books, music, private schools, genteel friends, and European travel, from the traditions of Channing and Emerson, to a world in which, barring the death of a child by stillbirth, accident, or war, the flaw is functionally cancelled by disuse.

So I ask, is it, as the Universalists in 1935 asserted, within the power of men and women of good-will to overcome all evil and progressively establish the kingdom of God? I invite your thoughts.

A faith for the free. In 1946 a Unitarian theologian at the University of Chicago ventured to articulate a faith for the free. What, he asked, can or should men and women of liberal religious persuasion have faith in? Coming on the heels of the Humanist Manifesto and the Washington Declaration, and addressing the concerns of a nation as well as a denomination in the first months of the tense peace that followed the Second World War, the question could not have been more timely.

"Our ultimate dependence for being and freedom," this author writes, "is upon a creative power and upon processes not of our own making." What is this creative power, we ask. The author answers, "God (or that in which we have faith) is the inescapable, commanding reality that sustains and transforms all meaningful existence." What is it that religious liberals can have faith in? It is — mark the words — a creative, inescapable, commanding, sustaining, transforming power, a power of which it may be said that "no one can live without somehow coming to terms with it."

Is this all, you ask. Is there more? There is more. The power in which we are to have faith is a justice-seeking power that ever presses beyond its own attainments to a new kind of community that provides new expressions of freedom and new channels for love. It is a community-forming power that "inspires persons to give of their time and energy to shape the various institutions — social, economic, and political — of the common life." Faith in this power is a faith that shapes history through participation in institutions for, the author says, "the decisive forms of goodness in society are institutional forms."

It is, finally, a judging power that exposes idolatry and hypocrisy and stands against indignity and arbitrariness, even as it manifests "the forgiving, redemptive power of God, a power every person may know and experience whether or not one uses these words to describe it."

What may we have faith in? An answer is given. We are to place our faith in a creative, inescapable, commanding, sustaining, transforming, justice-seeking, community-forming, judging, forgiving, redemptive power. "Our ultimate faith," the author writes, "is not in ourselves." It is in a power, a reality beyond time and history that yet intervenes in time and history as justice and mercy and love. "So the procession of the gods passes over the stage of our world," the author writes. "Human history is not the struggle between religion and irreligion; it is veritably a battle of faiths; a battle of the gods who claim human allegiance. . . . The differences among people do not lie in the fact that some have faith and others do not. *They lie only in a difference of faith.*"

So I ask, what do you have faith in?

II

The development of Unitarian Universalist theology — or, we might say, the varied expressions of Unitarian Universalist theological concern — is a history waiting to be written.

"Lyrical theism" is the label Samuel A. Eliot, president of the American Unitarian Association, gave to the mainstream religious values of Unitarians at the turn of the century. This liberal Christian outlook incorporated Emersonian optimism, the belief in inevitable progress spawned by Darwin's theory of evolution, and the sturdy individualism of the Unitarian movement in the Midwest as embodied in the person of its foremost missionary, the Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones.

This turn-of-the-century doctrine of human possibility achieved institutional form, both within the liberal churches and in the larger culture, in such movements as the social gospel, progressive education, and international organizations such as the International Association for Religious Freedom. If a unitive term of description for these disparate impulses is sought, the word "modernism" comes to mind. Scions of Whitman rather than of Hawthorne, the Unitarians regarded themselves as the enlightened vanguard of civilization, open to every new discovery of science, liberated from binding orthodoxy, readied by nature and by nurture to embrace the fathomless future unafraid. (I shall discuss the development since 1900 of the liberal Christian consensus later in this section.)

The first major departure from the liberal Christian consensus came in the movement of religious humanism. Humanism affirmed the self-sufficiency of humankind. Against a benign theism it asserted the solitary grandeur of the human experiment in an uncaring universe. Ironically American religious humanism found its voice in the midst of the First World War, the graveyard of Western civilization. Ironically, too, the humanist claim to the immanence of God, that is, the location of the holy entirely within the human world, occurred simultaneously with the claim by Karl Barth, a young Swiss pastor and theologian, of the radical transcendence of God — the location of the holy in the God-man Jesus Christ. In these two viewpoints, the humanist and the neo-orthodox, we glimpse the extreme polarities of religious faith in a Western Christian context in the twentieth century.

