

Syllabus - UU History for Lay Leaders I (Chronologies), Fall 2007

Introduction:

This course is designed to foster knowledge of the historical antecedents of our current Unitarian Universalist movement. It is taught from two distinct historical perspectives: 1) a chronological story of Unitarian and Universalist movements from the 16th century to the present; 2) a reading history from contemporary perspectives, designed to trace the historical precedents of current Unitarian Universalist religious, theological, and social concerns.

Each segment of the course is 7 weeks long. Assignments are intended to take one to two hours of reading each week. Both the reading assignments and the additional materials posted by the instructor are intended to foster dialogue. The instructor will include alternative assignments, so that students can select an assignment of particular interest. Reading through the postings on these assignments will help to broaden the perspectives of everyone involved in this course. Students should use a word processing program to prepare and save their responses, so that even if Blackboard fails, assignments can be retrieved and posted again.

As an online course, the class is always in session. Students will log in periodically throughout the week to participate in ongoing discussion. Students are encouraged to post their reflections early and often, since the free exchange of ideas is a lynchpin of Unitarian Universalism. As a result of participating in this course, students can expect to acquire:

- a working knowledge of how Unitarianism and Universalism developed out of Christian heresies and the Radical Reformation and how they were shaped, first separately and then together, into the religious movement they are today.
- the ability to articulate more clearly their own identities as part of a historical community of Unitarians and Universalists.

- a sense of the recurring themes and issues in our history and the ability to reflect on how these issues relate to contemporary Unitarian Universalism.
- the ability to articulate our shared history in terms of theological and cultural trends that have shaped the way we worship, our polity, our emphasis on social action, and our identity as a religious movement.
- a familiarity with some of the history and theology resources available for further study.
- a sense of connection with the histories of their own congregations, clusters, area councils, districts, and the Unitarian Universalist Association.

A thoughtful and open exchange deepens our understandings of one another, our history, and of Unitarian Universalism. As lay leaders within your congregations each of you participate in our living history, whether through serving on committees and boards or through painting and setting up chairs. Your leadership counts, your voice counts, and your presence link you to the rich legacy of liberal religious movements. Let the conversation begin!

UU Chronologies:

This course is a survey of Unitarian Universalist history from the sixteenth century to the present. The twentieth century UU historian, Earl Morse Wilbur, identified three fundamental premises within Unitarianism as freedom, reason, and tolerance. Universalism incorporates the concepts of universal salvation, and the belief that as human beings, we can and should strive for the good. Both movements evolve from multi-stranded histories of dissent within European and North American Christianities.

The ideas of God as one (Unitarian) and universal salvation (Universalism) have surfaced and played across the histories of human belief for millennia. The antecedents of Unitarianism and Universalism, which inform our contemporary movement are most directly linked to Christian movements. There were and are parallels to each within the histories of different Jewish and Islamic sects. However these have not been directly traced to

the roots of North American Unitarian and Universalist traditions that inform our current movement.

Unit 1: The Radical Reformation in Europe and England
October 29 - November 4

Bumbaugh, David E. (2000). *Unitarian Universalism: A Narrative History*. Chicago: Meadville Lombard Press. ISBN 0-9702479-0-7. 1 - 95.

Parke, David B. (Ed.)(1985). *The Epic of Unitarianism: Original Writings from the History of Liberal Religion*. Boston: Skinner House. ISBN 1-55896-246-8.

pp. 1 - 9, Michael Servetus, *On the Errors of the Trinity* (1531).

pp. 20 - 23, Francis David, propositions of the Debate at Nagyvarad (1569)

pp. 23 - 29, Faustus Socinus *et al*, *Racovian Catechism* (1605)

Students will introduce themselves by posting a brief bio and photo, and look for histories of their own congregations or districts. They will choose an entry from the Dictionary of Unitarian Universalist Biography on line and describe the selection and reasons for choosing that person, and post a reflective response to one of the following questions:

1. What is the difference between an Arian and a Unitarian? Based on the excerpts from Servetus, David, and Socinus, which of these terms do you think more accurately describes their theologies? If you are a Christian Unitarian Universalist, which do you think more accurately describes your understanding of Jesus? If you are not a Christian UU, find someone in your congregation who is a Christian UU and attempt to determine how he or she might categorize him/herself.
2. Why do you think the issue of the Trinity was so important in the formative years of the early Christian church? In what ways is it still important today in dialogue between UUs and more traditional Christians?
3. Servetus was burned as a heretic. What is a heresy? Why was uniformity of belief so important to the church? Is it possible for a Unitarian Universalist to be a heretic? How can we call ourselves a religious movement if we do not insist on a common set of beliefs?

