

An Unusual Interest: Universalism and Rivalism, Assimilation and Liberation

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But in the course of a few weeks, an unusual interest seemed to prevail, larger numbers flocked in, and a greater freedom of speech was abundantly manifest... Soon the report became circulated, to the astonishment of the other sects, that there was a revival of religion among the Universalists!

—Nathaniel Stacy, from his *Memoirs*¹

How shocking! A *Universalist* revival! A review of literature regarding Universalism implies that such a thing is impossible, inconceivable—not just unlikely, but completely out of the bounds of possibility. Yet, Nathaniel Stacy, a Universalist circuit rider and one of the first preachers to establish Universalism in western New York, describes a two-year period in his *Memoirs* in which Hamilton, New York, becomes the epicenter of a Universalist revival. This event is not widely recognized in what literature there is regarding either Universalist history or revival-ism in New York; in fact, it seems to be absent from nearly any discussion of Universalism or revivalism whatsoever. In studies of religion which even consider early Universalist presence in New York, Universalism is frequently spoken of as a religion of opposition, not so much its own faith, but either Unitarianism's country cousin or the refuge of those fleeing evangelical Christianity. Studying the context, the events and the scholarship regarding the spread of Universalism across New York in 1800-1825, and particularly the years 1817-1818, reveals a previously obscured view of Universalism. Analyzing the text and subtext of history as it has been written thus far brings to the fore a Universalism that is dynamic and alive, not simply a prod to the revivalists or a refuge for less

excitable folk, but a faith which has its own motivations and trajectories, its own identity, and its own revivalism. Nathaniel Stacy's account can help to liberate Universalism from the limitations historicity has placed upon it.

Western New York, 1800-1825

The first quarter of the 19th Century in New York was a time of expansion and development for the Euro-American settlers, who left New England and pushed past the Hudson River in greater and greater numbers each year, reaching a peak in the 1820s. What is now central and western New York was, in the early 1800s, frontier and “wilderness” to the European settlers—seemingly empty, just waiting for settlement and occupation. The Haudenosaunee (also called Six Nations or Iroquois) Confederacy had fallen from power in the late 1700s, and communities of the member tribes had been moved ever further north and west by land purchase, treaty and warfare, eventually finding themselves only able to occupy reservations with limited natural and economic resources.² Haudenosaunee villages were abandoned in the east or enclosed within reservations in the west, and, to make matters worse, a combination of war, hunger, harsh winters, murder and disease had decimated the Haudenosaunee, leaving only 4,000 tribespeople in 1794, a drastic drop from 8,000-10,000 in 1763.³ While no Euro-American could avoid knowing that the members of the Six Nations were the original occupants of the land, as the Haudenosaunee were defeated, displaced and destroyed it became easier to disregard their presence on the land in the settlers’ move westward.

At the time Nathaniel Stacy was beginning his New York ministry in 1805, central and western New York were undergoing increasing expansion and development under the advances of the Euro-American settlers. About 1790, Euro-Americans began to settle western New York from both the south and the north, encouraged in their movement by the fact that the Six Nations were no longer raiding forts and settlements as they had during the Revolutionary War; at this time, each of the original Six Nations were fighting for survival, not land. Treaties and reservations took the place of raids and wars.⁴ This new safety for Euro-settlers encouraged Pennsylvanians to come up the Susquehanna River and follow its branches, distributing themselves throughout the Southern Tier of the state. Later, people from Massachusetts and Connecticut worked their way through the Catskill mountains and along the Mohawk River valley, while Vermonters came by way of the Adirondacks and the St. Lawrence River valley. By 1800, New Englanders were starting to occupy the Lake Ontario plain and the Genesee River valley in small settlements and villages often made up of extended families and even neighborhoods and villages from New England’s hill country.⁵ Rochester was founded in 1803, and plans for Buffalo had begun to be drawn in 1804; at first, neither city was more than a few homes and a central dirt lane. Syracuse, according to Whitney R. Cross, did not begin to emerge from a “neglected swamp” until the 1820s.⁶ Utica, to the east of Rochester and Syracuse, appears in a painting from 1807 to be a small village, lacking industry or even cobblestone pavement; it is certainly not the industrialized city it would become with the arrival of the Erie Canal and increased settlement in the 1820s. In fact, according to Cross, the five westernmost counties adjacent to the canal increased in population by 135percent in the 1820s; Utica grew by 183 percent, Syracuse by 282 percent, Rochester by 512 percent, and Buffalo by 314 percent.⁷