A second major departure from the liberal Christian consensus came at mid-century in the rapprochement of theology and the sciences. Prompted by Harlow Shapley, the Harvard astronomer, and Edwin Prince Booth, a church historian at Boston University, the movement organized around the concept of dialogue between physical scientists and persons of faith. Initially at summer institutes on Religion in an Age of Science on Star Island in New Hampshire, later in the work of Commission II of the study commissions on the Free Church in a Changing World, and finally in the department of theology and the sciences at the Meadville/Lombard Theological School in Chicago, the mutual stimulus of the sciences and theology was explored. At length, in response to the work of Ralph Wendell Burhoe, the movement's most persistent and original thinker, the primacy of the sciences and its corollary, the notion of theology derived from the sciences, became the movement's guiding principles. Although never a broad-based or popular movement, this effort to probe the effects of the scientific revolutions on religious ideas and institutions, and vice versa, was an important chapter in the formation of Unitarian Universalist theology in our era.

A third major departure from the liberal Christian consensus is the shift from a local to a global context of faith. In contrast to religious humanism and the rapprochement of theology and the sciences, this shift is the result of a transition in thought, one might say a relocation of intellectual loyalty, rather than of an organized movement per se. The awareness of, interest in, and commitment to the emergence of a new international society is one of the great facts of modern history. The publication of James Freeman Clarke's "Ten Great Religions" in 1871 signaled an openness to communities of faith other than Judaism and Christianity. The convening in Chicago of the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893 advanced the cause of world community, as did the establishment, already mentioned, of the International Association for Religious Freedom in Boston in 1900. The greatest impetus to global consciousness was, however, the all-but-universal demand during the Second World War for institutional structures to maintain the peace at war's end, a demand made in poignant recognition of the failure of the League of Nations either to maintain the peace following the First World War or to avert the rise of fascism in Germany, Italy, Spain, and Japan.

The global impulse in the liberal churches was a shift away from explicitly Christian symbols, rites, and thought forms toward other faiths, peoples, and struggles. A leading contributor to this theological reorientation was John Haynes Holmes of New York who in the years following the Armistice reconstituted the Unitarian Church of the Messiah as the Community Church of New York, proclaimed Gandhi the greatest man in the world, and in a bold act of syncretism assimilated the festivals of the world's major religions into the church's liturgical year. A later advocate of the global context of faith was Kenneth L. Patton, minister successively in Madison, WI, Boston, MA (the Charles Street Meetinghouse), and Ridgewood, NJ. Patton's poems and devotional writings, many of them incorporated into what we know as the blue hymnal as hymn texts and readings, pressed the denomination beyond traditional religious symbols to world myths and beyond traditional sources of religious authority to an uncompromising humanism. The global basis of religious truth found an advocate also in Sophia Lyon Fahs, the leading liberal religious educator of her time. Although as the daughter of Presbyterian missionaries in China she retained traditional biblical language and thought forms in her books for children, she moved in later years toward a larger framework of experience as embodied for example in her book of world stories, "From Long Ago and Many Lands" (1948).

I have mentioned three major departures from the liberal Christian consensus of faith: religious humanism, the rapprochement of theology and the sciences, and the shift from a local to a global context of faith. There were other departures of comparable magnitude, but space does not permit us to consider them here.

I have referred to the liberal Christian consensus as a continuum from which other impulses of thought diverged. I do not wish to give the impression that liberal Christianity was a fixed and immutable doctrine. Unitarianism and Universalism being non-creedal faiths, it may be said that there were as many varieties of liberal Christianity as there were liberal Christians. The liberal Christian faith took form in response to a number of thinkers, events, and movements, only a few of which can be mentioned here.

As has been mentioned, the evolutionary postulate of Charles Darwin, reinforced by the writings of Herbert Spencer, Thomas Huxley, and John Fiske, among others, was the ruling idea of liberal Christianity at the turn of the century. Of the relation of science and religion, "it is obvious that this is no longer a live question for our ministers," Samuel A. Eliot, president of the Unitarian association, wrote in 1902. "The results of scientific inquiry and the principles of scientific method have been absolutely accepted, and found to conform to the postulates of pure Christianity."

A thinker whose stature equalled that of Darwin and whose influence on liberal Christianity may be compared to that of the great biologist was Alfred North Whitehead. Whitehead's great idea, articulated in his writings on mathematics, science, and latterly metaphysics, was that God is integral to the world and grows with the world as the world grows in relation to God. He argued that God is not static, but changeable. This was a revolutionary idea in theology, although a familiar idea in the history of philosophy going back to the teachings of Heraclitus. The concept of a changeable God, which Whitehead labeled a philosophy of organism, attracted wide interest in the churches, becoming a kind of philosophic talisman for religious liberals who wished to retain the idea of God in the face of challenges such as Huxley's atheism, but whose intellectual commitments included the idea of development. Whitehead's teaching was congruent with and gave point to the teachings of a host of thinkers including for example Henri Bergson, Wilhelm Dilthey, Henry Maine, and John Henry Newman.

