

**Theologies of Sin, Theologies of Hope:
Unitarian, Universalist, Unitarian Universalist Historical Underpinnings
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A theology of sin and a theology of hope are dependent upon what one believes about human nature, about the nature of God,¹ and about the relationship between God and humanity.² As they articulated their identities Unitarians and Universalists came to the assertion that human beings are capable of good through the use of reason and conscience and that God is love and resides in the interconnected nature of life. Our understandings about the nature of God and God's relationship to humanity have shifted over time, yet I daresay that many of us continue to assert that the universe is more loving than not and humans have within them the potential for good. I believe those assumptions still lie at the heart of what we now might claim as theologies of sin and theologies of hope.

Five questions illustrate the development and progression of theologies of sin and hope among Unitarians, Universalists and Unitarian Universalists: What is the nature of God? What is the nature of humanity? What is sin? What is salvation? Wherein lies hope? Throughout this paper I will endeavor to explain our theologies of sin and of hope by reference to those questions.

Pre-Unitarianism: Arminians (18th c)

I begin in 18th century Massachusetts because there the departure from Puritan, theologically Calvinist, doctrines has the most to do with the Unitarian theologies of sin and hope that would develop in ensuing years.³ Between 1735 and 1805 New England religious liberals called Arminians asserted a different set of assumptions about human nature and destiny.⁴ These liberals were led by Charles Chauncy and Jonathan Mayhew. In the first part of the 19th century, William Ellery Channing took the liberal position further and was an important voice in the formation of Unitarianism as a separate movement within Christianity.

The Cambridge Platform, a document created by the Puritans and signed in 1648, affirmed the doctrines of original sin, total depravity of human nature, and salvation for the elect codified at the Westminster Assembly.⁵ These are the doctrines Arminians disagreed with.⁶

Based upon their reading of scripture, Arminians found the Calvinist position unscriptural and unreasonable.⁷ Chauncy's understanding of the bible took into account its consistent messages, the context of the time in which it was written, and the overall intent of the teaching. Nothing in the bible should be contrary to human reasoning. Thus, Chauncy and Mayhew's answers to the Westminster Shorter Catechism would be on this order:

What is God? God is the all knowing, all powerful creator, wise and just ruler of humanity, a benevolent father, a monarch who rules according to law and controls the natural, civil and moral world. This is not terribly different from the Calvinist understanding except in the emphasis upon God's benevolence.

What are the decrees of God? Because God is primarily benevolent, God seeks the happiness of humanity. (Calvinists said God acts for his own glory. God's justice and mercy are manifestations of this glory.) This benevolence inspires hope and joy in humanity. This benevolence is always associated with divine wisdom and is proven through God's works. The greatest mark of God's kindness is the redemption of humanity through Jesus.⁸

What is the chief end of man? Life is a process of trial and discipline and with God's help we can overcome bondage to sin. God created human beings with a moral nature. We recognize the good because it is more agreeable to us. God is perfect in moral excellence so we must imitate him without consideration of reward or punishment.⁹ (Mayhew) Righteousness or morality results less from religious experience than from education and training.¹⁰ (Chauncy)

What is sin? Did all mankind fall in Adam's first transgression? Sin is not living according to the moral injunctions of God or emulating God's moral example. Arminians were well aware of the sinfulness of humanity and believed that we inherited a state of nature less than perfect but it did not follow that humanity was totally corrupted by Adam and Eve's sin. Sin was personal and could not be transferred. Any other belief could not be reconciled with the goodness of God.¹¹

Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery? "It is by our reason that we are exalted above the beasts of the field, . . . yea by this we resemble God himself."¹² (Mayhew) Salvation is from both the guilt of sin and from sin itself. Through study of scripture Chauncy came to the conclusion that all humans would ultimately be saved - universal salvation.¹³ Evil is incidental to a greater good.¹⁴ The greatest incentive to do good comes when we suffer the pain of evil so although there would be punishment after death for the sinful, its goal was reformation and restoration.

God has left it to us to choose life or death so our salvation lies within the power which God has given us.¹⁵

Where is hope? Although humans are imperfect and thus subject to sin, the Arminian theology contained great hope: hope in God's benevolence and justice; hope in God's moral perfection and the grace through which God gave humans the reasoning facility to recognize it; hope in the human potential for good through the use of conscience; hope in salvation after death. Thus a liberal theology of sin and of hope was articulated.

William Ellery Channing and early Unitarianism (first half 19thc)

Such a rejection of Calvinist doctrine caused a controversy that lasted for decades. In the early 1800's the theological battle between Calvinists and liberals reached its greatest intensity and William Ellery Channing became a public spokesperson for the liberal position, laying the foundation for the Unitarianism which emerged from it.¹⁶ Channing and other Unitarians drew heavily upon the theology articulated by Arminians.

What is God? Like Chauncy and Mayhew, Channing asserted, upon a scriptural basis, that God was a benevolent father and perfect moral being.¹⁷

What is human nature? Channing, as the liberals before him, rejected the Calvinist belief in total depravity and predestination.¹⁸ He took the liberal position much further though, as he read scripture and found testimonies in it to the "divinity of human

nature."¹⁹ He argued this position from reason. Unless something of God was within us, how could we know God? We approach God by using our understanding, conscience, love, and moral will. We must adore God's goodness and use it as a model.²⁰

What is sin? "Man has animal propensities as well as intellectual and moral powers. . . . He is a free being and a tempted being, and, thus constituted, he may and does sin, and often sins grievously. . . ." ²¹ Human beings sin when we do not follow our conscience, which God gave us. In sinning, we move away from God when in fact we should be moving toward God.²² ". . . sin is viewed as the ruin of God's noblest work. . . the ruin of (humanity's) noble nature. . . the likeness to God . . ." ²³ Like Chauncy, Channing believed that sin had a purpose. ". . . God has given us a rational nature and will call us to account for it. . . . God's justice has for its end the highest virtue of the creation, and it punishes for this end alone, . . . God's mercy, as we understand it, desires strongly the happiness of the guilty, but only through their penitence. . . . but leaves the unpenitent and unyielding , to the fearful retribution threatened in God's Word."²⁴

What is salvation? By asserting our likeness to God, Channing came close to asserting the potential perfectability of human beings. In this he took the Arminian position to a different place. "To a man who is growing in the likeness of God . . . he carries within himself a proof of a Deity, which can only be understood by experience. He more than believes, he feels the Divine presence . . . we are brought into harmony with the creation; . . . we carry within ourselves the perfections, . . ." ²⁵ Salvation then, is realizing and living our likeness to God. Channing understood salvation to exist as much in this world as in the next. Thus his theological outlook began to encompass how one lives in the here and now and thus it had implications that exceeded the exercise of religion.

Wherein lies hope? Channing placed a great deal of hope in the human potential for connection with God and what that could mean for humanity. We could come closer to God because we were made in God's image. "I must reverence human nature. Neither the sneers of a worldly skepticism, nor the groans of a gloomy theology, disturb my faith in its godlike powers and tendencies. . . I shut my eyes on none of its weaknesses and crimes. . . I still turn to it with intense sympathy and strong hope." The essence of Christian faith was "that we trust in God's mercy."²⁶ God's purpose was the redemption of humanity.

This theology gave a large place to hope in the relationship between God and humanity.²⁷ Channing's theology, in its understandings of both God and human nature, took the focus off of sin and placed it on hope. In a sense he completed what the Arminians began regarding sin and hope.

