

Henry Ware Jr. on the Role of Emotion and of the Religious Life

Francesca Hughes

Hughes wrote this paper in Fall 2000 for Dr. Alicia Forsey's Unitarian Universalist History class at Starr King School.

C.A. Bartol is even more extreme:

Logic mutilates; the whole being should act. Nobody does anything well who has to refer for it to his head. The design and will are there; but I notice, said one, that the great performer on an instrument plays from his spinal marrow. The journey for feeling is too long from the brain... You will put on your considering cap? I do not care what is smoked slowly out of it, but for your instantaneous impression.

In fact, the slightest effort unearths the positive role of emotion for early Unitarians. But being passionate about religion implies that we are then obligated by our own inclination to spend a lot more time on it. If a high degree of positive feeling were involved, then a greater expenditure of time and energy would also be implied. Religion is, historically, a topic upon which the beliefs involved have been emphasized at the expense of the time and energy that might be demanded by actually living those beliefs.

Our aversion to selecting a spiritual path, or a specific direction in which to go with religion, a particular map to the top of the mountain, is most notable with regard to Christianity. That many of our congregations are inhospitable to Christians is so much in evidence in current discourse as to have reached scandalous proportions. A scandal, in this case, would be defined as an event that is outside

the specified norms of a particular society. Rejection of a particular religious belief [that is in accord with our principles] is specifically forbidden in our UU culture. It is not a new thing to reject spiritual paths. It has taken place within most religions on a regular basis. Most often it takes the form of knowing that certain attitudes and actions are expected and choosing to ignore such expectation. Ours is perhaps the only denomination in which such ignoring has been institutionalized as “openness.”

In 1936, the Commission of Appraisal made this observation:

But diversity is not the same thing as indefiniteness... precision is largely lacking in current Unitarian expression of values. There is more than a suggestion that the movement has drawn to itself a good many persons afflicted constitutionally with indefiniteness. They account for such definitions as that Unitarianism is ‘all that makes for beautiful life.’ But, apart from this extreme, nowhere along the line is the precise formulation of results characteristic of current Unitarian thinking. Definiteness is dodged as a possible instrument of bondage. This attitude, it is submitted, implies neither a high view of human nature, nor a free use of intelligence, nor a great confidence in the quest for truth.

The Commission’s view supports my own observation that openness for its own sake does not fulfill the vision of early Unitarianism. A refusal to see spiritual development as desirable or to consider the freedom of our movement as freedom to choose and follow a particular path rather than freedom not to choose, does not imply a high view of human nature, or free use of intelligence or a great confidence in the quest for truth. On the contrary, many UU’s, when faced with the story that there are many paths up the mountain, self-righteously claim that there is no mountain. There is nowhere to go with our religious aspiration, we are fine as we are. It is also evidence of a vote of no confidence in the quest for truth. A spiritual path involves self-examination, and without self-examination we have little hope of making use of “free” intelligence. Without self-examination we have little understanding of our own feelings, motivations and influences.

As replacements for emotion and spiritual path, we allege the doctrines of reason and social action. It will be my case that these worthy ideas are not only flawed in both conception and execution, but are not adequate substitutes either. I will cite various Unitarian authors on both the role of emotion in religion, and the concept of religion as offering a specific set of steps to a new way of being. I have chosen Unitarian authors as opposed to Universalist authors because the Unitarian tradition is the one most often credited with our present attitude to reason.

An additional problem is created by the idea of context. Generally, when citing a particular passage, it is considered desirable that the context in which the passage originally appears not be entirely out of accord with the context in which the passage is to be cited. Historical situations may differ, but if the mood and intention of the original context differs markedly from the mood and intention of the work that the passage is intended to support, such support is weakened.

More specifically, the spiritual and religious context from which my citations are taken differs considerably from the spiritual and religious context of many Unitarian Universalists today. The thoughts of Henry Ware, Jr. and Octavius Brooks Frothingham on the topics of emotion in religion and the path to religious fulfillment are solidly grounded in Christian theism and say so. While a particular passage may not appear to require such presupposition, the context from which it is taken is clear on the point. What, then, is the value of such a citation for a more general UU audience (not necessarily Christian or theist), and how are we to think usefully about what it has to say to us? Is a passage supporting the warmth of emotions in the pursuit of God essentially less credible than a passage supporting the use of reason in same endeavor? If so, then the passages are already de-contextualized by our preferred interpretation and the influences of the time and culture that created that interpretation.

