



## Our Theological House: Unitarian Universalist Thea/ologies

*Our Theological House* was developed by Rebecca Parker and Lauren Smith.

**ST-4019**

Fall 2010

Thursdays 7:10 PM – 9:40 PM

Starr King School for the Ministry

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Office Hours: By appointment

The purpose of this course is to introduce the student to distinctive theological perspectives present within Unitarian Universalist traditions and congregations, and to equip students to begin to think and write theologically in the context of post-modern religious communities and cultures. Unitarian Universalism will serve as a case study in post-modern religious community and as a specific location for theological reflection. Especially oriented to students who identify as Unitarian Universalists, this course will encourage participants to form a practice of engaged theological thinking within the context of Unitarian Universalism's particular perspectives, resources, limits, and possibilities. Students who do not identify as Unitarian Universalists will become acquainted with this expression of American progressive post-Christian Protestantism as a site in which to engage theological issues critical to post-modern religious community.

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### LEARNING OUTCOMES:

After engaged participation and successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify and critique distinctly Unitarian Universalist theological perspectives present within 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S. American traditions and congregations.
  - Assess possibilities and limits within these theological perspectives as well as their contemporary relevance.
  - Articulate verbally and in writing an in-depth understanding of a particular aspect of Unitarian Universalist thea/ologies.
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### REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. *A Source Book for Unitarian Universalist Theologies: VOLUME I*
2. *A Source Book for Unitarian Universalist Theologies: VOLUME II*  
**NOTE:** The *Source Books* will be available as Readers and on Moodle.
3. John A. Buehrens and Rebecca Ann Parker. *A House for Hope: The Promise of Progressive Religion for the Twenty-first Century*. Boston: Beacon Press. 2010. **ISBN:** 0807077380; **ISBN-13:** 9780807077382, 978-0807077382. **\$18.94** on Amazon.com

### RECOMMENDED TEXTS:

- Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion 1805 – 1900*. (Westminster John Knox Press)
  - Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity 1900 – 1950*. (Westminster John Knox Press)
  - Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Crisis, Irony, & Postmodernity 1950 – 2005*. (Westminster John Knox Press)
  - Paul Rasor. *Faith Without Certainty: Liberal Theology in the Twentieth Century*. (Skinner House Books)
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**EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY:** Creating a community of **trust, respect, and flexibility** is at the core of the **community of learning** I hope to create as a teacher.

**Trust:** First, I see my role as teacher to guide and encourage your learning; it is your job to direct your learning experience. Second, it means that I trust that you will take a large measure of responsibility for your learning. This trust flows from the assumption that you bring considerable knowledge and experience to the classroom.

**Respect:** I ask that you respect class experience—making attendance, preparation, and engagement with the material a priority in your lives. Clearly there will be times when “life happens” necessitating absences or changes in the schedule. Respect means communicating those events via email in a timely manner. **PLEASE NOTE: Late work** will not be accepted without a very good reason, such as a serious illness or death in the family. Please contact me **immediately** if you will have difficulty completing any assignments on time.

**Flexibility:** The syllabus serves as a road map for material to be covered. Built into this structure is the expectation that detours and side trips will enliven rather than derail our learning. The forms that allow for flexibility in our learning are the group presentations and the “wild-card” sessions.

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### EXPECTATIONS IN OUR COMMUNITY OF LEARNING:

**Community of learning**, rather than “classroom,” is an intentional term because I believe that a good class is made great when all students participate fully. In addition, community of learning denotes a context in which learning flows in all directions: we will learn from one another. As a teacher, I am a part of the community of learning.

**What it takes to PASS this course:** Come to class prepared to participate actively in discussion and other learning activities. Complete the assignments on time. Attendance is required; students who miss more than three sessions will fail the course. *Please talk with me by September 16 if you wish to take this course for a Letter Grade.*

**Plagiarism** is using another person's words and attempting to pass them off as your own. Please take the time to hone your own thoughts and honor the thoughts of others by giving them credit (through footnotes and bibliographic references). If you have any questions regarding this, please see me.

**Technology Etiquette:**

- **Cell phones must be turned OFF** unless you are on-call for childcare or eldercare.
- **Internet access during class can be used for discussion references and presentations;** otherwise, please do not use class time for email.
- For research, internet resources, such as Wikipedia, can be a useful starting point for thinking about a paper or project. **Use them as a starting point only, please.**

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**CLASS FORMAT**—The general format for each week will be as follows: The first part of the class will consist of discussion of and engagement with the readings led either by the instructor or by Groups. The second part of the class will either be further discussion, lecture or presentations. Most classes will end with a wrap-up, a brief introduction to the following week's topic, and a student-led "wild card" session.