The construction of the Erie Canal is one of the most important events to shape the history of New York State. Not only did it allow for considerably faster cross-state travel once it was completed, it also brought labor and urbanization to the settlements it reached as it moved westward from the Hudson River. Construction began on the canal in 1817 and was completed in 1825, following the Mohawk River and other natural waterways from the Hudson River to Lake Erie. This route travels through what is now called the Northern Tier of New York, which was at that time the most heavily settled portion of western New York, with towns and villages both on the waterways and further inland. The influx of people which followed the progress of the canal created a series of economic and population booms in the cities and villages along the way, such that the boom in Utica was well past by the time Buffalo's boom had begun, leaving Utica behind as an economic and cultural center.⁸ Utica would later play a major role in the history of Universalist publishing, becoming the home of *The Christian Visitant* (1832), *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate* (1830-1850), and *Utica Evangelical Magazine* (1828-1829).⁹

Although the Erie Canal brought about major economic development in western New York, and certainly helped to draw people westward, it was the earlier emigrations from New England that opened the way for Universalism to enter the region. Euro-settlers from New England did not leave religion behind when they moved, and leaders and circuit riders of many faiths followed the New Englanders on their journey west, including Methodists, Baptists, the Society of Friends, Congregationalists and Presbyterians.¹⁰ The Universalists, while fewer in number, were not to be left out. The first Universalist society in western New York was established by Miles Wooley in Hartwick in 1803. Through the diligent efforts of circuit riders and preachers, including Nathaniel Stacy and Stephen R. Smith, the numbers of societies and of isolated Universalists increased a great deal. By 1806, there were four societies Upstate, and by 1824, 50 societies/congregations,¹¹ most heavily in the lower Black River valley, the Finger Lakes region and the Genesee River region.¹² In 1825—the same year the Erie Canal was completed—Universalists in New York, guided by Nathaniel Stacy's vision, voted to establish the New York State Convention of Universalists (NYSCU). According to the NYSCU website's *History of Universalist Societies in New York State: 1803-1975*, the convention would exist:

to be a bond of union between the existing associations; to provide a means for settling disputes; to consider candidates for the ministry; and in general to promote the cause of Universalist benevolence, working in close harmony with the General Convention of Universalist of the New England States. It was to have no authority over the churches (the associations retained this role), but would act judicially in the field of "complaints and grievances against any brother in the ministry presented to the Convention."¹³

NYSCU was not formed without opposition, of course. There were those who feared it would create a hierarchical, restrictive structure and impose a controlling denominational authority, leading to creedalism.¹⁴ That fear does not seem to have ever materialized; however, the goal of promoting Universalist benevolence (and, by extension, Universalism) seems to have worked quite well. By 1845, there were nearly as many Universalist congregations in western New York as there were Episcopalian, and twice as many as there were Catholic.¹⁵ The strong growth of Universalism in western New York took place in the midst of a religious phenomenon which most scholarship suggests is antithetical to Universalist faith and spirituality: revivalism.

Revivalism in the Burned-Over District

An adequate definition of revivalism is hard to find. The term “revival” has often been used to describe Protestant Christian evangelical events which are known for a joint enthusiasm, an affective, communal swelling of religious sentiment. The term has come to enjoy broader use as scholars and religious leaders speak of revivals of Islam, Hinduism, civil progressivism and other movements, both religious and ideological. Historian Russell E. Richey uses an entire essay (“Revivalism: In Search of a Definition”) to detail one way of understanding the concept using 10 factors, of which eight to 10 must to be present in order to name an event a revival (Appendix I). Richey’s factors are theological, liturgical and sociological, creating a systematic tool based in Western Christian religion.¹⁶ A simpler, yet nearly as complete, definition is given by the Rev. Calvin Colton, an American minister in the early to mid-1800s, in his book *History and Character of American Revivals of Religion*:

A revival, therefore, may be defined, as,—*the multiplied power of religion over a community of minds, when the Spirit of God awakens Christians to special faith and effort, and brings sinners to repentance.*[sic]¹⁷

He goes on to speak of a “sympathetic economy of revivals,” describing the way in which revivals act synergistically, resonating with one another in separate, yet connected, individuals and communities, resulting in a growing revival-ism which spreads across and through communities and congregations.¹⁸

“The Burned-Over District” is a name used to refer to western New York during the first half of the 19th Century, when speaking of religious movements, particularly revivalism in a Protestant context. Whitney R. Cross, in *The Burned-Over District*, suggests that the term was first used by critics of revivalism, making an “analogy between the fires of the forest and those of the spirit.”¹⁹ The term’s derivation, of course, is less important than what occurred in the region: an approximately 50-year series of revivals which Cross identifies has having begun with the “Great Revival” of the winter of 1799-1800, itself the result of cumulative, smaller revival events. Cross describes the overall shape of the period thus:

After 1800, excitement diminished, rose again to a lesser peak in 1807-1808, and slumped once more during the [War of 1812]. But even the least promising seasons saw awakenings in a few localities.

