

"How do Unitarian Universalists articulate and teach about sin and hope as part of lifespan faith development?"

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Introduction

After 19 years as a parish minister, I have spent the last four years on a multi-staff team with a portfolio that included religious education. These four years however, have not been my only exposure to Unitarian Universalist religious education. I am a lifelong UU raised in the historically Unitarian Church in Trenton, New Jersey, which moved in my late elementary years to Washington Crossing, NJ. I not only continued my experience of being a student in an RE program, but where, after seminary I returned to be their first Director of Religious Education. I continued my RE experience at the Unitarian Church of Princeton where I participated in the About Your Sexuality program, and where I later became a Sunday school teacher and youth advisor. As a parish minister in Kent Ohio, I had the honor of working with three religious educators who were excellent at what they did: Mary Leeson, Karen Lapidus, and Michelle Culley. I have made it a point to know what was happening in the children's religious education program of each congregation I have been associated with and to get to know not only the program but those in the program. Additionally, I have used and created curriculum for adult courses that met the needs and interests of members of each of the congregations I have served.

My most recent position as a Developmental Minister for Religious Education gave me the specific task of reviewing how the congregation's religious education program was doing, where its strengths and weaknesses were, and setting the congregation on a course to a stronger model for the future. What I have learned in this process, which I think is important to put before us as we enter a discussion of how Unitarian Universalists teach a theology of Hope and Sin, is that how we teach has and continues to change to meet the learning styles and technology available to us. The methodology of teaching those theological concepts has also changed dramatically. Not only has how we teach changed because of new understandings, but so too does what we teach. My plan, therefore, is to begin by offering an introduction to the methodologies used in educating children and adults in the past, before I move on to the theological matters of sin and hope.

When I go on to offer understandings of how we teach sin and hope, at times I may equate other terms such as sin and evil, and hope and salvation to more accurately address the language which was being used in the materials I could find from the various periods under discussion at that point. As might be suspected, the ways theological concepts were more commonly discussed in the days of early Unitarians and Universalists and modern Unitarian Universalists have undergone some significant changes.

Next I will move on to an examination of where Unitarian Universalists have been in the 50 plus years since the merger of the two separate movements into one unified religious association. I will then discuss where we are currently with these two theological ideas and our current, if rapidly changing, methods of educating children and adults about them. The final portion of the paper will address focus on how religious education landscapes and methodologies are changing

quickly and thus where we might need to go as a movement to keep these ideas relevant and accessible if we choose to continue offering a UU perspective on either or both sin and hope.

Methodologies

There were two primary methods of education throughout most of religious history, the sermon and rote memorization. Only in recent history has education for children been separate from the learning for the entire religious community. Typically what the clergy wanted the congregation to know was shared in the message on Sunday, these messages were not the short 15-20 minute sermons we know today, sermons might last hours explicating in great detail views on specific aspects of theology, and how those understandings were lived out in the word of scripture. When a move was made to educate individuals on specific teachings so that the entire community would understand the teachings or doctrine of a church they moved to rote memorization of a set of questions and answers which were explicit in what the church felt its believers should understand. There was no room for questioning. The documents from which congregants were taught were called catechisms.

Catechisms, or rote memorization dominated the process of learning theological concepts and the beliefs of the church, and in some faith traditions still does. The Racovian Catechism of 1605 was the first statement of faith published that taught Unitarian ideas in this formal manner. Catechisms in general are structured in a question and answer format, a question is asked, an answer is given, the learner memorizes both the questions and answer.

Subsequent Catechisms were found in both Unitarian and Universalist denominations. In 1782, Judith Sargent Stevens, later Murray, published what is considered to be the earliest known writing by a Universalist woman, titled Some Deductions from the System Promulgated in the Page of Divine Revelation: Ranged in Order and Form of a Catechism Intended as an Assistant to the Christian Parent or Teacher. This Catechism often referred to as having been written by Murray even though originally published under her prior name is quite thorough in its expression of the nature and origin of sin. As is typically the case of a Catechism, this frames sin in biblical language and in reference to the text of the scriptures. Murray shares numerous questions about the creation story and the original sin before arriving at this question “Q. What then befel (sic) his particular family? A. Sin, that principle of enmity to the divine Being, took place in their nature; murder, you know, very soon made its appearance, and one of his own sons fell by the hand of another. A series of crimes and misfortunes attended them ‘till the deluge, which swept away the whole race, eight persons only excepted, who were descended from the youngest son of Adam.”

