

Unitarian Universalism



Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael
The Unitarian Universalists of Sterling



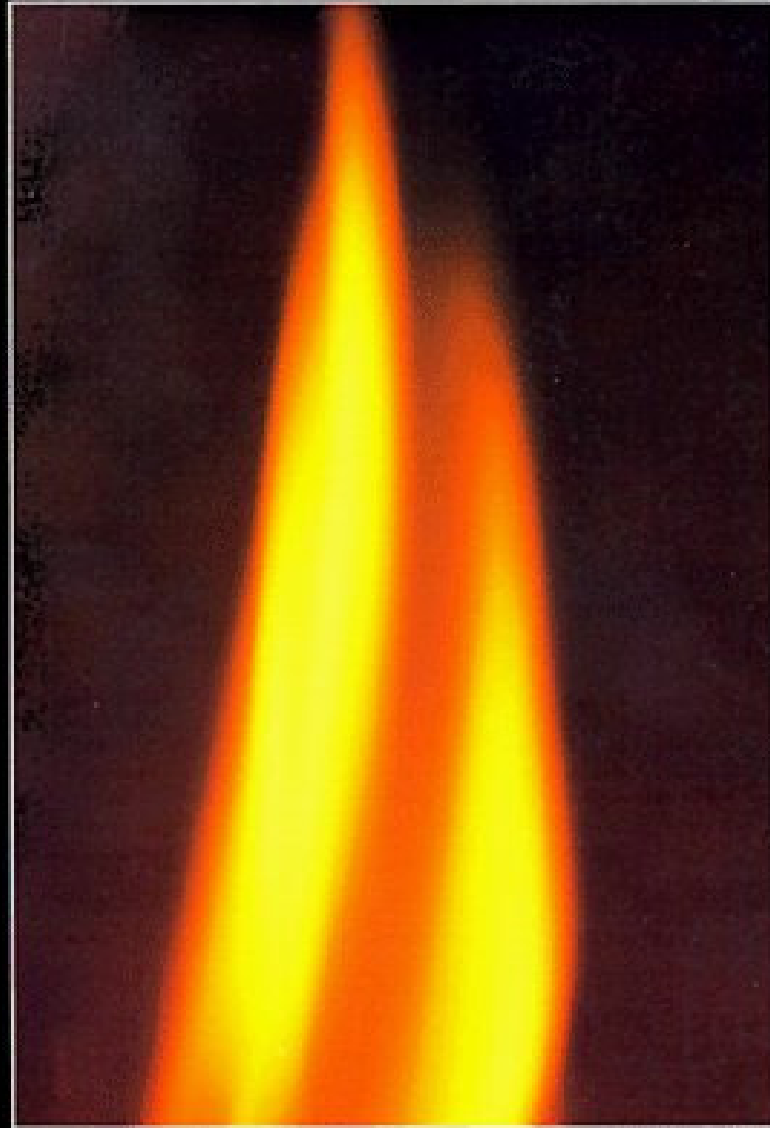
North Branford Congregational Church established in 1724



Rev. David Bumbaugh as a student in the early 1960s, talking with Margaret Boell, Librarian, Meadville Lombard Theological School

A CHOSEN FAITH

An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism



New Foreword by ROBERT FULGHUM New Preface by Denise Davidoff

JOHN A. BUEHRENS *and* FORREST CHURCH

A Chosen Faith

- Not a chosen people
- Nor a people whose choices are determined by an outside religious authority by decree or demand
- We are a people who choose

“I believe that one is converted when one first hears the low, vast murmur or life, troubling one’s hitherto unconscious self. I believe one is born first unto oneself for the happy developing of oneself, while the world is a nursery, and the pretty things are to be snatched for, and the pleasant things tasted; some people seem to exist thus, right to the end. But most are born again on entering maturity; they are born to humanity, to a consciousness of all the laughing and the never-ceasing murmur of pain and sorrow that comes from the terrible multitude of brothers [and sisters]. Then, it appears to me, one gradually formulates one’s religion, be it what it may.

