

Liberal Beacon

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Life goes on. Perhaps this sentiment best gets at the common thread loosely running through this issue’s assortment of interesting articles. Life goes on, so we begin by concentrating on the welfare of toddlers and teenagers—our future generations—with Ann Pandya’s *Spirituality for Toddlers*, followed by a book review of social psychologist Jonathan Haidt’s *The Anxious Generation*.

Life goes on, even after the Unitarian Universalist Association’s recent decision to eliminate its seven principles from its bylaws, replacing them with seven euphemisms that no longer reflect liberalism’s core commitment to human dignity, freedom, independence, and democracy. So, Rev. Terry Cummings and Rev. Andrew James Brown offer us their own opinions about where we might go from here.

Life goes on, even in light of a dramatic shortage of liberal ministers available to lead our churches and fill our pulpits. So, I introduce you to the new and novel approach of my friend and colleague, Rev. “Twinkle” Marie Manning.

Life goes on. So, instead of dwelling on the past, there’s another review of a new book, along with information about NAUA’s Yearly Summit in October, our calendar of events, and more.

Life goes on. So, let’s get to it.

Todd F. Eklof
Editor

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Spirituality for Toddlers

Ann Pandya

My grandson is just over four years old. I get to spend time with him every week. As a result, he and I share a deep closeness.

It is a joy to buy books and toys for him—High Five magazine and a Brain Quest card deck; bubbles, balls, and balloons; popsicles, mini-M&Ms, and mango lassi (a drink made from mango pulp and yogurt).

Even though all my actions are guided by instinct, I have another motivation that I might not have if we were living in a different time and place. My hope is that a strong emotional and relational foundation laid at this young age will inoculate him against fragility, temptations, and dysfunctions as he grows into his teen years and beyond.

However, I am aware of the risk that he might come to regard being indulged and being the center of attention as the natural order of things.

So, I have started introducing ideas such as

- kindness and sharing
- gratitude and reciprocity
- family and community

In my view, words and practices that model and encourage these comprise *Spirituality 101*.



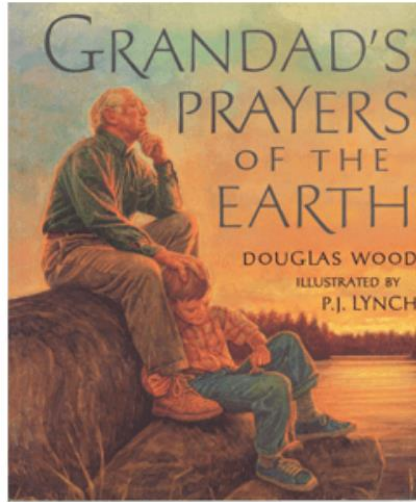
Searching and finding

In hindsight I see that my parents and grandparents modeled just these values. Even though the community in which we lived was much more overtly religious than them, that

religiosity was practiced through much the same values.

When I was raising my children in the US, having no extended family nearby and lacking a community, I could not rely on the same organic transmission. I was on my own and I understood that I had to be nimble and creative to meet my children where they were, i.e., within their American context.

I kept an eye out for content, groups, camps, etc. that would help start the conversation and keep it going. A gorgeously illustrated favorite was “Grandad’s Prayers of the Earth.”



I also joined a nearby Unitarian Universalist congregation at a friend’s suggestion. This turned out to be a great fit. My children and I developed our beliefs and learned to thoughtfully and confidently articulate them.

Baby steps

When I recently visited a bookstore after a long time, browsing the shelves turned out to be a rewarding experience—more so than searching online with the help of recommendation engines. Serendipity brought me to what I was seeking.

I realize that I am not well-equipped to explain the words “Pray,” to a 4-year-old.



But one must start somewhere. After all, even the youngest “readers” take words like “dinosaur,” “unicorn,” “forever,” and “superpower,” that are common in board books, in their stride. Through a kind of alchemy, they get the gist of the stories heard in the embrace of loving caregivers.

My hope is that the same will happen as I read books like these to (and later, with) my grandson.

Time is of the essence

I love the book “Grandad’s Prayers of the Earth” by Douglas Wood because it talks about praying in the context of nature, creativity, and hard times. Its most powerful message may well be the boy’s relationship with his

grandad. Many years later, memories of shared time and meaningful conversations put the boy back in touch with his grandfather’s spirituality and give him a sense of meaning.

So, spending abundant unrushed and undistracted time with a child lays a strong foundation through the formation of a nurturing relationship. Starting when the child is young helps seed the child’s cognitive, emotional, and spiritual DNA.