“Q. Did mankind then cease his disobedience, after this terrible punishment for iniquity? A. No surely; the descendants of Noah continued in the most God-provoking sins! Nevertheless, God chose from among them a particular notion, of which, in process of time, the redeemer was to be born.” Further into the catechism after exploring the Ten Commandments Murray writes: “Q. to what end were the commandments given? A. For two reasons. 1. To give an exhibition of divine perfection. 2. To convince mankind of sin. of their own impotency, and thereby to induce them to rely wholly on their Redeemer. “Q. How is our breach of those commands to be punished? A.

To disobey our Sovereign Law Giver is sin, and God hath declared, the soul that sinneth, shall die.

Even further into this particular catechism we find “Q. But is there not a sin, said to be unto death, can we repent or turn from this sin, seeing we are not commanded to pray for it? A. The wages of sin is death, every transgression tendeth thereunto; but though we are not commanded to pray for that sin, yet it is the will of God, that prayer and supplication be made for all men.” Truth be told much of this document deals with sin, sin as we have already heard and sin against the Holy Ghost, “the law of sin” as had by the Apostle Paul, these statements are explicit and detailed, yet when it comes to the subject of hope there is little if any reference which is not inferred by the reader. Hope comes from thoughts of eternal reward and salvation, but nothing about hope is explicitly taught in this catechism.

In 1887, a Catechism for children was written by Shippie Townsend, and in 1810, Child’s Scriptural Catechism, was written by Hosea Ballou and starting in 1821 it was assigned to Universalist Children. The purpose of the early Sunday Schools in the Universalist tradition were made clear by these words from the Upstate New York Sunday School Society: Orderly lives, and minds stored with useful knowledge, will make (children) the support and ornament of civil society, but religion alone will give them a claim on the white robes and palms of heaven.” (p84. Growing Up Absorbed, Richard S. Gilbert, iUniverse Press, Bloomington Indiana, c. 2014) In 1890, the Unitarian, Minot J. Savage published a catechism which he says he was motivated to do because “Fathers and mothers have said to me, ‘Our children are constantly asking us questions that we cannot answer. . . . Their reading and study have not been such to make them familiar with the results of critical scholarship. . . . This is an attempt to make the path of ascertained truth a little plainer.” He delves not into sin but into evil and salvation.

“From 1870 -1912 Universalists participated in the ecumenical international Uniform Lessons System. From early in the 19th century the curriculum was Bible-centered with memorization required even for the very young.” (p87. Growing Up Absorbed, Richard S. Gilbert, iUniverse Press, Bloomington Indiana, c. 2014) These ecumenical protestant lessons were supplemented with materials specific to Universalists in the form of the *Sunday School Helper*. Catechisms continued to be used into the 1900’s. Richard Gilbert in his book Growing Up Absorbed: Religious Education Among the Unitarian Universalists shares this information from “*The Sunday School Helper* Third Quarter 1917 # 3 we find twelve lessons. Each ending with a Universalist Catechism.”(p.88 Growing Up Absorbed, Richard S. Gilbert, iUniverse Press, Bloomington Indiana, c. 2014)

These Catechisms however were not the last Catechisms in our tradition. As Unitarian Universalists, even though our overall approach to education changed dramatically, at least some among us like the idea of a Catechism even if it is not a rigidly presented model of rote memorization of both question and answer. In 1982, George Kimmich Beach self-published his Catechism with an Open Mind, in which the first session makes perfectly clear that these are not singular correct answers to be repeated in a rote fashion when he writes “ The answers provide the author’s ideas, but you will provide your own answers, as well. Furthermore, the answers will invariably provoke further questions—lots of them! So while this may have the form of a question-and-/answer catechism, it remains “a catechism with an open mind”. (p.6 Catechism with an Open Mind, George Kimmich Beach, c1982 revised 1995)

