



Liberal Beacon

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Welcome to our latest issue of *Liberal Beacon*. We apologize that it's been so long coming. Our editor, Kevin McCulloch is still dealing with the recent loss of his father so I'm taking the reins on this issue. It is especially difficult to lose loved ones during the holiday season. We continue to keep Kevin and his entire family in our thoughts.

For now, I'm happy to step back into my previous role as our online magazine's editor and am especially grateful for the opportunity to personally wish you happy holidays and a wonderful new year ahead. Speaking of which, our first article in this issue is one of my own, about what Christmas, in particular, means to me as a non-Christian who grew up in the U.S. celebrating its secular significance.

By the time this issue hits your inbox, Christmas will be nearly upon us, and Thanksgiving has already passed. But 'tis the season, and it's not too late to benefit from Rev. Terry Cummings' musing about "Turkey Day," its history, its folklore, and its relevance for us today.

Also in this issue, psychologist Candace Schmidt, a familiar contributor to *Liberal Beacon*, shares her insights about ego development and how we become healthy and compassionate adults.

We also welcome Judy Robbins, PsyD. as a new contributor to *Liberal Beacon*. Judy, a member of the Unitarian Society of Hartford, CT, reflects upon the importance of what remains even after the loss of one's religion.

And special thanks to Dick Burkhart for offering us a special remembrance of Rev. Dr. Finley C.

Campbell who passed away August 18, 2023, at age 88. Dick describes Rev. Campbell as "a beloved black Unitarian Universalist and no-nonsense follower of MLK." He was also the founder of the UU Multiracial Unity Action Council (UUMUAC), which we are proud to have as a member of NAUA.

Please enjoy these informative and thought-provoking articles, along with a few other of our regular features.

Todd Eklof
Guest Editor

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The Meanings of Christmas

Reflections on a Couple of Holiday Classics

Rev. Dr. Todd F. Eklof

I have loved Christmas my entire life, not for its religious significance, but for its secular meaning and mythology. For many, “Jesus is the reason for the season,” but for those of us who don’t identify much with Christianity, Christmas can be just as meaningful, albeit in a different way, for different reasons. I still recall the title of a cover story on a Christian magazine that I saw decades ago, “Santa: Satan’s Substitute Savior.” Theatrical as that title is, it draws a distinction between the religious and secular significance of Christmas. Yet there are many traditional churchgoers who celebrate its religious importance while also making sure jolly old Saint Nick slips down the chimney on *O Holy Night* to leave gifts under the Christmas tree.

The secular has always accompanied the sacred. Commerce always travels alongside our festivals and Holy Days. Marketplaces emerge wherever larger numbers of people gather, especially when throngs of religious pilgrims travel to holy sites during annual religious rituals and celebrations. Despite their attention toward spiritual matters, religious sojourners still need to eat, drink, shelter, sleep, stay warm, and so on. It has always been a mutually beneficial opportunity for those with an entrepreneurial spirit to make a living by helping to provide the material needs that coincide with our Holy Days and holidays.

So, it is possible for us to appreciate both the religious and secular significance of our holidays, including Christmas, my favorite of them all. My earliest memories of Christmas were in South San Francisco (South City), where I lived until I was five years old. Our small apartment was only a few blocks from the town

square, which was transformed into a magical place at Christmastime. I still remember my mother walking my siblings and I there to see all the colorful lights adorning the lampposts and buildings. There were Christmas scenes painted on all the storefront windows, bells and ornaments and more lights on all the trees, and cheery holiday music filled the crisp cool air.



I recall one year being disappointed when Santa Claus, who was supposed to make a special appearance by landing at City Hall via parachute, ended up a no show. It turns out he completely missed his target and broke a leg in the process. At the time I thought “this never would have happened had he just flown in with his reindeer and magic sleigh.” I cherish such memories to this day, and, for me, Christmas has never lost its magic.

An especially favorite holiday ritual was watching my favorite Christmas shows on our small black and white TV. In those days, before VHS and DVD players were ever even thought of, let alone streaming services, we had one opportunity each year to watch all the holiday classics, like *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, *White Christmas*, *Miracle on 34th Street*, *It’s a Wonderful Life*, and *A Christmas Carol*. My favorite of them all remain the stop-motion

animated films produced by Author Rankin and Jules Bass— *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer* and *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*.

The first, *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer*, originally aired in 1964, the year I was born, so it wasn't yet a classic. Old as it now is, old as I now am, it still holds meaning for me, not only because of the nostalgic feelings it engenders, but because of its moral significance, which has continued to impact my psyche as I've matured, and, I hope, that of our society as we've continued to evolve for the better.