A person has no religion who has not slowly and painfully gathered one together, adding to it, shaping it; and one’s religion is never complete and final, it seems, but most always undergoing modification.”

D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930, English Author)





Non – Creedal

“I have an almost complete disregard of precedent and a faith in the possibility of something better. It irritates me to be told how things always have been done ... I defy the tyranny of precedent. I cannot afford the luxury of a closed mind. I go for anything that might improve the past.”

- Clara Barton, Universalist layperson and founder of the American Red Cross

Chosen Faith – choose freedom, and choose to live in freedom

Beliefs Held in Common

1. We believe in the freedom of religious expression. All individuals should be encouraged to develop their theology and to openly present their religious opinions without fear of censure.
2. We believe in tolerance of religious ideas. The religions of every age and culture have something to teach those who listen.
3. We believe in the authority of reason and conscience. The ultimate arbiter in religion is not a church, a doctrine, or an official, but the integrity of the individual seeker.

Beliefs Held in Common

4. We believe in the search for truth. With an open mind and heart, there is no end to the fruitful and exciting revelations that the human spirit can find.

5. We believe in the unity of experience. There is no fundamental conflict between faith and knowledge; religion and the world; the sacred and the secular.

6. We believe in the worth and dignity of human beings. All people on earth have an equal claim to live, liberty, and justice; no idea, ideal of philosophy is superior to a single life.

Beliefs Held in Common

7. We believe in the ethical application of religion. Inner grace and faith finds completion in social and community involvement.

8. We believe in the force of love, that the governing principle in human relationships is the principle of love, which seeks to help and heal, never to hurt or destroy.

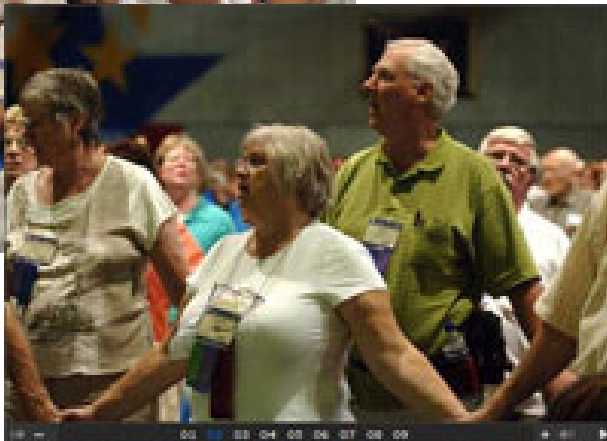
9. We believe in the necessity of the democratic process. Records are open to scrutiny, elections are open to members, and ideas are open to criticism, so that people might govern themselves.

Beliefs Held in Common

10. We believe in the importance of a religious community. Peers confirm and validate experience, and provide a critical platform, as well as a network of mutual support.

--- Adapted from Unitarian Universalist minister David Rankin

General Assembly



General Assembly

Principles, adopted at General Assembly 1986:

We the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person (a)
- Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations (b)
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth (c)
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning (d)
- The rights of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large (e)
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all (f)
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence, of which we are a part (g)

Are Unitarian Universalists Christians?

- ❖ Unitarians and Universalists grew out of the Christian fold
- ❖ Some Present day Unitarian Universalists consider themselves Christian, but not all



“King's Chapel is both a living church and an historic site: As a church, we are unique: Unitarian Christian in theology, Anglican in worship, and congregational in governance. That combination reflects our curious history. King's Chapel was first established in 1689 by the King of England to serve the Tories. But in 1785, the congregation broke its ties with the Episcopal Church and became the first Unitarian church in the United States.”

How did we Get Here?

In 1961 the **Unitarian** Association merged with the **Universalist** church of America

Thus: “**Unitarian Universalism**”

But our story begins many years earlier...