We are fond of saying that we prefer to emphasize character formation rather than prayers and practices. We much prefer a theology of wholeness to a theology of lack. These two statements are somewhat at odds, however. To hold up the value of character formation is to understand that character must be formed. A child does not generally emerge from the womb with strength of character, knowledge of virtue and the will to perform in accord with these. If we wish to see such character formed, there must be years of example, teaching, discipline and appropriate motivation. There are maps for how such learning might take place, from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* to the younger Ware's *On the Formation of Christian Character* and from every spiritual tradition we might name. In our eagerness to cite formation of our children's character we can easily overlook the "openness" in our congregations that allows the character of adults to go unchallenged in any serious way.

It is somewhat inappropriate to juxtapose character formation with prayers and practices. Prayers and practices are, in most traditions (particularly Christian, Tibetan Buddhist, Taoist and Moslem) part of the mode by which character is formed. To claim to emphasize character formation without a concurrent map by which such a thing is to happen as well as a significant imperative for its motivation is to stop short. As UU's, we live in the happy expectation that the openness of creating or discovering our own path and our own motivation will somehow controvert centuries of human experience in which sloth and good intentions are much more likely. Our congregations contain their share of people who are unable to practice what they preach.

For present purposes I will define a theology of wholeness as a theology in which the person is presumed to be inherently good and a theology of lack as one in which the person is presumed to be inherently bad. Most spiritual traditions contain elements of both. The person is thought to be basically good, but there are difficulties that must be cleared up. Tibetan Buddhism is a good example, in that the “Buddha-nature” of a human being is inherently “perfect” but is covered up by the desires, fears and ignorance inherent in embodied being. In the western tradition we often assume that it must be one or the other, and UU’s, still reacting to Calvinism, are often indignant at the suggestion that we might find some inward path that is challenging and, most objectionable, messy. We are fine as we are. The old adage that the Universalists thought God was too good to damn them forever and the Unitarians thought they were too good to be damned forever in very much still our mentality today. Even if we are not thinking in terms of salvation, we are too good to have to worry about becoming any better.

We would much rather look outward at the problems of the world. This has the advantage of being theologically irreproachable and of allowing us to be religious without having to look ourselves in the eye. The only question we are allowed to ask ourselves about our spiritual development is whether or not we involve ourselves in social action. And, in common with many other people at other times and places, we are willing to allow our denomination’s belief in this particular value to stand not only for action on our own part, but for individual examination of exactly what our own role should be in creating a better world. It is easy to summon evidence of UU social action and serious people intent in its pursuit. It is also possible to cite numerous moribund social action committees in our congregations. Whether or not we consider social action to be the most appropriate spiritual practice, or our own spiritual practice, or what role or value we see for it, as a spiritual practice it suffers the fate of other practices. It is easier to say that it is part of our belief than it is to practice it.

But the most important problem with regard to social action as a doctrine is not whether it is an appropriate practice or whether it is our own preferred practice. The important issue is that its pursuit is rarely balanced with looking inward. It has always been difficult and usually unpleasant to look inward but our denomination may be the only one that has successfully institutionalized the view that it is somehow wrong or suspect to look inward. We have no problem with it if it takes place in the context of therapy, but not in religion. Then it may be labeled as “self-absorbed,” “navel-gazing,” and other derogatory terms. Henry Ware, Jr. had a different idea. Among the means to religious improvement, he discusses “meditation”:

This is a great and essential means of improvement. It is essential to self-examination and self-knowledge, without which the hope of progress and of virtue is vain. No one can know his own character, or be aware of the dispositions, feelings and motives by which he is actuated, except by means of deep and searching reflection. In the crowd of business and the

hurry of the world, we are apt to rush on without weighing, as we should, the considerations which urge us; we are liable to neglect that close inspection of ourselves, and that careful reference of our conduct to the unerring standard of right, which are requisite both to our knowing where we are, and to our keeping in the right way. It is necessary that we sometimes pause and look around us, and consider our ways; that we take observation of the course we are running, and the various influences to which we are subjected, and be sure that we are not driven or drifted from the direction in which we ought to be proceeding. Without this there is no safety.

