

**Please send to your friends!**

# UUUnderWorld

**A NEWSLETTER FOR UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST FREE THINKERS**

**POST UUA EDITION, JULY 2024**

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**Volume 1, No. 3**

## SO WHAT DID WE LOSE?

### A Summary of the Upcoming Changes

We need to look this extremely serious situation straight in the face! That is how we will go forward with joy, excitement, and anticipation. And there are pay-offs - what are the payoffs of what you suggest - leaving the UUA?

It's like this: Those who voted "no", and/or backed a "no to the Article II rewrite" vote are quickly realizing that they came out the winners - because all those who decide to jettison the UUA have left is all we were fighting for in the first place!

Let's review: What we had under the old Article 2, among other things, was

- Seven Principles
- Six Sources
- Freedom of Belief
- Ability to welcome whom-ever we wish to our churches
- No accountability to others
- No policing
- No accusations of racism
- Not being faulted for race
- Freedom to choose how we will help in the world
- A Seventh Principle that is about loving and caring for the environment and everything in It
- No crazy claims that we are for something we aren't, like "Defund the Police"!

I don't think we need to worry about Unitarianism, if we want to go to that - there is no longer a

"head office" to royally screw it up. It may just be a nice, soft, fluffy, but sturdy, foundation we can safely land and build on, already strengthened and steadied by centuries of dedication by those who love freedom of practice and thought in all things spiritual/ practical. Their legacy is here for us, though it would be fine to go in other directions, also.

So the best route may be away from the UUA ASAP. But we also need to keep our UU brethren foremost in our minds that cannot, at this moment, get away from their UUA-affiliated church, and those that are going to realize, at some point, that they made a terrible mistake in being part of pushing for this deleterious change. We need to keep them in our hearts, and always be thinking of how we can help them, to the extent we can, in ways we are comfortable with, and that we think will be effectual, considering what the UUA has shown themselves to be: dishonest, unethical, and not having the best interests of Unitarian Universalists or the world, in mind.

--Terri Keller

## SEPARATION

### Needing a New Association?

Here's a list of things to consider before becoming an independent church or joining with a different national association:

*An incomplete draft checklist*

1. Find an attorney to review the congregation's bylaws and

agreements, with the goal of updating the bylaws

2. Start cottage meetings with small groups of concerned members.

3. Secure "outside" funding for the research process

4. With the attorney's advice, get a board or congregational vote to explore options (only)

5. Ask the staff what resources they use from the UUA

- a. Worship aids & resources
- b. Salary and Wage Guidance
- c. Health insurance
- d. Retirement plan
- e. RE material
- f. Music
- g. More?

6. Research how to replace those resources and the cost.

7. If there is a mortgage or loan from the UUA find alternative lenders

8. Explore the relationship with the UUA Common Endowment Fund, if any

9. Continue cottage meetings, expand to larger discussion groups.

10. Create a budget specifically for the transition period

11. Present intent to a congregational vote

12. Present budget to a congregational vote

13. Fundraise for transition expenses

14. Final vote to withdraw from the Association

--Rebecca Pace

## FROM THE WEB

### Homage to What is Disappearing

We gather here to remember Unitarian Universalism, a beacon of liberal faith that once stood as a proud mosaic of diverse opinions and beliefs. It was a spiritual home that welcomed all seekers, a place where questions were cherished more than answers, and the journey mattered more than the destination.

Unitarian Universalism taught us that the sacred tapestry of life is woven from threads of many colors and textures. It showed us the beauty of a pluralistic vision, where each unique strand was integral to the whole. It was a tradition that found strength in

way to a singular focus, and the chorus of many voices fell silent before a dominant creed. The garden of free thought, once lush with varied blooms, began to fade, as only certain flowers were tended to.

Today, we honor the legacy of what Unitarian Universalism once was—a sanctuary for free spirits, a school for thought, and a community bound by love and respect. We cherish the memories of its vibrant days and hold close the lessons it imparted upon us. May the spirit of true inclusivity and open-hearted dialogue live on in each of us, as we carry forward the flame of compassion and justice in our own ways.

In its essence, Unitarian Universalism reminded us that we are all part of an inter-



its openness, its commitment to democratic principles, and its unyielding belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

Yet, there came a time when the winds of change shifted, and with heavy hearts, we witnessed a narrowing of that once-expansive horizon. The celebration of diversity gave

connected web of existence, and it is in this spirit that we say farewell. May its memory inspire us to build bridges where walls have risen and to light the way for a future where every voice can once again find its song.

Rest in peace, dear friend. Your vision of a world united in diversity will not be forgotten.

## WE WON'T FORGET

### Seven Principles

We affirm and promote UU's Seven Principles:

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relation
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
5. The right of conscience and the use of democratic process within our congregations and in society at large
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all
7. Respect for the interdependent web of existence of which we are all a part



## PLEASE FORWARD!

### Be An UUnderWorld Paper Carrier!

It seems that many, or even most, UUs didn't get the word of the many significant changes that occurred at GA24, or what those changes could mean to our religion.

Since there is no longer an easy way to express non conforming, dissenting views to a wide audience of Unitarian Universalists, we have put this inelegant newsletter out to try and establish a platform where ordinary UUs can make their voices heard.

This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> issue of a one-time effort, originally to try and stop the disastrous rewrite of Article 2, but it continues on *zombie-like* as an early attempt to deal with the aftermath.

One way we're trying to get the newsletter out to the rank-and-file congregants and independent UUs is by asking you, dear reader, to ***please forward*** this on to anyone and everyone you know, who might need to know, about the new direction our association is trying to lead us. Church emails lists, newsletters, discussion groups and the like.

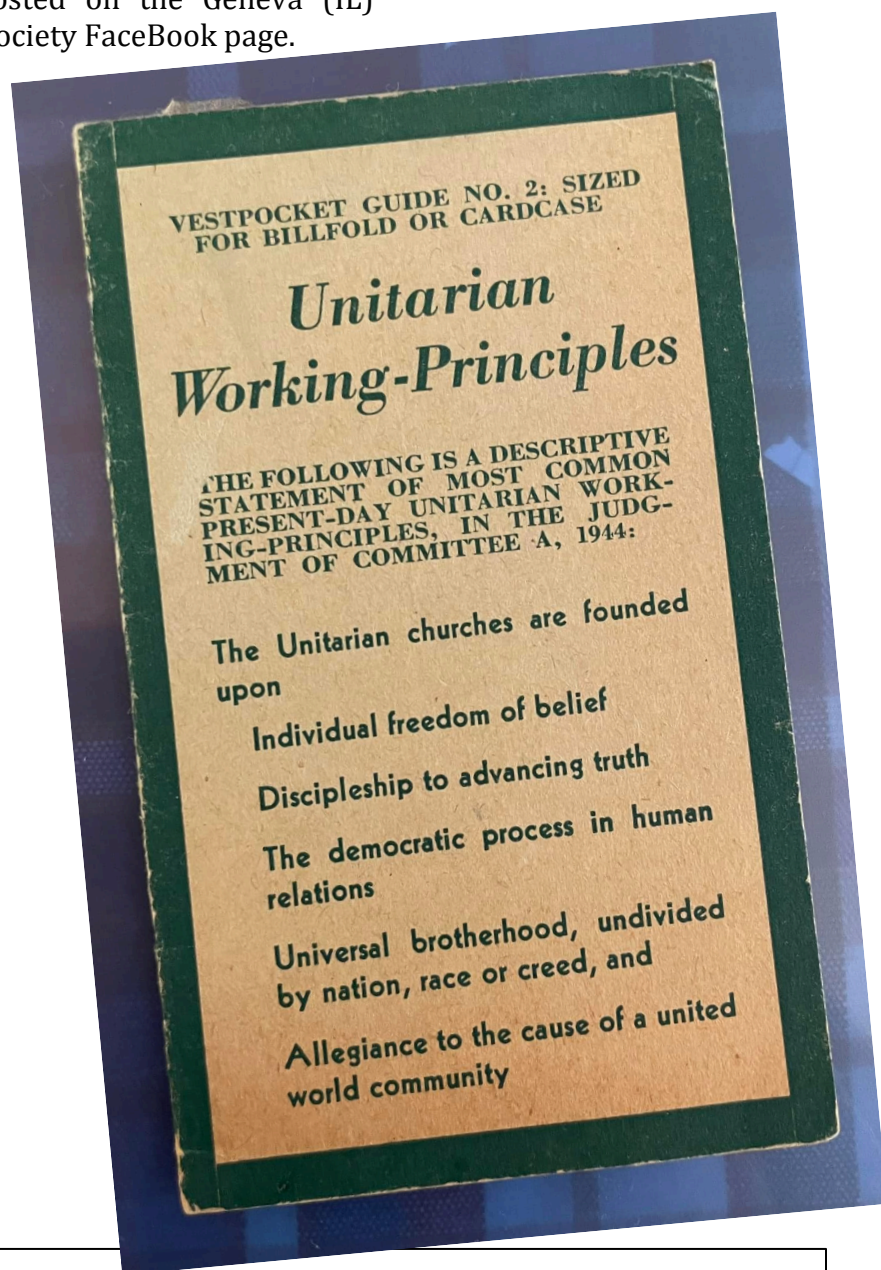
UUnderWorld is in standard "pdf" format, and a pretty small file, so folks can open and read it as is.