An Autobiographical Timeline

Origen of Alexandria d. 254 CE



- ❖ Origen's father martyred in Christian persecutions of 202 CE
- ❖ Learned Hebrew – consulted with Rabbis with regard to historical and linguistic problems in the scripture
- ❖ Developed two forms of scriptural exegesis: **Typology and Allegory**

Theology: Hierarchy with God at top / Free Will: “The fall caused by the individuals will can also be reversed by the individuals will” / No divine punishment “Each sinner kindles for himself the flame of his own fire.” / A Connected universe – “by virtue of the soul's dignity.”

Arius

Faced off against Bishop of Alexandria at the Council of Nicea: 325 CE



Arius: “Christ was Begotten or create or appointed or established”

Proof Texts:

- John 14:28 “The father who sent me is greater than I”
- Philippians 2:6-9: Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death -- even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name.

Early History Recap

- The birth of Orthodoxy and Heresy
- Early Church – diversity of theological perspectives
- 325 CE – Council of Nicaea establishes dogma of the Trinity – Nicene Creed
- 544 CE Belief in universal salvation condemned at another church council



The Emperor Constantine was frustrated with diversity and argumentativeness in new Christian Empire

Michael Servetus (1511 – 1553)

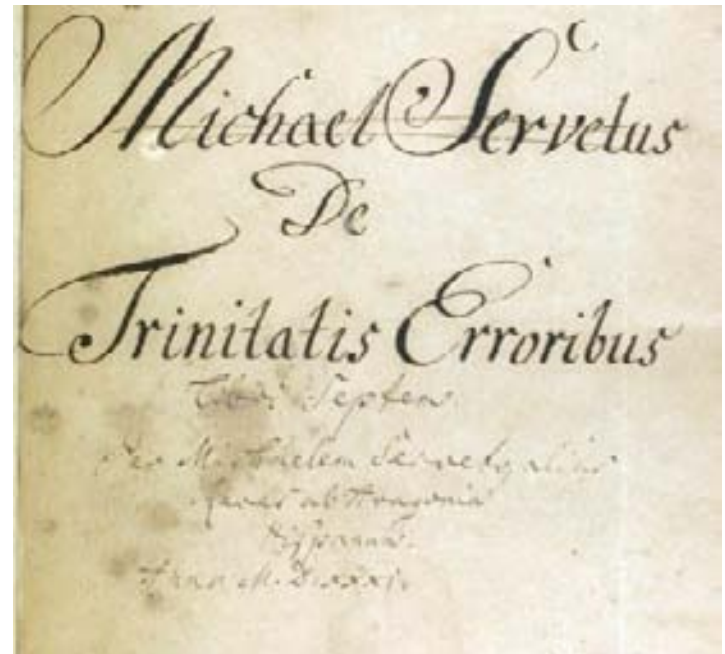


- Reformation – Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli
- Established the “Priesthood of all believers”
- Reform = Institutional

- Servetus – Found no mention of the Trinity in the scriptures
- Reform; Theological = Replaced the authority of the Pope with that of Scripture