As the child enters adulthood, he is free to examine, question, and reject any of these ideas and beliefs. It is good for the emerging adult to have ideas to question on the path to eventually finding the ones that make sense to him.

A vacuum or lack of any explicit foundation is, in my view, worse than imparting beliefs that the child may eventually reject. This is because, to paraphrase Thoreau, all humans are naturally

inclined to worship something. Without a foundation, the child-turned-adult will seek to fill that vacuum, and others who are far less principled and scrupulous will rush in to fill that vacuum.

Praying across generations

Rereading Grandad's story after decades offered me new clarity about how I learned spirituality from my grandmother.

She had lost her own mother at a very young age, was educated only up to the fourth grade, and was married at the age of fourteen. Unmothered and unschooled, she had acquired her religious beliefs from the culture in which she existed. But her practice of those beliefs was uniquely hers.

I recall walking with her to the neighborhood temple and, following her cue, praying with folded hands and closed eyes. I recall her telling me stories from Hindu mythology and see now that they formed my core ideas about morality. I recall the gentleness and kindness with which she interacted with every person who crossed her path. Most of all, I recall her comforting me while also reinforcing my mother's teaching when, as a young teen, I would run to her after altercations with my mother.

My grandmother taught me about being gentle and kind and about being present and patient. She taught me how to pray and how to be a grandmother.

Whenever I am back in Mumbai, I visit the old neighborhood temple. Just like the boy in the story, there I find the spirituality—peace, sense of connection, and meaning—that I don't find anywhere else.

So yes, I think spirituality can be taught and it is never too early to start. I pray that I will be the

instrument that passes my grandmother's spirituality to my grandkids. That even as I try to be a good pencil, I am also a good pencil-maker.

[Ann Pandya, who also contributed to our last issue, grew up in Mumbai and has lived in the United States for nearly four decades. She has a graduate degree in mathematics from the Indian Institute of Technology and is a former software developer. You can also read more of her writing by subscribing to her blog "Notes from a Naturalized American" at [Notes from a Naturalized American | Nandini | Substack](#)]

The Anxious Generation Book Review

Stephanie Gronholz
Candace Schmidt

On a warm afternoon in July, I had the pleasure of having fellow UUCS member Candace Schmidt over for a glass of iced tea. While my son was downstairs FaceTiming his grandma—and then playing a video game—we discussed Jonathan Haidt's *The Anxious Generation*. (The irony of my son's preferred activity is not lost on me. In his defense, he was exhausted from a full day of screen-free summer camp!)

The Anxious Generation is full of relevant information to me as the parent of a tween, but I was curious about Candace's perspective as the parent of adult children, one of whom has a 6-year-old daughter. We reflected on the arc of what Haidt referred to as the "Great Experiment" of replacing play-based childhoods with phones, specifically those with internet access and social media apps.

Candace’s daughter and I were in college when we joined Facebook. The 2009 innovation of the “like” button appeared after our adolescent years, so we escaped its devastating effects on self-esteem. I admit to spending more time on my phone than I would like. But I don’t worry about my phone taking over my life and causing the kind of mental distress that Haidt describes.

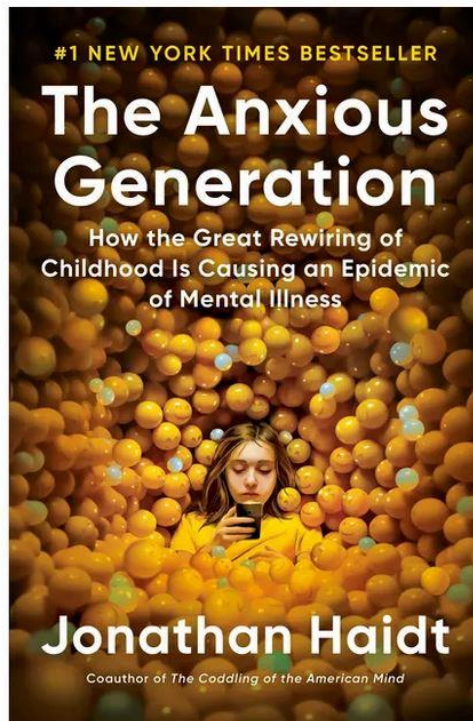
People who are a decade younger than me, however, seem to be suffering the most. Their parents didn’t know what they didn’t know. Now, thanks to Haidt’s book and the researchers he references, we are better informed. New school policies and innovative alternatives to smartphones, such as the Gabb watch my son wears, offer hope that our up-and-coming adolescents can develop without an addiction to phones.