Implications and Legacy. The implications of Channing's theology are still with us. That God is infinitely good, benevolent, and just opened up the question of theodicy and evil and its existence in the world, a question some might argue we have never fully grappled with. The assertion that human sin is the degradation of our noble nature shifted the idea of human nature from totally depraved to God-like. If our nature is potentially perfectable, sin is no longer primarily disobedience of God's law but rather not living up to the process of developing ourselves morally. Channing's theology taught us that moral relations have a basis of love, a concept which remains foundational for UU's. Channing eliminated fear from the spiritual life and engendered a deep

commitment to moral action as an organic outgrowth of human nature. Through Channing's writings, which took his theology and applied it to social issues as well as to literature, the growth of the human inner capacity took on theological, literary and political consequences. This has become an abiding characteristic of Unitarian Universalism.

Channing had a big influence on the generation of Transcendentalists who followed him in that he redefined the spiritual capacity of human nature. Channing looked to how one lived as the most important indicator of theology.²⁸ This made for a more human-centered religion.²⁹ In *Likeness to God* Channing spoke of intimate experience of God, something that Transcendentalists particularly resonated with. However, they would offer a different view of God and ultimately influence the Unitarian relationship with the Christian God of William Ellery Channing.

Transcendentalists (mid-late 19thc)

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Unitarians were a combination of liberalism, rationalism, and social respectability. This is what the generation of Transcendentalists objected to. Orestes Brownson declared, "Unitarianism has demolished Calvinism . . ." ³⁰ Original sin and total depravity were no longer accepted theologies and some feared that Unitarians were in danger of solidifying in their theological accomplishments. Margaret Fuller described them as "That crowd of upturned faces, with their look of unintelligent complacency!"³¹ The religious passion of Transcendentalists kept Unitarians from becoming stale in their beliefs and rituals as they brought new ways of conceiving and experiencing God and new understandings of human nature. In turn these gave rise to new implications regarding sin and hope.

What is God? While Transcendentalists did not speak with one voice and did not completely agree on everything, they did agree 1. That God was immanent and present in the creation, particularly in nature, as opposed to God having created the world and then withdrawing into transcendence.³² 2. They saw God as the divine law, the foundation, the be-ing of the universe, but not the creator, the governor or the father.³³ They re-imagined God as The Unity, The Oversoul, The One, an Infinite Mind. 3. They maintained that human beings could know God not through reason but through intuition and experience.³⁴ 5. They disrupted Unitarians by asserting that human beings could have a direct perception of God's truth and did not need revelations or miracles from God to find truth.³⁵ 6. Furthermore, each person was part of God. ". . . within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE. . . . There (is) no bar or wall within the soul where man, the effect, ceases, and God, the cause, begins."³⁶ (Emerson)

In these points the Transcendentalists were at times building upon Channing's understandings of God while they also offered something new: a more abstract God that was alive within the world in general and within each person in particular and of whom (or which) human beings could have a direct experience through their own intuitive perceptions.

What is human nature? By nature, Transcendentalists said, the human being is religious. "The great truths of morality and religion, the deep sentiment of love to man and love to God, are perceived intuitively, and by instinct, as it were, though our theology be imperfect and miserable. . ." ³⁷ (Parker) They believed in the perfection of

humanity and that the purpose of life was to come as close to perfection as possible, perfection being living the image of God that is within us.³⁸ In speaking of Jesus, Theodore Parker said we could attain his wisdom, love, and piety. In Jesus we see the image of God and it is also possible for us to be changed into that same image.³⁹ By nature humanity is virtually compelled to seek its own perfection, its own living image of God. This assertion added a mystical character to Unitarianism and also asked the question, so often asked by mystics, namely where does God stop and humanity begin? Or are we, in some unfathomable way, God?

What is sin? God was conceived as both moral perfection and the unity holding us each to each in an intimate, interconnected web. Sin, then, took on both an individual character and a societal character. As Channing asserted and Transcendentalists seemed to affirm, sin was not seeking to live up to our moral capacity as the image of God. Because we are connected to one another, sin is also not living up to our moral capacity in society.⁴⁰ "There is a far more intimate connection between sound theoretical principles, and the advancement and prosperity of society . . . (But) when the primitive and sublime sentiment of Duty, engraved by the finger of God on the heart of man, has been lost sight of, . . . a slow but vital poison has preyed upon the vital interests of the community."⁴¹ (Ripley) Humans feel an inward obligation to obey the Law of Duty. Our conscience is the voice of God within us. It separates evil from good. We can be tempted not to follow it and if we give in to that temptation, we sin.⁴²

In general Transcendentalists did not speak of sin very often. Their focus was much more on using our intuition to, as Emerson wrote, "Place yourself in the middle of the stream of power and wisdom which flows into you as life, place yourself in the full center of that flood, then you are without effort impelled to truth, to right, and a perfect contentment."⁴³

What is salvation? Again, we find Channing's ideas echoed and expanded in Transcendentalist writings. How a person lived was the most important indicator of their theology and indeed was salvation. "It is a most pernicious mistake, which leads men to suppose, that they must give up the interests of this world in order to prepare for another, instead of making their preparations for another, to consist in a faithful discharge of all the claims and trusts of this."⁴⁴ (Ripley) While there was not one theology about salvation among Transcendentalists, there did tend to be agreement both about the existence of an afterworld and the importance of how one lived in this world. Thus in an important way each human being was responsible for their own salvation.⁴⁵

Where is hope? Transcendentalism had a strong theology of hope. Embedded in the very nature of God and of humanity is hope. God is benevolence and moral perfection and we exist in that image. We are perfectible. Further, we can know it and live it through our God-given intuition. God is right here and right now. "God is Love, and whoso dwells in Love, dwells in God and God in him."⁴⁶ (Ripley)

Implications and legacy. The Transcendentalists gave Unitarianism a more abstract, less personal God. They began to move Unitarianism beyond Christianity and made the point that Christianity was not, in the words of Conrad Wright, the "unique channel of God's revelation to man."⁴⁷ For Transcendentalists, religion derived its authority from its congruity with universal truths. God was love, from which morality arose and humanity, through intuition and conscience, could live as a perfect example

of those universal truths. This theology created a tension, played out for generations, between Christian Unitarians and the "universalist" Unitarians.

By the second half of the 19th century the focus shifted from arguments against the sinful, depraved nature of humanity to optimism in the perfectibility of humanity. A theology of sin was less important than a theology of hope. Indeed, one could not sin if one was truly in harmony with God. The human conscience took on more authority. Transcendentalists made religion even more human centered than Channing had, and they strengthened the connection between their theology and social justice when they asserted that the way of God benefited all of society.⁴⁸ For Transcendentalists a theology of Oneness, of interconnection, lay at the heart of what was good and evil, and what would save us and what would not. This abides today in Unitarian Universalism.

Such a theology raises some questions. Given human history one can reasonably wonder whether human beings can live in the image of God to the extent the Transcendentalists seemed to believe. Is the human conscience, fed by intuition, a trustworthy enough source for establishing and living moral truths? If one believes that humans can achieve perfection and that sin is not living up to our moral capacity, what explanation is there for why we do not fulfill our moral potential? What is the function of God, the One, the Love, the Source? For me, this is where the Transcendental theology of sin falls down. In the face of reality it is not enough to say we could be good but we are not. If indeed we have it in us to live the image of God, what calls us to do so?⁴⁹ What consequences are there for not doing so?

Free Religious Association, Western Unitarian Conference, Humanism (mid 19th-20thc)

There was never one agreed upon theology of sin or hope among Unitarians, as the various parties argued with and influenced one another. So it continued after the controversies provoked by Transcendentalists. The period after the Civil War was a time of denomination building and westward expansion. It was also a time of identity searching.⁵⁰ Were Unitarians Christian and if so, what did that mean? This was a quest that took until the end of the 19th century to resolve, or at least quiet. In terms of sin and hope, any movements in theology came from the so-called radicals of the Free Religious Association and those in the Western Conference.