This now iconic film was born just after McCarthyism had ended, at the start of Vietnam and during the Civil Rights movement. And, in its simple, playful, moving way, it subtly showed us kids that there was a better way than the groupthink, hostility, and prejudice of the times. Even Rudolph's famous red nose may have been representative of the red scare that had occurred only a few years earlier, between 1947 and 1957. Communists in Russia and China were referred to as "Reds," and it was fear of them that led to the rise of Senator Joseph McCarthy who oversaw the House Un-American Activities Committee and its infamous "witch-hunts" for Communist sympathizers during what has become known historically as the "second red scare." (This followed the first red scare resulting from Russia's Bolshevik Revolution in 1917.)

Back then, people, particularly Americans, were suspicious and fearful of anyone who seemed a little different than most, whether they were persons with dark skin, or with foreign accents, or boys with long hair, or girls who wore pants.

Such dread, and the desire for the conformity it craved, became indicative of the 1950s. As historians George Brown Tindall and David Shi say, "Fears generated by the Cold War initially played a key role in encouraging orthodoxy. McCarthyism was simply the most visible symbol of the many political social forces promoting common standards of behavior." As a newspaper editor put it in 1954, "Conformity may very well be the central social problem of this age."



Red, in general, has many negative associations. It is the color of warning signs, stop signs, and yield signs. It is the color of blood and injury. It's the color of anger that incites raging bulls. It is the color that shows up during disasters via the Red Cross, Red Crescent, and Red Crystal.

"Condition red," "red alert," "red lines," warn

us to stay back. Yet, Rudolph, with his shiny red nose, an elf who wants to be a dentist instead of a toymaker, and an entire island of misfit toys, not only guides Santa's sleigh on a foggy night, but helped guide my generation through the fog of war, fear, and intolerance. I'm still moved by one of the show's closing lines, "When everybody hears their story, they start to realize maybe they were a little hard on the misfits. Maybe misfits have a place too."

In 1964, just suggesting misfits have a place in society was daring, so we can forgive Rankin and Bass for the timidity of their approach; the gentle suggestion that "maybe" we should give the misfits a chance. But only six years later, in 1970, when the American counterculture was in full swing, they were no longer willing to pick any bones about it. The shy misfits who had been abandoned to a lonely island in the *Rudolph* story finally stopped trying to fit in,

had rebelliously infiltrated the mainstream, and were loudly and boldly living contrary to cultural expectations and openly celebrating their differences.

One particular and prominent non-conformist was Abbie Hoffman, who boasted that, “Our conception of revolution is that it’s fun.” Hoffman was a leader of the Youth International Party, also known as yippies, the nickname for hippies who were political activists, famous for distributing leaflets promoting causes like the legalization of marijuana, the abolition of money, student run schools, free love, and, most of all, ending the Vietnam War.

Come mothers and fathers,
throughout the land,
And don’t criticize what you can’t
understand.
Your sons and daughters are
beyond your command.
There’s a battle outside and it’s
ragin,’
it’ll soon shake your windows and
rattle your walls,
for the times, they are a-changin.’

- Bob Dylan

It’s difficult to ignore the obvious similarity between the hippies and the redheaded, red-clad, Kris Kringle character, voiced by the famed and beloved actor Mickey Rooney, in *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*. It is the story of a baby left on the doorstep of the Kringles, a family of toymaking elves who love him and raise him as their own. Like any good hippy, young Kris Kringle is a nature lover who grows up learning from the animals. He even gets his distinct laugh by imitating the seals—Ho, Ho, Ho!

When he grows up, he decides to take the Kringles’ toys to Sombertown and give them

away to its children, unaware that the town is run by the Burgermeister Meisterburger, a cruel dictator who has outlawed all toys. I don’t believe it’s coincidental he has extremely bushy eyebrows resembling Leonid Brezhnev, the once leader of the Communist country’s Red Army who had become the Soviet Union’s Head of State at the time. Burgermeister Meisterburger also has a German accent, and an army of soldiers clad in black uniforms and spiked helmets, reminding us of the Nazis. I think, from this, it’s fair to say the personified antagonist in *Santa Claus is Coming to Town* represents fascism and authoritarianism.

When, after a perilous journey, Kris Kringle finally arrives in Sombertown, dressed in his bright red suit, he finds its inhabitants, who are all dressed in gray clothes and live in gray houses, to be extremely suspicious and unwelcoming. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself, young man,” one of them says, “wearing such outlandish clothes.” When Kris learns that distributing toys is illegal, he says, “That’s kind of a silly law,” and begins distributing them anyway, making him Sombertown’s most wanted criminal.

The toys, I believe, stand as a metaphor for psychedelic experiences, which the youth in revolt were enamored with back then. At one point, Kris gives a china doll to a rather stuffy schoolteacher who soon undergoes a full-blown psychedelic trip. Destined to become Mrs. Santa Claus, Miss Jessica eventually lets her hair down and says, “My eyes are beginning to open for the very first time to what life is really all about.” She had a mind-altering experience.