**"WILD CARDS" are opportunities for exploring wider topics.** In order to allow time to explore additional interests and concerns that arise from the class, we will include in most classes a 45-minute time slot for wrap-up, anticipation of future topics and assignments, and/or a "wild card session." Class members may propose topics for wild card sessions. A participant or a group of participants may lead the session, or the class may ask the instructor to lead the session. This is your chance to ensure that the topics of greatest interest to you are addressed.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The "wild card" concept and description come from Judith Berling's, *Doctoral Seminar on Teaching and Course Design*.

**REQUIREMENTS:**

**1) A Theological Reflection Journal. *Submit for review on October 14 and November 18.***

You will create a journal to create a record of your theological inquiry this semester. This is a place to note your weekly responses to the readings, discussions and issues. You may combine visual and written reflections and the form can be of your choosing: a blog, typed one-page reflections, or a handwritten notebook. These journals will provide the springboard for our in-class discussions as well as help you identify your focus for the final paper/project. **Be sure to bring the journal to class with you each week.**

**(2) Participate in leading a GROUP PRESENTATION on one of the following dates:**

- *September 23, September 30, October 7, or October 14.*

In order to practice critical thinking collectively, students will lead Group Presentations on the readings. Groups responsible for each of the sessions will meet together to plan their presentations. You are encouraged to be as creative and experimental as possible in presenting the material. Groups are free to decide which aspects and issues of the readings need to be engaged by the entire class, and are free to assign selected portions of the readings (rather than the whole). The point is not to “cover” the material, unless you decide that “covering” a portion of it is vitally necessary; the point is to help the class engage the issues or aspects of the material that your group finds most compelling. **NOTE: *Groups will lead a 75 minute discussion of a portion of the week’s readings—plan your time carefully and have fun!***<sup>2</sup>

**(3) A Theological Autobiography—a five page paper. *Due October 7.***

Using the terminology from Systematic Theology as a starting point, explain how your life experiences inform these concepts. What key influences, experiences and relationships have shaped your theological perspectives? What do you see as the goals or purposes of ministry in light of your theological perspective?

**(4) A one-page proposal for your Final Project/Paper. *Due October 21.***

Please indicate the following: (A) Which of the two options you have chosen, (B) Some of the references you will be using, and (C) What (if any) your concerns are.

**(5) A Final Project/Paper. *Due December 9.***

Articulate your own vision for Unitarian Universalist Thea/ologies for the next century. Be creative! There are two formats to choose from:

**(I) A ten-page paper.** This can be a historical research paper, a sermon (complete with an order of service such as readings and songs), a promotional brochure, a website, a religious education class/workshop, etc.

**(II) A group paper** (each group member contributing ten pages of writing, e.g. three students submit a thirty-page paper). Again, this can take the forms mentioned above.

**You will present a synopsis of your final paper/project on December 16. Think creatively for how to best present your concepts** with handouts, a power point presentation and whatever else you need to make a concise and strong argument for your thea/ological positions.

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<sup>2</sup> The Group Presentation format comes from Judith Berling’s, *Doctoral Seminar on Teaching and Course Design*.

<b>CLASS SCHEDULE</b>
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**September 9: The Unitarian Universalist Theological House--Overview and Assessment**

**Introductions:** We will take some time getting to know each other. Please share why you are taking this course, what prompts your interest in this course. Is this course related to your professional goals or your ministry-plans and/or congregation-related plans?