On The Errors of The Trinity – 1531

--- Michael Servetus



Michael Servetus Legacy

Murdered by John Calvin's orders in Geneva in 1553

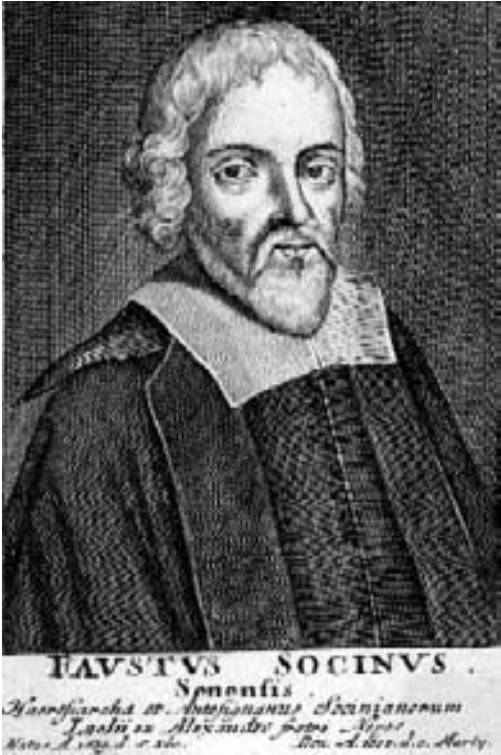


Concerning Heretics by Sebastian Castellio

*“When I consider the life and teaching of Christ who, though innocent Himself, yet always pardoned the guilty and told us to pardon until seventy times seven, I do not see how we can retain the name of Christian if we do not imitate His clemency and mercy ... Great care must be exercised to distinguish those who are really seditious from Christians ... Christ was crucified among thieves ... **To kill a man is not to defend a doctrine, but it is to kill a man.**”*

- Dedication to Duke Christoph of Wurttemberg

Unitarianism Sprouts in Poland & Transylvania



Socinus (1539-1604)

- Minor Church = the liberal wing of the Polish Reformation
- Socinianism spread rapidly in spite of harsh persecutions by Jesuit majority
- Systematic extermination policy destroyed the movement
- Socinus dies in prison 1604

Movement became known as the Polish Brethren

Unitarianism Sprouts in Poland & Transylvania (cont)

Edict of Torda by King John Sigismund:

"... in every place the preachers shall preach and explain the Gospel each according to his understanding of it, and if the congregation like it, well, if not, no one shall compel them for their souls would not be satisfied, but they shall be permitted to keep a preacher whose teaching they approve. Therefore none of the superintendants or others shall abuse the preachers, no one shall be reviled for his religion by anyone, according to the previous statutes, and it is not permitted that anyone should threaten anyone else by imprisonment or by removal from his post for his teaching, for faith is the gift of God, this comes from hearing, which hearing is by the word of God."



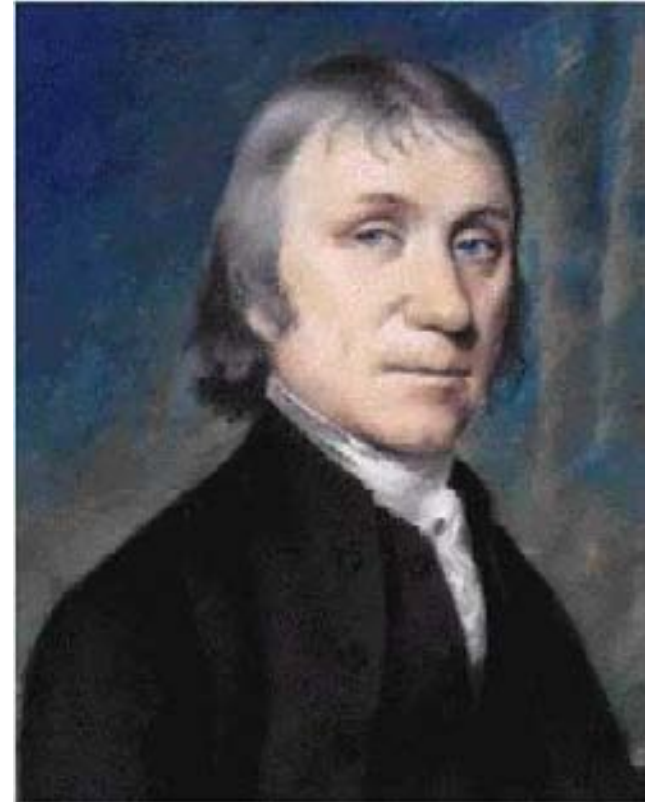
Francis David (1510 – 1579)

Francis David condemned as a heretic dies in prison 1579

Unitarianism from England to America

- Pupil of Theophilus Lindsey who held first Unitarian service in Britain
- Scientist and Theologian, discovered oxygen
- Inspired Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson:

❖ *"I have read his Corruptions of Christianity, and Early Opinions of Jesus, over and over again; and I rest on them ... as the basis of my own faith. These writings have never been answered."*



Joseph Priestley – (1733-1804)

Unitarianism from England to America (cont)



Anti-Priestley Political Cartoon

“We are, as it were, laying gunpowder, grain by grain, under the old building of error and superstition, which a single spark may hereafter inflame...”