If anyone wants to get a copy, join the small email list, send an article or letter, or anything else, they can send an email to [UUnderWorld74@gmail.com](mailto:UUnderWorld74@gmail.com)

## FROM OUR HISTORY

### 1944 AUA Principles

Posted on the Geneva (IL)  
UU Society FaceBook page.



This is the third issue of **UUnderWorld**, which possibly is gonna be thrown together, with any luck, monthly, or perhaps periodically, or so. The original purpose, or mission, was to draw attention to the major changes on tap at this year's General Assembly 2024. It continues on. Hopefully helpful.

The totally unqualified and easily replaceable editor is currently John Griffin Miller, a lifelong UU, who got lots of help from lots of others across the nation. Much info was gathered from, among other places, *The 5<sup>th</sup> Principle Project* and *Save The 7 Principles* websites and Facebook pages.

Please send Letters to the Editor, contributions, input, nasty comments, unsolicited praise, requests for a pdf of UUnderWorld and/or other info to:

**UUnderworld74@gmail.com**

## THE VOTES ARE IN!

### Democracy in Action

As you can see from the pie chart below—and who doesn't love pie charts—the results of the voting at General Assembly are clear and dramatic.

If you start with the big blue pie, you can easily see that most of the Unitarian Universalists in the country were not involved at all.

But if you look closer, and squint at the two tiny slices at the bottom, the red and green ones, that is the total number of GA delegates. And while many of the delegates who were eligible to vote decided not to, and several hundred voted against it, of those that actually did vote, who represent over 1% (0.01) of the national UUs, most did indeed vote for the change (the green slice).

It's just as clear as can be.

## READY TO GO DEEPER?

### Longer Articles at the End of This Issue

Don't forget to check out several longer articles at the end of this newsletter—starting on page 9.

They were much longer than our usual hit-and-run pieces from previous issues, but just so good and topical they had to be included!

## REACTION TO THE VOTE

### Rev Dr Todd Eklof

Rev Eklof from the UU Church of Spokane has recorded a short video with his perception of the June vote. The video is available on the NAUA site:

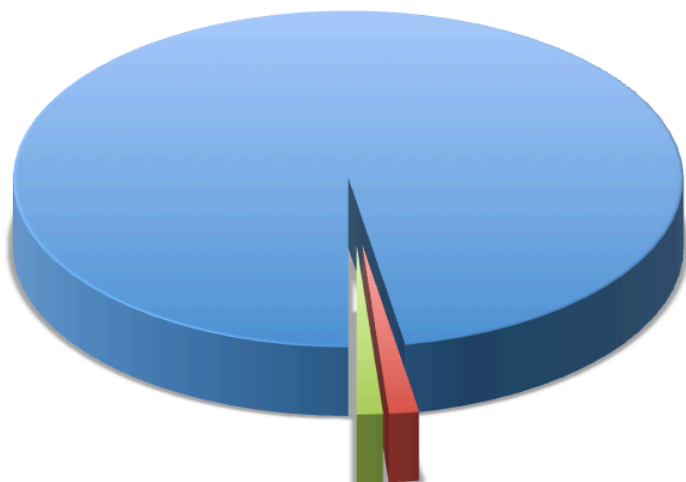
[NAUnitarians.org](https://www.naunitarians.org)



## FRANK AND ERNEST THAVES



## Article 2 Votes at GA 2024



- Total UUs in U.S.
- GA delegates not voting for rewrite
- GA delegates voting for rewrite

## FABLE?

### A Cautionary Tale

Once upon a time in a land far away, most of the people had small noses and were called Plain People. But a minority of people had large noses and a sensitive sense of smell. They had once been called Big Noses but they preferred to be called Persons of Better Smell or PBS.

In this land there was a small but important utopian community named United Utopians. The founding documents of the UUs stated "All persons are created equal," and the UU strove to eliminate the marginalization of the PBS.

One thing the UU was proud of was their bathrooms. They all had the fanciest bathrooms imaginable. In addition to the usual toilet and lavatory, every bathroom also had a bidet and both a shower and a bath. In fact, their bathrooms had so

many features that people called them the Seven Benefits, although few people could remember more than four or five of the benefits.

One day the UU were notified that their bathrooms were going to be revised. They thought, "Great, now maybe we will get handicapped seats on our toilets or maybe rainwater shower heads." But when the revision plans came, they showed that the bathrooms were dominated by a washer and a dryer. When the plain people asked what's happened to our Seven Benefits, the governors said "Well, they're basically still there, there's a shower in the corner and there's a toilet over there behind the dryer."

"Well," they asked, "why is this revision being made?" The governors explained that their bylaws called for the bathrooms to be revised every few years,

that the PBS were complaining about the smell of the Plain People.

The Plain protested "Well haven't we done a lot for the PBS? We pay our pledge every month"

"No," the management answered. "The PBS feel we were not changing clothes often enough. You need to wash and change them every day."

"Well, that seems excessive," said the PP."

"All plain people are so immersed in plainness that they cannot understand," said the governors, "therefore their opinions do not matter."

--Steve Bottorff  
UU since 1972

*Currently a member of Mountain  
Vista UU in Tucson AZ (Winter)  
and UU Congregation of  
Cleveland (OH) (Summer)*

## NAUA

### Save the Date!

The North American Unitarian Association will hold its first annual convention on October 17-20 2024 in Spokane WA and on line. For more information check out:

**NAUnitarians.org**

The NAUA is a member service organization dedicated to supporting and promoting the practice of liberal religion by embracing freedom, reason and tolerance and rooted in the commitment to the inherent worth and dignity of every person and all peoples. At the October convention, among other things, the NAUA will be electing its first permanent board of directors and forming bylaws to govern the new association. Come be a part of this new exciting organization!

**North American Unitarian Association**



## Why Do You Go To Church?

That was the question I asked. It was a visit, to one of our members in his apartment. I was a twenty-two year old ministerial intern at the First Unitarian Church in Denver. My guess is that he was in his early 30s. It was an apartment he shared with his mother. She was in a bedroom, dying of cancer. I would ask to look in before I left, but the talk in his living room was him and me.

"Why do you go to church?"

His answer: "To get the strength to live through another dangerous week."

I'm still wowed by that answer.

To me, it brings a torrent of unasked questions.

What kinds of strength? What kinds of dangers? How does church, your church, my church, our churches, give us strength to live our lives? And could we do better?

--John Keohane  
Austin, Texas

## Freethinkers

Dearest Editor

My name is Aspen. I am 25yrs of age. I have been a UU since the age 18. I came across this faith by way of a professor who was educated in philosophy at Boston College. Since then I have been involved in many national UU organisations. In my involvement I have sadly grown disillusioned by this faith, but still believe in its values. In the wake of article II and the capture of many of our UU affiliated faith groups, I started to wonder about the state of the humanist and non-theistic community, whose ideas have shaped Unitarian Universalist theology for the better part of a hundred years. Ever since the first humanist manifesto signed at Meadville Lombard one of our now corrupted UU seminars. I was struck by the tagline freethinker in your subtitle. Because freethinkers is a very dated and often underused word. It is exactly what I still believe humanist and non-theistic spirituality is about.

I am writing to show appreciation for this newsletter and to drum up enthusiasm for a freethought or freethinker group, which would seek to revitalise the once noble freethought tradition of the 19th century. A project many Unitarians were a part of and influenced by. I think

today's politically minded atheism and nontheism is not beneficial to building a secular religious community. I envision a group dedicated to the values of freedom of thought, inquiry, discourse and rejection of tradition in favour of something which uplifts humanity.

Rather than divide it along tribalist lines which recreate negative traditions and dogmatic groups. It is my hope to create a group which values humanity over traditions, borders and class lines, I would like this group to hold reasonable and respectful debate, something that is missing in today's world. Furthermore this group's mission would be nonpartisan and intellectual rather than socially engaged.

The fact stands true freethought should aspire to deal philosophically with the questions of reality. I hope in writing this letter others who define or resonate with freethinker, humanist, atheist, agnostic, deist, scientific pantheist or scientifically inclined will feel called to help establish this group.

My email is [aspenbasaldua2@gmail.com](mailto:aspenbasaldua2@gmail.com)  
All inquiries are welcome and encouraged. In gratitude to all especially the editor.

--Aspen Basaldua  
I am currently in the  
Cypress/Katy area in Houston, TX,  
USA

## EDITORIAL

### So Who's Confused?

Prior to this year, a lot, many, ok most, people did not know much about Unitarian Universalism. Sure, they'd seen the Unity Church and the United Church of Christ, but they weren't sure what those people believed in. And just how Christian are they?



*"I'm sorry, sir, but Dostoyevsky is not considered summer reading. I'll have to ask you to come with me."*

Maybe a friend they used to work with had explained that UUs are not those, but they were a progressive non-creedal religion that didn't claim to have the answers, but whose members and friends explored lots of religious traditions and let people form their own theology. Along with potlucks and yoga offerings. On any given Sunday, there would be Jewish, Moslem, Hindu and many other religious and spiritual talks, with the occasional lecture about

environmentalism, history and El Salvador.