4. What was it about the political and religious atmosphere in England that allowed dissenting churches, including ours, to take root and succeed when they had much less success elsewhere? What lessons does that suggest for the experience of dissenting religion in the United States?

Unit 2: Origins of American Unitarianism

November 5 - 11

Bumbaugh - pp. 95 - 119

Parke - pp. 48 - 51, Joseph Priestley, *History of the Corruptions of Christianity* (1782)

pp. 56 - 59, John Murray, portions of letters & sermons (1770 -)

pp. 59 - 62, King's Chapel, passages from the revised *Book of Common Prayer* (1785)

pp. 63 - 67, Thomas Jefferson, "Statue of Virginia for Religious Freedom" and letter to his nephew (1787)

pp. 99 - 100, Thomas Jefferson, letters prophesying a Unitarian America (1822)

pp. 94 - 96, Massachusetts Supreme Court, decision in the Dedham case (1820)

Choose one of the following assignments, and post a reflective response.

Read the responses of other students, and comment as appropriate:

1. Visit the King's Chapel web site (www.kings-chapel.org) and read the history as the congregation tells it. How does this story reflect the theological controversies of that period?
2. What were the major theological controversies in Unitarianism during this period? How did the theological focus change from the earliest to the latest dates covered this week? How is this theological focus still evident in public life in the United States today?

Unit 3: Origins of American Universalism

November 12 - 18

Bumbaugh, pp. 141 - 173

Parke, pp. 81 - 83, Hosea Ballou, *A Treatise on Atonement* (1805)

Williams, George Hunston (2002). *American Universalism, Fourth Edition*.

Boston: Skinner House. ISBN 1-55896-441-X. 1 - 64.

Respond to **one** of the following with a reflection of some kind—a personal statement, essay, or poem. Post your reflection, read the contributions of other students, and comment as you think appropriate.

1. Reflect on the extent to which Universalism ceased to be a Christian denomination and became a separate religious movement. How did the historical context (Darwin, slavery, the frontier, etc.) and developments within mainstream Christianity influence that shift? How does that history shape our relationship to Christianity today?
2. Why was "A Treatise on Atonement" so important in the development of Universalism as a major denomination? What is your response today to this critical work?

Unit 4: Transcendentalism: Channing, Parker, & Emerson
November 19 - 25

Bumbaugh, pp. 119 - 136

Parke, pp. 88 - 93, William Ellery Channing, "Unitarian Christianity" (1819)

pp. 112 - 118, Theodore Parker, "The Transient and Permanent in Christianity" (1841) and "The Fugitive Slave Law" (1851)

pp. 105 - 111, Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Divinity School Address" (1838)

Respond to **ONE** of the following with a reflection of some kind—a personal statement, essay, or poem. Post your reflection, read the contributions of other students, and comment as you think appropriate.

1. Search the on-line Dictionary of Unitarian Universalist Biography and other resources to identify at least two famous Transcendentalists from this period. Include at least one woman and if, possible, one from your state or region. Post a paragraph that addresses the following questions: What did they do or say that is still relevant to contemporary Unitarian Universalism? In what ways are their writings or beliefs bound by their time?
2. In relation to Theodore Parker's *The Permanent and Transient in Christianity*, identify the major themes. Why was this sermon so significant in altering the course of Unitarianism? Which themes still speak to you today? Describe ways in which Transcendentalism

continues to influence public life in the United States in the 21st century.

Unit 5: Women in Unitarian and Universalist Ministries
November 26 - December 2

Tucker, Cynthia (2000). *Prophetic Sisterhood: Liberal Women Ministers of the Frontier, 1880 - 1930*. New York: Authors Choice Press. ISBN 0-595-681-7. 1-234.