- Chased out of England to America
- Founded First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia in 1795

Universalism from England to America

- Excommunicated as a Methodist after hearing the “good news” of Universalism from James Reilley
- Established the first Universalist congregation in Gloucester Mass.

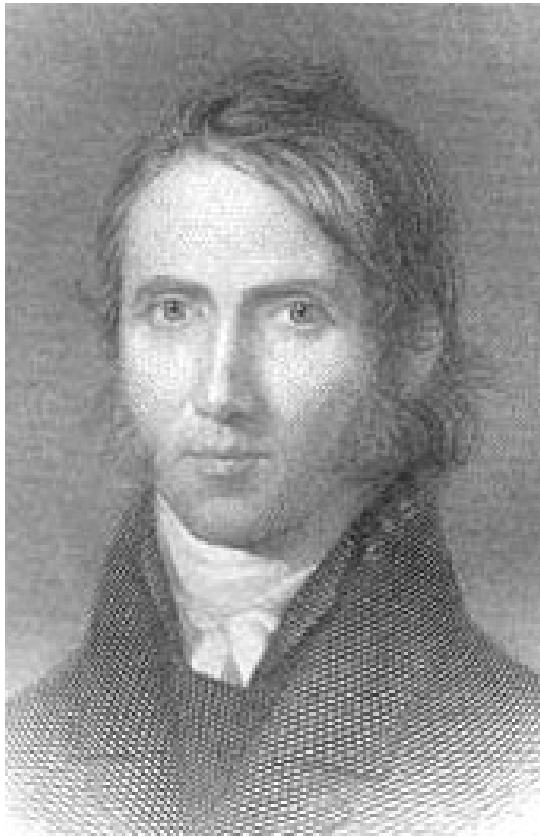
❖ *“You may possess only a small light, but uncover it, let it shine, use it in order to bring more light and understanding to the hearts and minds of men and women. Give them not Hell, but hope and courage. Do not push them deeper into their theological despair, but preach the kindness and everlasting love of God.”*



Reverend John Murray

Rev. John Murray (1741- 1809)

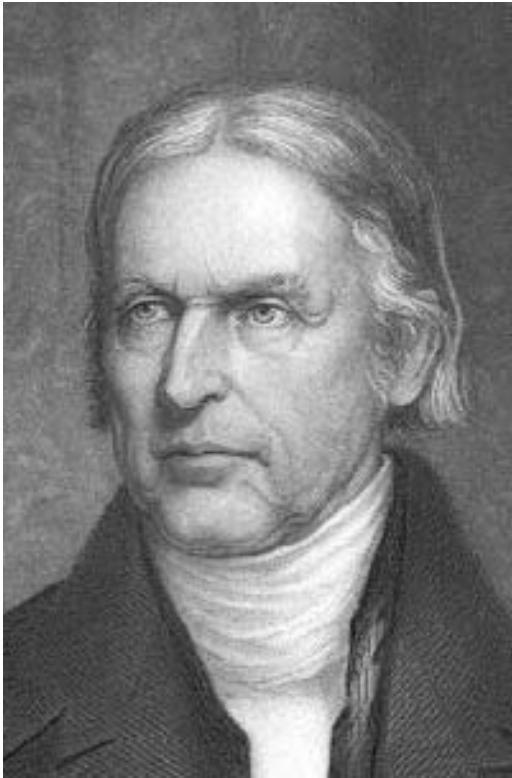
Unitarianism Born in America



William Ellery Channing (1780-1842)