Visitors were not subjected to dogma or endless bible stories, children were encouraged to learn about spiritual things in a free way, and everyone was accepted, as they came, to be themselves and be curious about just about everything.

"Come and Have your Answers Questioned," was one ad I used to run to appeal to searchers who wanted to experience an environment with music, fellowship, entertaining and enlightened sermons that brought the congregation together in the spirit of Welcoming All, including LGBTQ+.

I got used to explaining to folks that no, not Christian, not even necessarily religious, but the kind of place and atmosphere that worked for lots of folks and had worked for me for all my life.

Being kind of busy with, y'know, life, I had only recently discovered that they had dismantled the local districts in favor of a few huge regions that spanned many states and many, many churches. The board was now 'at large.' I had served a couple times on district boards in other areas. Getting rid of the districts was odd, in my opinion, because the districts were very helpful and help connect area churches. I thought that maybe this *could* work, if there were enough staff who were

interested in helping out local churches when there were issues to be dealt with.

A few months ago, I was listening to a sermon from my old friend and previous minister, Rev. Dr. Todd Eklof, who shocked the bejeesus out of me by announcing that the national association, which I had had marginal and not wildly satisfactory dealings with 20 or more years before, was getting into the dogma business and getting rid of the Seven Principles, which I always thought were really cool.

They were also changing from a service organization (which I never got much use out of) to a doctrine-issuing denominational organization that was gonna dictate to local churches which of the new, vague redone "Values" the national association had issued and which the local churches were now responsible for upholding.

Well, this wasn't what I had become accustomed to over 67 years. How was I gonna explain to people on the street (who were just starting to understand that there was a big difference between Unity and Unitarian), what us UUs were all about? How were outsiders, visitors, casual acquaintances, and even church members gonna ever understand the change from what had been the Unitarian Universalist mission and bywords for nearly 50 years?

And I still don't know.

*John Griffin Miller, Editor  
UUnderWorld*



# How The UUA Manufactures Consent

*Reverend Gary Kowalski*

Co-Minister, Unitarian Congregation of Taos, New Mexico

Minister Emeritus, First UU Society of Burlington, Vermont

*Our Unitarian Universalist Association adopted a new form of governance in 2010 that has vested power in the hands of a small, self-selected group of insiders who now exercise control of the denomination by the manufacture of consent.*

Let's unpack that alarming claim.

## *I: The Shift To Policy Governance*

Up until 2010, the UUA Board was elected geographically, with representatives from each of 23 districts. This made for a large and sometimes unwieldy deliberative body. On one hand, it meant that the average person in the pew might actually know their elected Trustee (as many in my Burlington congregation knew Rev. Will Saunders, our Vermont/New Hampshire Trustee, because even though Will was in New Hampshire his mother Miriam was a member of the church I served in a neighboring state). There was more local control, but this also meant that many Trustees looked like their constituents. Vermont and New Hampshire are overwhelmingly white, and our Trustee, Rev. Saunders, was also white.

In order to bring more racial and gender diversity to the UUA Board, and to streamline its cumbersome decision-making, the General Assembly in 2010 voted to move to Policy Governance. I believe I voted in favor of the change. It sounded like a good idea at the time.

As a result, the size of the Board was cut in half, with two youth representatives (again to bring diversity to the mix), while the President, Moderator, and Financial Advisor were made *ex officio* members, without vote. The members of the Board were no longer elected locally. Instead, they were named by the Nominating Committee, subject to confirmation by the General Assembly. How did that work out?

## *II: Good Intentions Gone Awry*

The switch to policy governance ended by making our Association less democratic, less diverse and more centrally controlled.

Members of the Board were to be selected by the Nominating Committee with special regard to including "historically marginalized communities" and other factors to guarantee a true cross-section of the multicultural faith we aspired to be. And who selected the Nominating Committee? The Nominating Committee itself. Power was vested in the hands of insiders. No votes or ballots (much less secret ballots) were required for the General Assembly delegates to confirm these appointments. As long as there were no pesky "nominees by petition" (and petitioning to get on the ballot was an arduous, expensive and time-consuming process, about as likely to succeed as running as a third party candidate for President of the United States) both Board and Nominating Committee

members assumed their wins by acclamation. Their ascension became part of the consent agenda. One member of the Nominating Committee I spoke with told me that never had there been a nominee by petition or any successful outsider challenge to this powerful, self-appointed body of insiders.

Imagine a City Council or U.S. Congressional contest with just one nominee and no other contestants. Would we call that democracy? Or something else?

### III: UU Evolves Into Unctious Uniformitarianism

Naturally people on the Nominating Committee want to replace outgoing members with others who share their viewpoints and agendas. It's only human nature. Friends gravitate toward friends. Like is attracted to like. So while the Nominating Committee and Board became more inclusive in terms of race, sexual orientation, and gender, they both became more homogenous, more uniform, in their ideologies and priorities.

Meanwhile, the Board became much more powerful. For example, the Board was able to transfer a quarter of the denomination's unrestricted endowment to Black Lives of UU without either the President's or Financial Advisor's presence or input. When these kinds of unilateral actions created tension, as we saw in 2016, the Board was able to engineer the ouster of an elected President and several other UUA staff. The Board knew it had the stronger hand. Other players had to fold their cards.

### *IV The Manufacture of Consent*

How can the Board act with such impunity? Doesn't the General Assembly hold the real power in our denomination? No, the Nominating Committee and their pals on the Board prevail through the manufacture of consent.

- General Assembly is largely a spectacle where delegates wave their yellow ballots on cue. Delegates pay attention to the resolutions of Social Witness, where there is always heated debate but not much happens, and they take interest in the Presidential races, even though the President has become a largely ceremonial figurehead to bless the Board's decisions. Other business items almost always pass in a blur of Robert's Rules that baffle the average lay person.
- Consent is manufactured by alienating the opposition. In 2010, Peter Morales defeated Laurel Hallman by a margin of 2,061 to 1,481 votes. In other words, 3,542 delegates were present in Minneapolis. According to the General Assembly credentials report from 2016, after Morales' negotiated resignation, there were 1,842 delegates present in Columbus, about half the number that participated in his election. Absentee, online voting, although a good idea, doesn't begin to make up the difference. It may sound Machiavellian, but you can whip your opponents simply by encouraging them to drop out of the process.
- The UUA Board appoints over two-thirds of the members of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee. Seminarians and smart young clergy in preliminary fellowship know they must

pass a litmus test to receive their punch card to practice ministry. Consciously or unconsciously, they understand they must not rock the boat. I am not saying that any knowingly compromise their principles. I am saying that, when your paycheck depends on it, principles seem more flexible. (One older graduate of Starr King I know well was given a Category 4 and told to seek mental health counseling because he told the MFC that while he saw racism as a pressing moral concern, he believed that climate change posed an event greater threat to the future of the planet) Clergy not only vote at GA, they have tremendous sway with their congregants. By weeding out outliers, the Board grooms the next generation of trusted functionaries to serve on its endless committees and run the bureaucracy.

- The Board manufactures consent by encouraging purges, censures and denunciations of clergy who fail to pay deference to their decrees, through the propaganda of its house organ the *UU World*, and by the manipulation of myths and memes that identify the current generation of thought police with the freethinkers and bold minds of an heroic past.

So what if even half of this true?

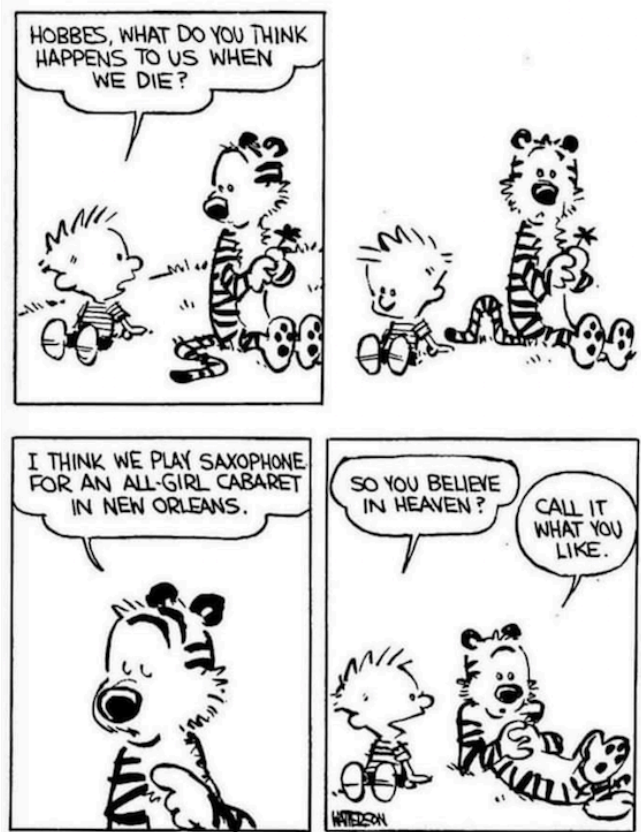
### V: Conclusion

The things I am saying are not nice, but I want to be clear that I am not attacking anyone on the UUA Board or Nominating Committee personally. Since Dick Jackie died, I'm not sure I know any of the current members and they are probably wonderful individuals who love their dogs, work at the soup kitchen, recycle and floss. My critique is not directed at individuals, rather at a system. I think policy governance has led us down a road where our religious leadership

- Is increasingly self-selecting and ingrown
- Is less accountable to the rank and file
- Is less transparent in its operations
- Is less diverse and tolerates less diversity of opinion in our movement

When given unchecked authority, automatic ascent to electoral victory, and the power to judge, punish, and control the livelihoods of others who stand in their way, while cloaking themselves in a mantle of moral purity, even the best human beings succumb to their worst instincts. This is why I believe my original statement to be true, even if alarming:

*Our Unitarian Universalist Association adopted a new form of governance in 2010 that has vested power in the hands of a small, self-selected group of insiders who now exercise control of the denomination by the manufacture of consent.*



Understanding the ongoing schism in this religious tradition

# The 2 Cultures of Unitarian-Universalism

[GEORGE Q TYREBYTER](#)

APR 05, 2024

## UUism – a short primer

The Unitarian-Universalist faith tradition is a relatively new religious tradition, in comparison to Judaism, Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism. [It started](#) roughly in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the Transylvanian portion of Hungary, and then in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as an offshoot of Congregationalism in the United States. Today, it has become a different religion, one in which many persons are atheists, and are not particularly Christian.