Whitehead's concept of "event," which he defined as the "true unity" of the "primary concrete element discriminated in nature" ("The Concept of Nature," Cambridge: At the University Press, 1920, p. 75), became the fulcrum of a distinctive school of thought known as process philosophy, later as process theology. This project of thought, articulated after Whitehead by such thinkers as Charles Hartshorne, Bernard Loomer, John Cobb, Schubert Ogden, Penelope Washbourne, and J. Brenton Stearns, has become perhaps the most representative theological position in contemporary Unitarian Universalism, fully congruent with liberal Christianity yet not limited to its doctrinal postulates.

The event which most powerfully shaped liberal Christianity in the twentieth century was undoubtedly the Holocaust. The horror of the Final Solution, with its vision of a purged and repristinated Europe, took root in the diseased mind of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists. The Nazi program called forth the Confessing Christian protest against the German Christian appeasers of Hitler, a protest spelled out in the Barmen Declaration of May, 1934, but it was too late. The Nazi poison was spreading throughout Germany and Europe. When the structures of collective security in Europe collapsed at Munich in September, 1938, in France and England's surrender to Hitler's decision to absorb Czechoslovakia into the Third Reich, the policy of genocide was extended throughout Nazi Europe and another world war was assured.

The Nazi Holocaust — one is mindful that the word holocaust applies with equal justice to the Turkish massacre in Armenia in 1915 and to the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia in 1975 under Pol Pot — the destruction of the European Jews changed the trajectory of world history. It deprived the human community of a generation of women, men, and children. It made visible anew the cruelty of tyrants. It eclipsed the God of the Hebrew scriptures, of the Psalms and Isaiah and Hosea, giving bitter irony to the latter's pledge, "Israel, . . . I will be true and faithful; I will show you constant love and mercy and make you mine forever. I will keep my promise and make you mine, and you will acknowledge me as God" (Hosea 2:19–20, "Good News Bible," adapted).

The Holocaust also challenged the sensibilities of Christians. Because of his opposition to the Nazi regime, the German philosophical theologian Paul Tillich was in 1933 dismissed from his post as professor of philosophy at the University of Frankfurt. Accepting an invitation to teach at the Union Theological Seminary in New York, he started a new life in the United States. Tillich's theological program incorporated in his essays, sermons, and books, including the three-volume "Systematic Theology," is arguably the most trenchant analysis of the human condition produced by a Christian theologian in the twentieth century. It grew directly out of events in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s of which the Holocaust was the most extreme and terrible.

Three of Tillich's primary formulations address the catastrophic events of the German experience. The first, the Protestant principle, pronounces "the divine and human protest against any absolute claim made for a relative reality" ("The Protestant Era," translated by James Luther Adams, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948).

A second formulation is that of autonomy, the law of self, in relation to heteronomy, the law of the other (the non-self, the oppressor), and to theonomy, the law of God. Autonomy in Tillich's typology is the inner, rational principle; heteronomy is the alien, destructive principle; and theonomy is the unitive, sanctifying principle. In a theonomous situation God is held to be everywhere; in Tillich's words, "the consciousness of the presence of the unconditional permeates and guides all cultural functions and forms."

A third formulation is that kairos, a term which has become synonomous with the radical Protestant resistance to Hitler. The word, taken from the Greek, means the right time, the opportune moment, the fulfilled occasion, as in, for example, the moment of harvest or the hour when the messiah is to come. Chronos in Greek refers to worldly, linear time, kairos to sacred, decisive time. Tillich in his 1922 essay of the same title defines kairos as the "turning-point in history in which the eternal judges and transforms the temporal."