She soon helps others who have been imprisoned for the unlawful distribution of toys escape with the help of magic feed corn that “can’t dissolve prison walls. All it can do is “make reindeer fly.” And that’s how they escaped, by flying higher than a kite. Later, Kris and Miss Jessica even have an unsanctioned wedding. “And since no town would welcome

them, they stood before the Lord in the silent winter woods, and a grove of pine trees was their cathedral,” narrator Fred Astair says. “They placed all that pretty stuff onto the pine trees, and then Kris and Jessica placed their gifts to each other under the trees. No church ever looked nicer.”

Be kind to strangers. Include those who are different. Don't bully others. Stand up to authoritarians. Expand your consciousness. Think for yourself. Be free. Have fun. These are some of the meanings of Christmas for me, rooted in my childhood memories, the subtle and positive impacts of which continue to unfold as my own years progress. It doesn't matter that I am not a Christian, any more than not being a Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist, Muslim, or Jew means I can't benefit from the moral wisdom of those traditions. For the same reason, Christmas is for everyone, or can be for whoever chooses it to be, believers and nonbelievers alike. So, as I reflect back upon my childhood experiences of this magical holiday, I remember that it not only reflects the wish of people the world over for peace on Earth and goodwill toward all, but in subtle ways, like Rudolph's shiny red nose, it sometimes shows us a way of getting there.

Giving Thanks A Time for Remembering & Gratitude

Rev. Terry Cummings

There is no greater church than a congregation, which may ordinarily meet in one place.

Stones, timber, though squared, hewn and polished, are not a house, until they are compacted and united; so saints or believers, in judgment of charity, are not a church, unless orderly knit together. [The Cambridge Platform, Chs. III.5, IV.1]

Like many Americans, Thanksgiving, with its primary focus on sharing gratitude for family and friends, is my favorite holiday of the year. As a naturalized citizen, Thanksgiving has always felt significant to me. It is a uniquely American celebration steeped in history, albeit not the history reflected in the folklore that has grown around it. A tradition in which, as an immigrant, I am grateful to be able to participate.

The New England settlers' mistreatment of indigenous peoples is, of course, not a reason for celebration. The misty folklore that was/is baked into the story of that first Thanksgiving in 1621 is rightfully beginning to clear under the light of day.

Such reexamination of the history of that era is an opportunity not only to learn more about the relationship between the settlers and the indigenous people they encountered; It is also an opportunity to learn more about a chapter in America's religious history that gave birth to congregationalism here in the New World. The British philosopher G.K. Chesterton once said that if you really want to understand European history, don't focus on wars and battles, kings and princes. Instead, he suggested, one should learn about the history of the Church.

No doubt, the same might be said about the history of religion in the context of the broader history of America.

The congregationalism introduced in the 17th century New England colonies is still claimed by several denominations today, including Unitarian Universalism. For Unitarian Universalism, however, a case can be made that in recent memory congregational polity is more often honored in its breach.

In telling the story of Thanksgiving it is perhaps understandable that the Pilgrims and the Puritans are sometimes conflated as the same group of religious believers. While they shared similar Christian beliefs rooted deeply in the theology of the Protestant Reformation inspired by Martin

Luther and John Calvin a century before, their hopes for the secular world were not the same.

The Pilgrims never used that name to describe themselves. That name was given to them more than a century after they came to America on *The Mayflower* in 1620. They called themselves Separatists instead, because they didn't want to be a part of the Church of England, which English law required of all citizens at the time, on pain of death.

That first winter of 1620 to 1621 was very harsh, and roughly half of the original settlers from *The Mayflower* died. The following spring two native people who had learned English from other colonies helped the survivors to plant corn and other crops. By September the harvest had been gathered, and a harvest festival lasting three days took place, probably around September 29th of 1621, not in November as tradition has it.¹ (The church the Separatists established in Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1620 still exists today, at least its successor does, as The First Parish Church of Plymouth, a Unitarian Universalist congregation.)

The Puritans arrived in New England in 1630. They were not Separatists, and instead wanted to bring the Church of England around to their way of thinking from within, rather than leave the Church. Among them was John Winthrop, who would later become the Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Winthrop's essay written the same year, entitled *A Model of*

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Christian Charity contained the phrase for which he became famous; "we must Consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us."

The Puritans who settled colonial New England were strict Calvinists who believed that God's chosen elect were predestined to have a place in heaven. They believed also that each congregation was its own separate, autonomous, church, as opposed to part of a single church based in Rome or England, and it was mainly that from which congregationalism took its name.

Congregationalism soon became the established religion in New England, which meant that Congregational churches were supported financially by taxation.

In Massachusetts, only men who were members of a Congregational church had the right to vote in elections. Members of other religious denominations were disenfranchised.