Unitarianism began as a “heresy” distinct from the main Christian tradition of “trinitarianism”, which is the notion that God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are all manifestations of the Most High. Unitarianism began as a rejection of this trinitary view (hence the name “Unitarianism”), and reverted to the founding “unitary deity” notion of Christianity, in which God is the central deity, Jesus is a prophetic voice and leader although not divine, and the Holy Spirit is not really part of the mix. As such, in the USA, it was a minor religious tradition, mostly in the New England area, although it [was extended to the Upper Midwest](#) and Heartland during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 1960s, Unitarianism merged with [Universalism](#). Unitarianism had become, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a religion of intellectual interest in multiple religious sources. Universalism was far more Christian, and held to a doctrine of universal salvation and eternal life after death, without the notion of Hell to frighten parishioners. The merger was somewhat awkward, as Unitarians were far more intellectual and upper-class, while Universalists were more lower-class, and more strongly Christian. Few Unitarians today have a strong belief in the notion of eternal life nor have any belief in Jesus.

As part of the merger, a [set of 7 principles](#) were formulated:

[1<sup>st</sup> Principle](#): The inherent worth and dignity of every person.

[2<sup>nd</sup> Principle](#): Justice, equity and compassion in human relations.

[3<sup>rd</sup> Principle](#): Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations.

[4<sup>th</sup> Principle](#): A free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

[5<sup>th</sup> Principle](#): The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.

[6<sup>th</sup> Principle](#): The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.

[7<sup>th</sup> Principle](#): Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

These principles form the core of UUism. They define a faith tradition of rational examination of belief, but one which is not oriented toward some supernatural deity.

The faith tradition is not particularly Christian at the current time. In fact, many adherents are atheists or agnostics. Many hold pagan beliefs, spiritual views of a non-deistic nature, and strong views of social justice. The notion, from the Universalist tradition, of universal salvation to eternal life is not held by many current UUs, who often do not have much belief in life after death. Instead, UUs mostly believe that we must live good lives in the present while alive.



## **The Enlightenment and the Rights of Man**

Current UUism draws much of its impetus from the Enlightenment, a philosophical and historically important movement. The [enlightenment](#) occurred during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, with a [culmination](#) in the [Declaration of Independence](#) and [the Declaration of the Rights of Man](#). These two documents, written closely in time, proclaimed that men have inherent rights, that aristocrats are not inherently better, and that men have rights for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The rights in these documents, which arose out of philosophical writings of many persons (to a large degree French), set forth a new view of humanity. [In summary](#):

The goal of the Enlightenment's proponents was to apply the methods learned from the scientific revolution to the problems of society. Further, its advocates committed themselves to "reason" and "liberty." Knowledge, its followers believed, could only come from the careful study of actual conditions and the application of an individual's reason, not from religious inspiration or traditional beliefs. Liberty meant freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and freedom from unreasonable government.

## **The cultures of dignity and victimhood**

In a [previous discussion](#), the notions of 3 different moral cultures (honor, dignity, victimhood) were discussed by summarizing their description from other sources. A "moral culture" is a set of rules and beliefs which define the organization of a society. It defines what actions are considered acceptable and unacceptable, the way status is defined and increased, and defines how disputes are handled. In a "culture of dignity" (CoD, the current dominant mainstream culture in the 1<sup>st</sup>-world countries of the West), individuals have a value, which is intrinsic. Individuals can improve themselves and increase their status, by education, economic accomplishments, achievement in the arts or sports, and by political leadership. Actions which break laws are considered unacceptable. When laws are broken, the system of courts and trials is used to resolve disputes and solve problems. This "moral culture" has held through much of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is the "moral culture" of the Enlightenment.

In the recent 20 years or so, a new moral culture, the "culture of victimhood" (CoV), is increasingly important in many countries of the 1<sup>st</sup>-world west. In the CoV, the key value lies in recognizing and elevating "marginalized communities". These include communities of color (black, brown), foreign origin (immigrant, refugee), sex (women but not men), sexual minority (gay, lesbian, bi-sexual), gender dysphoria (trans), body size (overly fat), handicaps (missing limbs), and intellectual deficiency. As such groups have been historically discriminated against, the members of the CoV work to overcome the discrimination and raise the members of the marginalized groups to the status of the supposed dominant white male normal-sex-interest group. The process of raising "marginalized groups" may include positive discrimination in favor of the marginalized persons, as well as explicit favoritism. For persons in this culture, discrimination to produce results and elevate minorities is considered appropriate.

## **The culture clash in UUism**

UUism is engaged in a potentially schismatic dispute at the present time. This period began in the years 2016-2019 (although some hold that the situation dates to 1995 or so). There are 2 groups in this dispute. These groups may be called "Traditional UUs" (T-UUs) and the "Victim-oriented UUs" (V-UUs). With the understanding of the CoD and CoV, the issues that the T-UUs and V-UUs are in dispute about become clear and more easily understood.

## **The 7 Principles and T-UUs**

The 7 Principles listed above were composed during the time when T-UUs were the main type of UU. From the standpoint of the CoD and persons who identify as T-UUs, the Principles are almost a definition of the CoD. The 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> Principles are key to UUism and its relationship to the CoD. The 2<sup>nd</sup> is also somewhat important. The 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> Principles are less relevant to the CoD notions.

- The 1<sup>st</sup> Principle: “the inherent worth and dignity of every person”, uses the word “dignity”, and defines a person as having intrinsic, inherent worth. That is, the worth of a person is not earned. All persons have equal worth. This worth or value is part of the person, and is a birthright. This is a core Enlightenment ideal.

- The 2<sup>nd</sup> Principle: “Justice, equity and compassion in human relations”, defines how disputes are handled, and considers that they must follow the notion of “justice”, leavened by “compassion”. Justice implies that rules will be used to settle disputes and contentions. The use of “equity” implies that no persons have an elevated status over others intrinsically. This follows also from the 1<sup>st</sup> Principle.

- The 4<sup>th</sup> Principle: “A free and responsible search for truth and meaning” is again at the heart of the CoD, and derived directly from the Enlightenment. When a person searches, this is done because the answer is not readily at hand. In defining “free and responsible search” as a foundational principle of UUism, the implicit admission that “the answer is not known already” is included. Revelation is not sealed. Thus, no Deity, no Supreme Authority, has provided answers to questions. The admonishment to “search in a free and responsible manner” implies that each person must answer questions for himself.

- The 5<sup>th</sup> Principle: “The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large” is a key one for the CoD interpretation. UUs are to use the “conscience” to make decisions. Sometimes, it is said that “UUs can believe anything”. This is not true. No person who follows the “right of conscience” can condone murder or the sacrifice of children. The “right of conscience” implies that persons must make up their own notions as to what is important, although mitigated and modified by legality and appropriateness. There are boundaries in this decision, and these are defined by the conscience of a moral and reasonable person.

Thus, the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> Principles define UUism as part of the CoD. They also link UUism to a spiritual tradition which grew directly from the Enlightenment. The French revolution, announced by [“The Declaration of the rights of Man and Citizen”](#), and the [Declaration of Independence](#) in the English colonies which soon became the United States of America, both use similar ideas. These foundational documents, which are key parts of the Enlightenment, define “persons” having “inalienable rights” to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

### **The V-UUs and new views of the Principles**

The victim-oriented UUs (V-UUs) are a relatively new group within UUism. They have arisen within the last 30 years, and are attempting to change the organization, structure, objectives, and direction of UUism. The V-UUs are particularly interested in changing and modifying the foundational 7 Principles of UUism. They seek to change the future spiritual path that the UU faith will follow.

If these persons are understood as adherents to the CoV, much of what they do and have done is far easier to understand. The use of the CoV as meta-narrative explains what the V-UUs are aiming to do, and much of the rationale that motivates their actions. To understand the V-UUs and why they are adherents to the CoV, it's best to consider several recent events.