I set forth these principles in order to argue first that the Holocaust and attendant events in the German experience decisively shaped liberal Christian thought. I mention them also to indicate their relevance to the travail of the German people and, in what Tillich called the "permanent crisis" of history, our own historical passage. The Protestant principle, articulated in 1931, calls us to invoke divine judgment against Hitler's act of self-deification, his exercise of absolute power against the democratic aspirations of the German people, and the Nazi program of the extermination of the Jews. The typology of autonomy/heteronomy/theonomy, articulated in 1922, calls us to affirm the just longings of the German people for individuality, order, and peace (autonomy), to condemn the denial of fundamental rights to the Jews and other minorities (heteronomy), and to join in the Confessing Christian proclamation of the sovereignty of God — or some other transhistorical principle of justice — against the arrogance and cynicism of the German Christians who permitted Hitler to substitute himself for Jesus Christ and to substitute the Nazi party for Christ's church (theonomy). The principle of kairos, also articulated in 1922, invites us to see God, the unconditional, truth, the dignity of the moral personality, creative freedom, and, in Tillich's phrase, "the humanity of man" not in the appearance of Hitler and his minions but in the appearing of Jesus Christ and his disciples and his church; to see the fulfillment of history not in the triumph of Nazism but in resistance to Nazism; to see the true church not in the deification of the state or in the Nazi claim to hegemony over Christian faith, worship, and ministry but in the Confessing Christian proclamation at Barmen, already cited, that "Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death."

In asserting the Holocaust to be the event which most powerfully shaped liberal Christianity and liberal Christian theology in the twentieth century, and in naming Paul Tillich as a primary theological interpreter of this event, I have prepared the ground for mention of the individual who is all-but-universally acknowledged to be the leading North American Unitarian Universalist theologian of this century, James Luther Adams. You will appreciate how much restraint I have exercised to defer mention of Dr. Adams by name to this point in my presentation. It would have been easy to devote the entire lecture to Adams' life and thought. I have chosen the more disciplined path of delineating thinkers, events, and movements, letting the emergent ideas tell their own story, as it were.

Born in the state of Washington in the first year of the century, nurtured in a strict evangelical Christian household, Adams abandoned Christianity during undergraduate studies at the University of Minnesota, then re-embraced the Christian faith during theological studies at Harvard. His curiosity, quickness of mind, commitment to scholarship, and natural charm brought him into contact with a wide and deep humanistic culture that included J. S. Bach, Irving Babbitt, Whitehead, T. S. Eliot, and the minister of the First Parish in Cambridge, the Rev. Samuel McChord Crothers. It was at Adams' service of ordination and installation at the Second Church, Unitarian, in Salem, MA, in 1927 that Crothers spoke the words that catch the spirit of Adams' entire career. "Every personal problem is a social problem," he said, "and every social problem is a personal problem."

Every Unitarian Universalist knows that it was the social, economic, and political dimensions of faith, the institutional implications of religious belief, that were to engage Adams for the rest of his life. The young minister's experiences in Germany in 1927 and in 1935–6 alerted him to the dangers of unrestrained power. The presence of both the demonic and the divine in the travail of the European Jews, as witnessed by Adams at first hand and as interpreted by Tillich, Karl Barth, and other continental theologians, became for him a paradigm of history. In 1981 he wrote of the Holocaust, "if every trace of mutuality is lost, then existence itself disappears." In the same article he described racism and demonic nationalism as "darkness visible." Those familiar with Adams' work will recognize him as the Chicago theologian whose description of God as the commanding, sustaining, transforming reality we discussed earlier. You will also recognize the explicit biblical basis of his life and thought.

Happily Adams continues to dwell among us at the age of 86, studying, writing, preaching, conversing, counseling, instructing, worshiping, laughing, and admonishing. Two months ago he preached at the service of installation of my wife and colleague, the Rev. Marta Morris Flanagan, at the First Universalist Society of Salem, a few hundred yards from the church at which he was ordained and installed six decades ago.

Having named liberal Christianity as the normative faith of religious liberals at the turn of the century, identified humanism, theology and the sciences, and the globalization of faith as departures from this consensus, indicated the influence of certain thinkers, notably Darwin and Whitehead, on liberal Christian thought, and pointed to a single event, the Holocaust, as determinative for theological inquiry, most crucially in the work of Tillich and Adams, I want now to mention three movements that have, in addition to the above, significantly affected the course of liberal Christian thought. It will be seen that all three continue to influence the theological priorities of Unitarian Universalists.

Existentialist ideas, including those of Dostoyevski, Nietzsche, and Camus, served in the 1950s as a corrective to what Adams has called "the swe~~a~~t gloss of e old-fashioned liberal religion." Irrational violence, surrealist visions in art and literature, and the culture of madness and death struck many religious liberals, including the person who stands before you, as a welcome corrective to the late-19th century doctrine of "the progress of mankind onward and upward forever." The permanent legacy of existentialism in liberal Christian theology includes a certain toughness of analysis and speech, impatience with unsupported generalizations, skepticism toward locating the holy, and an openness to the demonic as a category of personal and historical experience.