This did not sit well other settlers, whose churches were not supported by tax revenues, and whose members were not entitled to vote because their churches did not follow congregationalism. In 1645, some Massachusetts Presbyterians threatened to take their complaints to the British Parliament in London if things didn't change for them.

Fearing that the English government might interfere with their internal affairs, a synod of churches met in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1646, for the purpose of establishing a uniform

national holiday that we know today did not come into existence until 1863, when President Lincoln issued a proclamation that the fourth Thursday of November would be the annual Thanksgiving celebration.

¹ This harvest festival was not the first Thanksgiving. The first documented thanksgiving services, in what is now the United States, were conducted by Spanish and the French in the 1500s. Thanksgiving services were routine in what became the Commonwealth of Virginia as early as 1607. George Washington proclaimed that there should be an annual Thanksgiving holiday as early as 1777, but the

set of church governance practices. The synod's membership included ministers and lay delegates from all but four of the 29 churches in Massachusetts, and it also had the support of the 24 churches in the other Puritan colonies of Connecticut, New Hampshire, New Haven, and Plymouth.

The result was something of a compromise but overwhelmingly congregationalism won the day. In 1648 the synod adopted a formal *Platform of Church Discipline* that came to be known as *The Cambridge Platform*.

The Cambridge Platform explained that congregationalism is the only form of church government authorized by the Bible. It defined a Congregational church as “a company of saints by calling, united into one body by a holy covenant, for the public worship of God, and the mutual edification one of another.”²

The *Platform* stated that a church should choose its own officers, admit new church members, and importantly, ordain its own ministers through the laying on of hands by the members of the church. It also emphasized that the relationships between church members, and between churches, are covenantal ones, based on the covenant between Israel and God described in the Old Testament.³

The right to choose and ordain a minister was sacred to the early Congregationalists. If a minister decided to leave the church where they had been ordained in order to accept a position

at a different church, they would have to be ordained all over again by their new church. Ordination was specific to the church where the pastor would serve.

Congregationalists looked solely to the Bible as the source of their authority and their faith. They saw no need for external sources of governance. While their strict Calvinism gave way to other strains of Christianity in New England during the 18th and 19th centuries, including the Unitarians and the Universalists, the congregational tradition lived on.

It is from the Puritans that UUs inherited the tradition that ordination of ministers is vested solely in individual congregations. That tradition, as *The Cambridge Platform* recognized, honors not just the authority but the competence of each congregation to determine the qualifications of the ministers that will serve them the best. The establishment of an external denominational committee to vet and discipline prospective ministers would likely have been viewed as anathema to the drafters of *The Platform*. (*The Platform* also contains provisions that govern the process for each congregation to deal with disciplinary issues.)

While it would be unfair, and inaccurate, to describe the UUA's Ministerial Fellowship Committee, and the UUA's ministerial settlement process as usurping entirely the role of congregationalism in the denomination, there is nevertheless cause for concern. The MFC not

² The drafters of *The Cambridge Platform* also adopted a Christian religious creed known as *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, based on the creed that had been adopted by the British Parliament in Westminster, England, a few years before.

³ Perhaps in deference to the Presbyterians in attendance, *The Platform* stated:

Of the power of the church and its presbytery This government of the church is a mixt government, and so hath been acknowledged

long before the term of independency was heard of. In respect of Christ, the head and King of the church, and the sovereign power residing in him, and exercised by him, it is a monarchy; in respect of the body or brotherhood of the church, and power from Christ granted unto them, it resembles a democracy; in respect of the presbytery, and power committed unto them, it is an aristocracy.

only vets prospective ministers' education and background, it also polices their beliefs and opinions. This is wrong.

And, the MFC has assumed for itself the role, reserved to the congregations in *The Platform*, of disciplining ministers. Whether this is wise in every case is a matter of debate. That this usurps the role of the congregation is hard to deny.

It is also concerning that the UUA has encouraged congregations to adopt bylaw provisions that require their settled ministers to be in fellowship with the UUA, as this brings a level of control over, as the price of protection for, the congregation. Such bylaw provisions limit the pool of ministers to those whose beliefs and opinions agree with those in power at the UUA. The drafters of *The Cambridge Platform* would have seen the English Parliament at work if they had seen such requirements.

The drafters of *The Cambridge Platform* would likely also have been aghast at the suggestion that the Ten Commandments be re-written. To some that doesn't seem much different than doing away with the Association's beloved seven UU principles as is currently being considered.

Whether Unitarian Universalism will still lay claim to being the inheritor of Congregational polity ten years from now remains to be seen. There are no plans afoot to usurp the congregations' power of ordination. Whether much else remains is unclear.

This Thanksgiving holiday, I will be grateful to our Puritan forbears, whose religious beliefs I cannot share, but whose sense of purpose and autonomy I admire. It is my hope that their chapter in our history will not be forgotten.