The religious upheavals following the War of 1812 surpassed all previous experiences. Those accustomed to such events may have

seemed less impressed than upon the earlier occasion, but this revival did spread more widely and abundantly than had the one at the turn of the century. Yankee towns which featured in the earlier awakening again stimulated similar communities more recently founded.²⁰

Cross notes a strong series of revivals between 1815 and 1819, a slump between 1820 and 1825, and then the period's strongest series of revivals from 1825 to 1837. In slow years, it appears that, while the general sense of fervor was weak, there were still sporadic and localized revivals occurring throughout western New York.²¹

Colton's "sympathetic economy" shows itself in the patterns of the Burned-Over District's Protestant revivalism. Older towns and villages acted as storehouses of revivalist yeast, which would, through association, leaven the new, towns and villages with fervor, causing revivals to rise in new locations. As regional communication improved (including such Universalist publications as were mentioned before) and the Euro-settler population grew denser, these "infections" (as Cross calls them) became coordinated.

At first, little uniformity in timing has been apparent, but with each succeeding wave, the tendency grew toward simultaneous operation over an extensive area. Contagion grew the more significant as improved communications made each vicinity more conscious of the moral and religious state of its neighbors. Most of western New York during these years experienced revivals at the same times.²²

Cross does not suggest that denominations experienced revivalism separately, with the Methodists on a schedule that was unrelated to the Presbyterians or the Baptists. Instead, his evidence speaks to a cross-denominational sympathetic economy. The denominational affiliation of the revivalist or the community matters less in the transmission of revivalism from community to community than the simple excitement of religious fervor. If this is so, revivalism, then, need not be limited to Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists.

Russell Richey notes in his essay on revivalism that his methodology for defining a revival event is open even to Catholic revivals; he cites Jay P. Dolan, who makes a persuasive argument for a Catholic revivalism in the form of "parish missions."²³ Dolan, in *Catholic Revivalism*, states that early 19th century observers (like New York revivalist Charles Grandison Finney) referred to parish missions as revivals. Dolan goes on to suggest that the first Catholic revivals likely began in the United States in the late 18th century, but that by 1829 revivals were a regular and important part of Catholic mission work. He reports that by 1850, 36 parish missions had been held in five states, one of which was New York.²⁴ The degree of Catholic revivalism in western New York prior to 1850 is hard to determine; however, the evidence strongly suggests revivalist Catholicism was present and known in the Burned-Over District.

Anthony F. C. Wallace, in *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca*, also speaks of revivals occurring among the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois). In 1799, a Mohawk prophet began efforts to revive an altered form of Native worship,²⁵ but Wallace points to Handsome Lake, a Seneca prophet, as the strongest revivalist of the Native Americans in the region at the time. Handsome Lake began preaching a religious form that began as a reframed version of traditional beliefs and practices in 1800, and by 1801 had begun to speak to aspects of Quaker belief, preaching on temperance, Native social unity, land ownership, domestic morality and education.²⁶ From 1801 until his death in 1815, Handsome Lake travelled throughout Haudenosaunee territory (including western New York), exhorting Native communities to strengthen their religious lives according to his instructions, known as the Code of Handsome Lake.²⁷ Handsome Lake was a circuit rider for the Haudenosaunee, and his work among the tribes brought about a revivalism that fits both Richey and Colton's definitions, so long as they are expanded beyond the bounds of Christianity.

Revivalism, then, was not limited to only certain Christian communities, while other communities, Christian or not, were left out of the phenomenon. Cross's *Burned-Over District* addresses revivalism as a solely mainline Protestant phenomenon but notes that revivals acted as a "contagion," spreading from place to place through each community's awareness of "the moral and religious state of its neighbors." While the Haudenosaunee (and, to a lesser extent, the Catholics) lived separately from Protestants in western New York, their communities were not invisible to each other. They interacted in many ways: economically, socially, politically and religiously. For example, Handsome Lake's preaching and work was reported on in the Euro-settlers' religious and secular publications, such as the *Evangelistic Intelligencer*, the *Massachusetts Missionary Magazine* and the *Buffalo Gazette*. Handsome Lake's prominence in western New York can be seen in the fact that the *Buffalo Gazette* published the Seneca prophet's obituary to its Euro-settler readership.²⁸

If revivalism was so pervasive among the varied communities of western New York, how is it, then, that the Universalists are presumed to be entirely opposed to revivalism and untouched by revivalist fervor? Cross speaks of the Universalists as a prod and a refuge:

A healthy minority opinion, propagated with forthright zeal, often serves to develop strength in the majority group by furnishing a definite antithesis to be controverted. More than the Catholics in western New York did the Universalists serve as this kind of foil for the evangelists, stimulating them to ever-more-heroic efforts. Thus, a thriving Universalist Church served a dual function, irritating the revivalists to action while providing a stimulus for alternate types of enthusiasm.²⁹

Was the Universalism of the time simply so reactionary that it could not be a part of the revival movement? Were the Universalists so rational as to completely refuse the revival spirit? Cross speaks of "forthright zeal" and "alternate types of enthusiasm," implying that the Universalists had a

passion for their message, but the opposition he creates places the Universalists in a position which eliminates the possibility of revivalism in their enthusiasm. If the Catholics of the time, who were nearly as vilified as the Universalists, can now be seen as participants in revivalism, and the Haudenosaunee, who are invisible in most scholarly study of 19th Century revivalism, as participants as well, then the scholarly interpretation of the position and actions of the Universalists in regard to revivalism must also be reconsidered. Nathaniel Stacy's *Memoirs* is a key to freeing the Universalists from a limiting and limited historical perspective; his experience and descriptions of a early 19th century Universalist revival challenge an over-simplification which marginalizes Universalism in western New York's community of faiths.

Universalist Revivalism in Nathaniel Stacy's Memoirs

Stacy wrote his *Memoirs* in the middle of the 19th Century, publishing in 1850 in Columbus, PA. Nearly 530 pages in all, the book is a dense autobiography of Stacy's life, from child to circuit rider, young missionary to elder statesman of frontier Universalism. Stacy notes in the introduction that the book could have been "ten times" its final size, but that he "selected and abridged according to the best of [his] judgment."³⁰ Even so, the *Memoirs* is an invaluable, extremely detailed primary source for exploring the spread of Universalism in western New York and beyond. Writing at the behest of Michigan's Central Association and New York's Chautauque Association of Universalists, Stacy says of his *Memoirs*, "It has afforded much pleasure to retrospect the days of the infancy of our cause, to trace its onward progress, and mark the hand of God in its establishment and prosperity."³¹

The hand of God was certainly present during the years 1817-1818 in Hamilton, New York, when that town became the site of a Universalist revival which spread to other Universalist communities in the Burned-Over District. Stacy begins the story of the revival by describing the "social evening conferences" held by the Hamilton Universalist community, and how they became the launching point of the revival.

From our earliest organization in Hamilton, we had been in the habit of holding social evening conferences, in the fall and winter, when the evenings were of sufficient length, for singing, prayer, and exhortation, and for religious discussion... These meetings proved vastly profitable, by enlightening the minds of inquirers, confirming the wavering, strengthening believers, and enlivening and exhilarating all. They were generally well attended by Universalists, and not unfrequently engaged the attention of non-professors, and sometimes even of opposers.

In the fall of 1817, as usual, our conferences were commenced. No unusual excitement was at first manifested, and no uncommon exertions made to induce people to attend. But in the course of a few weeks, an unusual interest seemed to prevail, larger numbers flocked in, and a greater freedom of speech was abundantly manifest... Soon the report became circulated, to the astonishment of the other sects, that there was a revival of religion among the Universalists! Such a thing had been confidently denied, by the professedly religious world, as ever having taken place, and as confidently pronounced impossible, under the preaching of that doctrine. Curiosity, therefore, if nothing else, prompted people of other sects to come in and see what was being done; and the Methodists soon caught the true spirit of the meeting, and joined, heart and hand, in the exercises.³²

Stacy's narrative shows that the revival was not caused by a takeover of evangelical "Partialism" (Stacy's term for the belief that only some people would be saved), but rather that it was Universalism itself that was drawing "larger numbers" into the evening conferences. Stacy goes on to speak of the transformation he saw in the Methodists who joined in the meetings:

They lost all the obnoxious points in their sectarian creed... all was love, the boundless love of God to sinners, the universal atonement of Christ, the unchangeable will of God for the salvation of the whole world, the amplitude of Divine grace, &c. "The middle walls of partition" were completely broken down between us; and so pleased, edified, and animated, and so perfectly at home in our meetings were they, that they even attended our service on the Sabbath, expressed their approbation of the doctrine they heard, and many of them united in communion. Some of the Baptists came in, but were a little more cautious; and the Presbyterians, after a few casual calls, came en masse, with their clergyman at their head.³³

Stacy's accounts of his interactions with members of other denominations, particularly the Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians, make it clear that Universalism was not generally well received by the evangelical Christians of western New York. It seems all the more remarkable, then, that the revival drew in not just the Methodists, but Baptists and Presbyterians as well. Speaking of the Methodists in particular, Stacy makes the following statement:

The Methodists would come in crowds, and... they neither felt nor thought of opposition. Their whole theme was love; and they swelt upon it with all the fervor that the superabounding love of God in the soul inspires. We felt, we talked, and worshiped, for almost two years, as one people.³⁴

Whitney R Cross's sense of cross-denominational revivalism here is shown not by concurrent revivals in different denominations, but by members of other faith communities joining the Universalists to form one religious community. Stacy writes of his own amazement at the existence and growth of the revival, describing it in uniquely Universalist terms; where evangelical revivals persuaded converts with God's wrath, the Universalists brought about a conversion of the soul through grace, not despair, through love, not fear.³⁵ According to Stacy, 60 to 70 new members joined the Hamilton church as a result of the revival.³⁶

The ability of religious fervor to spread itself beyond any single community is an important part of revivalist movement. Colton's sympathetic economy is in evidence both in the degree to which the revival spirit spread through Hamilton, and in the way it went beyond the town's borders into other communities in the wider Universalist movement in western New York.

Nor was this revival confined exclusively to our town; but the spirit seemed to extend, in some degree, through the whole fraternity of Universalists in Central New York, and even farther. The town of Madison shared quite largely in it. Conference meetings were holden, preaching obtained as often as possible, and converts multiplied to such an extent, and so much engagedness realized by the believer, that Mr. S.R. Smith and myself were called to assist in the organization of a church; and on that occasion, numbers came forward and related their experience, and eight received baptism by immersion.³⁷

Stacy's account of the spread of the Universalist revival is quite short, not entering into great detail or comprehensive description; while the brevity is disappointing from a historian's perspective, it is unsurprising given Stacy's own views on conversion.

Had we, during the period of this excitement, entered into that regular system of proselytism uniformly practised by other denominations, we might, unquestionably, have swelled the ranks of our church to triple or quadruple the numbers who united with us; but this I never could conscientiously consent to do... I could never accuse myself of using any unwarranted exertions to produce [the revival] or continue it; nor of taking undue advantage of it to swell the ranks of nominal Universalists.³⁸

The Universalist revival of 1817-1818 fits Calvin Colton's definition of a revival: communities were affected *en masse* by religious fervor, and Stacy states that Universalists began deeper and more frequent study of the Bible and many exhibited a passionate faith that was more intense than he has previously seen (fulfilling Colton's "special faith and effort" clause).³⁹ In the *Memoirs*, Stacy writes of his advocacy for study of the Bible, wisely suggesting to Universalists caught up in the enthusiasm of the revival a way in which their excitement might carry them into a deeper, more mature understanding, rather than relying on changeable emotion to sustain their faith. He writes of his belief in the value of mature and considered faith prior to conversion, refusing to act as a revivalist-style preacher, even as the communities which he serves are in the throes of revivalist-style fervor.⁴⁰

The Hamilton-based revival also satisfies Richey's 10 criteria (Appendix I) for the most part; but it is within these criteria where we can see that the revival, while real, was also bound to be limited in scope. The Universalist revival involved proselytism (circuit riding by Stacy and others), liturgical form (social evening conferences), crowds of people able to choose their own faith, a sense of God's working in the communities, and sufficient density of people to allow for easy communication of religious fervor and experience. Richey's criteria include a soteriology of crisis, resulting in dramatic forms of conversion, rather than the considered, calmer, less emotionally based form of conversion Stacy preferred. Stacy describes such a conversion in his *Memoirs*:

Discovered a visible emotion among my hearers; and soon thirteen youths, of both sexes, were bathed in tears, and audibly sobbing...[I] inquired of them, Why this emotion?... God had been good, gracious, and merciful to them, they had been indifferent about religion... In short, they were not as they desired to be; but no such thing as fear of hell, wrath of God, or endless misery, entered their minds. Several of them afterwards united with the Universalist church.⁴¹

Richey's first criterion for revivalism requires, at the very least, "pietist-like" aspects to be present in a religious community. Ann Lee Bressler, in *The Universalist Movement in America, 1770-1880*, describes the Universalism of that period as having strong pietist roots,⁴² and John Morgan's *The Devotional Heart* identifies Methodist and Baptist Pietist teachings as important formative pieces of the religious educations of John Murray, Elhanan Winchester, and Hosea Ballou.⁴³ In particular, Bressler discusses Ballou's understanding of the effects of conversion and belief in universal salvation, stating that "although the doctrine was a rational belief, it had transcendent power over the feelings" and that "accepting that all were saved marked a change in a person's mind, heart, and relation to society."⁴⁴