During the 1960s the movement of black self-determination rattled the cage of Unitarian Universalist institutions and exposed religious liberals, many for the first time, to the values and rhetoric of militant blacks — and at a deeper level to the diminishment and rage in which all black people, including black Unitarian Universalists, live their lives. In the face of the black demand for self-determination, a demand realized in the establishment of the Black Unitarian Universalist Caucus in 1967, the policy of integration as a strategy for achieving racial justice was exposed as a white palliative. The consequences of this action included the creation of a biracial Black Affairs Council, the vote at Cleveland in 1968 to fund the Council's work for a period of four years, and the abandonment of this commitment when denominational resources proved inadequate to the task. The virtual disappearance of militant blacks from the denomination after the schism in the Black Caucus has made it difficult to assess the impact of black militancy and of the white response on the development of Unitarian Universalist institutions and ideas.

Feminist experience and feminist thought has, along with existentialism and black power, shaped the theological agenda of religious liberals. The rejection by an increasing number of women of patriarchal, hierarchic, and traditional thought forms, in women's self-concept, in the marketplace, and in worship, has had explosive consequences in human relationships — among women and between women and men — and in the nation's political and economic priorities. In spite of the failure of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1982, the number of women in elective public office and in corporate life has increased dramatically in the past decade. The Unitarian Universalist Association is the leading North American denomination in the proportion of women clergy. Not only women but also men are more conscious than ever before of the rights and expectations of women in governance, opinion formation, and language. It is clear that the women's movement has permanently changed the strategic equation, the terms of discourse, and the gender of the players, alike in the church and in the culture today.

III

Having looked at three problems in theology — the sacred and the secular, the status of evil, and the structure of faith — and having traced the development of Unitarian Universalist theology in the twentieth century, we turn to future directions.

A viable theological concern among Unitarian Universalists will, I hold, embody, or at least be mindful of, certain principles of faith. Here is my agenda.

Our concern is biblical. While cherishing the freedom of the spirit above all freedoms, we ground our concern in the account of the drama of creation, alienation, and reconciliation found in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, assured that in the sacred record of the history of Israel, the history of Jesus as the Christ, and the history of the early church our freedom is secured, our faith is made whole.

Our concern takes account of the life, ministry, teaching, death, and victory of Jesus as the Christ. While welcoming insight from all of the world's teachers and prophets, we see in Jesus a supreme exemplar — some religious liberals say *the* supreme exemplar — of messianic power, the living out in history of the statutes and commandments given by Goddess/God in the creation and in the covenants with Israel, the establishment by personal authority, free in obedience to the eternal counsels of righteousness and mercy, of the community of justice, and the healing of persons in whatever kind and degree of brokenness by the quickening and consoling presence of the Holy Spirit.

Our concern begins and ends in direct personal experience. While valuing the insights of others, we give highest priority to what we ourselves have seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled and to the gifts of the spirit received through powers not our own. While cherishing the testimony of others we demand an original engagement with the world and we are impatient with lifeless truth and borrowed authority.

Our concern impels us to seek out the most vulnerable among us as the object of our solicitude and to stand with that person/those persons. In the family we will seek out and stand with the newborn, the young, the afflicted, persons with disabilities, the dying. In our society we will seek out and stand with the poor, the oppressed, the hungry, the forgotten, the despised. It is precisely those who are rendered marginal, whether by private prejudice, public neglect, or structural inequality that theology is to name and the church is to succor. We may not, we recognize, always give high priority to protecting and healing the most vulnerable among us, either in our personal actions or in the public policies we assent to, but our theology is to be framed in mindfulness of these. We recognize also that, at times, the most vulnerable person I know is myself.

Our concern is devotional, cherishing the inner world of mystery and miracle, of silent pain and unrequited longing, of hidden fears and secret consolations, as an expression of the Word of God. The purpose of worship is, we affirm, to make contact with this world in word and song and silent aspiration, and to celebrate this world as, in Karl Barth's phrase, a theater of glory.

Our concern is political also, cherishing the public world of law and right, of contest and decision, of caucus and debate and ballot-box as an expression of the Word of God. As our devotion finds its center in mystery, so our politics finds its center in power. As the characteristic action of devotion is submission, so the characteristic action of politics is persuasion. As our devotion achieves form in sacraments — prayer and preaching and the sharing of gifts — so our politics achieves form in institutions — the church, the state, the voluntary association. I use the term political to refer to the common life of shared decisions in contrast to the solitary life of private decisions. I do not mean to imply that theology is politics or that the life of faith consists only of tactics and strategy. I do mean to imply that a faith that embraces only the inner world is a truncated and ineffective faith. James Luther Adams said it as well as anyone. "Freedom requires a body as well as a spirit . . . a purely spiritual religion is a purely spurious religion."