A Remembrance of Rev. Dr. Finley C. Campbell

Dick Burkhardt, PhD

I was at a plenary session of the 2017 General Assembly of the UUA in New Orleans when Finley Campbell got up to speak in protest against how former UUA President Rev. Peter Morales had been treated by the UUA Board and others in leadership after a so-called "hiring controversy".

I too had great respect for Peter Morales from my years of justice advocacy with UUs for a Just Economic Community, and I was trying to figure out what the hell had happened and why. So when this principled black man of obvious courage spoke, defying attempts by the Moderator to shut him up, I took notice.

At the conclusion of his short speech, Finley invited attendees to join him that evening to ride with him on a New Orleans streetcar. Why? I wondered, but I was intrigued, so I took him up on that offer. Turned out that I was the only newcomer to his little group, showing that the resignation of Rev Morales wasn't actually about the claims of racism in the hiring process, but that a powerful and ruthless faction had captured the UUA, a faction that few dared to question.

In fact, this was my first exposure to cancel culture. It turned out that Finley's streetcar ride was just to demonstrate how much progress there had been on racial issues since the Civil Rights era of the 1960s. Namely, the streetcar was integrated – the era of Jim Crow segregation was long past, contrary to the astounding claims of this faction that little or no progress had been made. After that ride, we all went out to dinner together. That's when Finley explained the divisions in the black leadership and I decided to join his team, later becoming a board member of UUMUAC.

I read book after book, learning that Finley’s “multiracial unity” was deeply grounded in our UU principles, whereas the faction in power was strong, but stealthy, hiding its anti-UU ideology. Finley had not studied Critical Race Theory, but he had this faction all figured out, particularly the anti-white dogma at the heart of its supposed anti-racism.

Finley’s great strength was his eagerness to find common ground with others and to organize to defend our UU principles. He became a beacon for those had been cancelled or oppressed by what today are called woke ideologies, such as the neo-racism that was his focus.

Finley described himself as a Marxist/Christian UU, but he was fine with non-Marxists and non-Christians, showing what is today a rare strength of character. As such he became a mentor to me and many others.

We will carry forward his mission to all humanity in a time of increasing societal turmoil, propelled by escalating inequality nationally and by the surging forces of ecological and civilization collapse globally. May Finley Campbell not rest-in-peace but forever in the uplifting activism for the beloved community that he so cherished.

Ego Development Theory

Candace Schmidt, PhD

It is not an uncommon occurrence for someone to experience or witness something happen and then make sense of what happened, only to discover that others who witnessed the very same event came to very different conclusions. For example, a child might act up in a grocery store when trying to get our shopping done. One individual witnessing this might automatically blame the child’s parent for bad parenting practices, while another person might wonder whether the child

had difficulty handling the over-stimulating environment of a grocery store. On a larger scale, perhaps your neighbor is energized and excited by listening to a certain political figure that you often find frightening because of the politician’s anti-democratic viewpoints. What accounts for the differences in how other people, events, and situations are perceived? Often a person’s cultural background and educational attainment can explain some of these differences, as well as religious and political affiliations. Another explanation is an aspect of personality development, called Ego Development, that was developed by the psychologist Jane Loevinger in the 1970s. She considered ego development as the “master trait” that is an alternative and fascinating way to understand some of the different ways people perceive and interact with their world.

The concept of ego development did not originate with psychoanalysis, but has roots in several cultures, including Greek, Hebrew, and Hindu. Interest in multiple aspects of development was spurred at the end of the 19th century by Darwin’s theory of evolution. Concepts such as “moral development,” “character development,” and “style of life” share similarities with Jane Loevinger’s theory of ego development. She believed “the search for coherent meanings in experience is the essence of the ego or of ego functioning,” which Victor Frankl also explored in his seminal book, “Man’s Search for Meaning.” Loevinger also thought a person’s ego maintains its stability and coherence by selectively blocking out experiences and observations that are inconsistent with the person’s current state of mind. She identified nine sequential stages of ego development, which rather than being thought of as completely separate, are described as having some overlap with adjoining stages. As most people grow and mature from infancy into adulthood, they pass through at least the early and middle stages, while some individuals are able to attain the higher functioning characteristic of the later stages. Unfortunately,

some people never transition out of the earlier stages and find adapting to adult life very difficult.

The first stage is experienced in *Infancy* and describes the early tasks of constructing a stable view of the world, both of caregivers and objects, as well as the beginnings of a sense of self. The second stage, labelled the *Impulsive Stage*, is characterized by continued dependency on others for physical and emotional needs.

Other people are understood in terms of good and bad. There is little sense of cause and effect, rules are

confusing, and punishment seems arbitrary.

These attributes are normal for the very young child. In the third stage, called *Self-Protective*, impulses are beginning to be controlled.