**Lecture:** Systematic and Visual Theologies—grappling with definitions and integrating images with words.

*Rebecca Parker's "Under Construction" offers an overview of Unitarian Universalist theologies from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present and introduces the traditional categories of systematic theology: **theological anthropology, the doctrine of God, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, missiology, eschatology, and pneumatology.** Elaborating a model of "Our Theological House," she also introduces the structure and scope of this course. The readings from Gordon McKeeman and Paul Rasor help to contextualize Unitarian Universalist theologies. McKeeman, reflecting on the mistakes and missed opportunities of the institutional merger of Unitarians and Universalists, argues that our theological house "is in serious need of remedial attention" and articulates core issues that require our attention. Examining the central features of modernity, postmodernity, and those of liberal theology, Paul Rasor discusses the cultural turn from modernity to postmodernity and its implications for liberal theology.*

**Reading Assignment:**

Parker "Under Construction: Knowing and Transforming Our Unitarian Universalist Theological House" [SB 1-20]

McKeeman "2004 Starr King President's Lecture" [SB 22-31]

Rasor "The Postmodern Challenge to Liberal Theology" [SB 32-57]

**Suggested Reading:**

Gary Dorrien. Introductory chapters to Vol's I, II, and III of *The Making of American Liberal Theology*. These chapters briefly situate Unitarian Universalism within the larger context of American liberal theology.

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**September 16: The Unitarian Universalist Theological House--Context**

**Discussion:** What is your relationship to Unitarian Universalism? What can you identify as central theological affirmations and or perspectives of Unitarian Universalism?

*This week's readings provide further historical context, which will help us to situate, understand, and think critically about the Unitarian Universalist theologies which follow. Robinson gives us a succinct overview of Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist history in US America through the 1980's. Livingstone's first reading discusses the major themes of the Enlightenment and their influence on religious thought; the second introduces the Romantic movement and its central religious expressions, in particular the work of Coleridge and Schleiermacher. Moore's excerpt identifies trends in post-Darwinian liberal theology, distinguishes two major divisions, evangelical and modernistic, and accents the unique contributions of African and African-American liberal theologians, in particular that of Orishatukeh Faduma. Wilber articulates central assertions of post-modernity and critiques their extreme expressions.*

**Reading Assignment:**

Robinson, "The Unitarians and the Universalists: A Summary Overview" [SB 72-75]

Livingstone, "The Enlightenment and Modern Christianity" and "Christianity and Romanticism" [SB 96-135]

Moore, "Faduma and the New Theology" [SB 85-95]

Wilber, "Postmodernism: To Deconstruct the World" [SB 141-151]

**Suggested Reading:**

Paul Rasor. *Faith Without Certainty: Liberal Theology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The introduction and first three chapters offer a helpful framework for much of the assigned contextual readings.

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**September 23: Foundations--God and Humanity I. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century--Re-imagining Humanity.**

**GROUP PRESENTATION:**

Presenters will engage us with the following questions: What aspects of Channing's, Child's, and Peabody's theological views of human nature do you see reflected in contemporary Unitarian Universalism? What resources do they provide? What limits need to be recognized or addressed?

**Lecture/Discussion:** What does Unitarian Universalism have to offer in response to the following questions: What do we most deeply trust? Who are we? What will get us through the night? What holds us together in religious community? Where are we going?

*Unitarian and Universalist theological views on the nature of being human were formed within the ethos of the Enlightenment, in reaction to Calvinism, and express modernity's focus on the authority of individual conscience, reason, and experience.*

*The excerpt from Elizabeth Cady Stanton's autobiography illustrates the dismal character of New England Calvinism and shows how welcome the new ideas of liberal religion were. In "Likeness to God" William Ellery Channing, the great spokesperson of Unitarianism during the first half of the nineteenth century, introduced a new vision of the goodness – even divinity – of humanity. In the following readings, Channing develops and applies that vision. Earnestly adopting that vision, Lydia Maria Child, as you'll read, helped to persuade Channing "to make his controversial public antislavery statement." Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, a Channing disciple, introduced the German concept of the kindergarten to America – and a distinctly Unitarian pedagogy.*

**Reading Assignment:**

Stanton, *Eighty Years and More: Reminiscences 1815-1897* [SB153-160]

Channing, "Likeness to God" [SB161 -172]

Channing, "Self Culture," "A Discourse on the Life and Character of The Rev. Joseph Tuckerman," "An Address Delivered at Lennox On the Anniversary of Emancipation in the British West Indies" [SB 173-192]

Channing, "The Imitableness of Christ's Character" [SB 193-202]

Child, "Appeal to End Slavery" [SB203-210]

Peabody, "Thoughts on Kindergarten Education," "Spiritual Aspects of Early Childhood Education" [SB 211-217]

**Suggested Reading:**

Gary Dorrien. *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion 1805 – 1900*. Section I. Unitarian Beginnings: William Ellery Channing and the Divine Likeness (pp 1 – 57); Section 4. Victorianism in Question: Henry Ward Beecher, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and the Religion of Reform (pp 179 – 260).