While Stacy notes opposition to Methodist participation in the Universalist revival as a key part of its closure, ultimately, the end of the Universalist revival of 1817-1818 was brought about by two matters intrinsic to the Universalism of the time. First, as he himself wrote, Nathaniel Stacy was not the kind of charismatic religious leader who would propagate revivalism for the sake of gaining quick converts. While he did not rail against the Universalist revival, he refused to adopt the role and actions of a revivalist preacher, insisting upon more measured behaviors that would limit continued revivalism among the Universalists of western New York. Furthermore, Universalism did not support a theology of declension, such as Richey discusses in his criteria (Appendix I, #4). Stacy's *Memoirs* do not give a sense that Universalists regularly understood their communities to be saved, then corrupted, and, finally, in need of renewed salvation. Repeating such a cycle could support a lengthy revivalism; however, Universalists of the time understood personal fallenness to come from not loving God as God had faithfully loved them. Correcting that error was not a matter of saving the soul from eternal torment, but rather a matter of restoring relationship—the drama of salvation from Hell lends itself more easily to fervid cycles of declension and conversion, whereas restoring relationship lacks the same degree of drama that necessarily occurs in revivalism.

By examining Stacy's account of the Universalist revival, we can see that Universalism was not completely in opposition to revivalism as scholars such as Whitney R. Cross or Ann Lee Bressler would have us believe. Whitney R. Cross, in *The Burned-Over District*, sets Universalism in opposition to the wider revivalist movement in western New York during the first half of the 19th century. Ann Lee Bressler, in *The Universalist Movement in America, 1770-1880*, creates the same opposition, even using material from Stacy's *Memoirs* to support her understanding of Universalism as a vehemently rationalist, anti-revivalist religion. Stacy, clearly, is not an evangelical revivalist

preacher, and Universalism is not merely one of the evangelical denominations of the time; however, the blanket categorization of Universalism as a religion solely of opposition is just as incorrect. There is no doubt that there was a strong anti-revivalist sense among the Universalists as well as a rationalist one. There are also pietist and revivalist aspects to Universalist history. Bressler does touch upon pietism's important role in forming early American Universalism, and yet leaves no room for the possibility of a Universalist revival. How much of the anti-revivalist sentiment comes out of individual Universalists' reactions to the discrimination and opposition they faced from revivalist preachers? Were the Universalists pure rationalists, or do they appear so because they spoke against the emotionalism which was used against them? Can there be a way to envision historical Universalism that allows for complexity of belief and representation in the world?

Universalists did not stand outside of the social, political and religious issues of their day—they were no more isolated than the Catholics or the Haudenosaunee and, like both those groups, interacted with and existed within the dominant culture of the time. Revivalism was in the air, the water; it was on the roads and in the churches of western New York. No one living in the state, no matter their social location, could avoid the influence of revivalism. The Universalists were no different. They were varied in experience and sensibility, made up of lifelong believers and recent converts. For the Universalists of western New York, revivalism could be many things all at once: an important part of spiritual life, the antithesis of true religion, a curiosity, a threat, an oppression, a freedom. It should come as little surprise that there was a revival in Universalism at some point during the revivalist period in New York, except for the fact that discussions of Universalism make it seem beyond comprehension. Why should this be so? Why should Universalism be molded in such a way as to eliminate diversity of thought and experience from historical understanding?

Assimilating Universalists, Liberating Universalism

Since the 1961 consolidation of the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America into the Unitarian Universalist Association, there has been ongoing debate about the nature of the consolidation and what has come of it. The UUA's Commission on Appraisal published a study of the merger in 1975. In 2001, Skinner House published *The Premise and the Promise*, in which Warren R. Ross presents three different themes he found in interviews with Unitarian Universalists regarding the consolidation:

- 1) The merger has resulted in the formation of a single religious family.
- 2) Consolidation was inevitable (and saved the Universalists from extinction).
- 3) The Universalists won.⁴⁵

John C. Morgan has a different understanding of the merger:

[H]istory is written by the victor. With the emergence of a Unitarianized version of Universalism in the twentieth century (a more rational, humanized ethos), Pietism suffered from either benign neglect or outright hostility, because it represented to some a relic from the past.⁴⁶

Did the Universalists “win,” taking over the UUA with their theology? Were Universalists and Unitarians merged evenly, blended smoothly and easily into the whole? Were Universalists assimilated by the Unitarians, losing history and identity in the process? The way in which Universalism has been subject to reductionist scholarship and Unitarian Universalist culture would suggest the last of these questions is a particularly important one to ask.

Bressler acknowledges this question in her book's introduction, advocating for study of Universalist history that does not define Universalism in terms of Unitarianism.