Ware's observations on the feelings and motivations by which one is actuated is reminiscent of the post-modern critique of objectivity. We realized that observation was a process and that no knowledge project takes place without social location, enculturation and subjectivity. We saw that unless we took overt and conscious note of the role of subjectivity in our knowledge projects, it would certainly run them from some dark closet of the unconscious. Ware is pointing to the same kind of difficulty, in this case concerning projects in the religious life. The 1936 Commission of Appraisal was concerned about indefiniteness because it did not manifest a high view of human nature, a free use of intelligence or confidence in the quest for truth. Religious life is different from everyday life in that it occupies a different dimension. It occupies a different temporal dimension in that we set aside a particular day that we devote to religious considerations and development. It occupies a different dimension in that, ideally, the inspiration and transformation engendered will infuse the entirety of our existence on all the other days. This is Octavius Brooks Frothingham's take on religious gathering:

We come together here mainly, not to discuss scientific questions; not to discuss social questions; not to study the practical problems of existence; not to deal with matters of scholastic or secular learning; we come here, let me say it in all sincerity and simplicity, to see if we cannot get a closer sight of the secret of existence; if we cannot feel with fingers of faith along those finer lines of law which the fingers of science fail as yet to reach.

So a part of the earlier vision was to "feel with the fingers of faith" for the "secret of existence." It is fashionable nowadays to claim that there is no secret, that the best we can do is to be kind to one another. But can we be kind to one another? In his book, *Behavioral Covenants in Congregations*, Gilbert Rendle points out that that's the last thing we can say with certainty. Being kind to one another has never been easy, and his case is that today it is much harder. Selfish and careless and angry influences bombard us at every turn so much so that he calls these responses the "cultural default" and explains how intentional we have to become not to default to it in our churches.

Can Frothingham's terms, "faith" and "secret of existence" resonate with us today? Certainly they will resonate with a number of UU's, but others will have trouble. Is this a part of our history for the latter to discard as not helpful, or meaningless? It is the nature of our denomination that we can choose the pieces of history that are helpful to us and jettison the rest. However, in the most idealistic Unitarian sense, the idea to be jettisoned will have been submitted to inquiry by one who has done a certain amount of self-examination, using his or her free intelligence. To be a "free" intelligence, we might consider that it has not only to be free of dogma, the original sense of free intelligence, but also free (or at least aware) of its own feelings, motivations and influences. It is then that we throw the idea out, not before.

As for the secret of existence, the kernel of traditional religious inquiry, we are very likely to dismiss it as being impossible to locate, perhaps with a rider questioning the utility of such an answer if we were to find it. Again, we might have little awareness of the cultural, personal, and temporal influences that make this appear a likely assessment. My question would be, how Frothingham's thought in this instance resonates with our own experience? Is there a buried yearning for faith, for finding the secrets of existence? How can we look at the question at all without the self-examination that will inform us about how our religious decisions have been made?

In a discussion about psychiatrists and theologians on religion, Angus MacLean, writing in 1965, observes:

But no one among the lot questions the deep emotional grounds of religion, and so far as I know not one of note any longer assumes the possibility of its eradication. It is a response to life out of man's deepest needs.

Very much in the same tone, something much earlier, from Henry Ware the elder:

Yet Unitarians by no means eschewed emotionalism in their own preaching. The good minister not only appealed to the 'cool approbation' of men, Henry Ware the elder admonished a colleague; he imparted to his precepts 'a glow of feeling.' After all, Ware pointed out, religion was not 'merely the act of assenting to the truth'; it represented the satisfaction of a powerful emotional need.

Perhaps it has been our attempt to excise emotion from religion that has led us to subscribe to the modern (not post-modern) view that there is no meaning to discern apart from that which we create. It is a notion originally propounded in the scientific community, along with the denigration of subjectivity in experimentation. But science only addresses a part of our human lives. In the post-mod-

ern world, we know that it is time to look again.

Henry Ware, Jr. was absolutely convinced of the centrality of religion in human life. He knew landmarks on his own religious path: prayer, meditation, self-examination, hearing the Word, reading scripture, communion and attending to them assiduously. He was an American prototype of the understanding and manifestation of Unitarian theological power. He had a deep emotional involvement with his religion and its transmission to others. He knew that care for others had to be balanced by looking inward, and was wary of the temptations of discussion:

Many a religious character has been spoiled in the forming, by too much talk with too many persons. The best religious character is formed in retirement, by much silent reflection, and private reading and prayer. What the soul needs above all things, is to commune with itself and with God; then it is established, strengthened, settled. But if a man go out from his closet, and seek for instruction and guidance by talking with all who will talk with him, he fritters away his feelings; his frame becomes less deeply and essentially spiritual; words take the place of sentiment; and he is very likely to become a talkative, fluent, superficial religionist, with show of sound doctrine, and a goodly readiness of sound speech, but without substantial principle.