**For Further Inquiry:**

Catherine Clinton. *Fanny Kemble's Civil Wars*. (Simon & Schuster)

Catherine Clinton, ed. *Fanny Kemble's Journals*. (Harvard University Press) An acclaimed actress and member of the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia, Kemble married a (Unitarian, also) slaveowner. Her painful, personal awakening to the connections and contradictions of slavery and marriage led her to publish *Journal of Residence in America*, which influenced abolitionist sentiment here and in Britain.

**September 30: Foundations--God and Humanity I. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century--Re-imagining Humanity**

**GROUP PRESENTATION:** \_\_\_\_\_

Presenters will engage us with the following questions: What aspects of Emerson's, Fuller's, Harper's, and Thoreau's theological views of human nature do you see reflected in contemporary Unitarian Universalism? What resources do they provide? What limits need to be recognized or addressed?

**Discussion:** Led by journal entries.

*While drawing much from Channing, Ralph Waldo Emerson was the pre-eminent voice among the Transcendentalists in revolt against first-generation Unitarians. Greatly influenced by Coleridge as well, Emerson exalted the intuitive faculty of the individual. Transcendentalist Margaret Fuller's essay appeared in an 1843 edition of *The Dial* and in 1844 as the book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. It was the first American feminist manifesto, which, as Madeleine Stern wrote, "helped clear the ground for the first woman's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848." A forerunner of womanist theology, Francis Ellen Watkins Harper was the first Unitarian writer to "demonstrate how racism, sexism, and classism are intricately intertwined in American culture. . . [calling] for a spiritual resurrection within people and in their actions as moral beings." (Melba Joyce Boyd) *The capture and trial of escaped slave Anthony Burns was a signal event in the anti-slavery movement, engaging many Transcendentalist activists. Henry David Thoreau's commentary on this event expresses the social implications of Transcendentalist ideas.**

**Reading Assignment:**

Emerson, "Self-Reliance" [SB 218-230]; Emerson, "The Over-Soul" [SB 231-242]

Fuller, "The Great Lawsuit: Man *versus* Men. Woman *versus* Women" [SB 243-266]

Harper, "The Colored People in America," *The Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Colored Woman*, "Woman's Political Future" [SB267-274]

Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts, Remarks Delivered July 4, 1854" [SB 275-282]

**Suggested Reading:**

Gary Dorrien. *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion 1805 – 1900*. Section 2. Subversive Intuitions: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Theodore Parker, and the Transcendentalist Revolt. (pp 58 – 79)

**For Further Inquiry:**

Albert J. Von Frank. *The Trials of Anthony Burns: Freedom and Slavery in Emerson's Boston*. (Harvard University Press) A vivid telling of the story, this book is also a study of how Transcendentalist ideas related to social change.

**Bibliography:**

Melba Joyce Boyd. *Discarded Legacy: Politics and Poetics in the Life of Frances E.W. Harper 1825 – 1911*. (Wayne State University Press)

Madeleine B. Stern. Introduction to *Woman in the Nineteenth Century: A Facsimile of the 1845 Edition*. (University of South Carolina Press)

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**October 7: Foundations--God and Humanity II. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Humanistic Theism/Atheism**

**ASSIGNMENT DUE TODAY: A Theological Autobiography—a five page paper.**

**GROUP PRESENTATION:** \_\_\_\_\_

Presenters will engage us with the following questions: How are this week's readings important for contemporary Unitarian Universalism? What resources do they provide? What limits need to be recognized or addressed?

**Discussion:** Led by journal entries.

*Nineteenth-century Unitarian and Universalist theological anthropology was optimistic and essentialist about human nature and uncritically regarded white male experience as normative for all humanity. This unit will begin to explore how these perspectives shifted in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The nature of being human came to be understood in new ways as gender, race, culture and class increasingly informed the Unitarian and Universalist theological conversation. Liberal optimism was shaken by the devastations of World War I and II, and liberal theologians began to grapple with the limits of reason, the need for grace, and the vulnerability of human beings as well as our power and responsibility.*