- Defines Unitarian Christianity (1819)
- Salvation by Character
- Rejects the Calvinist doctrine of predestination - *“makes of men machines.”*
- Rejects the doctrine of the trinity- not in the scriptures.
- Rejects the idea that Christ was a God who died to save humanity. *“does not make the promotion of piety [Christ's] chief end. It teaches, that the highest purpose of his mission was to reconcile God to man, not man to God.”*

Universalism Born in America



Hosea Ballou (1771-1852)

- Saw Universalist message in Roman's 5:18 (Salvation for All) and other scripture.
- Stressed Reason in interpreting scripture.
- Ballou said: "Sin is Finite - its consequences are also finite."
- He also said - "God needs to be reconciled to Man," meaning we do not know why we suffer because we cannot see the big picture, so we get frustrated or angry at God.

Unitarian: *Humans are too good to be damned*
Universalist: *God is too good to damn humans*

Unitarians & Universalists Through the Ages



"When I read of the vain discussions of the present day about the Virgin Birth and other old dogmas which belong to the past, I feel how great the need is still of a real interest in the religion which builds up character, teaches brotherly love, and opens up to the seeker such a world of usefulness and the beauty of holiness."

Olympia Brown (1835-1926)

First woman to achieve ordination recognized by any denomination

"All life is miracle," from "the blowing clover to the falling rain."



Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

Unitarians & Universalists Through the Ages



Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906)
& Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902)

“What you should say to outsiders is that a Christian has neither more nor less rights in our Association than an atheist. When our platform becomes too narrow for people of all creeds and of no creeds, I myself shall not stand upon it.”

“Let my name stand among those who are willing to bear ridicule and reproach for the truth's sake, and so earn some right to rejoice when the victory is won.”



Louisa May Alcott 1832 - 1888

Unitarians & Universalists Through the Ages



John Adams (1735-1826)

"The Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount contain my religion."



Paul Revere (1735 - 1818)

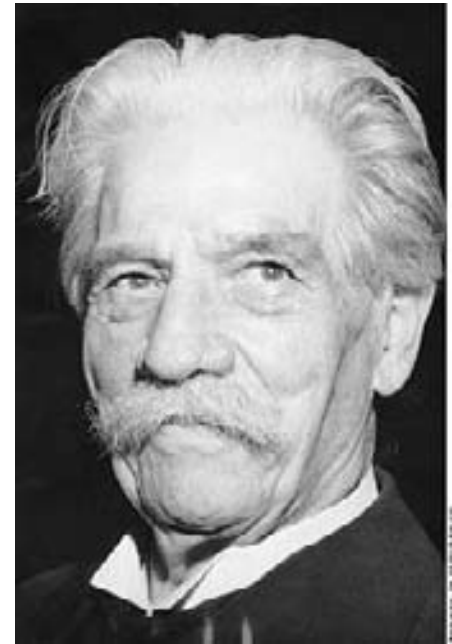
Unitarians & Universalists Through the Ages



William Howard Taft 1857 – 1930

"I love judges, and I love courts. They are my ideals, that typify on earth what we shall meet hereafter in heaven under a just God."

"Until he extends his circle of compassion to include all living things, man will not himself find peace."



Albert Schweitzer(1875 - 1965)

Unitarians & Universalists Through the Ages



Kurt Vonnegut (1835-1926)

“There are plenty of good reasons for fighting but no good reason ever to hate without reservation, to imagine that God Almighty Himself, hates with you also.”

From Martin Luther King’s Eulogy for James Reeb: “James Reeb was martyred in the Judeo-Christian faith that all men are brothers. His death was a result of a sensitive religious spirit. His crime was that he dared to live his faith; he placed himself alongside the disinherited black brethren of this community.”