Childlike qualities such as immediate gratification and the favoring of routines and rituals are seen in young children. Older children and adults in this stage may see life as a zero-sum game, and become opportunistic and even hostile toward others.

The next three stages describe different levels of conformity and begin with the *Conformist* stage. In normal development, the child identifies with the group or authority figures and rules are accepted unquestioningly. What is socially acceptable is considered right, and disapproval is a powerful deterrent. Emotions are understood in very simple terms, and others are perceived as stereotypes based on social groups. The *Self-Aware* stage brings the awareness that not everyone conforms perfectly all the time to the previously mentioned stereotypes. “What I am” is understood to be sometimes different from “what I should be,” which allows for some self-

reflection of attitudes and behaviors. Absolute rules and statements are beginning to be questioned. When an individual shifts to the *Conscientious* stage, the capacity for self-evaluated standards of conduct is possible. People in this stage are reflective and recognize there can be multiple ways to react in various situations, leading to some sense of choice and agency. Moral issues are differentiated from conventional rules, achievement is highly valued although often conforms to societal values, and greater conceptual complexity is possible.



The next three stages are considered Post-Conformist and begin with the *Individualistic* stage. Persons at this stage not only have a vivid sense of individual differences in self and others but experience a greater tolerance for these differences. There is a clear awareness of the distinction

between the inner self and the social self. There is a perceived sense of individuality and how that individuality interacts with society and interpersonal relationships. If and when a person transitions to the *Autonomous* stage, the chief characteristic is the recognition of other people’s need for autonomy, and deep respect for others to find their own way and even make their own mistakes. Moral dichotomies (e.g. good/bad) are not typical and instead there is understanding of the complexity of people and of situations. There is a high tolerance for ambiguity and recognition of paradoxes. A frequent theme is the search for fulfillment that partially replaces the striving for achievement. The last and highest stage of ego development is the *Integrated* stage. Even though most of us might want to believe we have achieved this pinnacle of development (well, at least some of the

time!), the research considers this stage to be mostly theoretical, with projections of less than 1% of the U.S. population actually at this level. Because in research studies this level of functioning is rarely seen, there is little data as to its characteristics. Loevinger considered Maslow's description of the self-actualizing person as the best way to depict an individual at the Integrated stage. To be self-actualized, individuals have realized their full potential, are able to maintain a fresh outlook on life, have a sense of gratitude, can accept themselves and others as they are, and are often motivated by a strong sense of personal ethics and responsibility.

To assess a person's typical level of ego functioning, Loevinger created the Sentence Completion Test (SCT), comprised of 36 sentence stems that participants were requested to complete. Rather than ask people about their personality traits with the use of multiple-choice questions or forced-choice questions (as with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator), ego development is assessed by asking people to finish incomplete sentence stems. Participants do not choose from answers provided for them but are given no other instructions other than to finish the sentences, allowing them to project their own frame of reference on the task, rather than responding to hints or suggestions from the test provider.

To give you a sense of how this works, a small sample of the Washington University SCT is provided. If you would like, you can complete the sentence stems below.

1. When a child will not join in group activities
2. When I am criticized.....
3. Being with other people.....
4. Rules are.....

Responses to sentence stem # 2 "When I am criticized" could be completed from any of the eight stages: "I am doing something wrong" (Impulsive), "I get mad and hit somebody" (Self-Protective), "I shut up and take

it" (Conformist), "I listen and try to change" (Self-Aware), "I learn from the experience, but sometimes I take it personally" (Conscientious), "Even though I get angry, I later try to see if the criticism was justified and if possible try to change it" (Individualistic), "I often am initially insulted but then if the criticism is valid, I am actually grateful because then I can change my bad attribute" (Autonomous).

Responses to sentence stem #4 "Rules are" could fall into any of the eight stages: "always broken" (Impulsive), "bad in most cases" (Self-Protective), "made to be followed" (Conformist), "necessary in groups of people" (Self-Aware), "made to protect and be fair to everybody" (Conscientious), "made to be evaluated, and if they are not for the good of all, changed" (Individualistic), and "to provide structure within which freedom abides" (Autonomous).

A trained rater uses a detailed guide to rate each of the responses, assigning each completion as consistent with one of the 8 stages (there is no rating at the Infancy stage). These ratings are then aggregated according to an algorithm and an overall score is provided, which is then translated into the corresponding overall level of ego development.

Research shows that ego development tends to progress with age and life experience, particularly in people with more diverse life experiences. However, it is not strictly age-dependent, and people of similar chronological age can be at different ego levels. There are minimal differences between genders. Certain personality traits, such as openness to experience, conscientiousness, and adaptability, correlate with higher ego levels. Individuals at higher levels tend to have better coping strategies, greater psychological maturity, and more nuanced and principled moral reasoning. People rated at the higher ego stages often describe having parents who were relatively nurturing, responsive, and supportive, with an

emphasis on love and warmth in addition to limits and fair discipline.