Our concern is dialogic and dialectical. It seeks to bring diverse persons and disciplines into fruitful contact with each other, and assumes that each can learn from every other. Inasmuch as every answer to a question constitutes a new question, the inquiry on which we are embarked is open-ended and no answer can be regarded as final.

Our concern includes the laity in equal partnership with the clergy, women in equal partnership with men, the young in equal partnership with those of mature years. Fully valuing the critical and constructive reflection and research of theological scholars working in colleges and universities and theological schools, we look also to the laity, whatever their condition and calling, to bring their insight to bear on the questions before the church. I am happy to report that an increasing proportion of theological scholars active in the denomination are laymen and laywomen, surely a welcome change from the clergy-dominated theological discourse of an earlier period of history. The goal is an informed people in active dialogue on ultimate questions. The goal is a struggle that is worth the struggle.

Now I recognize that not all of these emphases will be congenial to every one. The emphasis on biblical models, on the figure of Jesus, and on the political nature of our faith may, I acknowledge, be a stumbling block for some. I hope that taken together these proposals constitute a useful theological program for religious liberals in the next quarter century.

There are three theological priorities on which I wish to focus in conclusion.

The first is faith. Through the years my Unitarian Universalist faith has sustained me in numerous moments of pain and loss. I have been consoled by our dissenting tradition of courage and sacrifice. I have been inspired by the spiritual vision of preachers, poets, and mystics who cherished freedom as the highest principle of earth. I have taken strength from forebears and contemporaries who put defeat behind them and, empowered by struggle, won new victories of the spirit.

Faith is making a comeback among Unitarian Universalists. Many religious liberals, I observe, have regarded faith as an element of their orthodox past, an anachronism to be left behind in their transition to a freer approach to religion. For such persons faith is a symbol of bondage, not of liberation.

In recent years, however, increasing numbers of men and women have come to our congregations not from orthodoxy but from secularism. For these persons faith is something to be embraced, not something to be relinquished. A robust, textured, life-giving religious faith is what these persons are looking for, and they are finding it in Unitarian Universalist churches and fellowships.

Thus understood faith is especially important to our children. I want my sons and daughters to be glad they are Unitarian Universalists precisely because they have found here, are finding here principles to sustain them in their hours of loneliness and defeat. I am not ashamed to be a person of faith. I want a denomination full of faithful men and women and children, persons who know what they believe, persons who can endure insult and rejection, persons who will take risks for what they know to be right. I want to see more faith in our congregations, not less; more courage, not less; more serious thinking, not less.

A second priority is the poor. Just as the church, in order to deserve the name, had to respond to the Holocaust a half century ago, so the church must respond at this moment in history to the poor. By one estimate, 40 per cent of the more than 700 million people in India today live in absolute poverty. This terrible truth applies to additional billions of women, men, and children in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and increasingly in North America. The perfection of technology, the globalization of technological culture, has produced not a reduction but a tremendous increase in poverty, powerlessness, and despair among the world's people. This is because the means of technological production and the profits from technological production are controlled by the few rather than the many, so the few get richer while the many become poorer, and rage and hopelessness grow and grow and grow.

What does Unitarian Universalism, what does Unitarian Universalist theology have to say about the problem of mass poverty?

Two voices from our past challenge us to respond from our depths to this overwhelming tragedy.

In the early 1960s a young pastoral theologian in Chicago, the late Carl E. Wennerstrom, developed a theory of pastoral care in the liberal churches in connection with doctoral studies at the University of Chicago. On the basis of interviews with ministers, theological students, and members of the laity, and drawing on his own analytical and intuitive powers, Wennerstrom concluded that many liberal ministers had an aversion to what we today call hands-on ministry to the needy. "I am tempted," he wrote, "to say that the [religious] liberal wants to have a kind of prophet's relationship to people in need," that is, a dramatic, public, even heroic role in the lives of the disadvantaged. "Our standard liberal, I believe," — he includes the laity on the same plane with the clergy — "feels most at home when there is a safe distance between him and the actual sufferings of particular people" ("Pastoral Care in the Liberal Churches" edited by James Luther Adams and Seward Hiltner, Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1970, pp. 34, 37).