### **4 recent events**

A brief recounting of recent events can help understand why persons who adhere to either the CoD or the CoV are in dispute. If you are an adherent to the CoD, you are not willing to be within the moral culture of the CoV, and CoV adherents reject the CoD. The two moral cultures are antithetical to one another. In addition, the persons enmeshed in either of these cultures do not understand nor communicate with those from the other culture. This is due to the great differences in the authority structure, the treatment of disagreements, and the matters over which disagreements occur.

## The 8<sup>th</sup> “Principle”

A recent [proposed addition](#) to the Principles is the “8<sup>th</sup> proposed Principle”:

*“We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.”*

A cursory reading of this proposed Principle leads one to conclude that it is written very differently than the other 7 UU Principles. It is longer (42 words), has many unknown terms (e.g., “diverse multicultural Beloved Community”, “spiritual wholeness”), includes terms which are implicit threats (“accountably”), and makes multiple assumptions about UUism and UUs (“racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions”). The 8<sup>th</sup> Principle is not mandatory for UU congregations, but has been adopted by a minority of UU congregations (perhaps 25% of all UU congregations as of March, 2024).

This proposed 8<sup>th</sup> Principle, which was written in 2013, was defined in response to a perceived omission in the 7 Principles by the author Paula Cole Jones:

After working with congregations on these issues for over 15 years, she realized that a person can believe they are being a “good UU” and following the 7 Principles without thinking about or dealing with racism and other oppressions at the systemic level.” Thus, the 8<sup>th</sup> Principle is motivated by the need to “deal with racism and other oppressions”.

Left unstated in this discussion of the origin of the 8<sup>th</sup> Principle is any evidence of “racism and other oppressions” within UUism.

This wording of this 8<sup>th</sup> “Principle” includes terms and ideas which place it firmly within the CoV. The Principle requires all to address “racism”. This is the term which describes discrimination against persons of black African heritage. By using the term “dismantle”, the proposed Principle calls for the elevation of this group of “marginalized” persons. No evidence is furnished for this “racism”, but a survey was conducted by the Committee on Institutional Change which purported to support this notion.

As noted in the “origin” page (linked above), “For people identified as white, it is too easy to ignore these issues, which is exactly what keeps the system of racism in our society alive and in fact worsening right now. We need to de-center whiteness and other dominant cultures in UUism.” Here we see several key indicators of the CoV:

- “For people identified as white”: persons are placed into groups and the groups define the relevant characteristics of all persons. You are “white” or “black”. No discussion in the 8<sup>th</sup> Principle concerns those who are neither (e.g., brown, Asian, Native American). This statement assumes that the understanding of all persons about this issue is defined by the group membership of that person.

- “keeps the system of racism in our society alive and in fact worsening right now”: This is an attempt to create a sense of urgency and of an immediate problem. It is objectively noted by neutral observers that “racism” is in fact NOT “worsening”, but is substantially a minor problem in the US and the West at this time.

- “de-center whiteness and other dominant cultures in UUism”: here we see the Prime Drive of the CoV – to elevate “marginalized” communities to the center of the power position. This is related to the CoV project of “dismantling the power structure”.

For many T-UUs who are adherents to the CoD, the 8<sup>th</sup> proposed Principle was a terrible shock and a violation of core UU beliefs. It is both embedded within the 7 Principles, and a contradiction of them at the same time.

## The BLUU grant of 2016

During a UUA Board of Directors meeting in 2016, [an award](#) was made to BLUU (Black Lives of UU). This award of \$5,300,000 was made without an actual vote, but was simply made by acclamation of the

Board members. In a subsequent Board meeting, a post-action vote was taken to retroactively justify the award. The award was made without any form of plan for the use of the money (a requirement for grants to be considered by the Board of Directors), and it was proposed that the money be taken from the Endowment Fund of the UUA. Here is a paragraph from the UU World report about the vote:

The board did not take a vote on the decision to fund BLUU, but set aside Robert's Rules of Order for the trustees' conversation about BLUU's request for \$5.3 million. It took this unusual step, trustees said, in recognition of the frustration many UUs, especially people of color and young people, expressed about an [emphasis on process over content and meaning](#) during the successful but contentious debate and vote on an Action of Immediate Witness to support Black Lives Matter at the 2015 General Assembly. In recognition of the frustration and the need for new approaches to decision-making, the board framed the BLUU funding decision as a "religious act, not as a piece of corporate business," said trustee the Rev. Patrick McLaughlin.

This is a set of actions rooted in the CoV.

- The action was taken to help people of color and young people, who are being characterized as marginalized groups.

- The action is framed as a religious act, exempting it from the normal process of consideration.

In the view of many UUs, the action to approve the grant was done due to the imposition of a feeling of "white guilt" on the Board of Directors. From the report: "We made a decision that we all understood without [first] perfecting the language, so we managed to challenge white supremacist decision-making." By framing this as a counter to "white supremacist decision-making", the Board is clearly "feeling the heat" of the dreaded charge of "racism" and "white supremacy".

### The 2019 GA and The Gadfly Papers

The events which occurred during the 2019 General Assembly (GA, the annual meeting of UUs) were the clearest example yet of the change of culture in UUism. These events involved the release of ["The Gadfly Papers"](#) (TGP), a collection of 3 essays by Rev. Todd Eklof, minister at The Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane. The three essays discuss various aspects of current UUism. The essay which is of most interest to this discussion is the first, "The coddling of the Unitarian universalist mind" (COTUUM). The essay is based closely on ["The coddling of the American mind"](#), written by Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt in 2019. In this essay, Rev. Eklof discusses the conflict between T-UUs and V-UUs, although it is not termed as such.

To understand the essay and the reaction to same, COTUUM should be examined. To facilitate this discussion, it will be briefly summarized. COTUUM discussed a number of trends in recent UUism which Eklof was concerned about: **safetyism** (the push in numerous institutions to "help" persons by suppressing the speech which makes them uncomfortable, and which is creeping into UUism), **identitarianism** (the practice of focusing on group identities and promoting the interests and stature of "marginalized groups" over others, thus elevating them), **concept creep** (changing and expanding the meaning of words, such as "harm" and "hurt", to include "mental harm" or "make someone uncomfortable", which shades into **linguicide**, which is the control of the debate by the control of the definition of terms), **microaggressions and call-out culture** (controlling the debate by telling speakers that they offend others and that their speech is offending people, leading to charges of "racism" or "sexism"), **political correctness** (intolerance which is politically motivated leading to ruling that certain types of speech cannot be used), and **witch hunts** (seeking internal enemies to denounce and destroy, in a crusade for intellectual and moral purity).

Eklof notes that UUism is grounded in humanism. This philosophical position is antithetical to identitarianism. It is a belief in overall human goodness. UUism is not a faith tradition consistent with identitarianism. The essay concludes by calling for a policy of common humanity (an approach which



unites), rather than a policy of common enemies (an approach which divides), and calling for tolerance of imperfection rather than Puritanical condemnation of human frailty.

The essays were published in a small volume at the expense of Rev Eklof. He began to distribute the books, without charge, in an authorized booth in the GA hall. The response was immediate and precipitous. The books were confiscated and removed from the hall. A [letter](#) (L-500M) was written by a UUA staffer, and signed by approximately 500 UU ministers, within a very few days of the release of TGP (and before a majority of those signing the letter had conceivably been able to actually read TGP). Following the letter and the release, Rev. Todd Eklof was removed from Fellowship of the UUA. The events are recounted at more length in [several places](#).

This “Gadfly episode” has led to several consequences. As noted above, Rev. Todd Eklof was removed from Fellowship of the UUA. This is a direct attack on his fitness to be a UU minister. He retains his pulpit, as UU churches are free to have a wide variety of ministers. A very active FaceBook discussion (now archived as “The Gadfly Effect”, but I have been unable to locate the archived discussions). Accounts in the [Financial Times](#) and the [“Blocked and Reported” blog](#) discuss the events. The term “gadfly” now identifies persons within UUism who agree with Rev. Eklof. For some, the term is a pejorative, while for others it is a badge of honor.

When the COTUUM is read in the context of the T-UU (UUs in the CoD) and V-UU (UUs in the CoV) moral cultural viewpoint, the impact of the book is clear. In the essay, Rev. Eklof pointed out that the V-UU moral culture is completely different from the T-UU culture, and identified specific practices and issues which are changing T-UUs into V-UUs. COTUUM points out features of the CoV which are changing the meaning of UUism. The CoV is antithetical to the CoD, which is the culture of the T-UU group. The L-500M should be read by you, Dear Reader. It is a response, which is ironic and self-sabotaging, as it contains within it the very elements which TGP notes are problems for UUism. During the very heated FB discussions for “The Gadfly Effect”, the very points which Eklof raised (e.g., safetyism, concept creep, microaggressions) were used by V-UU discussants, while T-UU discussants criticized them for these very usages.

## **The revision of Article II**

In UUism, the closest document that we have to a statement of a religious faith are the 7 Principles, which were listed earlier. The Article II Study Commission completed a proposal for [new wording](#) for Article II. This is the place in the UUA documents where the 7 Principles and 6 Sources were stated. Readers should examine the Article II revision before continuing to read this posting.