How is such a citation to be meaningful if the theist context is insurmountable? Is it enough to invite those who will to benefit from it and others to leave it behind? In Tibetan Buddhism, which most describe as a non-theistic religion in that it does not concern itself with discussions of God, the prescription for watching the use of one's energy is the same as that outlined here by Ware. Here he addresses another issue that is still very current today,

I would even presume, further, to warn one class of readers, and that not a small one, against a danger which lurks even in their established respect for religion. That general regard for it, which grows out of the circumstances of education and the habits of society, may be mistaken for a religious state of mind; yet it is perfectly consistent with religious indifference. A man may sincerely honor, advocate, and uphold the religion of Christ on account of its general influence, its beneficial public tendency, its human and civilizing consequences, without at all subjecting his own temper and life to its laws, or being in any proper sense a subject of a peculiar happiness it imparts. This is perhaps not an infrequent case. Men need to be made sensible that religion is a personal thing, a matter of personal application and experience. Unless it is so considered, it will scarcely be an object of earnest pursuit, or of fervent, hearty interest, nor can it exert its true and thorough influence on the character. Indeed, its desirable influence upon the state of society can be gained only through this deep personal devotion to it of individuals; because none but this is genuine religion, and the genuine only can exhibit

genuine power.

This is what Ware has to tell us about character formation. For him, religion is “the religion of Christ,” but the kernel of the wisdom to be obtained here is not about which set of ideals we have in mind. It is about honoring and advocating an ideal without subjecting one’s own temper and life to its laws. It is the beginning of an answer to the recurrent theme of contemporary studies in liberal religion about the source of theological power.

Appendix — **Early Unitarian Thoughts on the Role of Emotion in Religion and the Role of the Religious Life or Spiritual Path**

Henry Ware, Jr. on the Religious Life

I would even presume, further, to warn one class of readers, and that not a small one, against a danger which lurks even in their established respect for religion. That general regard for it, which grows out of the circumstances of education and the habits of society, may be mistaken for a religious state of mind; yet it is perfectly consistent with religious indifference. A man may sincerely honor, advocate, and uphold the religion of Christ on account of its general influence, its beneficial public tendency, its human and civilizing consequences, without at all subjecting his own temper and life to its laws, or being in any proper sense a subject of a peculiar happiness it imparts. This is perhaps not an infrequent case. Men need to be made sensible that religion is a personal thing, a matter of personal application and experience. Unless it is so considered, it will scarcely be an object of earnest pursuit, or of fervent, hearty interest, nor can it exert its true and thorough influence on the character. Indeed, its desirable influence upon the state of society can be gained only through this deep personal devotion to it of individuals; because none but this is genuine religion, and the genuine only can exhibit genuine power.

Ware, Henry, Jr. Formation of the Christian Character, Addressed to those who are seeking to lead a religious life. Boston: AUA, 1890, p. 2–3.

I know of nothing to be more earnestly desired, than that men should cease to look upon religion as designed for others, and should come to regard it as primarily affecting themselves; that they should first and most seriously study its relation to their own hearts, and be above all things anxious about their own characters. His is but a partial and unsatisfactory faith, which is concerned wholly with the state of society in general, and allows him to neglect the discipline of his own affections and the culture of his won spiritual nature. He is but poorly fitted to honor or promote the cause of Christ, who has not first subjected his own soul to his holy government.

Ware, Henry, Jr. Formation of the Christian Character, Addressed to those who are seeking to lead a religious life. Boston: AUA, 1890, p. 3.

In a word, let it be considered how little and how infrequently the idea of God is brought home to the child's mind, even under the most favorable circumstances, and how little is done to make him the object of love and obedience, in comparison with what is done to unite its affections to its parents; while, at the same time, the spirituality and invisibility of the Creator render it necessary that even more should be done; -- and it will be seen that the want of an early and spontaneous growth of the religious character is not owing to the want of original capacity for religion, but is to be traced to the unpropitious circumstances in which childhood is passed, and the want of uniform, earnest, persevering instruction.

Ware, Henry, Jr. Formation of the Christian Character, Addressed to those who are seeking to lead a religious life. Boston: AUA, 1890, p. 20–21.