Having explored Catechisms, I think it would be wise to move to some of what we know from sermons, specifically from William Ellery Channing in his 1826 *The Superior Tendency of Unitarianism to form an Elevated Religious Character: A discourse Preached at the Second Congregational Unitarian Church, New York*. Channing is quite explicit about hope and sin when he says “Trinitarians imagine, that there is one view of their system, particularly to give peace and hope to the sinner, and consequently to promote gratitude and love.” He then explains that Jesus is the substitute for the sinner. Channing then asks on behalf of the Trinitarian what in Unitarianism can compare? He says that this doctrine of “Infinite Satisfaction” is improperly called a doctrine of “infinite atonement, subverts, instead of building up hope” after considerable exploration Channing concludes his view with this “You do infinite wrong to God’s mercy. On that mercy I cast myself without a fear. I indeed desire Christ to intercede for me. I regard his relation to me as God’s kindest appointment. Through his, ‘grace and truth’ come to me from Heaven, and I look forward to his friendship, as among the highest blessings of my whole future being. But I cannot, and dare not ask him, to offer and infinite satisfaction for my sins; to appease the wrath of God; to reconcile the Universal Father to his own offspring; to open to me those arms of Divine mercy, which have encircled and borne me from the first moment of my being. The essential and unbounded mercy of my Creator, is the foundation of my hope, and a broader and surer the universe cannot give me.” Ten years later, in October 1837, “The Great End in religious Education” which was a sermon delivered to the Unitarian Sunday School Society which speaks to the state of and need for transformation in Unitarian education in the 1830’s.

As we move forward, sermons continue to be a primary method of educating and informing people of the teachings of the church, but the focus on education as distinct from worship begins to be made clear. This will introduce us to alternative approaches specifically because Channing asks the question, “Shall a catechism be taught? I say, No. A catechism is a skeleton, a dead letter, a petrification.” (as quoted on p53 Growing Up Absorbed, Richard S. Gilbert, iUniverse Press, Bloomington Indiana, c. 2014) After explaining that the responsibility of the educator is to teach the Gospels using them as a textbook, using Christ as the teacher. Further on he says “How shall religion be taught? ‘As the first means of establishing an influence over the young, I would say you must love them.’ And then Gilbert tells us that “in a real departure from conventional rote learning he introduced the Socratic method for Sunday School ‘Teach much by questions’.

Richard Gilbert in his book, Growing up Absorbed, tells us “William Ellery Channing, this seminal figure in Unitarianism transformed liberal religious education in four ways: (1) He urged replacement of rote learning and catechisms by a method in questions were as important as answers. The non-creedal nature of the newly evolving Unitarianism required the Socratic formulation. If there were no creeds to which to be beholden, then individuals were to formulate their own answers to questions that matter most; (2) Channing developed his educational philosophy out of a theology that there is much to admire in an often-beleaguered human nature. The child was not born in sin, requiring some sudden and dramatic conversion, but was a growing creature who would –through self-culture—grow into a fully religious human being. The formation of character, a life-long endeavor, was the mission of the Unitarian Sunday School; (3) He taught an ethic that was based on the intrinsic nature of sin and salvation: “sin is

its own curse,” “goodness its own reward;” (4) Furthermore, education was not only for the purpose of self-culture, but for the wider purpose of reforming society.” (p53-54 Growing Up Absorbed, Richard S. Gilbert, iUniverse Press, Bloomington Indiana, c. 2014)

As we moved into the 1900’s in both Unitarian and Universalist circles, several individuals stand out as pioneers of the changing approaches taken to education. Notable among Unitarians was Sophia Lyon Fahs, “...moved from a Bible-centered to a child centered curriculum, she also moved from the then popular ‘life-situation’ method to a mediated or secondary experience—the theory of *recapitulation*. It was too often threatening for children to consider personal problems in class, but they could consider them by exploring stories of other people in other times and places who faced similar issues. She also pioneered the in the ‘project method’ of teaching based on the interests of the children. Given her own experiences with suffering and death (two of her daughters Gertrude Helen and Ruth died in childhood), Fahs was dissatisfied with material that did not sufficiently deal with the ‘dark side’ of human existence. Her ‘confidence in a Special Providence watching over every human life was gone.” (p.71 Growing Up Absorbed, Richard S. Gilbert, iUniverse Press, Bloomington Indiana, c. 2014)

Richard Gilbert shares this passage about Fahs work and ideology, “Religious education was a ladder which one climbed one rung at a time. It was the work of building a credo over a lifetime, not accepting traditional creedal answers to life’s perplexing theological problems. Building a theology in religious community is quite different from learning a catechism already prescribed by that community. (p. 77 Growing Up Absorbed, Richard S. Gilbert, iUniverse Press, Bloomington Indiana, c. 2014)