Candace and I left our conversation feeling fairly optimistic about the future of childhood and adolescence. Candace’s daughter has a friend group who share similar values about young children using technology. My son has a good handful of friends whose parents haven’t yet given them smart phones. Finding a like-minded cohort is exactly what Haidt recommends for families adopting his proposed solutions.

In addition to suggesting no smart phones before high school and no social media until 16,

Haidt advocates for more unsupervised outdoor play and phone-free schools. Both Candace and I are encouraged by our local school board’s recent recommendation to further restrict cell phone use. There appears to be broad community support for these changes as well. I know Candace and I would be thrilled to see a phone-free middle school lunchroom!

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As Stephanie writes in the previous paragraphs, Jonathan Haidt has written a book, *The Anxious Generation*, that is meant to be a clarion call to our society regarding how best to raise current and future generations of children. Haidt describes what the generation born after 1995 (Gen Z) experienced with the popular usage of smart phones during its childhood and adolescence. Gen Z was the first cohort in history to have a play-based childhood replaced with a phone-based childhood, an occurrence to

which Haidt attributes to the sharp rise in mental health issues in this group.

Haidt wrote that the work of social psychologist Jean Twenge, who has studied what factors are responsible for generational differences, greatly informed his views of developmental influences on Gen Z. Twenge posits these influences not only include societal impacts such as financial downturns, armed conflict, and political crises, but also cites the technologies children grow up with, such as radio, television, computers, and the internet. Haidt writes, “Gen Z became the

first generation in history to go through puberty with a portal in their pockets that called them away from the people nearby and into an alternative universe that was exciting, addictive, unstable and ... unsuitable for children and adolescents.”

While children, and especially teenagers, have always felt the need to fit in with their peer group, in the past this often involved joining in games on the playground and participating in clubs and sports. The advent of Facebook, however, required them to be very conscious of the images they projected on their profile pages, with the hope of greater acceptance by others online. The focus shifted from a focus on interesting and exciting play activities, often with other children, to a focus on carefully curating one’s image online. The emphasis on “how I look to others” replaced engaging in real-world experiences of having fun and learning skills, including valuable social skills.

Haidt contends that Gen Z are test subjects for experiencing childhood and adolescence in a way never-before experienced: spending many hours of each day scrolling through their phones, looking at the “shiny, happy posts” of others, user-generated videos, and streamed entertainment. Far less time is thus available to spend playing with, chatting, and having eye contact with others. Absent are the taking of small risks, both physical and social, in play that can develop good social skills and a healthy sense of self.

Haidt is adamant it is not too late for our society, or at least parts of it, to reverse what he calls “the great rewiring” of our children. To do so will take collective action on the parts of governments, institutions, tech companies, and

communities. Governments can require all social media companies to verify ages of new users, and institutions such as schools can set policies that require all students to keep phones locked away during school hours. Also, making available better basic phones, with no internet access to social media, could help parents delay giving their children smartphones before high school. Parents can support other parents when they collectively choose to delay giving their children smartphones; this way their children will still have a peer group to belong to, even as some classmates will continue to experience phone-based lives.

## A Reform Unitarian Faith?

Terry Cummings

It is now official. Having been voted out during the UUA’s most recent annual General Assembly, the principles and sources, which arguably defined Unitarian Universalist identity for the past forty years, are no more. Whatever Unitarian Universalism is nowadays, it isn’t your grandmother’s Unitarian Universalism.

I began writing this article as an effort to imagine the future of the denomination following the recent change. Instead, I found myself concluding that it is time to draw a line under a brief chapter in Unitarian history and move on. It is time to reclaim the Unitarian religion as a separate denomination, independent of the association which currently claims the term “Unitarian Universalist” as its intellectual property right.

The time is ripe for a “Reform Unitarian” denomination to be born, a liberal religion

based on modern theology, and not dominated by identity politics.

Prior to the merger/consolidation of the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America in 1961, Unitarians and Universalists were separate denominations. Both denominations had their roots in Christianity. The early Unitarians and Universalists held complementary Christian beliefs concerning the nature of God, the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the authority of the Bible, and the role of reason and science in living a Christian life.

Unitarians got their name from their rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity, but it would be an overstatement to say that this was the limit of their beliefs. Universalists emphasized a loving God who forgave sin and promised salvation for all.