No man will give himself to the thoughts, studies, devotions, and charities, of a religious life, who does not find them essential to the satisfaction and peace of his mind, that is, who is satisfied without them. Cherish therefore the conviction of this necessity. Cultivate by every possible means a deep persuasion of the truth, that the service and love of God are the only sufficient sources of happiness; and that only pain and shame can await him who withholds his soul from the light and purity for which it was made.

Ware, Henry, Jr. Formation of the Christian Character, Addressed to those who are seeking to lead a religious life. Boston: AUA, 1890, p. 26.

Many a religious character has been spoiled in the forming, by too much talk with too many persons. The best religious character is formed in retirement, by much silent reflection, and private reading and prayer. What the soul needs above all things, is to commune with itself and with God; then it is established, strengthened, settled. But if a man go out from his closet, and seek for instruction and guidance by talking with all who will talk with him, he fritters away his feelings; his frame becomes less deeply and essentially spiritual; words take the place of sentiment; and he is very likely to become a talkative, fluent, superficial religionist, with show of sound doctrine, and a goodly readiness of sound speech, but without substantial principle.

Ware, Henry, Jr. Formation of the Christian Character, Addressed to those who are seeking to lead a religious life. Boston: AUA, 1890, p. 42–43.

The means of religious improvement. The means to be used in order to render permanent your religious impressions, and promote the growth of your character, are now to be considered. They may be arranged under the following heads: Reading, Meditation, Prayer, Hearing the word preached, and the Lord's Supper.

Ware, Henry, Jr. Formation of the Christian Character, Addressed to those who are seeking to lead a religious life. Boston: AUA, 1890, p. 47.

(On Meditation) This is a great and essential means of improvement. It is essential to self-examination and self-knowledge, without which the hope of progress and of virtue is vain. No one can know his own character, or be aware of the dispositions, feelings and motives by which he is actuated, except by means of deep and searching reflection. In the crowd of business and the hurry of the world, we are apt to rush on without weighing, as we should, the considerations which urge us; we are liable to neglect that close inspection of ourselves, and that careful reference of our conduct to the unerring standard of right, which are requisite both to our knowing where we are, and to our keeping in the right way. It is necessary that we sometimes pause and look around us, and consider our ways; that we take observation of the course we are running, and the various influences to which we are subjected, and be sure that we are not driven or drifted from the direction in which we ought to be proceeding. Without this there is no safety.

Ware, Henry, Jr. Formation of the Christian Character, Addressed to those who are seeking to lead a religious life. Boston: AUA, 1890, p. 68–69.

In attempting, therefore, the acquisition of a religious character, it is important that you maintain an habitual thoughtfulness of mind. It has been said, and with perfect truth, that no man pursues any great interest of any kind, in which important consequences are at stake, without a profound and settled seriousness of mind; and that a man of really frivolous disposition never accomplishes anything valuable. How especially true must this be, in regard to the great interests of religion and eternity! How can you hope to make progress in that perplexing and difficult work, the establishment of a religious character, the attainment of the great Christian accomplishments, without a fixed and habitual thoughtfulness? -- a thoughtfulness which never forgets the vastness and responsibility of the work assigned to man, nor loses the consciousness of a relation to more glorious beings than are found upon the earth.

Ware, Henry, Jr. Formation of the Christian Character, Addressed to those who are seeking to lead a religious life. Boston: AUA, 1890, p. 70–71.

(On Self-examination) This self-examination must be universal; embracing alike the conduct of your external life and the habitual tenor of your mind. You must survey the train of your thoughts, the temper you have sustained, your deportment toward others, your conversation, your employment, the use of your time and of your wealth; you must consider by what sort of motives you are prevailingly guided, what is the probably effect of your example, and whether you are doing all the good which might be reasonably expected of you; you must compare yourself with the example of Jesus Christ, and measure your life by the laws of holy living prescribed in his gospel. And in order that these and other topics may all have their place in the survey, it may not be amiss to keep them by you on a written list...you have little reason to be satisfied with your reflections and your penitence, if they do not issue in prompt and resolute action.

Ware, Henry, Jr. Formation of the Christian Character, Addressed to those who are seeking to lead a religious life. Boston: AUA, 1890, p. 81–82.