Earlier in the century an anonymous critic of Unitarianism, writing in the *Christian Register*, pointed out a flaw in religious liberalism's approach to the poor. Unitarianism, he wrote, "seems to lift at the top and not at the bottom. By this I mean that it may be able to make good men better, while it seems to have little power to make bad men good. If the world is to be redeemed, it must be by a power which seeks and saves the lost, the lowest. Jesus lifted from the bottom."

If these criticisms are correct, and I believe they are, religious liberals, ministers and laity alike, need to break out of their class-bound isolation from the poor and to reach out in solidarity and succor to those whom fate has made, in the words of Jeremiah, the "offscouring and refuse" of the world (Lamentations 3:45 RSV). If our theological concern accomplishes only this in the next 25 years, and nothing else, it will be enough. Alas the poor cannot wait so long.

A third priority is world theology. You and I are witnesses to, and potentially participants in, the moment when the world's religions, for centuries and millenia isolated from and antagonistic toward each other, reach out and touch one another as embodiments of a common human tradition and instruments of a common human vision. It is difficult, given the murderous conflicts of religion in Ireland, the Middle East, South Africa, Cyprus, India, Sri Lanka and elsewhere, to imagine that the lion will at last lie down with the lamb, that Catholics and Protestants, Jews and Muslims, Muslims and Hindus will end their strife and embrace as sisters and brothers. Yet it is possible.

A historian of religion, Dr. Wilfred Cantwell Smith of Harvard University's Center for the Study of World Religions, has proposed that the world's major faiths have more in common than they have hitherto acknowledged, and that by entering into theological dialogue in a new spirit of openness and reciprocity they might achieve a world-historical convergence of faith.

Dr. Cantwell Smith argues that faith is personal and idiomatic, not formal and remote. All knowledge is self-knowledge, he writes ("Towards a World Theology," Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981, p. 111). "The faith of Buddhists does not lie in the data of the Buddhist tradition," he writes. "[I]t lies in the human heart; is what that tradition means to people; is what the universe means to them, in the light of that tradition" (47).

For Cantwell Smith the context of faith is expanding from tribe and city to the globe itself. He foresees the day when each individual and each religious group will regard itself as a participant in the religious history of humankind through a cognitive act to which he gives the term "corporate critical self-consciousness" (59). "I choose," he writes, "to participate as a Christian in the world process of religious covergence. For, ultimately, the only community there is, the one to which I know that I truly belong, is the community, world-wide and history-long, of humankind" (44).

Cantwell Smith lays down two crucial requirements for dialogue. One is that no statement can be made about another person that cannot in comparable circumstances be made about oneself (33). The other is that no statement about a group of persons is valid that cannot be accepted as valid by those persons themselves (97). These principles of verification introduce a dimension of precision and equity into interreligious dialogue that it has never had before. "No statement about Islamic faith is true that Muslims cannot accept," he writes (97). You will immediately see the revolutionary implications of the principles of verification, which are based on experimental science and not on religious discourse, utilized in this way.

We Unitarian Universalists, having renewed and deepened our faith, have the opportunity through dialogue with the world's religions to share in a global epiphany, a worldwide coming-to-oneself in the company of women and men from many cultures and communities of faith. "The study of religion is the study of . . . human lives at their most intimate, most profound, most primary, most transcendent." So writes Cantwell Smith (48). In articulating our theological concerns, as we have done together this evening, we grow in self-knowledge and at the same time prepare ourselves for full citizenship in the world community of which, by fate and by faith, we are a part.

WHY I AM A FEMINIST CHRISTIAN

SUZANNE R. SPENCER

A sermon preached at Arlington Street Church, Boston, Massachusetts, on August 8, 1982. The lessons were Mark 5:24b–34; Mark 7:24–30, and Luke 10:38–42.

IT was about six years ago that I decided that it was high time I started going to church again. Don't ask me what prompted this decision after many, many years away, for I couldn't tell you. Maybe it was the Spirit; maybe it had to do with my thirtieth birthday close at hand. All I knew was that something important seemed to be missing from my life — there was a void, and intuition told me a church might fill it.

But which church? I remembered Arlington Church from the late sixties. I had been new to Boston then, fresh out of college, involved in the anti-war movement. ASC's social activism had attracted me. And so, in one of my brief flirtations with religion, I had come to services here. I had even gone so far, in 1968, as to sign the membership book. But, as with all of my flirtations with religion during that time, this one didn't last very long. I had drifted away and had not been to any church for a long, long time. When I walked through those big double doors of ASC one bright October morning in 1976, I had been gone for over seven years.

