

**Executive Summary of “Used to Be UU”, by Frank Casper
September 16, 2023 by Frank Casper**

What follows is the result of a request I'd had from one of our members some time ago. He said that while he enjoyed reading our book, it was nonetheless long and could have greatly benefitted from an executive summary. It was not the first time I received comments from those who found the book difficult. Hopefully, some will find this piece useful.

Why the Book was Written

The main impetus for writing this book was, and still is for the most part, the realization that there is no way for average Unitarian Universalists to communicate with one another. All the levers of power are controlled by the UUA. The avenue of communication goes from the UUA to the local congregations and back. There is no way for congregations to communicate among or between themselves unless they deliberately establish it. This includes social media, which could be used in such a manner, but has yet to occur to local congregations. By “avenue of inter-congregational communication” we mean the ability to broadcast messages that reach not just the email addresses of congregations, but the independent members of congregations as well. Because there is no such facility, UU's are isolated from one another, able to hear only what comes from official UUA channels. We were confronted with this reality when trying to announce the formation of the Fifth Principle Project, an organization devoted to resurrecting a commitment to the democratic process within UUism, particularly at the level of the UUA, a central tenant of Unitarian Universalism practically from the inception of the faith. We ended up gleaning the email addresses of UU congregations from the list available from the UUA, a labor-intensive enterprise from a list that is not well maintained to start with. Our mass email was then at the mercy of whomever received our message. The open rate was a little less than half, so at least half the congregations failed to open our email at all. Those that did often refused or just failed to send the message on to their members. We have been counting on word of mouth ever since. Hence, the book.

What Happened

The sudden realization of the extent to which faith in democracy had atrophied within the UUA began with the wildly inappropriate and wholly unprofessional response of the UUA and UUMA to the publication of one small book, “The Gadfly Papers”, by Rev. Dr. Todd Ecklof. That is the only way to describe the initial reviews found on Facebook within hours of the book being published. One would have thought in ordering the book that they were about to read the meanderings of a madman, “full of sound and fury.” That is how shrill and alarmist those first reviews from leadership were. But the reality of the book was far, far from it. For both authors, it was the stunning dissonance between the actual content of the book and the wildly over-the-top response to it that drove us to investigate the matter. What we found alarmed and dismayed us both. We are both long-time UU's, long enough to be the lifetimes of some, and neither of us had the slightest clue about what was beneath all this controversy, something that as we found out, had been brewing for quite some time, for at least a decade. In that sense, we are like the vast majority of UU's. The more we investigated, the more we felt the growing need to enter the fray and alert others. That is why we established the Fifth Principle Project. It was during the writing of the book that we realized to our utter consternation that the Unitarian Universalism as we've known it, the real core of it, our 7 Principles and 6 Sources, had been declared to be racist. More than that, the entire intellectual and liberal religious legacy of our faith for at least the past 500 years had been declared by leadership to be the source of white supremacy culture that they were now saying they were dedicated to dismantling. This is why leadership,

the UUA/UUMA and their associated groups, declared Rev. Dr. Eklof's book and himself to be racist. It was written on the basis and from the perspective of that Enlightenment legacy. It is why our book and all books like it are also declared by leadership and their supporters to be racist (see Dennis McCarty's book). Where had this come from? How did the 7 principles and 6 sources, which were born in anti-racism and the drive for greater diversity, come to be viewed as the very problem they were intended to counter? How did it happen so seemingly fast? Who or what was responsible? One day we are in the vanguard of civil rights and diversity, and the next we are being told we are oppressive white supremacists. That is something that demands an explanation, and that is what we attempted to provide with this book.

Structure

Such an explanation required that our book be structured in three distinct but related parts, History, Theology, and Governance. The History section tells the how and the who of these developments. The Theology section tries to explain why. The Governance section offers constructive alternatives to the approach of the UUA for 21st Century. It also includes the testimonies of good UU's who became victims of leadership merely for speaking their minds. Rev. Dr. Eklof is not alone in that regard. These stories are also windows into the governing structure sought by current UU leadership. The model they seek is a total reversal from the way we have governed ourselves from the start. As our book thoroughly shows using the UUA's own documents, they want to dismantle the associational model, where the purpose of the UUA is to serve the needs of our congregations, to a top-down authoritarian model where our congregations are required, under penalty of being "out of covenant", for not sufficiently conforming to the demands of the UUA.