By the time of the merger, both denominations were open to non-Christian spiritual beliefs, including humanism, religious naturalism, and atheism. Two similar faiths, in decline for decades, came together in 1961 after years of conversation about merging. Unitarian Universalism was thus born, but was a religious denomination created? In hindsight, the answer seems to be no.

The seven principles, which were embedded in denominational life since their original adoption at the time of the merger in 1961, were modified slightly by General Assemblies in 1984, 1985, and 1995. The seven principles and five—later six—sources would give UUs something familiar to point to when asked “what do UUs believe?” I would argue that, while conveying a sense of identity for Unitarian Universalists, the sources and principles were not a set of *theological beliefs*. Instead, they enabled

people of different spiritual and religious backgrounds to co-exist with one another under the same tent.

For the majority of UUs, it worked, and worked well.

But the principles and sources have now proved to be short-lived. We can debate the how and why of their demise, but they are not coming back anytime soon. And further changes are in the works that might erode the independence and theological autonomy of congregations.

If survival is the measure of whether the 1961 merger was a success, then the merger was a success. Unitarian Universalism is still around, and both denominations might have disappeared by now if the merger had not taken place.

If, however, growth in the number of people who identify as UU, or growth in the number of UU congregations, is the measure of success, then it was probably not. Both numbers appear to be about the same, possibly even lower, than they were 63 years ago.

For the last several years, the total number of UU congregations, and the total number of people who identify as UU, has been declining.

It is hard to predict what impact the recent demise of the principles and sources will have on the number of people who identify as UU, but it is difficult to envision that the change will lead to a dramatic UU revival. More than likely, a growing number of UUs and their congregations will explore alternatives to the association that was formed in 1961.

I believe there is room for (at least) two American denominations that trace their history to European and American Unitarianism. Congregations that offer “Reform Unitarianism”

can be a place for those whose needs are not met by the current UUA orthodoxy,

In my opinion, Reform Unitarianism can afford to drop the term Universalism. The original theology of Universalism was narrow, a belief that everyone is saved, and a loving God does not send anyone to Hell. In the long and complex history of liberal theology in America, the impact of Universalism was minimal. It is time to let it go.

Instead, let us rejuvenate Unitarianism as a separate denomination based on the original foundations laid by the likes of William Ellery Channing, Theodore Parker, and others. Unitarianism was never limited to rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity in Christianity. It had its beginnings in the rejection of orthodox Calvinism in favor of a liberal Christianity. Liberal Christianity was preached by New England pastors at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Pastors like Channing avoided talking about the doctrine of the Trinity in their sermons because they knew their rejection of it would be controversial and that it would draw attention away from their liberal Christian message. It was the conservatives' accusations that the liberal pastors were non-Trinitarians, i.e. were Unitarians, back then a pejorative term, that ultimately led Channing and others to accept the title Unitarian.

But at its core, Unitarianism was a liberal faith.

Influenced by the Enlightenment in Europe and appalled by a period of religious "awakenings" in America, Boston pastor Charles Chauncy and others began to preach liberal Christianity during the mid-1700s. Later, the English Unitarian, Joseph Priestley, fled to America where he formed a Unitarian church in

Philadelphia in 1796. It was around this time that liberal Christianity began to seep into the Congregational churches of New England.

In 1820, Channing organized an association of liberal pastors, the Berry Street Conference, which would lead to the formation of the American Unitarian Association in 1825. (On a side note, Channing's paternal grandfather was an active slave trader, and he grew up with enslaved people in his household. His discomfort with the juxtaposition of enslaved people in a community that championed individual liberty and freedom would later lead to his becoming a staunch abolitionist. Despite this, I wonder how long it will be before Channing is disavowed because of his family connection to slavery?)

In his brilliant three volume treatise, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, Professor Gary Dorrien traces the history of liberal religion in America from its Unitarian beginnings at the dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. What becomes clear from reading that history is that Unitarianism is the foundation upon which most if not all of today's liberal religions stand. Professor Dorrien defines liberal theology

primarily by its original character as a mediating Christian movement. Liberal Christian theology is a tradition that derives from the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Protestant attempt to reconceptualize the meaning of traditional Christian teaching in the light of modern knowledge and modern ethical values. It is not revolutionary but reformist in spirit and substance. Fundamentally it is the idea of a genuine Christianity not based on external authority. Liberal theology seeks to reinterpret the



symbols of traditional Christianity in a way that creates a progressive religious alternative to atheistic rationalism and to theologies based on external authority.