The Free Religious Association was formed in 1867, protesting the dominance of Christianity in the statement adopted by the National Conference of Unitarian Churches in 1865. Echoing Transcendentalism, the members of the FRA understood religion as the "consciousness of universal relation." The universe itself was a self-acting, living spiritual unity, shown to be so by the laws of science, and morality flowed out of that unifying interconnection.⁵¹ Religion was universal to all peoples.⁵²

Unitarians in the Western Conference faced a division over Christian identity similar to the one in the National Conference. In 1887 William Channing Gannett proposed to the Western Conference a statement of "Things Commonly Believed Among Us." ***What is God?*** "We worship One-in-All -- that life whence suns and stars derive their orbits . . . , -- that Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world, giving us power to become the sons of God, -- that Love with which ours souls commune." ***What is human nature?*** "We believe that to love the Good and to live the Good is the supreme thing in religion; We hold reason and conscience to be final

authorities in matters of religious belief; . . . We believe in the growing nobility of Man . . . " **What is sin?** We know sin by its fruits, just as we know good. "We believe that good and evil invariably carry their own recompense, . . . heaven and hell are states of being; that no evil can befall the good man in either life or death; . . . " **Wherein lies hope? What is salvation?** "We trust the unfolding Universe as beautiful, beneficent, unchanging Order; to know this order is truth; to obey it is right and liberty and stronger life; . . . all things work together for the victory of the Good; We believe that we ought to join hands and work to make the good things better and the worst good, counting nothing good for self that is not good for all; We believe that this self-forgetting, loyal life awakes in man the sense of union here and now with things eternal - the sense of deathlessness; and this sense is to us an earnest of the life to come; . . . "

Gannett's statement, which was adopted by the Western Conference, influenced the constitution adopted by the National Conference in Saratoga in 1894, keeping Christians and radicals under the Unitarian tent.

In the first decades of the 20th century the theological perspectives of Unitarianism included a "lyrical theism,"⁵³ process theology, (which is outside the scope of this paper), and the arrival of a non-theistic religious humanism. Lyrical theists understood the universe to be in the charge of a benign deity who acted upon humans through nature, scientific law, and spirit and who responded to prayer and good works through cosmic realization. They trusted in the future and believed that Good would ultimately triumph, both in society at large and in individuals. Human experience was the key to social reconstruction and knowledge. This manifestation of theism, which is expressed in the statement of "Things Commonly Believed Among Us," Conrad Wright claims was the predominant Unitarian theology.⁵⁴ It is both a continuation of "Channing Unitarianism" and an update of it.⁵⁵ Religious humanism was to offer another perspective.

What is God? Religious humanism, at least within Unitarianism, saw itself as developing from the Free Religious Association and the Western Conference.⁵⁶ Humanists had a different concept of God, rejecting any divine force as the governor of the universe and supernatural guarantor of human values. Curtis Reese put it bluntly: "Liberalism is building a religion that would not be shaken even if the very thought of God were to pass away."⁵⁷ While many humanists did not reject outright the possibility of God, they looked instead to what could be scientifically verified.

What is human nature? What is sin? Human beings are a part of nature and the natural order, but nature itself is morally neutral. Concepts of good and evil are fully human creations, for which we do not need God. Principles and characteristics such as altruism, cooperation, affection, empathy, shame, generosity, and versions of the Golden Rule are valued in most, if not all, cultures and arise out of our evolutionary need for survival. Humanist ethics are practical and utilitarian. What serves the greatest number is the greatest good within an ethic of relational responsibility. Human beings certainly have a potential for evil and evil comes from egocentricity, a desire for power over others, greed, apathy, idolatry and the like. "Sin is thus a relational concept. It is that which interferes with or prevents authentic relationships. . . "⁵⁸ (W. Murry)

Wherein lies hope? What is salvation? Humanists did not hope for the moral perfectibility of human beings. Humanists were not as idealistic as their predecessors. How could they have been, given that religious humanists were living in the 20th

century, one of the most violent ever? Nevertheless humanists believed in the potential of humanity to do good. Human beings have a capacity for growth and hope lay not in expecting a perfect world or a perfection of humankind, but rather in our continual striving for something better. "The kind of world we live in depends not on some kind of God outside of man but upon man himself, or, as some would put it, upon the God that dwells in humanity. It matters not which way you put it, the responsibility clearly rests upon man. . ."⁵⁹ (John Dietrich) The 1933 Humanist Manifesto stated that the goal was a ". . . free and universal society in which people voluntarily and intelligently cooperate for the common good."⁶⁰ Salvation would be such a society and it could be achieved through education and more humane and caring social conditions.⁶¹

Implications and legacy: As far as sin and hope theologies are concerned, by the end of the 19th century and in line with the trajectory articulated by Channing and Transcendentalism, a theology of sin had faded and a theology of hope had solidified.⁶² God had moved from the personal God of Jesus to a more abstract, unifying force of love and the universe was seen to be benevolent and good. Progress toward the good was ever ongoing in the human soul. Right and good enhanced our interconnections, evil (and sin) harmed them. Human beings could know the good because they were part of the unifying force of life, which was love. Goodness was its own reward here and now.

Religious humanism, in taking God out of the mix and asserting that morality not only resided within human beings, but was a human construct, located, (isolated?), humanity in a morally neutral universe and made religion fully and uniquely human centered. While morality arose from human interconnection, one wonders if that addressed the emotional, psychological, and spiritual feelings, perceptions, and/or intuitions that some had, and have, of connection to other living beings, nature, the planet, and/or a greater life force. Like previous Unitarian theologies, humanism still put more emphasis on hope than on sin, or that which interrupted interconnection. Humanism placed hope in human potential rather than human perfectibility. It also held onto hope that we could come closer to salvation in societies living the common good. In terms of sin and hope theologies, religious humanism both is, and is not, a terribly radical departure from the liberal Unitarian theologies that came before it.

Unitarians, by the end of the 19th century and to the present, identified individual human reason and conscience as the authorities in religion. This assertion potentially complicated or even contradicted the 19th century Unitarian position that the good would triumph. What happens to morality when every conscience carries authority and there is no agreed upon articulation and description of the God whose nature is unity, or the Good? Or was it implicit among Unitarians of that age that all people in agreed upon God and the Good, regardless of cultural, social, historical, and ethnic differences? Religious humanism provided a corrective to this with its linking of the good to the common good and its emphasis on fair and sustaining social conditions. Humanism explicitly added a community voice to the individual voice regarding concepts of good and evil. Humanism located salvation in the community rather than in the individual. These are important additions to 19th century theological idealism.

Universalism (late 18thc)

Universalist ideas arose in Europe and came to the United States from several sources, most notably from England. John Murray, Benjamin Rush, George deBenneville, and Elhanan Winchester were influential in spreading Universalism in the late 18th century. Because these early Universalists came upon their beliefs independently of one another, they did not all completely agree. Generally speaking, Universalist Christians believed, in the words of John Murray, "If Christ died for all men, then assuredly all men must be saved."⁶³ Further, this implied that all people were united through Jesus Christ, their common savior. This understanding was used by Universalists as a foundation for their commitment to social causes such as abolition of slavery and woman suffrage.⁶⁴

What is God? God was the creator and ruler of the universe. For Murray God was a trinity and a unity.⁶⁵ For Universalists, God was omnipotent, benevolent, generous, and loving and the consequence for humanity was universal salvation. **What is human nature?** John Murray and other early Universalists were Calvinists and so accepted that humanity was tainted by original sin. Jesus Christ paid for human sin by his death and so reconciled God to humanity once again. **What is sin?** Sin was disobedience of God's law. Human nature carried the sin of Adam plus its own individual sins. **What is salvation?** John Murray held that Christ had already atoned for our sins. However, only those who repented and believed in Christ would be saved and the non-believers would be punished. Elhanan Winchester thought salvation would come in stages and humans would be punished for their earthly sins. In this he differed from Murray. **Wherein is hope?** Hope resided in God's love for us. God has given humanity a second chance, offering salvation to all and restoration, albeit with different timetables.