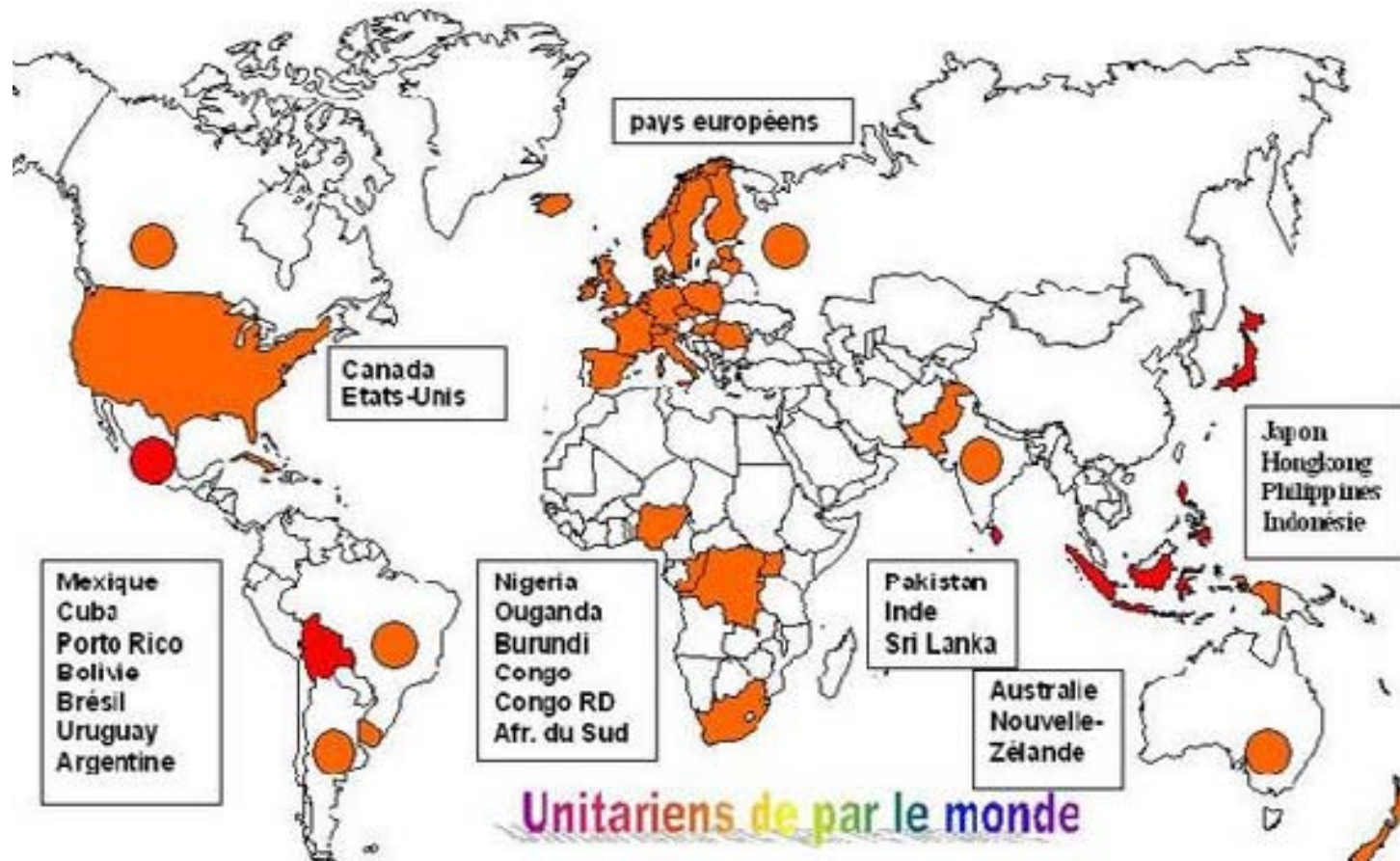


James Reeb (1927-1965)

... That is our Past. What is our Present?