Specifically liberal theology is defined by its openness to the verdicts of modern intellectual inquiry, especially the natural and social sciences; its commitment to the authority of individual reason and experience; its conception of Christianity as an ethical way of life; its favoring of moral concepts of atonement; and the commitment to make Christianity credible and socially relevant to modern people.

Professor Dorrien’s definition recognizes that liberal religion in America has distinctive Christian roots. That is not to say that Judaism and Islam do not have liberal factions; they do.

In fashioning a consensus for what constitutes Reform Unitarianism it will be necessary to be more expansive than Christian-centric ideas of liberal religion. Yet, we have a starting point, and an opportunity to write the next chapter of Unitarian history that rises to that challenge, and which meets the collective spiritual needs of our time.

## The Move Beyond All “Isms”—Being the Fuller Meaning and History of the Unitarian Tradition

Andrew James Brown

**D**uring a recent Sunday morning service, while celebrating the 460+ year-long history of the Unitarian tradition, I

noted in passing something important about what our creative, inquiring, free and liberative religious/spiritual tradition truly consists in something that, alas, can easily be obscured, especially when we look back to our initial years of existence. Afterward, I was asked to expand a bit about this, resulting in this article.

The difficulty is rooted in the fact that we began, without any shadow of doubt or ambiguity, as a radical, protestant Christian church whose first members were, primarily, protesting against the doctrine of the Trinity—a doctrine which defines one God as existing in three coequal, coeternal, consubstantial divine persons: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ) and God the Holy Spirit. Another way of putting this is to say that three distinct persons (hypostases) share one essence/substance/nature (homoousion).

This extraordinarily complex theory, which only became a doctrine of the church and characteristic of the religious tradition known as Christianity some three centuries after Jesus’ life and death, struck our forebears as not only something in which Jesus did not believe but which could also not be found in the Biblical text—their authoritative, foundational text. Consequently, they desired to promote instead, in a variety of nuanced ways, a religion based on their own doctrinally expressed belief that God is one. Hence, they were called “Unitarian” rather than “Trinitarian,” further believing that Jesus was himself a human being like us. He was our brother, a person who was, perhaps, a messiah, a prophet or exemplar, but who, most certainly, was not the God of monotheism.

Because holding and promoting a Unitarian Christian, rather than a Trinitarian Christian, view of God and Jesus was deemed dangerously heretical by the main Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic church, severe persecution,

and sometimes execution, all too often followed. Consequently, it's vital to understand that our tradition, from the outset, also began to promote the idea of tolerance in matters of belief, which may be summed up in the much later phrase, "We need not think alike to love alike." And, as Charles W. Eliot, a key American Unitarian, said in 1893, for us, religious toleration has been "the most precious fruit of the past four centuries."

So far so good. But, as our nascent, creative, inquiring, free and liberative religious/spiritual Unitarian tradition began slowly to unfold across generations and geography from the 16th century onward (a geography which eventually came to include non-Christian cultures such as Hindu India and Buddhist and Shinto Japan to those with the time, inclination and wherewithal directly to study the historical sources) it also began to become clearer and clearer that what lay at the heart of the Unitarian tradition was not doctrine at all, Christian or otherwise, but something else, something far, far more precious. So what was our movement's precious beating heart, our unique way of being in the world?

Well, the person to turn to here is the genuinely great Unitarian historian Earl Morse Wilbur (1886-1956). In his 1920 Berry Street Essay, entitled, "The Meaning and Lessons of Unitarian History," he gave his historically informed overview of what he saw lying at the heart of the Unitarian movement and "its significance in religious history" which "must still largely direct it today." It was Wilbur who coined the motto, "Freedom, Reason and Tolerance."

Although he acknowledged that, at first sight, Unitarian history might appear to teach us "the principal meaning of the movement has been a purely doctrinal one and that the goal we have aimed at has been nothing more remote than

that of winning the world to acceptance of one form of doctrine rather than another," the truth was very different. Wilbur's extensive and thorough research helped him to see that if Unitarian Christian doctrine was all the movement was about, it was already finished.

Having carefully studied the movement, however, he felt sure that the "doctrinal aspect" of our churches could be seen as being only "a temporary phase," and that Unitarian doctrines were, therefore, only "a sort of by-product of a larger movement, whose central motive has been the quest for spiritual freedom." With this insight, we arrive at what Wilbur thought was our movement's beating heart, our unique way of being in the world. Indeed, Wilbur's Berry Street essay begins with a clear statement of this belief, "that the keyword to our whole history . . . is the word complete spiritual freedom."