Given the relationship between higher ego functioning and the likely increased capacity for making positive contributions to others and to society overall, it seems that promoting supportive and responsive environments in as many social situations as possible could help people continue to progress in their ego development, and result in benefits to society as a whole.

Losing My Religion

Judy Robbins, PsyD

Although we focus on the imperiled Principles as the dominant outward sign, the *entire* religion of Unitarian Universalism is being reconstructed to the point where I do not recognize it. I am losing my religion. In the midst of heartbreak, I've been prompted to ponder the connection between religion and spirituality.

For me there is a big difference between religion and spirituality. Spirituality is inner-focused where religion is outer-focused. Religion is the way spirituality plays out in the world. When I became a Unitarian in my early 20s, I found a good match for my innate spirituality to express itself. Gathering in Unitarian churches felt safe and comforting, and a little challenging. It was a place that invited me to deepen both my intellectual and spiritual perspectives. Unlike other religions, UUism was liberal; it wasn't salvation-based with a rulebook of commandments. I flourished in the freedom, in the wholehearted acceptance of differing opinions and viewpoints. I resonated with The Seven Principles as the public face of UUism.

But UUism is not my spirituality. My spirituality is deeply personal and internal. It's heartfelt and experiential, not noisy with thoughts. It is not goal oriented. Paradoxically, it is both

unbounded yet grounded in the world. It is entirely accepting and nonjudgmental and an unflinching guide to compassion. It's always there. It's a constant Awareness that is intangible so it cannot be threatened by anything external, including religion. From a spiritual perspective I have no trouble seeing the interdependent web of existence. On a good day, I can grasp the concept of Oneness. Indeed, my spirituality is the deepest and dearest part of me. I would not be wrong to say it *is* Me.

Until recently, my religion has supported my spirituality. UUism has reinforced my need to seek truth and meaning wherever I find it. Printed right there in The Principles was a guarantee that I had no need of an external authority; I could rely on my conscience to know what was right. I believe that all of us are inherently worthy; that we are united in valuing justice, equity, compassion, democracy, and world community. The implication at the heart of The Principles is clear: I can be trusted to be a good person; that we *all* can be trusted to be good people doing the best we can with what we've got.

But the Universe is upside down now. It is unrecognizable. An invaluable trust has been broken. My own conscience, inseparable from my spirituality, is no longer seen as trustworthy. Instead, I am to submit to an external authority that presumably knows what's best. My individuality is no longer acceptable. My religion currently wants me to embrace an impossible To Do List to save the world. At the same time, I am being judged as stubborn, clinging, rigid and unaccepting in my views. Unbelievably, even my ability to love is in question. I feel foolish to have trusted that the morality and freedoms expressed in The Principles were a given, something that could not be easily tossed aside by a committee. Did I misplace my faith and trust and leave myself open to betrayal?

The word *faith* in a UU context has always puzzled me. I could see that others had faith in the tenets of their religion, faith in God. But did I have faith? It turns out I *did* have faith. I had put my faith in a liberal religion that I thought would be there for me always. I was wrong and I am shaken to my core to watch my religion morph into an entity that I can no longer entrust with my faith.

Today, I would not choose to become a UU. This new brand of UUism hinders my freedom to express my spirituality in the world. Even as I am losing my religion, no one can take away my spirituality. In fact, right now, everything *religious* feels very unstable and the only place of true refuge is in my spirituality.

Yet that is not entirely true. My current congregation espouses the values that drew me to UUism so many years ago. We are quick to embrace, and we come around to acceptance when things don't go our way. Like all churches we are not without strife, but this is a group of people who are faithful to each other. Often at the end of services, you will see folks pressing their hands together prayer-wise and bowing slightly as we exchange "Namaste." *The light in me greets the light in you.* Now, in these unstable times, it feels important to stay centered in that inner light and in loving community wherever we find it, both in our congregations and in the wider world of our very small denomination.

Judy Robbins, PsyD, is a lay leader at the Unitarian Society of Hartford, CT. Her doctorate is in Transpersonal Psychology, the area where psychology and spirituality overlap. She raised three Unitarian kids who remember YRUU and their UU Camp experiences fondly. Judy has had leadership roles in a number of Unitarian churches and at Rowe Conference

Center in the Berkshires. She is married to Rick Tsukada, a lifelong UU.

Help Wanted for Planning our First NAUA Annual Gathering

Joyce Kinnear

NAUA is planning our first annual meeting. We are excited to have a chance to work with each other online and in person to further the work of liberal religion. In order to have the best annual meeting possible, we need volunteers help plan this special and historic gathering.

The first meeting is tentatively to be held in fall 2024 in the Spokane area. We are looking for NAUA members to help us find a conference location, and develop speaker lists and workshop topics, and to coordinate with our NAUA provisional Board of Trustees on the business to be conducted.