Woods, Gretchen (Ed.)(1998). *Leaping From Our Spheres: : The Impact of Women on Unitarian Universalist Ministry*. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association. Cynthia Grant Tucker, "Women and the Unitarian Universalist Ministry, 33 - 51. Betty Jo Middleton & Roberta M. Nelson, "The Ministry of Religious Education," 75 - 81. Carolyn S. Owen-Towle, "Leadership: Women's Impact on the UU Ministry," 91 - 96.

Respond to **one** of the following with a reflection of some kind—a personal statement, essay, or poem. Post your reflection, read the contributions of other students, and comment as you think appropriate.

1. Has your congregation called an ordained woman to professional ministerial leadership? Discuss the history of ministerial calls in your congregation in terms of gender issues in your community.
2. Discuss the concept of a ministry of religious education in relation to the concept of a director of religious education. Include your opinions of how the current program leading to credentialed religious educators will affect trends in religious education leadership.
3. Discuss how the history of liberal women ministers in the United States has affected such issues as compensation, professional expenses, authority, and leadership in terms of call, ordination, and trends in preparation for professional ministry.

Unit 6: Unitarians and Universalists in the 20th Century
December 3 - 9

Bumbaugh, pp. 136 - 140, 173 - 181

Parke, pp. 133 - 138, Curtis Reese, "The Content of Present-Day Religious Liberalism" (1920)

- pp. 138 - 142, J.A.C.F. Auer *et al*, "A Humanist Manifesto" (1933).
The Humanist Manifesto is also available on-line at www.jcn.com/manifestos.html. This is the American Humanist Association web site, which has other interesting information as well.
- pp. 142 - 146, Commission on Appraisal, "*Unitarians Face a New Day*" (1936)
- pp. 146 - 149, Lon Ray Call, memorandum on "Unitarian Lay Groups" (1946)
- pp. 149 - 154, James Luther Adams, "A Faith for Free Men" (1946)
- Williams, pp. 64 - 83

Respond to **one** of the following with a reflection of some kind—a personal statement, essay, or poem. Post your reflection, read the contributions of other students, and comment appropriately.

1. In what ways does James Luther Adams speak to contemporary Unitarian Universalists? How do his central concepts of covenant, prophethood and voluntary association inform our faith tradition and your own religious understanding in the 21st century? Is he, like many of the other great voices we have encountered, already embedded in a cultural context of the mid-20th century that is different from our own, or does he have something timeless to say?
2. Describe the ways in which humanism continues to inform your congregation. How are the perspectives of humanism related to the request for "more spirituality" in Unitarian Universalist congregations today?
3. How has the history of the fellowship movement played itself out in your district? How have the perspectives of this movement affected your congregation's decisions on whether to call an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister as a professional ministerial leader?

Unit 7: Merger and Beyond
December 10 - 16

Bumbaugh, pp. 181 - 200

Ross, Warren (2001). *The Premise and the Promise: The Story of the Unitarian Universalist Association*. Boston: Skinner House. 83-206.

Respond to **one** of the following with a reflection of some kind—a personal statement, essay, or poem. Post your reflection, read the contributions of other students, and comment as you think appropriate.

1. One useful but controversial action of the newly formed religious movement was to create a statement of seven principles and six sources that helps us define ourselves in positive ways as a religious tradition related to but quite distinct from Christianity. Some people call the principles a creed, others a statement of shared values. Some congregations recite or print them, still others ignore them. How are the principles used in your congregation? Do you agree with them all? If you had the opportunity, would you drop or change any of them?
2. In what ways are the perennial issues of freedom, reason and tolerance being challenged and/or lived out in our faith movement and in your religious community today?
3. In what ways does the relationship of your congregation to your district and to the Unitarian Universalist Association reflect the historical trends we've reviewed in this course?
4. Where did your congregation fit into the merger? Was it in existence in 1961? Where was its origin, in Unitarianism, including the fellowship movement? Or in Universalism? Or is it a product of the merged association? How do you think your congregation history affects the way your congregation worships, teaches, and relates to the larger community?