Implications and Legacy: Because punishment was not for sins but for lack of belief, Murray's theology muted the consequences of sin and raised the question of whether human beings needed to pay attention to moral behavior. In Murray's own lifetime his theology was questioned by other Universalists.

Desiring to focus upon their belief in universal salvation and not on their disagreements about when and how restoration to God would be accomplished, in 1803 Universalists crafted the Winchester Profession, which became the basis for Universalist Christian belief through the 19th century. The Profession affirmed: revelation contained in scripture regarding the nature of God and destination of humankind; that God's nature is love and God is one, revealed in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit; that humankind will finally be restored to God; that holiness and happiness are inseparable, thus people should do good works. Humanity had an obligation to the moral law and that the love of God for humanity was the best incentive for obeying that law. Finally, churches could add other statements of belief as long as they did not contradict anything in the profession.⁶⁶ Like the Unitarians, Universalists were committed to a certain amount of individual freedom and diversity of belief.

Universalism (early 19thc)

Hosea Ballou, using scripture and reason as his authorities, articulated a Universalist theology of sin and hope.⁶⁷ Ballou rejected the trinity,⁶⁸ adopting a unitarian understanding of God, and asserted that punishment of sin, for which human beings were accountable, occurred only in this lifetime. **What is sin?** Ballou rejected original

sin as an absurd belief contradictory to a loving God. Sin, for Ballou, was violation of God's moral law, of which human beings had only an imperfect understanding. God gave humans the ability to choose and to reason, but our abilities were imperfect and influenced by circumstances. The intention of an action made it good or sinful rather than the consequences, which we could not foresee.⁶⁹

What is human nature? Human beings were created of flesh and of spirit. The law of the spirit and the law of the flesh often battled for control. Our spiritual nature was the part of us made in the image of God. Our fleshly existence inherently contained cravings and desires and some of these were sinful. That we sin was a part of the way we were created as mortals. Thus the consequences of sin were felt only in this mortal lifetime.⁷⁰ God created us prone to sin as part of God's divine wisdom and plan for humanity's holiness and happiness. When we know sin we also know goodness. God's love calls us to moral behavior and away from sin. Our primary motivation is happiness and we feel happiness when we behave in a moral way. "Love is the life and happiness of the soul, and hatred is its death and misery."⁷¹

What is God? God is the infinite perfection and wisdom, omnipotent and omniscient. God is the creator. God is love. Ballou's theology was about the power of love. **What is salvation? Wherein lies hope?** Ballou rejected the idea of eternal punishment after death as having no good purpose and contradictory to a loving God.⁷² Ballou defined atonement as reconciliation and reconciliation as a renewal of love.⁷³ Love "hath power to remove the moral maladies of mankind, and to make us free from the law of sin and death, to reconcile us to God, . . ." ⁷⁴ Salvation potentially occurred in this life when we turned in reconciliation and love to God and made of this world a heaven. Salvation occurred in the next life when we would be restored to God. Hope resided in God's love for humanity and the manifestations of that love, including humanity's capacity to respond and universal salvation.

Implications and legacy: Ballou's theology of sin and hope was more dependent upon God and less human centered than the early 19th century Unitarian theology. God ruled the universe and knew all that would happen. Although humans had reason and free will, all had been determined beforehand. Ballou presented a dualistic view of body and spirit. Sin was an invariable part of earthly human life and God made it so in order that we might respond to God's love, which leads us to goodness and moral behavior in this world. In Ballou's theology sin and hope were intertwined. Ballou's belief in immediate restoration after death seemingly undercut the importance of how one lived during one's mortal life. Universalists were often criticized for this. With no threat of punishment after death, what would motivate human beings to adhere to moral principles? The Universalist answer, that sin has consequences in this life and that people can and will respond to God's love with love for God and neighbor is convincing yet not fully borne out in history.

Universalism (mid 19th - mid-20thc)

In the ensuing years of the 19th century Universalism began to weaken as a religious force. The rise of biblical criticism and the publication in 1859 of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* challenged Universalist theology, which was grounded in belief in the bible.⁷⁵ On another end of the spectrum, Universalism lost whole congregations to Spiritualism. Universalism found itself in something of a theological identity crisis, a

crisis exacerbated by the general movement of Protestantism toward a doctrine of universal salvation. The number of Universalists began to shrink. In the words of Elbridge Brooks, speaking post-Civil War, "The old theologies are dying; souls are adrift; minds are questioning and doubting. Hearts are hungering."⁷⁶ The Christian identity of Universalism began to grow weaker.

In the face of these developments, much of Ballou's carefully developed theology of sin and hope basically fell apart. Universalists began to move away from the God who planned and pre-ordained everything and toward a greater assertion of human free will and choice. With the acceptance of evolution, faith in the potential of humanity grew. The body-spirit dualism began to fade and people no longer understood the existence of sin as part of God's plan to bring humanity back through love. However, sin remained a violation of the moral law, which is the Golden Rule, and human beings remained prone to sin. Its consequences were not completely limited to this life, as a majority of Universalists believed in some duration of punishment after death and before restoration. Hope remained in God's love for humanity, universal salvation, and hope grew in the human potential to respond to that love.⁷⁷

The 1917 Universalist Declaration of Social Principles, heavily influenced by Clarence Skinner and the Social Gospel movement, stated the "essential principles of the Universalist faith and their social implications. . . ." **What is God?** God was the universal father. **What is humanity?** The nature of human beings was, in essence, divine. Humanity was joined together in a universal siblinghood. **What is sin?** Human beings were not inherently depraved but led into sin "by evil surroundings, by the evils of unjust social and economic conditions . . ." ⁷⁸ While not minimizing individual responsibility, the Universalist Declaration conceived of collective sin and collective remedy. This view, it was asserted, came from the teachings of Jesus but was not confined to the Christian Church. **What is salvation?** In this world it is justice for all. Many Universalists still considered themselves Christian and called themselves such through the first quarter of the 20th century. However, the emphasis shifted to the moral implications of Universalism in the world.⁷⁹

Which opened a door for humanism. Although humanist beliefs were not uncommon among religious liberals in the 20th century, Universalism was a professedly God believing faith.⁸⁰ In 1935 Universalists accepted a "Bond of Fellowship and Statements of Faith" to that effect. **What is God?** ". . . we avow our faith in God as Eternal and All-Conquering love, in the spiritual leadership of Jesus, . . ." **What is humanity?** Each person has "supreme worth." **What is sin?** While not explicitly stated, the Bond of Fellowship implies that sin would be that which sabotages the Kingdom of God. **What is salvation?** ". . . a common purpose to do the will of God as Jesus revealed it and to cooperate in establishing the kingdom for which he lived and died." The Bond of Fellowship made no explicit mention of universal salvation. **Wherein lies hope?** ". . . in the power of men of good-will and sacrificial spirit to overcome all evil and progressively establish the kingdom of God."⁸¹ During the first half of the 20th century these statements attempted to keep Universalism's Christian character. One wonders, though, how broadly they represented Universalist beliefs.