Yet this still does not address the question, to what end is this freedom to be employed? For Wilbur (and indeed for me) our freedom is to be employed to help each individual human soul, without exception, to experience the genuine opportunity to come face to face, "at first hand," with the Ground of Being. In his essay, Wilbur simply calls it God, but it may also be gestured towards by countless other names, like Spirit of Life, the Light, Allah, Hashem, Brahman, Buddha-nature, Tenchi kane no Kami, or deus sive natura. This kind of freedom is what Wilbur thinks is "the fundamental quality of true Mysticism," and it is clear that he feels, in the end, we are to be characterized as a mystical tradition; albeit of a rational and free-thinking kind which never loses sight of the need always to draw upon sound historical and scientific evidence as much as upon our personal, direct religious experiences.

With all this in mind, here, in full, is the penultimate of Wilbur's 1920 essay:

“But if, as I have tried to make clear, the doctrinal aspect [of the Unitarian movement] is but a temporary phase, and if Unitarian doctrines are only a sort of by-product of a larger movement, whose central motive has been the quest for spiritual freedom, then our work is not yet finished; in fact, we have thus far done hardly more, as we have removed the obstacles which dogma had put in our way, than clear the decks for the great action to follow.”

This raises the question, what is “the great action to follow?” Here we run into what I think is the major, if perfectly understandable and forgivable, problem with Wilbur’s essay. Like each of us in our own ways (and lest it be unclear, I am absolutely including myself in this), Wilbur’s vision was limited. In 1920, he simply could not see beyond the admirable form of liberal Unitarian Christianity in which he lived, moved and had his being, and so his essay concludes as follows:

“Our vital task still remains, in common with that which falls to every other Christian church, the task of inspiring Christian characters and moulding Christian civilization, the task of making men and society truly Christian, the task of organizing the kingdom of heaven upon earth.”

We see the decks of the ship that he thought needed clearing were Christian decks. That was and remained an important task for him. But, today, the ship upon which our creative, inquiring, free and liberative religious or spiritual community is currently journeying is made up of planks taken from the liberal Christian tradition, but also of some from Buddhist traditions, whilst still others from Hindu, European radical Enlightenment, humanist, idealist pantheistic/panentheistic and

religious naturalistic traditions, and many more besides. Ours is a syncretic ship for sure, and one that, even as it remains completely consistent with the historical Unitarian tradition, is now something that transcends even the raft that was once called “Unitarianism.” For ours is a raft upon which we are seeking a way of being freely religious and spiritual that is beyond any *-ism*.

So, in the hope that Wilbur would understand why, I want to conclude by radically rewriting his concluding paragraph:

In common with that which falls to every other free religious, spiritual community, our vital task still remains that of encouraging all people and all societies to make their religions truly creative, inquiring, freeing and liberating so that, together, we can set about the task of organizing the ideal cooperative community in this, our most beautiful, but often bruised and hurting world.

[*Rev. Andrew James Brown is minister of the Cambridge Unitarian Church in the UK. To read more of his stimulating writings, visit his blog at [CAUTE — Making Footprints Not Blueprints \(andrewjbrown.blogspot.com\)](http://CAUTE — Making Footprints Not Blueprints (andrewjbrown.blogspot.com)).]*

## A Different Approach to Providing Ministry & Pulpit Supply

Todd Eklof

**W**e live in a time when technology has made it easier for ministers to connect with congregations from a distance. This fortuitous possibility may have come just in time, given the growing shortage of available and competent liberal ministers necessary to fill our pulpits. Seeing both the opportunity and the need before us, Rev.

“Twinkle” Marie Manning has created a novel approach that may be just the solution some congregations need.

“I feel called to help congregations in need by offering my skills in ministry, media and development,” Manning explains, with a special interest in serving some of the many smaller and rural fellowships that have little chance these days of finding an affordable and suitable minister. “Yet, their needs for spiritual leadership are the same if not greater than larger congregations,” Manning points out. “Some are in geographically affluent economic regions, yet their budgets do not support the minister’s cost of living year-round. Many are in remote locations that are not easily accessed by itinerant ministers.”

Her solution is to offer a variety of services that can be cherry picked according to a congregation’s specific needs and budget, ranging from \$5,000 to \$15,000 annually, and may simply include several pre-recorded sermons all the way up to contract ministry that includes two in-person visits that are up to four days in length, along with workshops and retreats that can cover matters like leadership development, grief, outreach, and fundraising.