(On Prayer) You must feed the soul as you do the body, furnishing it with suitable nourishment at suitable intervals. You must keep its armor bright and serviceable, as does the soldier in human warfare, who examines and restores it at a certain hour daily. If it were left to be done at any convenient season a thousand trifling engagements might cause the work to be deferred again and again, till irretrievable injury should accrue. You have too many other engagements and enticements daily and hourly occurring, to make it safe for you to leave this to accidental convenience or inclination. In order to secure its performance, you must put it on the list of your daily indispensable engagements; and, as it is part of your routine at certain hours to breakfast and dine, and at certain hours to attend to the concerns of your household and profession, so also must it be, to retire at certain hours for religious worship. The wisdom and experience of all the religious world insist on this; and it would not be necessary to state it so urgently, if it did not seem to be a notion growing into favor with some, that, as the spirit, and not the form, is the essential thing, it is better not to be burdened with methods and rules, but simply to pray always; -- which, there is reason to fear, would in practice be found a precept to pray never.

Ware, Henry, Jr. Formation of the Christian Character, Addressed to those who are seeking to lead a religious life. Boston: AUA, 1890, p. 86–87.

In this world of sensible objects and temporal pursuits, you are constantly exposed to have your thoughts absorbed by surrounding things, and withdrawn from the spiritual objects to which they should be primarily attached. You are incited to forget them, to slight them, to counteract them. The engagements, the anxiety, hurry and pleasures of life, thrust them from your thoughts; and desires, propensities, passions, are excited quite inconsistent with the calm and heavenward affections of Christ. All these tendencies in your situation are to be resisted. You are to be ever on the alert, that they may not lead you into any course of thought or of action at variance with the principles to which you are pledged as a believer in Jesus Christ, and which form your delight in your hours of devotional

enjoyment. Such inconsistency may be sometimes witnessed.

Ware, Henry, Jr. Formation of the Christian Character, Addressed to those who are seeking to lead a religious life. Boston: AUA, 1890, p. 151–151.

It is in the heedless disregard of the thoughts that corruption often takes its rise. They are suffered to wander without restraint, to attach themselves without check to any objects which attract the senses, or are suggested in conversation, and to rove uncontrolled from one end of the world to another. How many hours are thus wasted in unprofitable musing, which leaves no impression behind! How much of life is made an absolute blank! Worse still, how often do sinful fancies, sensual images, unlawful desires, take advantage of this negligence to insinuate themselves into the mind, and make to themselves a home there, polluting the chambers of the soul, and rendering purity unwelcome! This is the beginning of veil with many a one, who, from this want of vigilance over the course of his thoughts, has surrendered himself to frivolity and sensuality, without being aware that he was in peril. Thoughtlessness, mere thoughtlessness, has left the door open to sin, and the same thoughtlessness prevents the detection of the intruder.

Ware, Henry, Jr. Formation of the Christian Character, Addressed to those who are seeking to lead a religious life. Boston: AUA, 1890, p. 157–158.

Other Unitarians on the Religious Life

(According to Buckminster) No source of infidelity was ‘half so much to be dreaded and to be lamented as that profound supineness and indifference to religion, which sometimes assume the name and honors of liberality.’

Howe, Daniel Walker. The Unitarian Conscience Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1988, p. 165.

Transcendentalism admits a religious faculty, element, or nature in man, as it admits a moral, intellectual and sensational faculty, -- that man by nature is a religious being as well as moral, intellectual, sensational; that this religious faculty is adequate to its purposes and wants, as much so as the others, as the eye acquainting us with light, and that this faculty is the source of religious emotions, of the sentiments of adoration, worship. Through this we have consciousness of God as through the senses consciousness of matter. In connection with reason it gives us the primary ideas of religion, ideas which transcend experience.

Parker, Theodore. The World of Matter and The Spirit of Man Latest Discourses of Religion. Boston: AUA, 1907. Cooke, George Willis ed., p. 31.

But diversity is not the same thing as indefiniteness... precision is largely lacking in current Unitarian expression of values. There more than a suggestion that the movement has drawn to itself a good many persons afflicted constitutionally with indefiniteness. They account for such definitions as that Unitarianism is 'all that makes for beautiful life.' But, apart from this extreme, nowhere along the line is the precise formulation of results characteristic of current Unitarian thinking. Definiteness is dodged as a possible instrument of bondage. This attitude, it is submitted, implies neither a high view of human nature, nor a free use of intelligence, nor a great confidence in the quest for truth.

The Commission of Appraisal of the American Unitarian Association. Unitarians Face a New Age. Boston: AUA, 1936, p. 191.