Implications and Legacy: In the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries, a widely agreed upon Universalist theological belief was the expressed degree of optimism and hope in God as all-conquering love and universal parent. A theological shift appeared in

naming humanity as divine and of inherent worth. In this respect Universalism, as Unitarianism before it, became a more human-centered religion. Humanity did have the ability, and the full responsibility, to overcome evil and establish the kingdom of God in this world as a just society. This expression of hope in human nature remains a hallmark of Unitarian Universalism. Another shift, incorporated in current UU'ism and showing the influence of psychology in the 20th century, expanded the understanding of sin. Sin existed in society and played an important role in individual sinning. The roots of sin lay deeper than any individual. One could wonder whether the injustice and unfairness of human created societies pointed to something inherently selfish and destructive about people. How did this reconcile with the declared worth of humanity? Unitarian Universalism still grapples with that question today.

Looking toward Merger

Theologies of sin and hope in both Universalism and Unitarianism underwent change. Because both had a strong commitment to individual freedom of belief and to having no creeds that members would have to profess, we cannot point to one overarching, unchanging theology of sin and hope. Nor was there one theologian who spoke for all. A deep sense of hope, and really more than hope - faith - in both God and humanity pervaded these theologies, however the understandings of God and humanity changed. See Appendix 1 for a chart, broadly sketched, of those theologies which each group brought to their merger in the mid-20th century.

A recurring theme in both Unitarianism and Universalism has been the attempt to understand the nature of God, often over and against a different theology: (Arminian/ Channing vs Calvinist; Universalist vs Calvinist, Unitarian vs Transcendental; Unitarian Christian vs "universalist" Unitarian; Christian Universalist vs universal Universalist, theist vs humanist). The trajectory has been to have a more and more abstract God, (or no God), with more and more authority regarding morality given to the individual human conscience. In part because we have been at pains to keep both sides of each generations' debate within our tent, theology became an individual matter. Love of God/ love of neighbor continued to hold as an ethical base, although the meanings, especially of God, broadened. A theology of sin was still based on that, (sin being that which undermined love of God and neighbor both societally and individually). We increasingly grew to place more emphasis on our theology of hope for the capacity of human beings to be and do good. Both denominations placed a strong emphasis on how they showed up morally in the world. We tended to understand evil, not as having a separate existence, but arising from psychological and socio-economic causes. Human beings became the definers of sin and its consequences. For denominations in which authority rested within the individual conscience, a theology of sin ran the risk of becoming diffused and a theology of hope risked losing some of its power to inspire.

Unitarian James Luther Adams recognized this theological diffusion and weakening.⁸² Adams pointed to the steady movement in Unitarianism (and Universalism) to locate religious experience in morality and he warned that this would not sustain humanity. In his Ware Lecture of 1941 Adams said that religious liberals did not take seriously enough the sinful side of human nature, the destructive will to power which was intertwined with the human will toward mutuality. Neither human reason nor goodwill alone would or could create social justice.⁸³ Human beings needed something

more than themselves.⁸⁴ Religious community offered people a way of life that ". . . makes a difference in their attitude toward themselves, others, and God." In such a community ". . . transformation and the ethical standards rooted in it are operative."⁸⁵ Although Adams' particular Christian beliefs did not influence our denominations, in which a majority of members had moved, or were in the process of moving, out of Christianity, nevertheless I believe his warning was prophetic. Many Unitarian Universalists, especially younger UU's, recognize a need for something larger than humanity, call it God or what you will. We struggle with a language of reverence and giving voice to our experiences of that life force/God.⁸⁶

Post-merger (mid 20thc - present)

The 1961 merger produced a Statement of Principles, amended in 1984 to produce our current seven principles.⁸⁷ They represent, not a systematic theological statement, but rather a historical theological statement. They contain pieces of the theologies which both Universalists and Unitarians brought to merger, such as the "supreme worth" of each person, the free search for truth, the importance of the democratic process, and the interconnected nature of life.

During the past fifty or so years post-modernist thinking has influenced theology, and the impact of liberation, feminist-womanist-mujerista, neo-pagan, deep ecology, Buddhist, LGBTQ, and black theologies has been felt in UU theology, even if we clumsily at times attempt to put their messages into practice. Process theology continued to influence UU'ism although Process Theology is beyond the scope of this paper. Among many Unitarian Universalists a theology of interconnection has become foundational, with an expanded awareness of connection to other species and the earth itself. Religion is located in the human experience of interconnection and morality arises out of that. Human beings bear responsibility for the state of this world.

In terms of theology of sin and of hope, the questions what is God, what is human nature, what is sin, what is salvation and wherein lies hope have become less relevant. Today most of us agree that sin is intrinsic to human nature, as is goodness, and human beings might never be perfect. This is a position we have been moving toward throughout our history. In line with that, many of our recent theologians understand sin as that which breaks connection, individually and collectively.⁸⁸

A current theological question regarding sin and hope is not what or who is God, but rather what calls human beings to the good and how might we best recognize and respond to it, given the interconnected nature of life. What God may or may not be has become less important than how we respond to that which is transcendent and/or immanent.⁸⁹ As James Luther Adams said seventy years ago, the abstract universal God raises a demand in humans for something more immediate and concrete.⁹⁰ Unitarian Universalist theologians, recognizing the need for a living relationship with that which is more than human, have offered different ways for understanding it and linking our highest ideals to it.

Some, like Bill Sinkford, still call it God. "The God I know exists as a possibility . . . that is present in my life and in which my life plays a part."⁹¹ Others, such as David Bumbaugh, find it in science.⁹² Rebecca Parker states that the spiritual reality of our interconnection empowers us to respond with love.⁹³ Laurel Hallman calls for the metaphorical language of poetry to connect us to that which is deeper and larger.⁹⁴ This

description and response to the transcendent/immanent in words that make sense to each individual is ongoing theological work for us and is in keeping with our historical insistence on the freedom of each person to believe as they will. The theological foundation of interconnection and the ethics arising out of it, including what we call sin, form a common umbrella under which most of us stand.

As for hope, it lies, as it has for centuries, embedded in our theological understandings of the nature of what is transcendent/immanent. It has been described in positive language, particularly in the Universalist language of love. Hope continues to lie in our faith in the human potential for good. We encounter hope in our theological quest for how to recognize and respond to the transcendent/immanent, asserting that it calls to our better selves. We no longer expect a utopia but engaging the struggle itself inspires hope. As Sinkford put it: ". . . glimpses of wholeness give me hope."⁹⁵ Rebecca Parker talks about what she calls "responsive, receptive hope," or hope grounded in the good that is already here. Salvation comes from the powers of life and goodness all around us and that we use to respond to the suffering also all around us. We are saved by grounding our lives in the goodness of life while at the same time acknowledging the evils of life.⁹⁶

Implications and looking ahead: A theology based upon interconnection gives us a way to understand sin and salvation, both individual and collective, as that which damages or enhances our obligations to the network of relationship. It extends the Universalist belief that human beings are siblings and all worthy of life's gifts. A theology based upon interconnection takes the focus off of the nature of God and opens a door for different understandings of what is transcendent/immanent. This represents a move away from the abstraction that God had become at the time of merger. At the same time it follows the long held Unitarian and Universalist history of individual freedom of belief. At this time in our history, it seems that many UU's seek a connection with something greater than humanity. A theology of interconnection challenges us to recognize and respond to the transcendent/immanent as that which will help us access our best selves.

A theology of interconnection raises some questions about how we respond to multicultural diversity. Asserting that we are all connected sometimes slides into an assertion that we are all the same. Such a universalizing theology can become oppressive. Unitarian Universalists must carefully engage the tension between unity and diversity, mindful of our own positions in the world. This is a current theological issue for us, pointing to the relational nature of sin.

