

# Our Theological House: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalist Theologies

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

ST-8402

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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 culture. 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 United States Unitarian Universalist traditions and congregations, including their connections with modernity/post-modernity.
- 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 theologies.

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## REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. Weekly readings posted on Moodle.
2. 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: 9780807077382 Price: \$16 <http://www.uuabookstore.org/productdetails.cfm?PC=1463>

## RECOMMENDED TEXTS:

- Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion 1805 – 1900*. (Westminster John Knox Press) ISBN-10: 0664223540 Price: \$23-38.

- Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity 1900 – 1950*. (Westminster John Knox Press) ISBN-10: 0664223559 Price: \$15-38.
- Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Crisis, Irony, & Postmodernity 1950 – 2005*. (Westminster John Knox Press) ISBN-10: 0664223567 Price: \$23-38.
- Paul Razor. *Faith Without Certainty: Liberal Theology in the Twentieth Century*. (Skinner House Books) ISBN-10: 1558964843 Price: \$3-14.

## REQUIREMENTS:

This course will be conducted in a seminar style. We will all be researchers, teachers, and learners together. I have provided a set of readings and a structure to get us started, but the success of this course will depend on your active participation as a co-creator of our learning community. In keeping with the educational approach and philosophy of Starr King School [http://www.sksm.edu/about/educational\\_philosophy.php](http://www.sksm.edu/about/educational_philosophy.php) the course will ask for you to embody an ongoing practice of inquiry, study, action, and reflection. It will ask you to deepen your knowledge and wisdom by engaging with primary texts and primary experiences. It will ask you to come forth in your full, authentic presence including your knowledge, feelings and experience that may have been silenced. All of this will be undertaken within the context of trust in an empowering and liberating grace that is larger than ourselves and with the intention of leaning into the school's commitments to counter-oppressive theological education that advances religious leadership (through individuals and communities) for justice, compassion, and sustainability. This syllabus is a road map, but it is subject to change. The most up-to-date information about the course will be on our Moodle site.

- 1) Create an introduction following the directions on Moodle. In order to accomplish our learning outcomes together, you will have to be willing to be known and come to know one another.
- 2) Participate fully each week by completing the weekly readings, holding a conversation with your partner or group on asynchronous week, attending class and participating in discussion on synchronous weeks, posting and engaging in dialogue on the Moodle discussion board when indicated. On the first week of class, you will form small groups/pairs as your primary conversation partners during the asynchronous weeks of the course. You are welcome to use any communication technologies that work well for your whole group to have your weekly conversation: Moodle forum, conference call, Fuze, Skype, etc. It is required to discuss the readings in your group. Your group/pair will then be responsible for generating a discussion question and shepherding the ensuing discussion on the Moodle board during online weeks.
  - Have your reading done by Monday of each week. Meet with your partner or group sometime on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday.
  - Initial posts for discussion are due by midnight on Wednesday.
  - Discussion will continue from Wednesday night through Sunday during online weeks or in-person Thursday afternoons during in-person weeks (with a distance Fuze-in option). You will need to check-in to the online discussions at least two times between Thursday and Sunday and post at least 4-5 times during the online

weeks. This course will be a success in direct proportion to your investment in our learning community. We will construct our learning together.

- 3) **Periodic Assignments:** Several times in the course, there will be assignments due. These will be posted on Moodle throughout the semester.
- 4) **A one-page proposal for your Final Project/Paper:** Please indicate the following: (A) Your topic and methodological approach (B) Some of the references you will be using, and (C) What (if any) your concerns are.
- 5) **A Final Project/Paper:** Your final project should demonstrate significant engagement with one or more thinkers and theological concepts we have read in the course. Some examples are a 12-15 page paper, an outline of a sermon series with one or two written out, an adult or youth religious education curriculum, a covenant group series on UU theology, or something of the like. It needs to demonstrate your learning and integration of course materials and should cite them accordingly. It should be conceived of as something useful to you in your ministry.

**ABSENCES:** One week's absence is permissible, but please do let us know if you need to be "offline" for a week. Additional absences can be negotiated with the instructor in extreme situations.

**LEARNING DISABILITIES or OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS:**

If you have any learning disabilities or personal situations that will impact your participation in the course, please let me know in the first week of the course so that we can make appropriate accommodations.

**PLAGIARISM**

Plagiarism is the appropriation of words and ideas written by others without proper attribution and is a serious violation of academic and personal integrity. It amounts to theft and is ground for dismissal from the school. At the same time, different cultures have different understandings of plagiarism. At SKSM we follow GTU Guidelines.