*This week's readings illustrate these shifts. In the excerpt from *His Religion and Hers*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a 20<sup>th</sup>-century Unitarian feminist writing just after World War I, calls for religion to be informed by women's experience. Religious humanism, with its deep roots in the values of modernity, is carried forward into the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the *Humanist Manifesto*; unfettered from "likeness to God," 20<sup>th</sup>-century religious humanism affirms humanity's power and responsibility on its own terms. William R. Jones, a black humanist theologian and Unitarian Universalist minister, probes the ways concepts of God can function to sanction racism and oppression or to resist them. Marilyn Sewell's introduction to *Cries of the Spirit*, a collection of poetry by women, suggests how poetic language that arises from the body of our lives speaks of the divine. Rebecca Parker reflects on the meanings for religious humanism of the feminist insights of embodiment, interdependence, and vulnerability. Shirley Ranck argues for a Goddess-feminist theology, a pagan spirituality. Sean Parker Dennison develops Rita Nakashima Brock's notion of interstitial integrity in explicating the transgendered, in-between experience.*

*Nancy Mairs, in her excerpt and in the interview with Susanne Skubik, parses the theological and moral values of embodiment from the perspective of a “troubled body.”*

**Reading Assignment:**

Gilman, “Preface,” “Introductory,” “Suggested Causes” [SB 318-341]

Humanist Manifesto I [SB342-346]

Jones, “An Overview of Divine Racism,” “White God – Black Protest,” “Humanocentric Theism: A Theistic Framework for Ethnic Suffering” [SB358-394]

Sewell, *Cries of the Spirit: A Celebration of Women’s Spirituality* [SB 411-430]

Parker, “Vulnerable and Powerful: Humanism from a Feminist Perspective” [SB431-438]

Ranck, Shirley Ann, “Born of Woman, Born of Earth” [SB439-445]

Dennison, “The Integrity of the In-Between” [SB 474-478]

Mairs, “Body in Trouble” [SB 479-482]

Skubik, Susanne. “Body, Mind, and Soul: An Interview with Nancy Mairs” [SB 483-487]

**Suggested Reading:**

Paul Razor. *Faith Without Certainty*, chapters 4 – 7.

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**October 14: Foundations: God and Humanity II: Process/Relational Humanism and Theism**

<b>ASSIGNMENT DUE TODAY: Hand in your theological reflection journal today. It will be returned to you October 21.</b>
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**GROUP PRESENTATION:** \_\_\_\_\_

Presenters will engage us with the following question: How can we speak of god now?

**Discussion:** Led by journal entries.

*Rooted in modernity’s high regard for reason and science, Unitarian Universalist theologians have approached God through the disciplines of philosophy and the natural sciences. In this unit, we will focus on process theologians who seek reasonable, ethical, and scientifically grounded ways of conceiving of God and humanity.*

Charles Hartshorne, a distinguished 20<sup>th</sup> century American philosopher upon whose work a great deal of process theology is based, identified his theological commitments with Socinianism (a Unitarian perspective dating from the Renaissance) and attended a Unitarian Universalist congregation. In “Beyond Enlightened Self-Interest,” he offers a process view of human identity, as well as glimpses of a process God. In “Intellectual Autobiography” Henry Nelson Wieman, a process theologian active in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, traces the influences and development of his thought about God and humanity. In “The Human Predicament,” he writes more specifically about his central concept of creative interchange, and Jesus. Unlike Wieman, who also attended a Unitarian congregation, Bernard Loomer became a member of one. Loomer wrote little, but his influence on process theology, as Dean of the Divinity School at the University of Chicago, was great. “S-I-Z-E” is a statement of process values. Contemporary Unitarian Universalist minister Gary Kowalski introduces a process view of God in language that is accessible to general readers. John Jungerman, a Unitarian Universalist lay person and physicist, discusses how God can be re-imagined in process theological terms in light of the theories of post-Newtonian physics.

**Reading Assignment:**

Hartshorne, “Beyond Enlightened Self Interest: The Illusions of Egoism” [SB499-508]

Wieman, “Intellectual Autobiography” [SB 509-517]

Wieman, “The Human Predicament” {SB 518-524}

Loomer, “S-I-Z-E is the Measure” [SB525-531]

Kowalski, “God is a Verb” [SB532-542]

Jungerman, “Cosmology and Divinity” [SB 543-563]

**Suggested Reading:**

Gary Dorrien. *The Making of American Liberal Theology, Crisis, Irony, & Postmodernity 1950 – 2005*. Section 2. The New Metaphysics and the Divine Relativity: Charles Hartshorne, Bernard M. Loomer, Daniel Day Williams, Bernard E. Meland, and the Religion of Creative Process. (pp 58 – 132)