“My offerings of a selection of remote and hybrid options for congregations to utilize creates a winning solution. It enables all congregations the ability to access quality sermons at an affordable price. Having a twice-monthly contract minister in the virtual-pulpit creates the kind of consistency that is desired from a full-time or part-time minister, without the added burden of meeting living wage requirements. Congregations can also benefit enormously by inviting me to present in-person occasionally for extended stays. And, during those visits, I can lead the kinds of workshops and retreats their congregation most desires.”

To learn more about Rev. Manning’s offerings, and her unique and timely approach to ministry, or to contact her if you’d like, check out her website at:

[Remote Ministry | TwinklesPlace](#)

## *Morning after the Revolution: Dispatches From the Wrong Side of History – A Book Review*

Joe King

This book, by Nellie Bowles (2024), is a hell of a lot of fun to read, particularly when one has been or is part of a group victimized by the illiberal left. Tightly organized? No. Thematically consistent? Kind of. Great anecdotes? Absolutely. Sometimes the profile of the messenger is part of the message. Bowles is a dedicated liberal, lesbian (a non-man who likes non-men – John Hopkins language guide), former writer for the *New York Times* who grew up in San Francisco. As a NYT writer who was often corrected by the paper’s “Disinformation Experts,” she started wondering, “What the hell are these people thinking?” As a result, this solid liberal has become a humorous critic of the sanctimonious, oh-so-serious, hardcore illiberal left.

“To do reporting for a place that was so sure everyone was good, except, of course, conservatives who were very bad and whose politics came from hate,” was confusing for Bowles. The sanctimonious left, she says, “took diversity of ethnicities and backgrounds as gospel ... unless someone disagreed with them. Then, of course, they came from a place of hate and were willfully hurting people who they

believed deserved to be cancelled.” And cancelled with a great deal of glee.

Bowles doesn't offer a lot of her own opinions but allows the quotes and stories she tells to speak for themselves. There's no need for much editorial opinion when there's already such rich material to offer. Here, for example, is an example of a basic liberal value disparaged by the white diversity and equity guru (and highly paid corporate trainer), Robin DiAngelo:

“Challenge number two is the precious ideology of individuals, the idea that every one of us is unique and special.” OMG, it's a miracle that I raised three healthy kids in spite of the fact that I always told them they were unique and special.

Bowles also cites the following from a professional journal describing a new medical drug: “A landmark Alzheimer's drug approval would likely deepen racial inequities in dementia care.” A promising new treatment is bad because it will widen health disparities?

According to another of Bowles's anecdotes, the University of Washington listed some verboten phrases that include *brown bag lunch*, *grandfathered in*, and *blind spot*. Funny, but I would have thought that blind people would realize they had a *blind spot*. But these days we cannot be too careful about saying anything potentially hurtful about anyone. Bowles shares her own experience of touring a house and having the real estate agent apologize for using the term *master bedroom*.

A story she tells about the larceny behind some Black Lives Matter groups had completely

escaped me. The *Washington Post* estimates that fifty-billion dollars was pledged to BLM organizations between 2020 and mid-2021. Much of that money was from corporate donations and mega-donors, but also from thousands of small donors. Without going into the details, Bowles recounts the larceny of some BLM groups, making the point that the left can be as good as the right at using genuine tragedies as a source for fundraising. And here I thought that Steve Bannon had a lock on

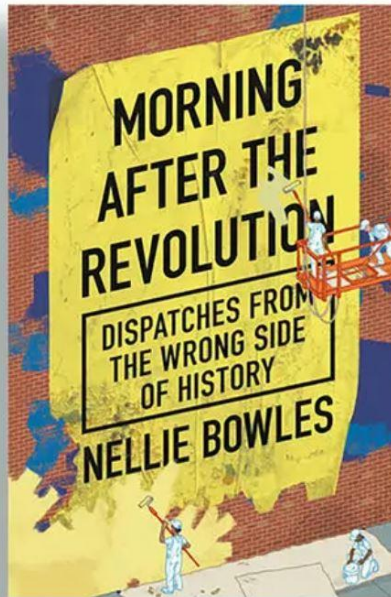
scamming, but it turns out that some on the illiberal left will also look the other way when it comes to similar kinds of fraud benefiting their causes.

Some of the oddest ideas identified by Bowles may sound familiar to those of us whose liberal religion, like so many once progressive institutions, has been captured by the type of ideological activists she writes about:

Rugged individualism is part of white culture.  
Timeliness is white culture.