**GRADE**

If you need to take this course for a letter grade, I need to know by the end of Week 2 so that I can provide you with a rubric for evaluation of your work in a graded system.

**CLASS SCHEDULE****Unit 1: The Unitarian Universalist Theological House--Overview and Assessment**  
**In person Thursday Sept 10 2:10-5:00 SKSM (distance students can Fuze in)**

*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.

**Unit 2: The Unitarian Universalist Theological House—Context**  
**Online**

*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 Razor. *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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**Unit 3: Foundations--God and Humanity I. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century--Re-imagining Humanity On-line**

*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.

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**Unit 4: Foundations--God and Humanity II. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century--Re-imagining Humanity In person Thursday Oct 1 2:10-5:00 SKSM (distance students can Fuze in)**

*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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**Unit 5: Foundation: God and Humanity III. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century—Re-imagining Humanity Online**

*Theodore Parker, writes Gary Dorrien, “was the first American to approach theology from a standpoint deeply informed by German theology, philosophy, and historiocritical scholarship. He was the first American to present a nearly full-orbed liberal view of Christianity in the nineteenth-century sense of the term; and he is the pivotal figure of the Unitarian tradition, the one from whom its neo-Christian and humanistic traditions both derive.” (Dorrien, 2001: xvii) Parker’s essay provides a summary of his theology as well as “a philosophical history of a whole generation.” It will give you a sense of how theological questions and commitments shaped one modern Unitarian’s life and work, and will provide a context for you to reflect on your own life’s deepest questions, theological convictions, and formative influences.*

**Reading Assignment:**

Parker, “Experience as a Minister”

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## Unit 6: Foundations--God and Humanity IV. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Humanistic Theism/Atheism Online

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

*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 Rasor. *Faith Without Certainty*, chapters 4 – 7.

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**Unit 7: Foundations: God and Humanity V. Process/Relational Humanism and Theism  
In person Thursday Oct 22 2:10-5:00 SKSM (distance students can Fuze in)**

*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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**Unit 8: The Sheltering Roof: The Search for What Saves Us I. Liberalism and the Problem of Suffering and Evil**

**Online**

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

*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. 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]

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)

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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**Unit 9: The Sheltering Roof--The Search for What Saves Us II. The Universalists--Re-imagining Sin and Salvation, Resisting Oppression, Restoring the Soul, Healing the World In person Thursday Nov 12 2:10-5:00 SKSM (distance students can Fuze in)**

*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. 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 (you will read some but not all of these, TBD):**

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]

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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**Unit 10: The Sheltering Roof: The Search for What Saves Us IV: James Luther Adams Online**

*"James Luther Adams," writes Gary Dorrien, "was a twentieth-century champion of a liberal tradition that the twentieth century nearly left behind, Unitarian Christianity. Though rather isolated as a Christian theist in the Unitarian (later Unitarian Universalist) denomination, he was the most connected, ecumenical, activist-oriented, and least lonely of its theologians." Referred to widely and fondly as JLA, Adams taught at Meadville Lombard Theological School for twenty years, as well as at the University of Chicago Divinity School, Harvard Divinity School, and Andover Newton Theological School.*

*In "Taking Time Seriously," Adams traces the development of his understanding of salvation as occurring in time, in history and introduces the themes of socially effective institutions and a critique of liberal religion which recur throughout his writings. In "Guiding Principles for a Free Faith," he offers a critique of and five "essential elements of a genuine and vital religious liberalism." 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. "The Prophethood of All Believers" calls for a radical laicism, a "church in which persons think and work together to interpret the signs of the times in light of their faith." "Theological Bases of Social Action" provides an analysis of power in various forms. In "The Prophetic Covenant and Social Concern," Adams furthers his discussion of historical religion, focusing on the nature and meanings of covenant. "In the Beginning Is the Word" treats a topic of ongoing controversy for Unitarian Universalists, religious language, and "The Church That Is Free" is Adams' classic statement, his understanding of the free church.*

**Readings:**

Selections from James Luther Adams

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**Unit 11: The Embracing Walls I: Church as Redemptive Community  
Online**

*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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**Unit 12: The Blessings of the Earth and Sky: Affirming the World as Sacred**  
**In person Thursday Dec 3 2:10-5:00 SKSM (distance students can Fuze in)**

*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.