History

At a 2-hour meeting of the UUA board on April 3rd, 2017, Unitarian Universalism as we have known it was declared to be swimming in white supremacy culture (WSC) and had to be dismantled. To that end, the board established the Commission on The COIC was charged with establishing how this declaration is true, not whether it is true. The veracity of the declaration was presented as simply axiomatic. Its report, "Widening the Circle of Concern," was issued in 2020. It is thoroughly critiqued in our book. The other outcome was a directive to persuade all UU congregations to participate in what the board called "white supremacy teach-ins." These were designed to show Unitarians that they are white supremacists. One can see an immediate problem. It is known as "putting the cart before the horse." Both efforts had the same basic intention, to show UU's how they are white supremacists. Except that the COIC report took 3 years to write. One is forced to ask how the UUA could launch teach-ins on the basis of knowledge that the COIC report was intended to provide. The only rational answer is expressed in another problem, that they assumed or insisted that facts are in evidence when they are in fact not. To this day the facts, the supportive data for the UUA's declaration that the COIC claims to have accumulated, has not been seen. All we have are fabricated avatars speaking words put into their mouths by the writers of the report.

The question pursued in the History section is how did this happen? How did the UUA decide to declare UUism as white supremacists and take immediate action to dismantle it without first seeking to ask whether such a view is even true? Our answer is that democratic safeguards within Unitarian Universalism have severely atrophied. We found this fact had been well established by the report of the [2009 Fifth Principle Task Force](#). That task force, also

commissioned by the UUA, started its work in Oct of 2007. It found that the General Assembly, the yearly event everyone points to as evidence of democracy within UUism, is broken, and badly. It has been nearly 15 years since the publication of that report and with the exception of an expanded capacity for online participation, nothing has ever been done by way of following the report's key recommendations. If anything, things have declined further still. A month after the Fifth Principle Task Force report, the UUA Board of Trustees launched an initiative to streamline the organizational district-based governing structure. Until then, the UUA Board was composed of qualified representative trustees identified and elected from the 19 district configurations of the association. However, the district model was demolished in favor of regionalization. This change alone would diminish representative democracy, principally because the district structure supplied qualified candidates for board-level positions. Afterward, all candidates for board-level positions were chosen by a nominating committee that was and largely remains appointed by the board. The upshot is an ingrown and insular process of choosing leadership that the UUA board controls.

We at the Fifth Principle Project can now see that an ideological influence operating in and organization whose democratic norms have atrophied can enable a few people to acquire control of the levers of power and make a sweeping declaration that the denomination is based on white supremacy culture and is therefore racist and must be dismantled. The question is why. To answer that, we turn to theology.

Theology

This is not, of course, the place for any vigorous theological engagement. The subject is complex, with multiple meanings and methods, and often obscure. This can be a serious problem when trying to convey such ideas to those unfamiliar with the discipline. It is, however, necessary to state for our purposes that any theology will assume or try to develop two distinct but intimately related ideas, one about the nature of God, otherwise understood as the nature of reality, and one concerning human nature, who or what we are and how we should live if reality is as any given theology teaches. Ergo, these two fundamental ideas will necessarily implicate one another. This is no less true of the UUA's "liberatory theology," the body of thought underlying the UUA's effort to discard the 7 Principles and 6 sources of classic Unitarian Universalism. Liberatory theology represents a complete post-modern break with the Enlightenment tradition that has served as the foundation of UUism since the beginning. But what does a statement like that mean to your average UU who cares little for such abstractions? What is it that is so important about this alleged break and why should anyone care? We can begin with two words, knowledge and power.