The notable figure in Universalist education that matches the impact of Sophia Lyon Fahs was Angus H. MacLean. MacLean’s contributions to Universalist religious education are most notable in one phrase, “ The method is the message.” Richard S. Gilbert states that this “suggests that the methods by which we teach values must embody those values” (p 99. Growing Up Absorbed, Richard S. Gilbert, iUniverse Press, Bloomington Indiana, c. 2014) Neither sin nor hope were at the top of this list for values we were trying to teach in those days. Instead “Values such as love, respect, patience and understanding of others are communicated through direct relations with persons” (p101 Growing Up Absorbed, Richard S. Gilbert, iUniverse Press, Bloomington Indiana, c. 2014)

This section is about methodology, and so far we have learned about catechisms, memorization and Bible based teaching, until Fahs brought in the child focused learning now we turn to what I consider the next phase in which Gilbert incorporates MacLean’s words and says, “The contrast in methodology between the traditional and the new era of religious education is illustrated in ‘The Theological Dilemma in Religious Education:’ “I believe fully that we may stuff a young person with doctrines, and creedal statements without teaching theology, which involves the problems, the processes by which creeds and theologies are made, and the validating of, and the commitment to, what is found, as well as the conclusions themselves.” (p101 Growing Up Absorbed, Richard S. Gilbert, iUniverse Press, Bloomington Indiana, c. 2014)

What we saw following these two innovators was a move away from rote learning and the incorporation not just of non-biblically based education but education that spanned a much wider subject matter, and curriculum that were more likely to be targeted at specific age groups, such as preschoolers and middle schoolers, not all focusing on the same Bible stories. David Park’s research is shared here by Richard S. Gilbert in Growing Up Absorbed “The *New Beacon Series*

in Religious Education emerged out of, and was a synthesis of the liberal movement in theology, the progressive movement in education, and the critical movement in Biblical studies. In the figure of Sophia Lyon Fahs, that synthesis found articulation at precisely the moment when the American Unitarians were seeking a curriculum editor.”(p.109 Growing Up Absorbed, Richard S. Gilbert, iUniverse Press, Bloomington Indiana, c. 2014) Park goes on to tell us that this is more important than Channing’s address, because as he says Channing “only announced a revolution, Mrs. Fahs affected one” (p.109 Growing Up Absorbed, Richard S. Gilbert, iUniverse Press, Bloomington Indiana, c. 2014) Fahs was appointed as as editor in 1937, 100 years after Channings delivered his sermon in 1837.

During Fahs’ tenure as editor, for the first time the publication of curriculum for Unitarians and Universalists came together, this larger work of creating publications including those for religious education in what was called the Council of Liberal Churches (CLC). UU minister Dan Harper in 2011 on his Blog , **Yet Another Unitarian Universalist** A postmodern heretic's spiritual journey

(<http://www.danielharper.org/yauu/2011/04/a-list-of-curriculum-books-in-the-new-beacon-series/>) shared this information about the New Beacon Series which was published durings Fahs tenure at the CLC from 1937-54. “The best organized series of Unitarian Universalist religious education curriculum, and certainly the series which maintains the highest quality overall, was the New Beacon Series in Religious Education, produced from 1937 to c. 1957 under the editorship of Sophia Lyon Fahs by the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America. Ask someone who went to a Unitarian or Universalist Sunday school in the 1950s, and they’re almost certain to remember *Beginnings* and *How Miracles Abound* and *The Church across the Street*. Ask someone whose children went through a Unitarian or Universalist Sunday school in those days, and they would probably add the *Martin and Judy* books for preschoolers.

The work of Fahs continues to be lifted up and recognized as transformative in the life of UU religious education, but the modern day and future are yet ahead of us.