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**October 21: The Sheltering Roof: The Search for What Saves Us I: Liberalism and the Problem of Suffering and Evil**

**ASSIGNMENT DUE TODAY: A one-page proposal for your Final Project/Paper.**

**Discussion:** What has most challenged your faith and hope? What theological resources were you able to draw upon?

*This unit and the following two units will focus on Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist perspectives on the problem of evil, the understanding of sin, and the search for what saves us – soteriology. Classic doctrines of the atonement – the idea that humanity was saved by the death of Jesus on the cross – have long been rejected by Unitarians and Universalists. So have ideas that salvation should be identified with an afterlife in heaven and escape from the fires of hell. Critics of liberal theology say liberals do not take evil seriously enough. Some Unitarian Universalists wonder as well: Is our theology only meaningful for the comfortable, the privileged, or those who do not have to struggle to survive the devastating effects of sin or evil? These questions came to the fore in new ways for some religious liberals in the aftermath of September 11, 2001.*

*William Wallace Fenn, Unitarian minister and Bussey Professor of Theology at Harvard Divinity School (1900 – 1932), examines these questions with respect to World War I. In “The Changing Reputation of Human Nature,” Adams works with two ancient Greek views of human nature, the rationalistic Apollonian and the “voluntaristic” Dionysian, to propose a more holistic integration of the two for liberal religion. Post 9/11, Warren Ross poses these questions to a number of Unitarian Universalist religious leaders in an article for the UU World. Unitarian Universalist minister and author Rosemary Bray McNatt raises questions about Unitarian Universalism’s capacity to address racial justice issues unless we can embrace humanity’s limitations and need for God. Fredric John Muir, also a Unitarian Universalist minister and author, employs insights from Latin American Liberation Theology in arguing for a saving move toward pluralism and away from the ideology of individualism among Unitarian Universalists.*

**Reading Assignment:**

Fenn, “War and the Thought of God” [SB 1-7]

Adams, “Root Ideas of Human Freedom: The Changing Reputation of Human Nature” [SB 252-264]

Ross, “Confronting Evil: Has Terrorism Shaken Our Religious Principles?” [SB 8-16]

McNatt, “The Problem of Theology in the Work of Anti-Racism” [SB 17-24]

Muir, “Liberating Religious Individualism” [SB 25-32]

**For Further Inquiry:**

Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker. *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us.* (Beacon Press)

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**October 28: NO CLASS—Reading Week!**

**Reading Assignment:** John A. Buehrens and Rebecca Ann Parker. *A House for Hope: The Promise of Progressive Religion for the Twenty-first Century.* Boston: Beacon Press. 2010.

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**November 4: The Sheltering Roof--The Search for What Saves Us II. The Universalists--  
Re-imagining Sin and Salvation**

**Discussion:** What are your responses to *A House for Hope*? How can we speak of evil, sin, and salvation from a Unitarian Universalist perspective?

*This week we will read excerpts from the 19<sup>th</sup> century Universalist Hosea Ballou's critique of the doctrine of the atonement. Clarence Skinner's The Social Implications of Universalism, written at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, presents an optimistic vision in which both hell and salvation are to be found in human social relations and institutions. Ibrahim Farajaje, professor of cultural studies at Starr King School, draws on connections between Unitarian Universalism and Islam in a sermon preached for a new Unitarian Universalist minister.*

**Reading Assignment:**

Ballou, excerpts from *A Treatise on Atonement* [SB 34-72]

Skinner, *The Social Implications of Universalism* [SB 73-122]

Farajaje, "Lighting Fires in Paradise, Pouring Water on Hell" [SB 123-126]

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**November 11: The Sheltering Roof--The Search for What Saves Us III. Resisting  
Oppression, Restoring the Soul, Healing the World**