[T]he linking of [Unitarianism and Universalism] has clouded examination of the very different origins and development of each. Universalism has probably suffered more; it has too often been regarded as simply Unitarianism's poor relation...⁴⁷

As noted earlier, though, her conclusions about the nature of Universalism allow for only one form of Universalism to exist in regards to revivalism: anti-revivalist Universalism, a form which is less alien to Boston Unitarian sensibilities than the one Nathaniel Stacy experienced. Bressler's work on Universalist history, while much needed, does not go far enough in terms of allowing Universalism to exist in all its complexity.

As Bressler notes, Universalism is often mythologized to have been a slightly eccentric cousin of Unitarianism—the country cousin who is unsophisticated, rough, too exuberant and altogether unsuitable for urbane company. According to Warren R. Ross in *The Premise and the Promise*, Unitarians saw Universalists as “theologically too conservative, too emotional, and essentially ‘not like us’...” at the time of the 1961 consolidation.⁴⁸ At the same time, scholars assert that historically there is a fundamental sameness between the two faiths. Whitney R. Cross in *The Burned-Over District* makes the following statement regarding Universalism: “This Yankee Church, the rural equivalent of Unitarianism...”⁴⁹ These contradictory and yet complimentary statements regarding Universalism do two things when taken together: they presume inferiority of Universalism to Unitarianism, while minimizing the differences between the two faiths. If the Unitarians felt the Universalists were “other” at the time of the merger, the time since then has been spent recreating the Universalists in the Unitarian image—rational and calm, anti-revivalist—their exotic pietist nature tamed by doctrinal study and, therefore, suitable for merger.

Very simply, Universalism was never either an exclusively anti-revivalist religion or a Unitarian clone. The way in which Universalism has been defined and historicized has edited a significant portion of its experience out of the Unitarian Universalist consciousness, even by historians seeking to bring Universalism’s history back into awareness. Such editing serves to decrease the authority of Universalism to speak with all its voices in all its complexity, and also serves to make Universalism less alien and less able to speak convincingly against its (sub)merger within the Unitarian Universalist Association. Bressler speaks of a classist “tendency to portray Universalists at the unlettered (and therefore less significant) kin of Unitarians” as part of the reason for the neglect of Universalist history.⁵⁰ While this is undoubtedly true, the neglect of Universalism’s fullness also serves to make the assimilation of the Universalists an easier, less troublesome process.

This silencing of Universalism not only does a disservice to Nathaniel Stacy and those Universalists brought to the faith through revivalism, but to all Unitarian Universalists. Denying the fullness of Universalism is to deny our own heritage. By eliminating voices and experiences from the past, we eliminate ways in which we can understand our own wholeness, ourselves in relation to others. If we silence this portion of our tradition, we only make it easier to silence other forms of diversity within Unitarian Universalism, including those of theology, class, race and gender. To allow Universalism to speak its fullness is to liberate it from a historical silencing. To liberate Universalism, room must be made for the wholeness of the faith and its history. Nathaniel Stacy must be able to both speak against the abuses of revivalism and participate in it. Scholars must be willing to explain the complexity of historical experience. Universalism must speak for all of itself, and Unitarian Universalism must be willing to listen.

Appendix I

Russell E. Richey's ten factors of revivalism, simplified:

- 1) Revivalism rests on Pietism. Pietist or pietist-like assumptions, beliefs, mores, and communal structures-the patterns of life and thought espoused by Spener and Francke, by the Jansenists, by the Hasidic Jews-give revivalism its shape and form.
- 2) Revivalism requires a theology conducive to, or at least permissive of, aggressive proselytism.
- 3) Revivalism works with a soteriology of crisis.
- 4) Revivalism assumes a worldview in which declension is premised-nature is pitted against grace, "worldly" souls must be wrenched from perdition to salvation. Declension...indicates that the boundaries have been violated, and requires the church to once again define its contours. So revival is again called for.
- 5) Revival is also impossible without crowds.
- 6) Voluntarism functions as an extrinsic factor for revivalism. Revivalism flourishes when it has legal and social permission to exist, where crowds can gather, when proselytism is not forbidden, where clerical activism is sanctioned.
- 7) A revival has liturgical form.
- 8) Revivals require charisma. Specifically, they depend upon charismatic leadership. It is the leader, the revivalist, around whom the drama of a revival unfolds.
- 9) Implicit in virtually all the above points is an assumption or belief essential to revivalism. Those caught up in a revival believe it to be the work of the Spirit of God.
- 10) Revivalism requires a communication network, a means by which the Spirit's working becomes known, a way by which a specific episode or series of episodes of conversions are claimed by the larger community.⁵¹

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¹ *Memoirs of the Life of Nathaniel Stacy* (Columbus, PA: Abner Vedder, 1850), 285-6.