Henry Ware, Jr., on the Role of Emotion in Religion

(On Religion) It is a sentiment or affection of the heart; not the cold judgment of the intellect alone, in favor of what is right; but a warm, glowing feeling of preference and desire; a feeling, which attaches itself in love to the Father of all and to all good beings; which turns duty into inclination, and pursues virtue from impulse; which prefers and delights in that which is well pleasing to God, and takes an affectionate interest in the things to which the Saviour devoted himself. (on Religion)

Ware, Henry, Jr. Formation of the Christian Character, Addressed to those who are seeking to lead a religious life. Boston: AUA, 1890, p. 7-8.

(On Reading Scripture) Make your heart feel and respond to every sentiment. Apply to yourself with rigor every precept and warning; and according to the character of the passage, let your mind glow with fervor, and be uplifted in holy adoration and devout gratitude, or be thrilled and humbled by the representations of infinite purity and justice, or melted and borne away by the tones of tender love and long-suffering grace. Suffer yourself to read nothing coldly, when you read for spiritual improvement. You might as lawfully pray coldly. Therefore let your reading be like your prayers, -- done with all your heart. And be sensible that it is better to go over one short passage many times, till you fully grasp its sentiment, and grow warm with it, than to run over hastily and unfeelingly many chapters.

Ware, Henry, Jr. Formation of the Christian Character, Addressed to those who are seeking to lead a religious life. Boston: AUA, 1890, p. 62.

He who truly prays, feels, during the act, a sense of God's presence, authority, and love; of his own obligations and unworthiness; of his need of being better. He feels grateful, humble, resigned, anxious for improvement. He who prays often, often has these feelings, and by frequent repetition they become customary and constant. And thus prayer operates as an active, steady, powerful means of Christian progress.

Ware, Henry, Jr. Formation of the Christian Character, Addressed to those who are seeking to lead a religious life. Boston: AUA, 1890, p. 83.

‘If religion and man have suffered from superstition and fanaticism on the one side, they have equally suffered from logic, philosophy, and metaphysics on the other,’ declared the younger Ware.

Ware, Henry, Jr. Works, III, 355 cited in Howe, Daniel Walker. The Unitarian Conscience Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1988, p. 157.

Octavius Brooks Frothingham on the Role of Emotion in Religion

The religion was essentially the old one, softened by thought, knowledge, experience, feeling; a faith rather than a creed, a sentiment more than a dogma, not sharp in outline, but full of emotion and charged with conviction, slightly illogical perhaps, but firm -- a religion of the heart.

Frothingham, Octavius Brooks. Boston Unitarianism 1820-1850 A Study of the Life and Work of Nathaniel Langdon Frothingham. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1890, p. 38

To those who apprehend that it is my purpose to exalt duties above dreams, I wish to say at the outset, that such is by no means my intention; that I wish rather to say a good word for dreams; to exalt the mission of feeling, of sentiment, of imagination; to create, if I can, an impression of the power, reach and nearness of this invisible world which is arrived at, not by science, neither by intellect, but by faith, hope, aspiration, in a word — by what we call the imagination.

Frothingham, Octavius Brooks. Creed and Conduct and Other Discourses. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1877, p. 147.

We come together here mainly, not to discuss scientific questions; not to discuss social questions; not to study the practical problems of existence; not to deal with matters of scholastic or secular learning; we come here, let me say it in all sincerity and simplicity, to see if we cannot get a closer sight of the secret of existence; if we cannot feel with fingers of faith along those finer lines of law which the fingers of science fail as yet to reach.

Frothingham, Octavius Brooks. Creed and Conduct and Other Discourses. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1877, p. 150.

C.A. Bartol

Logic mutilates; the whole being should act. Nobody does anything well who has to refer for it to his head. The design and will are there; but I notice, said one, that the great performer on an instru-

ment plays from his spinal marrow. The journey for feeling is too long from the brain... You will put on your considering cap? I do not care what is smoked slowly out of it, but for your instantaneous impression.

Bartol, C.A. The Rising Faith. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1874, p. 5.

How much is there of you, the amount of soul, is the question. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

But while inward seeking employs the best powers, it finds the clearest answers. Physiology is deputy, but not chief justice. I cannot analyze the sentiment which, like magnetism, pervades the world, but I feel its support at every step.

Bartol C.A. The Rising Faith. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1874, p. 10.

Other Unitarians on the Role of Emotion

William Ellery Channing justified the invocation of the affections by citing the need for balance in a Christian character, 'Some preachers, from observing the pernicious effects of violent and exclusive appeals to the passions, have fallen into an opposite error,' he complained. 'They have addressed men as mere creature of the intellect; they have forgotten that affection is an essential to our nature as thought, [and] that the union of reason and sensibility is the health of the soul.' Channing's pupil Abbot asserted that Christianity 'calls us not to annihilate our feelings, but only to regulate them.'