**Discussion:** Propose a UU theological basis for the work of Educating to Counter Oppressions.

*In an excerpt from Black Pioneers in a White Denomination, Unitarian Universalist minister and author Mark Morrison-Reed contrasts the central images of black religion with those of Unitarian Universalism, focused through the class-sensitive lens of H. Richard Niebuhr. Howard Thurman, a theological Universalist and friend of Unitarian Universalism, author of Jesus and the Disinherited, evokes the radical significance of Jesus for the oppressed. Jack Forbes, a Native American scholar and activist with ties to Unitarianism and Buddhism, speaks in a late-20<sup>th</sup> century voice that critiques the "whiteness" of earlier optimistic views of human nature and progress. Sharon Welch, a Unitarian Universalist ethics professor and Provost of Meadville-Lombard Theological School, articulates the power of love in the work of healing, liberation and justice, drawing on black women's literature as a source for theology. Rebecca Parker illustrates the education of white people into ignorance and denial, exposes the theology of innocence which sanctions it, and offers strategies of remedial education, healing, and engagement. "Educating to Create Just Communities that Counter Oppressions" is a document that guides the work of Starr King School.*

**Reading Assignment:**

Morrison-Reed, "Two American Faiths" [SB 128-142]

Thurman, "Jesus – An Interpretation" [SB 143-156]

Forbes, "If Jesus Were to Return" [SB 157-167]

Welch, "Introduction," "A Theology of Resistance and Hope," "The Healing Power of Love" [SB 168-209]

Parker, "Not Somewhere Else But Here" [SB 219-233]

\*\*\*"Educating to Create Just Communities that Counter Oppressions"

**For Further Inquiry:**

Sharon Welch. *Sweet Dreams in America: Making Ethics and Spirituality Work*. (Routledge)

Sharon Welch. *After Empire: The Art and Ethos of Enduring Peace*. (Fortress Press)

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**November 18: The Embracing Walls I: Church as Redemptive Community**

<p><b>ASSIGNMENT DUE TODAY: Hand in your theological reflection journal today.</b> It will be returned to you December 2.</p>
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**Discussion:** What are the essential elements for a covenant of membership for a UU church?

*Rebecca Parker writes, "Our distinctive ecclesiology, rooted in the radical reformation, says every member of the church has a say in what the church's purpose is and why we come together. This places the democratic process and human promise-making at the center of church life." This week's readings explore a variety of interpretations of UU ecclesiology, both historical and contemporary.*

*Thomas Starr King, Universalist, and Unitarian minister in San Francisco, preached that the purpose of the church is "to train and feed the spirit of worship." James Freeman Clarke invoked the image of "leaven" and "mustard seed" in calling for a church of disciples active in the world. Cynthia Grant Tucker, UU historian, shows how, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century the Unitarian women ministers of the western frontier enacted an ecclesiology of "church as home" in architectural, congregational, and community programs. The readings from the UUA Commission on Appraisal, Rebecca Parker, and Conrad Wright will introduce you to our distinctive covenantal ecclesiology. Both Thandeka and Jen Harrison lift up the religious experience of small group ministries as a new center of congregational vitality; Thandeka drawing on Schleiermacher, Harrison on UU youth groups.*

**Reading Assignment:**

King, "Christian Worship" [SB 299-309]

Clarke, “The Christian Church” [SB 310-316]

Tucker, “The Church Home” [SB 317-329]

Wright, “Congregational Polity and the Covenant” [SB 330-334]

Parker, “What They Dreamed Be Ours to Do: Lessons from the History of Covenant” [SB 335-342]

“Theologies of Membership,” *Belonging: The Meaning of Membership: A Report by the Commission on Appraisal* [SB 343-368]

Thandeka, “The Spiritual Life of Unitarian Universalists, Lost and Found” [SB 369-386]

Harrison, “Youth Groups as a Model for Transformative Ministry” [SB 387-395]

### **For Further Inquiry:**

Octavius Brooks Frothingham. *Transcendentalism in New England: A History*. (University of Pennsylvania Press) Chapter VII. Practical Tendencies includes the Constitution of Brook Farm and commentary on that communitarian experiment, an alternative configuration of religious community representing a radical Unitarian ecclesiology.

Carl J. Guarneri. “Brook Farm, Fourierism, and the Nationalist Dilemma in American Utopianism.” in *Transient and Permanent: The Transcendentalist Movement and Its Contexts*, Ed’s Charles Clapper and Conrad Edick Wright. (Massachusetts Historical Society)

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**November 25: NO CLASS—Thanksgiving/Thanks-grieving**

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### **December 2: The Embracing Walls II: Church as Cathedral of the World**

**Discussion:** How would you define an ethic for relating to religious resources?

*Rebecca Parker writes “Missiology: How do we relate to our religious neighbors? We know there are other religious houses. We are one among many. Our missiology does not call us to convert our neighbors, but to embrace them, learn from them, and support them.” This unit explores several Unitarian Universalist models regarding religious pluralism.*