² Anthony F. C. Wallace, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969),

149-183.

³ Wallace, 195-196.

⁴ Wallace 149.

⁵ Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950), 4-5.

⁶ Cross, 64.

⁷ Cross, 56

⁸ Cross, 64.

⁹ Other cities along the canal were part of a Universalist publishing boom in the early to mid-1800s. Rochester, Syracuse, and Buffalo each had their own Universalist publications. The *Gospel Advocate* began in 1827 in Buffalo, and merged with the *Evangelical Magazine* in 1830. [Information from the bibliographic information on Universalist Periodicals in GRACE, the GTU Library catalog.]

¹⁰ Cross, 15-22.

¹¹ Elmo Arnold Robinson, *American Universalism* (New York: Exposition Press, 1970), 45-46. New York City is a very different entity than Upstate New York at this time. For a fuller understanding of Universalism in New York City, read Abel C. Thomas's *A Century of Universalism in Philadelphia and New York* (Philadelphia: Abel C. Thomas, 1972).

¹² Cross, 18.

¹³ Ruth Wallace, "A History of Universalist Societies in New York State: 1803-1975," in *Early History* [online], [online: New York State Convention of Universalists, 1975.]. < http://www.nyscu.org/About_Us/history_1803-1975.shtml>

¹⁴ Wallace, [online].

¹⁵ Cross, 18.

¹⁶ Russell E. Richey, "Revivalism: In Search of a Definition," from Wesley Center for Applied Theology [online], [online: Northwest Nazarene University, 2000.]. < <http://wesley.nnu.edu/WesleyanTheology/theojrn/26-30/28-6.htm>>

¹⁷ Calvin Colton, *History and Character of American Revivals of Religion* (1832; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1973), 1-2.

¹⁸ Colton, 28.

¹⁹ Cross, 3-4. Cross further suggests that Charles Grandison Finney, the Methodist evangelist and revivalist, applied the name to a specific area of Upstate New York. Marianne Perciaccante, in *Calling Down Fire* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003, p. 133, end note 5.), disputes Cross's assertion, stating that Cross himself was the first to use it. Perciaccante disputes the use of the term at all (p. 3). This paper will use the term as Cross does, to describe the area of New York west of the Catskill and Adirondack Mountains (Cross, 4).

²⁰ Cross, 10-11.

²¹ Cross, 12-13.

²² Cross, 12.

²³ Jay P. Dolan, "American Catholics and Revival Religion, 1850-1900," *Horizons* 3 Spr (1976): 43.

- ²⁴ Jay P. Dolan, *Catholic Revivalism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), xvi, 16, 19, 21.
- ²⁵ Wallace, 299.
- ²⁶ Wallace, 251, 263, 277-280.
- ²⁷ Handsome Lake and his revivalism are widely credited with strengthening the Seneca tribe; his Code is the foundation of what would eventually become the tradition of the Longhouse, which is fundamental to traditional Seneca life today.
- ²⁸ Wallace, 362-363, 320-321.
- ²⁹ Cross, 17-18.
- ³⁰ Stacy, xvi.
- ³¹ Stacy, xv-xvi.
- ³² Stacy, 285-286.
- ³³ Stacy, 286.
- ³⁴ Stacy, 287.
- ³⁵ Stacy, 298.
- ³⁶ Stacy, 301.
- ³⁷ Stacy 299-300.
- ³⁸ Stacy, 300-301.
- ³⁹ Stacy, 302-303.
- ⁴⁰ Stacy, 301.
- ⁴¹ Stacy, 299.
- ⁴² Ann Lee Bressler, *The Universalist Movement in America, 1770-1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 17.
- ⁴³ John C. Morgan, *The Devotional Heart: Pietism and the Renewal of American Unitarian Universalism* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1995), excerpted in QUEST: Quaker Ecumenical Seminars in Theology [online], [online: QUEST, edited by Chuck Fager; cited 12 May 2004]. <<http://www.quaker.org/quest/issue3-2.html>>
- ⁴⁴ Bressler, 9, 19.
- ⁴⁵ Warren R. Ross, *The Premise and the Promise* (Boston: Skinner House, 2001), 190.
- ⁴⁶ Morgan, [online].
- ⁴⁷ Bressler, 7.
- ⁴⁸ Ross, 11.
- ⁴⁹ Cross, 18.
- ⁵⁰ Bressler, 7.
- ⁵¹ Russell E. Richey, "Revivalism: In Search of a Definition," from Wesley Center for Applied Theology [online], [online: Northwest Nazarene University, 2000.]. <<http://wesley.nnu.edu/WesleyanTheology/theojrn1/26-30/28-6.htm>>