Interconnection raises other issues as well. What is the relationship between our interconnection and our freedom of belief and conscience? Is theology personal and relative or is it communal? Or is it both somehow? Does the understanding of each person have equal weight? How are differences incorporated? What is the role of the community in dialogue with individual theologies? How important is an articulated, intentionally agreed upon commonality of theology? How do our theologies inform our actions in the world and does having individual theologies hinder us? The Commission on Appraisal considered a common theological base some years ago and the issue remains compelling. These are some directions current UU theology might take.

Concluding Thoughts

Religious liberals have long been accused of not putting enough emphasis on sin while placing too much emphasis on hope. I would differ slightly and say that our theology is lacking, not in acknowledging sin, but in responding to it. When we turned away from original sin and the total depravity of human nature, we turned away from judging and punishing sin for its own sake. But what did we turn toward? What is a liberal theological response to sin? It could be a theology of accountability, an ethic of consequences, leading us to hold ourselves and each other accountable for the consequences, intended and unintended, of our speech and actions. Our theology of hope is strong, but it is not enough. We need something that addresses the consequences of sin. A theology of accountability, in the sense of responsibility and reconciliation, could flow out of a theology of interconnection, as well as out of our historical covenantal nature. However, our high individualism and distrust of authority undercuts our willingness and our capacity to hold each other, individually and communally, to our covenants.

Our work is to create communities of accountability in which we name that which breaks connection, we have some means, (rituals?), of remorse and repentance, making amends as appropriate, and turning toward reconciliation and restoration of love and justice. A theology of accountability would guide us in putting safeguards and protections into place for when we do damage. Coupled with a theology of interconnection it would guide us in creating individual and collective environments in which we could respond with love to what is transcendent/immanent for us. The hope inherent in such a theology is that goodness and love are already among us and within us and we can, at times, actualize them.

Unitarian Universalist theologies of sin and hope play an important role in our presence with and in the world. They continue to change and evolve as we continue to reflect upon the nature and meaning of life, who we are as human beings, and who we want to be. Our theological history has shaped us and continues to inform us, without imprisoning us. I look forward to our next steps.

Appendix 1	Unitarianism	Universalism
<p>(mid-late 18thc)</p> <p>Arminians and others</p>	<p>Chauncy and Mayhew - original sin and depravity of human nature unscriptural. God: benevolent father, rules according to law. Desires the happiness of humanity. Humanity: has a moral nature capable of growth, through reason and with God's help. Sin: is individual; not living up to the moral injunctions of God. Salvation: is both from sin and from the guilt of sin; open to all; justification by faith.</p>	<p>Chauncy - universal salvation</p> <p>Murray - trinitarian, God: creator, ruler, omnipotent, benevolent. Humanity: fallen due to original sin. Sin: disobedience of God's law, fully atoned for by Christ. Salvation: universal for believers.</p>
<p>Early 19thc</p>	<p>Channing - God: benevolent father to all; moral being. Humanity: knows God because God is within; must follow God's moral lead. Sin: moving away from God's example; not following our conscience and thereby ruining our noble nature, our likeness to God; no original sin. Salvation: in this world is realizing, in a felt and a lived sense, our likeness to God. Is possible in next world with repentance.</p>	<p>Winchester Profession - 1803</p> <p>Ballou - unitarian, God: love, omniscient ruler. Sin: existence and consequences inherent in mortal life; no original sin; violation of moral law which humans imperfectly understand. The intention of an action makes it sinful. Humanity: will respond to God's love, through Jesus, with moral deeds. Salvation: for everyone as humans turn again toward God.</p>
<p>Mid 19thc</p>	<p>Transcendentalism - Religion becomes more human centered. God: immanent, perceivable through intuition, the divine law, the moral perfection, the unity. Humanity: is perfectible; is the image of God. Sin: not living up to our moral capacity as the image of God, both individually and collectively. Salvation: is living the moral law in this world; is in human hands. There is an afterlife and sin is punished there.</p>	<p>Restorationist controversy: What, if any, punishment for sin will occur after death. With no fear of punishment, what will motivate humans to act morally?</p>
<p>Post Civil War 19thc</p>	<p>Struggles over Christian identity. Incorporation of science and higher biblical criticism.</p> <p>Free Religious Association Western Unitarian Conference. God: is One; is love. Humanity: reason and conscience the final authorities in religion; ever growing human potential for good. Sin: known by its fruits; consequences of sin felt in this life. Salvation: all things work toward the ultimate victory of the good.</p> <p>National Conference at Saratoga 1894</p>	<p>Reconciled science and religion.</p> <p>God: works through evolution. Love. Paternal. Sin: violation of moral law - Golden Rule. Humanity: growing trust in evolutionary potential of human beings to respond to God's love. Salvation: in this life, as humans make it. In next life, universal after a period of punishment.</p> <p>Boston Declaration - 1899</p>

Appendix 1	Unitarianism	Universalism
<p>20thc to merger 1961</p>	<p>Lyrical theism - as expressed in "Things Commonly Believed" from the Western Conference. Humanism - concerned with values and actions. God: cannot be scientifically proven. Nature is morally neutral. Humanity: good and evil are human constructs; has potential for both good and evil; has potential for growth. Sin: humans know sin as that which does not enhance our survival; is relational destruction. Salvation: a just and humane society. May not ever be achievable but the struggle is ongoing.</p>	<p>1935 Bond of Fellowship and Statements of Faith - affirm Christian frame One religion for one world - universal Universalism 1917 Universal Declaration of Social Principles: God is universal father. Humanity is essentially divine and universally bound to one another. Sin is caused by social conditions and we bear a collective responsibility for it. Salvation is a collective human responsibility.</p>
<p>Trajectories of thought: A theology of hope is implicit in the faith both Unitarians and Universalists held in the potential of humanity to be and to do good, with or without God. A theology of sin does not receive the same emphasis as the theology of hope.</p>	<p>Moved away from Christianity in 19thc. Moved away from the concept of a personal God, however benevolent, to a more abstract, somewhat irrelevant force, or for some no God. Moved away from God as the giver of moral law and placed full authority in human reason and conscience. Moved toward both an individual and a collective understanding of sin and salvation. Sin breaks connection and goes against the common bond of humanity. Humans fully responsible. Continued to believe in human potential.</p>	<p>God shifts from the personal ruler to universal love and responding to that love motivates humanity. For some God fades. General movement away from Christianity in 20thc. For some Universalism becomes religion for all humanity. Sin placed firmly in this human world and goodness understood as that which benefits all of humanity. Sin breaks the bonds of love, both individually and collectively. Increasingly sin is understood to be socially and psychologically caused. Human beings have the potential and full responsibility for creating a just, loving world. That is salvation.</p>

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¹ Note that throughout this paper I will use the word "God" to denote that which is ultimate and foundational about life and about which we UU's have different ideas and beliefs. God, to me, is an umbrella word and in using it I am not suggesting or assuming a common belief among us.

² Of course other factors also influence theologies: social, economic, political, artistic, psychological, to name some. To do more than note the socio-economic implications of Unitarian and Universalist theologies of sin and hope in their historical context is beyond the scope of this paper.

³ Conrad Wright (*Beginnings of Unitarianism*, 3-8) states that Unitarianism in the U.S. was a largely indigenous movement developing out of Puritanism. Others, such as Andrea Greenwood 55-57, point to the Socinian influence upon Unitarianism in the mid-Atlantic states through Joseph Priestley and others, as also important.

⁴ So-called after Jacobus Arminius, Dutch 17th c, whose reaction against Calvinism was similar to the New England reaction, although the latter did not derive from the former. Similar ideas circulated in Western Europe and New England.

⁵ *The Cambridge Platform 4.*

⁶ That assembly, in the Westminster Shorter Catechism of 1647, asserted:

Quest. 1. *What is the chief end of man?*

Ans. 1. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.