In the liberal Enlightenment tradition that has given us Unitarian Universalism, human progress is driven by diversity of perspective. The acquisition of knowledge is a function of mutual criticism across varying views on any given subject. This means that there is a high premium on the rights of individuals to engage in the critical function of reason, and on institutions that create the conditions for the free expression of ideas. This also means that power must necessarily be distributed, not concentrated. This is the very ground of free speech and freedom of conscience. In this one can see the rationale for our first, fourth, and fifth principles.

All of this disappears in the post-modern liberatory theology adopted by the UUA. The diversity of perspectives lauded by liberalism as the condition of progress is regarded by liberatory

theology as a welter of views competing for the status of dominant narrative. That means that our diversity is regarded as fundamentally a struggle for power. There is no critical exchange in the marketplace of ideas. There are only bids for the power of narratives over one another. The liberal approach emphasizing reason, persuasion, and the method of science just happens to be the dominant narrative, oppressing all minority points of view, all declared as alternative sources of knowledge. This ascendancy to dominance by liberalism was not earned. Its dominance is strategic, a function of its purpose, to establish and maintain the privileged position of white people in our society. In the liberatory theology embraced by the UUA, the liberal approach is regarded as nothing more than the strategic language or discourse of the dominant narrative of whiteness. That narrative has one and only one purpose. To maintain and advance the dominance of whiteness or white supremacy, and the perpetual oppression of minority perspectives. This is why the likes of Rev. Dr. Eklof and the many others who love Unitarian Universalism as we have known it, and as the UUA wants to dismantle, are called racist MAGA types. Anything they say based on liberal Enlightenment thought can only be regarded as racist, because white people are by nature white supremacists, so the liberal legacy of UUism is itself white supremacist.

From this perspective, knowledge is not something out there to be acquired by use of accepted methods, like science or reason. Knowledge is, rather, a function of culture or identity. Members of any given culture, however, that is defined, are said to have special knowledge that is a function of their position in society. The most poignant example for our purposes is that minorities, particularly Black people, but anyone on the intersectionality scale of minority identities, is said to have special knowledge of the oppression at the heart of society. This special knowledge is not available nor conveyable to those not sharing that identity or having a place on the intersectionality scale. Neither is it liable to criticism of any kind, as this is the language of the oppressor. Whatever any minority says of their experience of oppression and their oppressor is to be accepted, and never questioned. Conversely, whatever the oppressor, that is, white people, have to say about oppression and how to alleviate it is to be dismissed and ignored as it can only be part of their effort to maintain their privileged position in society. Language in this theology is considered dangerous. Free speech is nothing more than a cover for advancing white supremacy, so it must be curtailed, and the narrative must be controlled. This is the sense in which the efforts of the UUA have serious implications for our broader culture.

Governance

The drive of the UUA to control the narrative is clear to see in the latter chapters of our book. These are the testimonies of UU's victimized by this effort, all merely for having spoken their minds in disagreement with what we call the new UU orthodoxy. The majority are ministers. We have others from lay UU's that did not make it into the book but were published on our website, The Fifth Principle Project. The rubric under which these punishments were carried out is the same as that given for the sustained attack on Rev. Dr. Eklof, they are "out of covenant." One can readily grasp that power within this new governing structure will be anything but distributed. It will be concentrated in the hands of the UUA Board and the sycophantic UUMA. We will no longer have an association of congregations, but an ecclesiastical organization, where the UUA will no longer serve as a source of support for local congregations. Rather, as we said above, the congregations will be expected to conform to the demands of the UUA under threat of being out of covenant.

It is important to remember the ultimate reason given by UU leadership for these dramatic changes is their unswerving commitment to anti-racism. This is, of course, a goal that all UU's tend to agree with and support. One could argue that our 7 principles were birthed in the struggle against racism. The UUA has, however, exploited this most worthy of goals to rationalize the changes they seek. Their liberatory theology that declares the very Principles and Sources established in opposition to all forms of oppression can legitimately be regarded then as a massive and persistent form of gaslighting. All UU's who have been drawn to our faith for our deep and abiding commitment to anti-oppression have, according to the UU leadership, been deluded or duped. The Principles and Sources have been racist all along and must be ditched. This is what our book is dedicated to exposing. We only hope enough people of goodwill are listening.