Volunteers who can help us coordinate technical and communication aspects are also wanted. If your specialty is working with software to collect polling information from the membership, zoom meetings, communication during in person meetings, taking minutes of team meetings, or any other aspect of group communication, please let us know if you can volunteer to help.

We also want to plan plenty of social activities for our members to get to know each other better during the event. If that's your specialty, please let us know. From conducting physical exercise to dinners to workshops, we need your help.

If you are interested in being part of this team, please let us know by sending an email to joycekinnear@hotmail.com.

Thank you!

Your Annual Meeting Development Team

How to Opt-Out of Contact Info Sharing

The Membership Team would like to help our members build local NAUA communities and to keep in contact with people they've met through our various programs. To facilitate this, we'd like to provide the contact information of our members when asked for with legitimate NAUA purposes. If you do NOT want your contact information to be shared for such purposes, please send an email to info@naunitarians.org stating your desire to Opt Out of contact sharing.

Follow NAUA on Social Media

In addition to all latest NAUA news, program information in *Liberal Beacon*, and our online video archive of past events (available at www.naunitarians.org), we are now posting “news” items to a variety of sources, including X (formally Twitter) at:

<https://twitter.com/NAUnitarians>

And on Meta (Facebook) at:

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61553146776020>

If you have news items you think might be of interest to other Unitarians, please share it (along with a photo, if possible) to web@naunitarians.org

Upcoming Events

Clergy Support Group

Dec. 28, 2023 | 10:00 AM to 11:00 AM PST

If you are a liberal minister currently serving a UU church, in search, or retired, please consider joining our monthly Clergy Support Group, which meets on Zoom the 4th Thursday of each month. We offer open and honest conversation, respect for one another, collegiality, and anonymity. If you're interested in learning more, please email us info@naunitarians.org

Anything Goes Discussion Group

Jan. 3rd, 2024 | 4:30 to 6:00 PM (PST)

Rev. Jack Reich hosts this friendly and open conversation on the first Wednesday of each month. Join this discussion on Zoom at <https://tinyurl.com/naua-anything-goes>

NAUA Monthly Worship Service

Jan. 20, 2024 | 10:00 to 11:00 AM (PST)

Our January speaker will be Rev. Dr. Todd F. Eklof. His topic is to be announced. This recurring event occurs the 3rd Saturday of each month and can be attended on Zoom via the following link: <https://tinyurl.com/NAUAService>

NAUA Academy News

The December NAUA Academy program took place on Wednesday, December 13th. The speaker was Kevin McCulloch. Kevin is a life-long Unitarian, studied religion as an undergraduate at Haverford College and received a Masters Degree in American Religious History from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University. He is a member of NAUA and the Editor of the Liberal Beacon Newsletter. His presentation was entitled “Revisiting the Broad Church: Lessons from the Unitarian Quest for Consensus, 1865-1895”. This presentation related to another time when there were major divisions in Unitarianism and perhaps has some lessons for us today. The program was well attended and stimulated a lot of interesting questions as well as a discussions after the presentation. If you’ve missed this program, you can see it on the NAUA website by clicking the following link:

<https://naunitarians.org/project/lessons-from-the-unitarian-quest-for-consensus-1865-1895/>

The January NAUA Academy program will take place on Tuesday, January 23rd at 4:30pm Pacific Time and 7:30 pm Eastern Time. The program will be in an interview format with our guest, David Reich being interviewed by Julie Hotard. The Social Host for the program will be Joyce Francis. The title of the NAUA program is “**plus ça change**” (translation: the more that changes, the more it's the same thing”). David Reich was editor of the UU World from 1992 until 2001. He published a satire in 2010 entitled “The Antiracism Trainings” drawing from his experience at the UUA. A later editor of the UU World called the book “an informed critique of recent UUA history”. As part of the program, David will read passages from his book and share his experiences at the UUA during the early days of the antiracism training programs, as well as the response the book received from his colleagues. David will be interviewed by Julie Hotard, known to many as the initiator of the network to Save the 7 Principles. Julie is a

member of NAUA and recruited David Reich for this program. You may view this program live on January 23rd at the appropriate time in your time zone by clicking the following link: <https://tinyurl.com/nauaacademy>

We would like your feedback and suggestions concerning NAUA Academy program offerings. Please let us know what you thought about past NAUA Academy programs and what you would like to learn about and discuss in future programs. In addition, if you would like to present or organize an NAUA Academy program, please let us know. We are always looking for new ideas as well as presenters. Please contact the NAUA Advisory Board at nauaacademybd@googlegroups.com

Participants are encouraged to [register for this event](#) if you register, a confirmation and a reminder email will be posted two days before the event.

WE WISH YOU A HAPPY

new year

2024