The new Article II can be summarized:

- It is far longer and wordier than are the 7 Principles and 6 Sources.
- The 6 Sources have been completely removed and are not referenced. A very vague “Inspirations” section is added but no specificity of what the inspirations are is given.
- The “7 Principles” are replaced by “6 Values”.
- The 6 Values overlap with the 7 Principles. However, they are wordier, and thus allow less interpretation. In addition, the concepts found in the 7 Principles are de-emphasized and are less clear.
- The term “Love” is added to the Values, but is not defined.
- The 8<sup>th</sup> Principle is included as a Value (Justice), although a majority of UU congregations have not accepted this Principle.
- The 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Principles are reduced. There is a mention of “free and responsible search, but it is enmeshed within a sentence of “learn from one another”. Individual learning and growth is not considered.
- The term “accountable” is included. Accountable means that some person or group will be evaluating the fitness of others.

- The 6<sup>th</sup> Principle (“goal of world community”) is modified.
- All Principles are altered to bring “mutual action” into the Values, and eliminate “individual improvement”.
- The undefined notion of a “Beloved Community” is introduced without any clear definition.

Taken as a whole, the new Article II (which is likely to be adopted in the GA of 2024) moves UUism from a faith tradition for individuals to a community action space. Many V-UUs have indicated very directly in personal conversation that the new approach will be a “social justice” oriented UU. The focus is relentlessly on “dismantling white supremacy culture”. The monthly email from the MidAmerica District, the MidAmerica Messenger, has a section “Resource for Dismantling Systemic White Supremacy”. There is no section in the email entitled “Resource for retaining members in the pandemic” and “Resource for running a Religious Education program with 3 children” – things that are real problems for small churches.

As to the CoV and CoD, the Revision falls specifically within the CoV framework. The overall notion of “love” is the unifying term in the Revision. This is interpreted by many as a “actionable” term. That is, “love” will be interpreted as “working for social justice”. This has led many to describe the new version of Article II as “turning UUism into a social justice collective with hymnals.”

### **Summary about the 4 recent events**

The short versions of the 4 events show a developing pattern of influence of V-UUs in UUism as a whole. These events show the pattern of takeover of those who subscribe to the CoV. UUism has always been attractive to persons who are rational and have the moral culture of the CoD.

These events discussed have occurred over the last 8 years or so, but the issue of the V-UU influence (and takeover) of UUism has been building for at least 25 years. In 1999, a prominent black UU minister, Thandeka, gave an invited address to the GA entitled [“Why antiracism will fail”](#), in which she critiqued the anti-racism approach which had been increasingly present within UUism as of 1999. Another event during this 25-year period was the publication of [“The Antiracism Trainings”](#) by David Reich (discussed below). This is a comic novel about a serious subject by a first-hand observer, a former writer of “UU World”. The novel describes the change of culture from T-UU to V-UU. Multiple other events (e.g., the resignation of Morales, multiple articles published in “UU World”, the elimination of comments and “Letters to the Editor” of “UU World”) during this period clearly define the wind direction of UUism. You don’t need to be a weatherman to see the “way the wind is blowing.”

### **Moral cultures and fundamental value**

Many current UUs are older white liberals. A large majority are both culturally liberal and politically liberal, but some, like this author, are politically conservative. Most UUs who have been members for any period are liberal in the classic sense – open-minded, willing to consider alternative viewpoints, and enmeshed within the ideals of the Enlightenment. Most current UUs are adherents of the CoD. They are T-UUs.

Within the professional clergy of UUism, the CoV has largely taken over. The push for the 8<sup>th</sup> Principle was an early indication that the culture was changing. Reports from those who underwent theology training indicate that the climate within the theology schools was intersectionality on steroids, where continual challenges from other students about marginalized group memberships occurred. The reaction to “The Gadfly Papers” is a good example of the “moral panic” which insistence on CoD values induces in the CoV persons who are the V-UUs. The push to change Article II, and thus the core set of beliefs of UUism, is the culmination of the change in cultures.

## **How CoD persons view CoV persons**

One of the great difficulties with the switch from the CoD to the CoV lies in the inability of persons in one culture to understand the reasoning, thought processes, and value structure of the persons in the other culture. For those in the CoD, the values stated in the 7 Principles are the values of the Enlightenment. The change in Article 2 described above

- The 1<sup>st</sup> Principle (“inherent worth and dignity of every person”) is a key value for T-UUs; the elevation of persons in “marginalized groups” over others by V-UUs is very troubling.
- The unwillingness of the V-UUs, including the current President of the UU, to respect the 4<sup>th</sup> Principle (“free and responsible search for truth and meaning”) is equally troubling. For the V-UUs, the “free and responsible search” has been replaced by a single-minded focus on “social justice” efforts, on “dismantling white supremacy”, and on the elevation of “marginalized group” members.
- The V-UUs are largely uninterested in important issues for T-UUs, represented by the 7<sup>th</sup> Principle. Similarly, important groups within the UU faith, who center this Principle (UU-Pagans, UU-Wicans, feminist groups, men’s groups) are equally denigrated by V-UUs.
- V-UUs do not support the 5<sup>th</sup> Principle (“right of conscience and use of the democratic process”). The election of the current UUA President involved a single candidate (who won, amazingly enough), which was additionally facilitated by changing the rules of nomination to make it impossible for a second candidate to be nominated in opposition to the UUA candidate.

## **How CoV persons view CoD persons**

I begin this section with a disclaimer: I am a T-UU, and am only modestly able to understand the viewpoint of V-UU persons. That being said, the revision of Article 2 contains important clues. Other clues have come from conversations with V-UUs.

- V-UUs consider T-UUs to be old, white, and wrong. There is a belief that they must be brought into the “new UU order” either by deception or coercion.
- The word “accountable” or “accountability” is found frequently within V-UU documents. This term suggests that methods to force V-UU beliefs on all UUs will be used.
- There is a frequent complaint that “people who pledge large amounts are attempting to force certain conclusions”. That is, older, whiter UUs, who make the majority of the pledges for their churches, are not to have any say in those churches.
- The UUA has actively segregated persons into groups for worship services (the 2021 GA final worship service had designated seating areas for specific groups), discussion sessions (persons are separated into groups of POC and white persons for discussions), and trainings.
- Dismantling white supremacy is considered the main function of the UUA.

## **What will happen?**

Why does it matter to identify the core members of the UUA, the V-UUs, as CoV adherents? Any label for a group is only useful if it can be used to make predictions of future behavior. This attempt to place this change in the organization of UUism from CoD to CoV suggests that further aspects of the CoV will be introduced. Active cancellation of those who disagree may be considered. Elimination of congregational polity (lack of centralized direction of individual churches) is rumored to be the next revision of the UUA.

## **The future of the UU faith**

The comic novel [“The Antiracism Trainings”](#), released in 2009 by a staffer who had worked on the UU magazine “UU World” for many years, imagines a religion which has many similarities to UUism. The religion is called “Yuperism” (YUism). Instead of 7 Principles, it has “6 suggestions”. In this book, the main character (who represents T-UUs) is friends with an anti-racism trainer (who represents V-UUs). At the

end of the book, the T-UU leaves UUism and the V-UU trainer remains to coerce YUs to become anti-racists. That is what is happening today in UUism.

For the T-UUs, the crisis point will occur in Summer, 2024. The GA will have a final vote to accept the new Article II. For most T-UUs, this revision is unacceptable. Its acceptance is highly likely. Once this Article is accepted, many changes will occur with the UUA. Documents will be written about the new version of the Principles. No documents will support the old version. Many T-UUs will find other changes, including more strident “social justice” and “dismantling white supremacy” campaigns, which will be difficult to accept. Many will fall away from UUism.

### **The North American Unitarian Association**

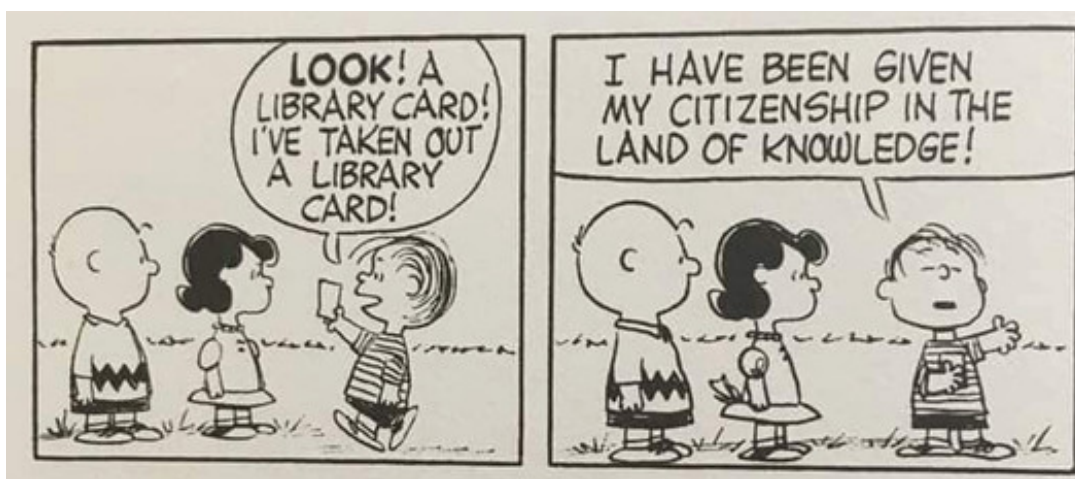
Rev. Todd Eklof has retained his position in his church, and has begun a new organization, the [“North American Unitarian Association”](#). This organization is new, but is developing rapidly. If you are concerned about the direction of the UUA, click that link, examine the NAUA website, and think about the new organization. I have joined it. There is no cost for membership.