Reason is part of white culture.  
Linear thinking is white culture.  
Self-reliance is white culture.  
Being action-oriented and future-oriented are both white culture.  
The nuclear family is white culture.  
Practices common in math classrooms are aligned with white supremacy.  
Objectivity—facts—it's all racist.

For several years I have often said that the far left scares me as much as the far right. When some of my liberal friends push back against this claim, I remind them of Chairman Mao, the Cultural Revolution, and the Red Guard. Community groups would banish people to the



countryside or to special reeducation camps for “incorrect thinking.” Bowles’ book points out the current equivalent of our Red Guard (my words, not hers) by describing a series of workshops, some of which she attended, that are primarily run by and aimed at white women who pay goodly sums of money to participate in these “struggle groups,” where peer pressure is used to get people to confess their “whiteness” and to atone for their white sins. It’s anecdotes like these that have left me shaken rather than amused.

Again, Bowles book is a fun read (in the sense that we might as well laugh as cry). It helped me understand why good liberals have been so slow to condemn the illiberality happening within their ranks. We’ve all benefited by liberal principles, and liberality has virtually been our religion. But the problem we have as liberals is that we are afraid to attack illiberality (*wokeness*, in common parlance) for fear that doing so will put us in the camp of the hard right ... and none of us want to be associated with those haters!

*[First time contributor to Liberal Beacon, Joe King is the former Speaker of the House of the Washington State Legislature (1986-1992). As such, he worked successfully with the Republican-controlled senate to pass the Growth Management Plan and the Washington State Basic Health Plan, making Washington the first state in the union to have a state-sponsored primary health care plan for working families. He and his wife Kelsey Gray now live in Spokane and are active members of the UU Church of Spokane.]*

## NAUA’s First Yearly Summit

NAUA’s first Yearly Summit, happening this October 18–20 in Spokane, WA, is fast approaching. Whether you’re planning to attend in person or online, please register today by visiting [www.naunitarians.org](http://www.naunitarians.org).

For those arriving on Thursday the 17<sup>th</sup>, you can register at [The Oxford Suites Downtown](#) from 4:00 to 7:00 PM, with plenty of free time afterward to explore Spokane’s vibrant and beautiful downtown.

Registration and our opening celebration begin first thing Friday morning, followed by several workshops, with lunch provided onsite at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane. The evening is free for attendees to relax and explore on their own or to participate in organized group outings.

Saturday morning activities officially begin at 10:00 a.m. with our keynote address, followed by our business meeting for approving bylaws and electing officers, along with a boxed lunch, afternoon presentations, and culminating with a catered dinner for those onsite.

Our first and historic Yearly Summit will conclude on Sunday with a service at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane. Click the following link to see the full schedule:

<https://naunitarians.org/summit-schedule/>

## Thanks for your Support!

Ann Frank said, “No one has ever become poor by giving.” NAUA remains an organization run by volunteers who give their time, energy, skills, and commitment, and of members who give what they can to help fund our many efforts. Together, we’ve accomplished a lot during our first year, and aspire to do much more in the coming months and years. Thanks to everyone for your continued support. Please click on the following link should you wish to make a financial contribution.

<https://naunitarians.org/support-us/>

## Coming Up at a Glance

Aug 17 @ 10 AM PST | NAUA Worship

Aug 29 @ 10 PM PST | NAUA Book Club

Sep 21 @ 4 PM PST | NAUA Worship

Sep 26 @ 5 PM PST | NAUA Book Club

For information and updates about specific NAUA events please visit our website at [www.naunitarians.org](http://www.naunitarians.org)

**W**e welcome letters from our readers for potential publication in *Liberal Beacon*. Letters should address matters of interest to Unitarians and Universalists and other religious liberals, including current news and events.

Please email your submission no less than five business days before the end of the calendar month in order for publication in our next issue. Letters are shorter than opinion pieces and should be no more than 250 words. Form letters and letters considered libelous, obscene or in bad taste will not be printed. Anonymous letters will not be printed. NAUA reserves the right to edit all letters for length. The decision to print any submission is completely at the discretion of the editors.

Please write "Letter to the Editor" in the subject line and email your submissions to [nauaedboard@gmail.com](mailto:nauaedboard@gmail.com) or mail them to:

North American Unitarian Association  
Letters to the Editor  
4340 W. Whistalks Way  
Spokane, WA 99224

Letters must include the writer's name, full address, and phone number for verification purposes. Only the name and town will be published.