Quest. 4. *What is God?*

Ans. 4. God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

Quest. 14. *What is sin?*

Ans. 14. Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.

Quest. 16. *Did all mankind fall in Adam's first transgression?*

Ans. 16. The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity; all mankind, . . . sinned in him, and fell with him, . . .

Quest. 18. *Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?*

Ans. 18. The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called Original Sin; . . .

Quest. 19. *What is the misery of that estate whereinto man fell?*

Ans. 19. All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell for ever.

Quest. 20. *Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?*

Ans. 20. God having, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.

(www.westminsterconfession.org) Note that the biblical references contained in the text have been left out.

⁷ This leaves open the question of biblical miracles or anything that would seem to confound human reason. Arminians admitted that revelation was needed to supplement reason because humans did not always make good use of their reason. This is supernatural rationalism. (Wright, *Beginnings of Unitarianism*, 147) William Ellery Channing also believed in the miracles of the bible as a way for God to advance the human mind, as he expressed in the Dudleian Lecture of 1821, called *The Evidences of Revealed Religion*. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Parker would later challenge that belief.

⁸ Wright, *Beginnings of Unitarianism*, 170-6.

⁹ Mayhew, *Seven Sermons*, 12.

¹⁰ Chauncy, *Twelve Sermons*, 314.

¹¹ Wright, *Beginnings of Unitarianism*, 83-4.

¹² Mayhew, *Seven Sermons*, 39-40.

¹³ Chauncy, *The Mystery Hid from Ages and Generations . . . or, The Salvation of All Men the Grand Thing Aimed at in the Scheme of God*, xi-ii.

¹⁴ Chauncy, *Similitude of a Vapour*, 286-7.

¹⁵ "Chauncy and the other 18th century Congregationalist liberals held that the use of reason was a better means of religious growth. While this attitude had evolved from the old Puritan confidence in the exercise of conscience, especially in church members' corporate discussions of issues of right and wrong, it was bolstered by new ideas in science and philosophy, in particular the writings of Isaac Newton and John Locke." (Wesley)

¹⁶ See in particular *Unitarian Christianity* -1819, *The Moral Argument Against Calvinism* - 1820, *Likeness to God* - 1828, and *Spiritual Freedom* - 1830.

¹⁷ "We believe in the moral perfection of God. . . infinite justice, goodness, and holiness. . . he created us for good and holy purposes, . . . his will is the perfection of virtue . . . We believe that God is infinitely good, kind, and benevolent . . . Good to every individual, as well as to the general system. . . . God is just . . . With perfect benevolence. . . ." Channing, *Unitarian Christianity*, 86-8.

¹⁸ "We think, too, that this system, which begins with degrading human nature, may be expected to end in pride, . . . And no distinction is so great as that which is made between the elected and abandoned of God." (*Unitarian Christianity*, 89-90)

¹⁹ Channing, *Likeness to God*, 554.

²⁰ "The idea of God, sublime and awful as it is, is the idea of our own spiritual nature, purified and enlarged to infinity. . . . That unbounded spiritual energy which we call God, is conceived by us only through consciousness, through knowledge of ourselves. . . . God is another name for human intelligence raised above all error and imperfection, and extended to all possible truth. The same is true of God's goodness. How do we understand this, but by the principal of love implanted in the human breast? . . . We know God because God is in us. God calls us by nature, experience and revelation (scripture) to be ministers of God's benevolence." Channing, *Likeness to God*, 555-64.

²¹ Channing, *Likeness to God*, 568-9.

²² "We believe that all virtue has its foundation in the moral nature of man, . . . and in the power of forming his temper and life according to conscience." Channing, *Unitarian Christianity*, 94.

²³ Channing, *Likeness to God*, 551-2, 569-70.

²⁴ Channing, *Unitarian Christianity*, 76, 88.

²⁵ Channing, *Likeness to God*, 553.

²⁶ Channing, *Likeness to God*, 554-5.

²⁷ "The text calls us to follow and imitate God, to seek accordance with or likeness to him, and to do this, not fearfully and faintly, but with the spirit and hope of beloved children. . . I affirm . . . as our great end, a growing likeness to the Supreme Being. . . . this is a felicity which obscures and annihilates all other good." Channing, *Likeness to God*, 555.

²⁸ Robinson 14-17.

²⁹ Channing did not think religion was entirely human centered, making sure, in *Spiritual Freedom*, to restate the human dependence on God.

³⁰ Miller 9.

³¹ Miller 7.

³² ". . . within and above are synonyms" Emerson, *Journal*, December 21, 1834.

³³ Wright, *Three Prophets*, 29.

³⁴ "Nature is the language of God and human beings can know it through intuition." Ridley, "Discourses on the Philosophy of Religion," 132-40.

³⁵ This assertion by Emerson in "The Divinity School Address," Ripley in "Discourses on the Philosophy of Religion," and Parker in "The Transient and Permanent in Christianity" caused a great controversy within Unitarian ranks over the authority and nature of Jesus and ultimately, the very identity of Unitarianism itself. It took many years for the Transcendental view to be absorbed into Unitarianism.

³⁶ Emerson, "The Oversoul," 190.

³⁷ Parker 124, 140.

³⁸ ". . . man has the power of conceiving of a perfection higher than he has ever reached. Not only so. He can make this perfection a distinct object of pursuit. . . . And his nature impels him to follow this ideal standard . . ." Ripley, "Discourses on the Philosophy of Religion," 140. Ripley attempted to live this statement in Brook Farm, the utopian community he created with his wife Sophia.

³⁹ The purpose of Christianity was to ". . . make all men one with God . . . to bring them to such a state of obedience and goodness . . . and keep the law of God by living a life of truth and love." Parker 136-7, 140.

⁴⁰ "There are sympathies, springing up spontaneously with the growth of our moral powers, strengthening and brightening the bond which unites us . . . multiplying and sweetening the relations among mankind, and causing them so to act and react upon one another, that no one live for himself alone . . ." Convers Francis, "Natural Theology," 64.

⁴¹ Ripley, "James Mackintosh," 65-6.

⁴² "There are sympathies, springing up spontaneously with the growth of our moral powers, strengthening and brightening the bond which unites us . . . multiplying and sweetening the relations among mankind, and causing them so to act and react upon one another, that no one live for himself alone . . ." Emerson, "Divinity School Address," 65.

⁴³ Emerson, "Spiritual Laws," 99.

⁴⁴ Ripley, "Discourses on the Philosophy of Religion," 134.

⁴⁵ Theodore Parker, for instance, placed himself more within a Christian frame than did Ralph Waldo Emerson, yet they had similar ideas about human salvation. Parker: "For it is not so much by the Christ who lived so blameless and beautiful eighteen centuries ago, that we are saved directly, but by the Christ we form in our hearts and live out in our daily life, that we save ourselves, God working with us, both to will and to do." Emerson: "Thus, in the soul of man there is a justice whose retribution so are instant and entire. He who does a good deed, is instantly ennobled. He who does a mean deed, is by the action itself contracted. . . . If a man is at heart just, then in so far is he God; . . . If a man dissemble, deceive, he deceives himself, and goes out of acquaintance with his own being. . . . a man is made the Providence to himself, dispensing good to his goodness, and evil to his sin. . . . Thus, of their own volition, souls proceed into heaven, into hell." Emerson, "Divinity School Address," 64-5.

⁴⁶ Ripley, "Discourses on the Philosophy of Religion," 139.

⁴⁷ Wright, *3 Prophets*, 4.