### **Conclusion**

There are 2 cultures within UUism today. Those who have been UUs for a long time, which are termed T-UUs here, have centered their views of UUism around the 7 Principles. These UUs fall into the moral culture of the Culture of Dignity. Newer UUs, the substantial bulk of the clergy (especially in younger cases), are term V-UUs. These V-UUs are far less interested in personal growth, spiritual development, and the “free and responsible search”. There is a single-minded objective of “social justice” and “dismantling white supremacy”.

The COTUUM essay by Todd Eklof of 5 years ago had many things to say that are similar to this essay. The contribution here is the name of “culture of victimhood”. When you know a name, you know something about the group. I have named it, and this leads to further predictions about the V-UUs.

The revision of Article II, likely to pass at 2024 GA, will precipitate a crisis in UUism. Many will leave the UUA and affiliate with the NAUA. This will be difficult, as many church By-Laws have deep connections with the UUA. There are legal issues about church ownership which will be complicated as well. In my view, by 2026, the UUA membership will have fallen by 25%, perhaps more.





## Why Anti-Racism Will Fail

By Thandeka, delivered at 1999 Unitarian Universalist General Assembly

Two events compel me to make a public statement against the antiracist theology and programs of our association. The first event occurred two years ago, when General Assembly passed a resolution calling upon the UUA, its congregations, and its community organizations to become anti-racist, multi-cultural institutions – terms that have a special meaning and history in our Unitarian Universalist context. To this end, the UUA Board of Trustees was urged to establish a committee to monitor and assess this process.

The second event occurred last spring when Bill Murry, president of Meadville/Lombard Theological School, asked me to present a public lecture at GA on my new book *Learning to be White: Money, Race, and God in America*. I accepted this invitation, knowing I would have to speak out against an official UUA program, something I do with great reluctance. But otherwise, my own work might be mistranslated at GA into yet another talk about white racism. As I hope to show, such racial talk is counterproductive to the social justice mission of the real religious vision of our religious movement.

And so I must begin my remarks with a critique of the anti-racist programs described by the “Journey Toward Wholeness Path to Anti- Racism,” the information packet developed by the UUA’s Faith in Action Department for Diversity and Justice. The packet itemizes the steps we need to take to develop an anti-racist UU identity, none of which we’re told, can be skipped if one wishes to become an anti-racist. The first step is to take an anti-racism training workshop led by an authorized trainer.

I took one of these workshops and read the accompanying material. As a result of these experiences, I learned three things:

- One. All whites in America are racists.
- Two. No blacks in American are racist. They’re prejudiced just like everybody else, but they lack the power of institutional resources to force other racial groups to submit to their will. Thus they can’t be racist because racism in this conceptual scheme is defined as prejudice + power.
- Three. Whites must be shown that they are racists and confess their racism.

Based on my experiences of the training and on my work with some of the anti-racism advocates at the UUA on a racial and cultural diversity task force, I concluded that the anti-racist strategies have three basic problems:

- First. They violate the first principle of our UU covenant together to actively affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Second. They make an erroneous assumption about the nature and structure of power in America; and
- Third, they misinterpret actions resulting from feelings of shame and powerlessness as evidence of white racism.

In more detail:

**Problem #1:** The UUA’s anti-racist programs tend to violate the first principle of our covenant together.

**Evidence.** Anti-racists assume that congregations and their leadership mirror -- and I use the anti-racist language here -- the larger society's racism by excluding people of color as well as other socially oppressed groups such as gays and lesbians, people with disabilities, "Third World citizens, etc., through their often unexamined policies, practices, teachings, and decisions.

What these anti-racists fail to notice is that most of our thousand or so churches are closed to virtually everyone regardless of race, color, class, or creed. Half our churches have fewer than 250 members. A great many of them function as clubs. A case in point. One white friend told me that the former white minister of his UU church left after the congregation met to decide whether he should be ordered to shave off his new beard.

Rather than recognize that our congregants often find all difference threatening, anti-racists conclude that these congregations stay small and virtually all white because of the members' racism. With the caricature in place that the congregants are, like all whites, racists, the antiracists then, through careful and protracted training, call upon these congregants to confess their racism. Thus the anti-racists have created what they describe -- Whites who have learned to think of themselves as racists.

The theological principle behind all this is expressed in Joseph Barndt's book, *Dismantling Racism: The Continuing Challenge to White America*, which was sent to me, complements of the UUA anti-racism program to reinforce the lessons of the anti-racism workshop. Barndt, a white Lutheran minister, conducts anti-racism trainings for the UUA.

Barndt's belief that all whites are racists is based explicitly on the Christian doctrine of original sin, which claims that through Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden human nature was corrupted -- a doctrine linked to the Trinitarian claim that only through the death of Jesus and with the assistance of the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit can human nature be saved. In every age, Christian theologians have found new language to explain this doctrine. The anti-racist doctrine is just a recent example.

As Unitarian Universalists we reject this doctrine in its pure form, but we have inadvertently brought it into our midst by using anti-racist rhetoric informed by Barndt's Christian dogma. Barndt, for example, tells us we're "Enslaved by sin and freed by grace," -- classic Christian Trinitarian language. In other words, only a Savior can free us from sin and human imperfection because we humans lack agency to help ourselves. Following this Christian doctrine to its logical conclusion, he thus urges whites to seek forgiveness for their racism and, to quote him verbatim, face the fact that "our [meaning whites'] unwitting and unwilling imprisonment in racism . . . continues even after we have repented, confessed, and been forgiven. [45]

In short, Barndt insists that whites will always remain sinners because their nature is corrupted. They are thus slaves to what Barndt calls -- and again I quote him verbatim -- the "original sin of racism."

Lacking all agency, they thus can't effect their own salvation. In short, they need a savior. And in the Barndt theology, this savior isn't Jesus but, in a brash leap, "people of color." Listen to what he says:

"Leadership and direction can only come from [people of color because they] understand racism far better than we do, and they know what needs to be done to eliminate it. Thus, the first step toward breaking the chains of this prison [for white people] is to recognize that we cannot be in charge of the changing" [99].

When it comes to specifics, though, Barndt and his colleagues call for no other action on the part of the white sinner except confession. Surely the moral passivity advocated by such a theology is one reason why antiracism programs can claim so few concrete results.

Further, the doctrine of human helplessness goes against the entire sweep of our religious traditions. As Unitarian Universalists, we affirm human moral agency and reject the orthodox, Protestant trinitarian dogma that makes the crucifixion of Jesus the justification for our salvation in the eyes of God. The first principle of our covenant together is a pointed rejection of this Christian doctrine of original sin. Rather than affirming that human nature is corrupt, we celebrate it as inherently worthwhile and filled with dignity. This affirmation sets aside the need for a Messiah to sacrifice himself to redeem a corrupted nature.

William Ellery Channing declared as much in his 1819 sermon "Unitarian Christianity," which Unitarian Church Historian Conrad Wright calls, "our party platform." Listen to what Channing said in this sermon that marked Unitarianism as a distinct religion from its orthodox Trinitarian kin. Channing, of course, uses the non-inclusive language of his era:

"all virtue has its foundation in the moral nature of man, that is, in conscience, or his sense of duty, and in the power of forming his temper and life according to conscience . . . [No act is praiseworthy, any farther than it springs from their exertion. We believe, that no dispositions infused into us without our own moral activity, are of the nature of virtue, and therefore, we reject the doctrine of irresistible divine influence on the human mind, molding it into goodness, as marble is hewn into a statue" [79-80].

In our tradition, we are always active agents in our own salvation. This is core to our teaching as Unitarian Universalists. So why have we accepted a doctrine of race that indicts 95% of our congregants as helpless, passive sinners?

To answer this question, we have to turn to the second problem I have found in UU anti-racist strategies: the errant assumption that white America works for white Americans. Any one who cares to look will quickly discover that it doesn't – at least, not for the vast majority of them. The privilege that, according to the anti-racists, that comes with membership in white America, actually belongs to a tiny elite. Let me illustrate this point.

Imagine that business and government leaders decreed that all lefthanded people must have their left hand amputated. Special police forces and armies are established to find such persons and oversee the procedure. University professors and theologians begin to write tracts to justify this new policy. Soon the right-handed begin to think of themselves as having right-hand privilege. The actual content of this privilege, of course, is negative: it's the privilege of not having one's left hand cut off. The privilege, in short, is the avoidance of being tortured by the ruling elite. To speak of such a privilege – if we must call it that – is not to speak of power but rather of powerlessness in the midst of a pervasive system of abuse-- and to admit that the best we can do in the face of injustice is duck and thus avoid being a target.

My point is this. Talk of white skin privilege is talk about the way in which some of the citizens of this country are able to avoid being mutilated – or less metaphorically, having their basic human rights violated

So much for the analogy. Here are the facts about so-called white skin privilege.