Channing "Discourse at the Ordination of John Emery Abbot" (1815), Works, III, 21; and John Emery Abbot, Sermons (Boston, 1829), p. 177 cited in Howe, Daniel Walker. The Unitarian Conscience Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805–1861. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1988, p. 153.

As an Arminian, Abbot taught that spiritual advancement was dependent upon men's own efforts. As a pietist, he devoted he devoted his efforts to cultivation of the affections. The 'religious life' was one of constant emotional refinement. 'It is impossible to remain stationary in respect to religious character,' he told his congregation; unless one were careful to stimulate the virtuous affections, one would be in danger of falling prey to bad habits and spiritual deadness....To avoid such pitfalls, the Christian was wise to develop an elevated taste, an emotional attraction toward spiritual things. (On John Emery Abbot)

Howe, Daniel Walker. The Unitarian Conscience Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805–1861. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1988, p. 155.

People 'are not religious in proportion to the strength, the clearness, or the soundness of their faith,' the moralists taught, 'but in proportion to the hold which this faith... has gained over their feelings.' *Walker, James. Sermons Preached in the Chapel of Harvard College (Boston, 1861, reprinted 1892), p. 252, cited in Howe, Daniel Walker. The Unitarian Conscience Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805–1861. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1988, p. 156.*

Yet Unitarians by no means eschewed emotionalism in their own preaching. The good minister not only appealed to the 'cool approbation' of men, Henry Ware the elder admonished a colleague; he imparted to his precepts 'a glow of feeling.' After all, Ware pointed out, religion was not 'merely the act of assenting to the truth'; it represented the satisfaction of a powerful emotional need.

Cited in Howe, Daniel Walker. The Unitarian Conscience Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1988, p. 164.

(On psychiatrists and theologians on religion) But no one among the lost questions the deep emotional grounds of religion, and so far as I know not one of note any longer assumes the possibility of its eradication. It is a response to life out of man's deepest needs.

MacLean, Angus H. The Wind in Both Ears. Boston: Beacon Press, p. 45.

I find in my experience as a teacher, and more recently as a preacher, that the most accurate of statements pass over most people's heads when they are devoid of beauty and warm intimacy or something else that speaks to one's feelings. Truths are not only more understandable, when addressed to the heart as well as the head, but often more usable; more easily possessed as personal assets — life's natural and unhappy limitations, for instance.

MacLean, Angus H. The Wind in Both Ears. Boston: Beacon Press, p. 50.

The concept of God, for instance, is born of an emotional need, as I am sure the drive to repudiate it is also. There is a need to relate to the universe and source of life. The concept of God did not develop, I feel, out of a craving for a father image or sovereign idea, before which to grovel and remain a child. It has been so used at times — and here's a fact Freud should have noted — children do not want to grovel to begin with. Neither did the originator of the God idea. It has just as strong an appeal to the creative emotions. Man wants to relate himself in both feeling and thought to the totality of all things. To question any particular formulation of the reality to which one seeks to respond is highly justifiable, but to question the yearning in the face of history would be difficult for a mind both informed and free.

MacLean, Angus H. The Wind in Both Ears. Boston: Beacon Press, p. 51.

I find that when I am most moved, my mind is most active, and even most trustworthy. For example, how easy it is for the liberal to think of the universe as an impersonal and purposeless, and unconscious mechanism. It seems so obvious, so commonsense a notion. Yet out of my sheer love of persons and life, my love of the universe and my desire to talk to it, came the realization that in interpreting the universe as mentioned above we project merely what we know about chemistry and physics and astronomy, and completely overlook that which we regard as most precious: consciousness, mind, personality. While projecting out of experience, as we must, why not project such things? I have heard hard-boiled rationalists talk endlessly on this general subject without ever becoming conscious of the theological problem that personality creates for the liberal, and without apparent awareness of the fact that in us the universe became alive and conscious and concerned. So my mystical inclinations have clarified my mind on this problem rather than clouding it.

MacLean, Angus H. The Wind in Both Ears. Boston: Beacon Press, p. 53.

Copyright © 2000 Francesca Hughes

STARR KING SCHOOL for the MINISTRY
Educating Unitarian Universalist ministers and
progressive religious leaders since 1904