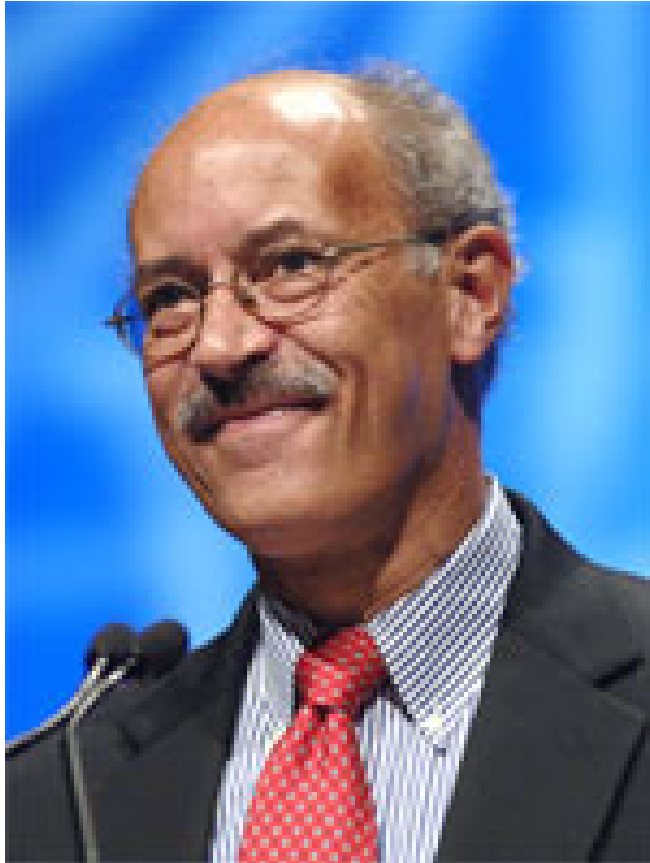
- 1,041 Congregations
- 163,000 in 2009, members in congregations in the United States of America
- 629,000 in 2001 claimed Unitarian Universalist religious affiliation
- .3% of Americans are Unitarian Universalist (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2007)

What is our Present? (cont)



International Member Congregations in:
Australia & New Zealand, United Kingdom, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, EUU, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Indonesia, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Romania, South Africa, Spain, and Sri Lanka

What is our Present? (cont)



--- William Sinkford, President of the Unitarian Universalist Association

“I gradually came to have a relationship with the luminance or the spirit that actually changed my spiritual path about 10 years ago when my adolescent son got into trouble with drugs and overdosed.

As I was sitting beside his bed in the hospital, as the afternoon grew into evening, I had an experience of being held. I didn't know by what or by whom, but I knew that I was being held and supported, and somehow I knew that my son was, as well. As the evening lengthened and I continued to sit with him, I found that presence incredibly hopeful regardless of what the morning would bring.

Out of that experience with my son, I came to develop a prayer life, and I no longer consider myself an atheist. I do believe in God, but I don't invest much energy in trying to define what or who that god is. I use the language of God in my ministry here with the Unitarian Universalist Association.

We're a very pluralistic faith, religiously, and my experience of and relationship to the holy does not need to inform the experience or the relationship of the holy of others in our faith.”

Suggested Reading

A Chosen Faith, 1995, John A Beuhrens and Forrest Church – *Great introduction to Unitarian Universalism*

Out of the Flames, 2002, Lawrence and Nancy Goldstone – *Narrative History of Servetus' life and times (Action, Adventure and Theology all mixed up together!)*

The Invention of Air, 2009, Steven Johnson – *Both a lament of the intellectual specialization of our modern age and an account of the 18th century minister and scientist Joseph Priestley's "connective sensitivity" ... and of course his discovery of oxygen.*

Norbert Capek – A Spiritual Journey, 1999, Richard Henry – *Life story of the Czechoslovak minister of extraordinary ability, founded and built in Prague what soon became the largest Unitarian church in the world. His tragic death, in a Nazi prison camp, was a terrible loss for his church and his country.*

...And if you have a soft spot for Scriptural exegesis find Hosea Ballou's **A Treatise on Atonement** online at: <http://www.danielharper.org/treatise.htm>