Victor Carpenter had just become ASC's new minister. That Sunday, he preached from the high pulpit, a powerful and moving sermon, much of it based on personal experience, about South Africa. I was enthralled. But suddenly, toward the end of the sermon, Victor shifted gears. He mentioned the Christian Century's "How My Mind Has Changed" series, and then said, "My mind has changed, too. Because of the suffering that I have seen, I have decided that I am a Christian."

My heart sank. "Oh, dear," I thought. "What has become of the Arlington Street Church?" I looked nervously around — was I in the right place? Had it not been near the end of the service, I probably would have headed for the door. For I was definitely NOT a Christian. I had decided *that*, after all, during my junior year of high school, when I decided that I was being asked to believe things I could not believe, when I decided that any God who sent human beings to hell just because they weren't Christians was not a God that I wanted to have any dealings with, and when I decided that all the interesting people were probably going to hell anyway, so why didn't I go, too? And so, on that Sunday morning in 1976, when the minister of the Arlington Street Church announced that he was a Christian, I was in a quandary. "Do I really belong here?" I wondered. "On the other hand," I thought, "where else can I go?"

Suzanne Spencer is a Unitarian Universalist Minister in Utah. Reprinted from Vol. 37: 3–4 (Fall/Winter, 1982).

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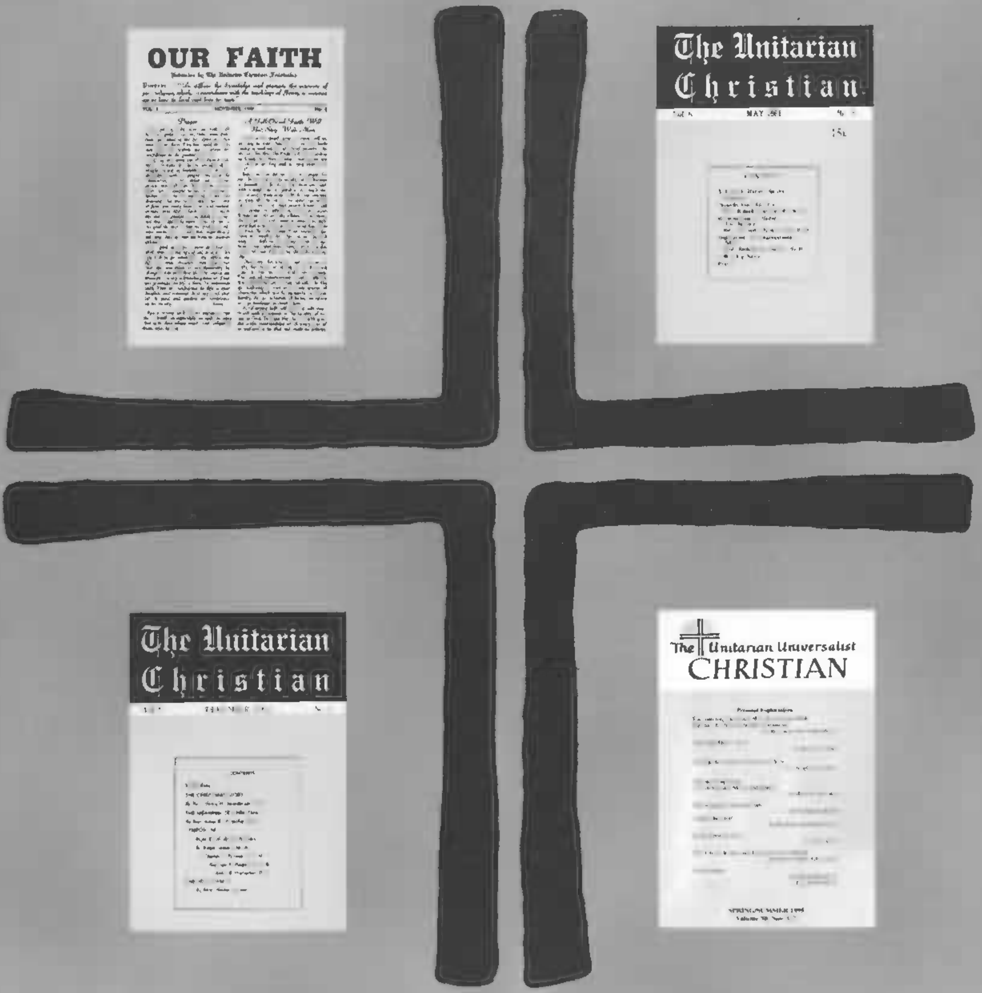
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