⁴⁸ Again, Transcendentalists did not speak or act with one voice regarding social issues. Some, like George Ripley, had stronger commitments to those in the working classes. Ripley even accused his fellow Transcendentalists of being too bound to their own upper class status to favor radical social change. (Greenwood 74)

⁴⁹ Emerson's friend Henry Ware Jr. had similar questions. He thought that a relationship to an abstraction could not satisfy the human religious need. (Wright, *3 Prophets*, 29-30)

⁵⁰ After the Civil War the National Conference of Unitarian Churches was formed, with Henry Bellows, James Freeman Clarke, Edward Everett Hale, and Frederic Henry Hedge as the prime movers. They formed the core of the "Broad Church Group" which tried to create a big enough tent to hold those Unitarians who looked to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, those who identified as "Channing Unitarians" or supernatural rationalists, and those "radicals" who claimed that Christianity held no special rank among religions. The Broad Church Group was committed to Unitarianism as a Christian religion, although they were not supernatural rationalists. They believed that Christianity taught the truths that other religions taught, and added more.

⁵¹ Wasson 24-37.

⁵² Octavius Brooks Frothingham called for "a religion inclusive of all special faiths, and more intellectual, more spiritual, more uplifting and commanding than any one." Frothingham, "Introductory," 15.

⁵³ "Lyrical theism" is termed used by Samuel Eliot. It is akin to the Protestant modernism of the early 20th c.

⁵⁴ Wright, *A Stream of Light*, 108-110.

⁵⁵ Channing's influence can be seen in the concept of a benevolent deity, the human relationship with that deity, and the hope and trust in the good. Modern updates were the inclusion of science and the lack of reference to a specifically Christian God.

⁵⁶ Olds 30-33.

⁵⁷ Curtis Reese, as quoted in Olds 38. The freedom of belief affirmed again and again through the 19th century made room for humanism within Unitarianism while at the same time it made possible the theist-humanist argument that took up much of the 20th century.

⁵⁸ Murry 84-89, 119-129.

⁵⁹ Dietrich in his 1921 address to the General Conference, as in Murry 42-3.

⁶⁰ Schulz 114.

⁶¹ Murry 91.

⁶² This was also in line with the general 19th century belief in progress, evolution and science.

⁶³ Murray 111.

⁶⁴ For instance the statement against slavery adopted at the 1790 Philadelphia Convention composed by Benjamin Rush, which said that slavery was "inconsistent with the union of the human race in a common Saviour." (Greenwood 65)

⁶⁵ Judith Sargent Murray compared this trinity-unity to water. Rain is water, clouds are water, ice is water - three forms, all water. (As quoted in Anderson)

⁶⁶ Miller 45-46.

⁶⁷ Ballou's assertion of immediate restoration to God after death with no intervening punishment gave rise to what is called The Restorationist Controversy among Universalists. Interestingly, it was only in the author's preface to the fifth edition of the *Treatise on Atonement* that Ballou came out directly for immediate restoration. In time Ballou's position on restoration fell from favor.

⁶⁸ Ballou conceived of Jesus as a representative of God, but not equal to God. Jesus was "a created, dependent being." 111

⁶⁹ "We call an action evil by comparing it with one which we call good." Ballou 1-11.

⁷⁰ "We call an action evil by comparing it with one which we call good." Ballou 49.

⁷¹ Ballou 12-39, 87.

⁷² Jesus' death was not a vicarious atonement for human sin. Jesus did not atone to God for humanity's sin because God was not unreconciled to humanity and so required no atonement. Jesus died because God loved humanity and if humanity saw that love, human beings would reconcile with God. God gave humans the rational power to discover this love through scripture and share it. One sought happiness "in the heavenly system of universal benevolence, knowing that his own happiness is connected with the happiness of his fellow-men, which induces him to do justly and to deal mercifully with all men . . ." Ballou 86.

⁷³ Ballou 119.

⁷⁴ Ballou 124.

⁷⁵ Universalists, among them Thomas Thayer and Orello Cone, were able to reconcile science with their faith by shifting their understanding of God and asserting that God worked through evolution. The practice of applying reason to religion prevented Universalists from a science-religion antagonism. "Science is the knowledge of God's doings demonstrated to our reason; religion is the knowledge of the same God revealed to our faith." (Elbridge Brooks, as quoted in Miller, *Larger Hope, Second Century*, 94) Others, reading the bible with more critical eyes, began to wonder about revelation, the infallibility of the bible, the afterlife, and even universal salvation, among them Herman Bisbee, who was eventually disfellowshipped. Cassara 35-39.

⁷⁶ As quoted by Forest Church in "The Church of the Future," 37. In an effort to bring coherence the 1870 General Convention determined that explicit belief in the 1803 Winchester Profession was required for Universalist ministry. Only in 1899 did the Boston Declaration restore freedom of conscience. The Boston Declaration affirmed the Fatherhood of God, the leadership of Jesus, the trustworthiness of the bible, certainty of retribution for sin, and universal salvation.

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⁷⁸ Miller, *Larger Hope, Second Century*, 733.

⁷⁹ At the same time there were those Universalists who had advocated for Universalism as one religion for all people in one world. This universalizing tendency within Universalism challenged its Christian identity and despite the Boston Declaration took hold among many of the younger clergy. The Humiliati (a small but influential group of graduates from the Crane Theological School) advocated for a Universalism "functional, naturalistic, theistic, and humanistic." Howe 114. Kenneth Patton founded The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House, an example of universalized Universalism. This expansion of theology signaled a change within Universalism.

⁸⁰ In 1923 Universalists reaffirmed the principles of the Boston Declaration as "fundamental to our church and as adequate expression of faith for the world." From the 1924 Yearbook, as quoted in Miller, *Larger Hope, Second Century*, 112.

⁸¹ Miller, *Larger Hope, Second Century*, 114.

⁸² I include Adams in a pre-merger discussion, although he spanned the years before and after merger, because his thinking about sin and hope arose in response to pre-merger theologies.

⁸³ Adams, "Human Nature," 66, 71-72.

⁸⁴ Adams believed in a God that was, in Gary Dorrien's words, a "creative power and process that sustains life . . . (and) works on humans and through humans to achieve truth, beauty, goodness. . . . God reigns through love. . ." Dorrien 140.

⁸⁵ Adams, "Human Nature," 76.

⁸⁶ For more on this see the essays by William Sinkford, David Bumbaugh, Laurel Hallman, Sharon Welch, and Thandeka in *A Language of Reverence*, Ed by Dean Grodzins.

⁸⁷ In 1995 we made an amendment to the Sources part of the statement, adding earth based spiritual traditions.

⁸⁸ Rebecca Ann Parker, *House for Hope*, 67, for whom sin destroys "life-giving relationships of love and justice in human affairs." Forest Church notes that Universalism is an inclusive, connecting theology and not living the inclusion or connection is sin. Church, *Cathedral*, 122.

⁸⁹ Instead of the word God I will use the term transcendent/immanent because it seems more appropriate to the discussion going forward.

⁹⁰ Adams, "Mere Morality," 49.

⁹¹ Sinkford, "Far From Ease and Grace," loc 554.

⁹² "Our very existence is rooted in the fundamental processes of the universe itself. How can we not stand in awe before the fact of our emergence as a consequence of those same vast processes that created galaxies, suns, stars and planets? . . . our existence, our struggles and our failures are lent moral significance by the fact that they occur within a larger context -- a context grounded in a unified view of existence." Bumbaugh, "Toward a Humanist Vocabulary," 11, 16.

⁹³ Rebecca Ann Parker, "Holy Ground."

⁹⁴ Hallman, "Images for Our Lives," passim.

⁹⁵ Sinkford, "Far From Ease and Grace," loc 554.

⁹⁶ Rebecca Ann Parker, *A House for Hope*, 12-13, 63-71.