*W. Creighton Peden presents William J. Potter’s early fashioning of a “Religion of Humanity.” In his theology of a “religion for one world,” Kenneth Patton proposes that the values of liberal religion – the testing of truth through reason and experience – can create a religion that will embrace the wisdom of the world’s many religious traditions, while freeing them of superstition. He claims all the religious resources of the world belong to liberals – a vision that leads some to*

react to Patton's theology as a form of capitalist, colonialist appropriation. Forrest Church offers a different image: Unitarian Universalism as a place that recognizes there is one light refracted through many windows, with implications for religious education and worship. Huston Smith, whose congregational home is the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Berkeley, CA, exemplifies a life-long practice of openness to all the world's religions through participation and respectful scholarship.

**Reading Assignment:**

Peden, "The Foundations of William J. Potter's 'Religion of Humanity'" [SB 397-402]

Patton, "The Temple" [SB 403-414]

Patton, excerpts from *A Religion for One World: Art and Symbols for a Universal Religion* [SB 425-435]

Church, "The Cathedral of the World" [SB 425-435]

Smith, "Point of Departure" [SB 435-441]

**For Further Inquiry:**

Carol Christ. *She Who Changes: Re-Imagining the Divine in the World*. (Palgrave Macmillan)  
Christ draws on the work of Charles Hartshorne as a means of stimulating dialogue and forging stronger bonds of connection among feminists of all religious traditions, especially Jewish, Christian, and Goddess feminists.

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**December 9: The Blessings of the Earth and Sky: Affirming the World as Sacred**

**Discussion:** What are the essential elements for UU Theologies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

*Rebecca Parker writes: "...[P]neumatology is how we speak about our sense of the elemental forces that permeate all of our lives, as close as breath, as fiery as the sun, as transformative as the waters of the river. . .[O]ur particular perspective on spirit is our emphasis on the immediate presence of the spirit of life in all of life.*

*"Eschatology is the theology of where we came from and where we're going." Unitarian and Universalist theologies reject apocalyptic eschatologies that imagine that history will end in a final battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil, with this earth being destroyed and "a new heaven and a new earth" being born. We also reject other-worldly eschatologies that locate the ultimate "end" or final purpose of human life after death. The distinctive feature of Unitarian Universalist eschatologies is their emphasis on "realized eschatology" – the conviction that the ultimate end or purpose of life is to be found here and now, in this life, on this earth, or to be realized over time in a progressive evolution towards the establishment of heaven on earth – a heaven of justice, compassion and peace for all beings.*

*Our pneumatology converges with our eschatology in our affirmation of the world as sacred. The reading this week from the Universalist E.E. Guild shows how mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century Universalists carefully argued from the Bible that this world is not meant to come to an end – a theological argument directed against apocalyptic theologies popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and even more popular today. Thoreau’s “Walking” reveals both his strong reading of nature and a notion of progress or manifest destiny that some would reject as justifying the advance of European colonialism. Readings from Starr King and Jenkin Lloyd Jones show how liberal religion began to see divinity revealed in the natural world and in the farm. The excerpt from Hartshorne’s “Do Birds Enjoy Singing?” offers a process philosophical view of the sacredness of all life. Carol Hepokoski, Unitarian Universalist minister and former Associate Professor of Liberal Religious Ethics at Meadville Lombard Theological School, points the way ahead for a Unitarian Universalist earth-focused theology.*

**Reading Assignment:**

Guild, “On the End of the World” [SB 443-449]; Thoreau, “Walking” [SB 450-468]

King, “Living Water From Lake Tahoe” [SB 469-480]

\*\*\*Jones, “Concerning the Soil” [SB481-490]

Hartshorne, “Do Birds Enjoy Singing?” [SB 491-494]

Hepokoski, “Finnish American Unitarianism: A Study of Religion and Place” [SB 495-505]

**For Further Inquiry:**

Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker. *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire.* (Beacon Press)

Ralph Waldo Emerson. “Nature” in *Emerson: Essays and Lectures.* (Library of America)

John Gatta: *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion and Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present.* (Oxford University Press) The works of many Unitarian writers are treated in depth.

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**December 16: Final Presentations, Assess the class & Celebrate!**

You will present a synopsis of your final individual or group paper/project. You will complete an evaluation form for the class. We will share potluck treats with one another!

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