First, 80 percent of the wealth in this country is owned by 20 percent of the population. The top 1 percent owns 47% of this wealth. These facts describe an American oligarchy that rules not as a right of race but as a right of class. One historical counterpart to this contemporary story of extreme economic imbalance is found in the fact that at the beginning of the Civil War, seven per cent of the total white population in the South owned almost three quarters (three million) of all the slaves in this country. In other words, in 1860, an oligarchy of 8,000 actually ruled the South.<sup>1</sup> This small planter class ruled over the slaves and controlled the five million whites too poor to own slaves. To make sense of this class fact, we must remember that the core

motivation for slavery was not race but economics, which is why at its inception, both blacks and whites were enslaved.

Second, let us not forget the lessons of the 1980s. As former Republican strategist Kevin Phillips reminds us in his book *The Politics of Rich and Poor: Wealth and the American Electorate in the Reagan Aftermath*, “For all workers, white-collar as well as blue-collar, their real average weekly wage – calculated in constant 1977 dollars – fell.

Third, let us also not forget that today, numerous companies are opting to lower standards for job qualifications for their work force rather than raise wages and thus cut into profits. 2 Jobs paying \$50,000 a year or more have twice the share of the job-loss that they did in the 1980s.

The result of these contemporary economic trends is the most acute job insecurity since the Great Depression. As economist Paul Krugman has pointedly argued in the November 3, 1997, edition of the *New Republic*, the modern success story of America’s booming economy rests on the bent back of the American wage earners. The economy is booming because wages, the main component of business costs, are not going up. And wages are not going up because the American worker is presently too fearful to stand up and make demands. Downsizing has shaken worker confidence. Unemployment insurance last only a few months, and the global labor market has undermined the American worker’s bargaining power. These basic economic facts, Krugman argues, have created one basic psychological fact for the typical American worker: anxiety.

A strong economy no longer means job security for most white middle-class Americans -- and they know it. This awareness, however, has not produced a rebellion against the rich but, rather, frenzied attempts by downwardly mobile middle-class whites to keep up the appearance of being well-being. Such appearances, however, include a penalty: debt. As social theorist Juliet B. Schor reminds us in *The OverSpent American: Upscaling, Downshifting, and the New Consumer*:

- between a quarter and 30 percent of all American households live paycheck to paycheck;
- In 1995, one-third of families whose heads were college-educated did no saving; and
- In 1995, the median value of household financial assets was a mere \$9,950.30. I do not call this economic condition in white America, white skin privilege. I call it white middle-class poverty. Talk of white skin privilege is a distraction from this pervasive problem in white America. Talk of white privilege, to paraphrase a statement of Martin Luther King Jr. can feed the egos of poorer whites but not their stomachs.

So why have white UU’s accepted a doctrine of race theory that is economically naïve, sociologically counterfactual, and racially damning? The answer is that by and large we haven’t. In so far as we have, it’s because the talk of privilege inflates some egos.

Unitarian Universalists, as we know, are the second wealthiest religious group in the country. We’re also the most highly educated. This means that 49.9 per cent of us are college graduates and that our median annual household income for us is \$34,800.

In other words, members of our association tend to have a big brain and a small purse. UU’s also tend to be politically active, environmentally conscious, nature-oriented, and live in the suburbs. This is not the profile of the power elite. It’s the profile of civil servants, school teachers, small business persons, and middle managers. In effect, Middle America – the group of professionals who keep America running by training its children, maintaining government, and paying taxes.

Two hundred years ago, the Unitarian part of our tradition had a very different profile, as Conrad Wright notes in his essay “Ministers, Churches, and the Boston Elite.” Between 1791 and



1820, Unitarianism was called "the faith of the well-to-do, urban New Englanders." Harriet Beecher Stowe noted in the 1820s [that], "All the literary men of Massachusetts were Unitarians. All the trustees and professors of Harvard College were Unitarians. All the elite of wealth and fashion crowded Unitarian churches." Calvinist Jedidiah Morse described his liberal opponents as "a formidable host...combining wealth talents and influence."

But that was then and this is now. Today, most Unitarian Universalists are not affluent. Yet we seem fond of describing ourselves in this manner. We find this hinted at even in the Commission on Appraisal's 1997 report on congregational polity, Interdependence, which relates one of church historian Tex Sample's generalizations about the cultural left: "They are mostly affluent." The members of the Commission go on to tell us that Sample's description is in general quite consistent with the demographic and psychographic profiles of the members of our association. I am increasingly persuaded that most of us do indeed imagine we're well off. I'm also persuaded that some of us impoverish ourselves trying to live out this myth of our lives.

The truth is that to be white in America and not affluent is for many persons -- embarrassing. No contemporary writer has chronicled the story of this middle-class shame better than Harvard social critic Juliet B. Schor in her book *The Overspent American*. Schor notes that if debts are subtracted from assets, the typical middle-class American household's net worth is less than \$10,000. Does this mean that even though almost three quarters of UU's own their homes, their net worth might still rank a great many of them as members of America's middle-class poor? I suspect so.

Most middle-class white persons, UU's included, are not part of the economic ruling elite in this country. They have not amassed structural power and control. Our UU anti-racist rhetoric, however, claims that they have. Such a claim seems to produce three kinds of ego responses in white UU's. For some, it is an ego boost. Bereft of real power and prestige in the eyes of America's ruling elite, what a tweak of the ego to have a so-called person of color tell you that you are all-powerful. Who could resist? Loads.

Thus the second category. Some egos are deflated. Those of whites who are not racists, but have sometimes acted in racist ways in order to retain membership in their own social groups. I will use a story from my new book to make this point about a minister I will call Dan. Although Dan is not a Unitarian Universalist, but a well-heeled Boston Presbyterian minister, I will use his story because he is much like the many goodhearted liberal white UU's I have met who are neither white supremacists nor racists.

One day, over lunch, Dan recounted an experience that helped shape his racial identity as a white. In college during the late 1950s, Dan joined a fraternity. With his prompting, his chapter pledged a black student. When the chapter's national headquarters learned of this first step toward integration its ranks, headquarters threatened to rescind the local chapter's charter unless the black student was expelled. The local chapter caved in to the pressure and Dan was elected to tell the black student member he would have to leave. Dan did it. "I felt so ashamed of what I did," he told me, and he began to cry. "I have carried this burden for forty years," he said. "I will carry it to my grave."

The couple at the next table tried not to notice Dan's breakdown. The waiter avoided our table. As Dan regained his composure, I retained mine. I could see his pain. I felt empathy for his suffering but was troubled by his lack of courage. Dan's tears revealed the depth of the compromise he had made with himself rather than risk venturing beyond the socially mandated strictures of whiteness.

I realized that being white for Dan was not a matter of racist conviction but a matter of survival, not a privilege but a penalty: the pound of flesh exacted for the right to be excluded from the excluded. Dan's tears revealed the emotional price of his ongoing membership in the "white" race.

Although he is not a racist, Dan might make a confession of racism to a UUA anti-racism trainer because this would be the only way to mollify the trainer and also because racism is the only category he would have to express a deeper loss and regret: his stifled feelings and blunted desires for a more inclusive community. But Dan did not cry during our lunch together in the restaurant because he was a racist. He cried because his impulses to moral action had been slain by his own fear of racial exile. The anti-racist charge of white racism gives persons like Dan a way of addressing their moral failure of nerve without having to face a harder truth that they acted in racist ways not because they were racist but because they were afraid of being rejected. The charge of racism does not heal this condition or even describe it. It simply punishes a person for being broken.

The third group affected by anti-racist rhetoric I will call the silent majority. These Unitarian Universalists know that the anti-racist rhetoric that pervades our religious association runs counter to the economic realities of this country and their own lives. I believe that these persons simply dismiss the rhetoric as insulting to their intelligence and walk away. This doesn't help us build a strong, vibrant religious community. Quite the contrary. This is the way in which our community is broken. One withdrawal at a time.

Enough. This anti-racist rhetoric and its fall out must be stopped. I have three suggestions.

First, read. Start reading groups in your local congregations that will help you figure out how to talk sensibly about the link between race and class in America. Learn how the creation of the so-called white in this country was a means to exploit this person's labor. Discover what white Americans have in common with other people of color and work on a language that takes into account the fact that the racial socialization process in this country makes all of us racial victims.

Second, empathize. Learn to replace moral judgment with loving compassion. All of us have made decisions and acted in ways that compromise our moral integrity. Use our collective power as religious movements to help each of us heal our crippled ability to relate with the full integrity of our humanity. Create new rituals in your Sunday services that allow persons to feel the healing power of a beloved community.

Third, Organize. Build coalitions using your new vocabulary and your new commitment to empathize and work with other UU congregations and other liberal religious groups who are also tired of race-talk separated from talk about class issues. I believe that we have the power to transform America because of who we are: We are Middle-America. Transform this group and you transform the country because we are the majority. All we need is the moral courage to practice what we preach. And we will generate this moral courage through love.

1. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880* (1935; reprint, Cleveland: Meridian Books 1964), 26. (See Herman Schlueter, *Lincoln, Labor and Slavery* (1913), 86).

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, 20.

4. *Ibid.*, 152