Changing teachings on Hope and Sin

What we have seen in methodology is that from the catechism’s approach of memorization and biblical understandings of our Unitarian and Universalist ancestors who began with sin as a harsh and dogmatic teaching, the place of hope came in the possibility of eternal salvation. The challenge of looking at how religious education and approaches to lifespan faith development have changed is as simple and as complicated as looking at how our approaches and understanding of theology has changed over 400 plus years. Richard Gilbert says, “It is important to understand that the story of religious education in Unitarian Universalism grows out of the history of a movement. Faith development is deeply embedded in this heritage and cannot be understood apart from it.” (p. 43 Growing Up Absorbed, Richard S. Gilbert, iUniverse Press, Bloomington Indiana, c. 2014)

Two of my favorite teachings about Universalist theology of sin no longer have clear roots in any text. They have simply become part of the legacy of oral tales that have come down to me in my life as a UU. Both of these involve Hosea Ballou so we can place them in the late 18th or early 19th century. When Hosea was a young man, his father banned him from reading Universalist

literature. One day, father Ballou found Hosea reading out by the woodpile. When asked what he was reading, Hosea said a Universalist book. After Hosea was punished, father Ballou went to the woodpile and found a copy of the Bible. This tale reminds us, modern day UU's, who are not commonly found reading the bible, or generally known for our biblical literacy, that our theology and the lessons taught about it had their roots in the same Biblical texts that other Abrahamic faiths root their faith in, and we would be wise to reacquaint ourselves with these texts and incorporate them back into the ways we formulate and develop our lifespan faith formation in the future.

The second story is that of Ballou riding from one town to another with a Baptist minister. The Baptist minister asks Ballou what there is to prevent a Universalist from committing horrible crimes without the fear of hell. Ballou's answer was quite simply, "It would never occur to a Universalist to do those things." This is a reminder to live the moral principles of our faith,

In 1826, when W.E Channing preached at the dedication of the second congregational Unitarian Church in New York, he preached what was titled "The Superior Tendency of Unitarianism to form an Elevated Religious Character". In this discourse, as Channing called it, he tells us "Trinitarians imagine, that there is one view of their system, peculiarly fitted to give peace and hope to the sinner, and consequently to promote love and gratitude... They say, it provides an *Infinite* substitute for the sinner, than which nothing can give greater relief to the burdened conscience. Jesus, being the second person of the Trinity, was able to make infinite satisfaction for sin; and what, they ask, in Unitarianism, can compare with this?... To such, I would say, You do infinite wrong to God's mercy. On that mercy I cast myself without fear. I indeed desire Christ to intercede for me. I regard his relation to me as God's kindest appointment. Through him 'grace and truth come' to me from Heaven, and I look forward to his friendship, as among the highest blessings of my whole future being. But I cannot and dare not ask him, to offer an infinite satisfaction for my sins; to appease the wrath of God; to reconcile the Universal Father to his own offspring; to open me to those arms of Divine mercy, which have encircled and borne me from the first moment of my being. The essential unbounded mercy of my Creator, is the foundation of my hope, and a broader and surer the universe cannot give me." (A Discourse Preached at the Dedication of the Second Congregational Unitarian Church, New York, December 7th, 1826. 5th Liverpool Edition 1831)

In that passage we see that Channing is putting forth a clear understanding of the merciful, all loving God of redemption. A message that came into being as we Universalists moved farther from the traditional theology of other Christians of the day.

The journey of teaching our theology also includes hymnody, and for that purpose I offer to you the words of the hymn "A Hundred Years Hence". The words of which were written by Frances Dana Barker Gage (1852). These words remind us that in every way we had of teaching we were teaching an ethic of morality, much like in the story of Ballou and the Baptist minister, Gage was reminding us that our faith teaches us to work for change and improved conditions. Here are those words:

One hundred years hence, what a change will be made
In politics, morals, religion and trade,

In statesmen who wrangle or ride on the fence,
These things will be altered a hundred years hence.

Our laws then will be uncompulsory rules,
Our prisons converted to national schools,
The pleasure of sinning 'tis all a pretense,
And people will find that, a hundred years hence.

All cheating and fraud will be laid on the shelf,
Men will not get drunk, nor be bound up in self,
But all live together, good neighbors and friends,
As Christian folks ought to, a hundred years hence

Then woman, man's partner, man's equal shall stand,
While beauty and harmony govern the land,
To think for oneself will be no offense,
The world will be thinking, a hundred years hence.

Oppression and war will be heard of no more
Nor blood of a slave leave his print on our shore,
Conventions will then be a useless expense,
For we'll go free-suffrage a hundred years hence.

Instead of speech-making to satisfy wrong,
We'll all join the chorus to sing Freedom's song;
And if the Millennium is not a pretense,
We'll all be good [neighbors] a hundred years hence

Our Universalist and Unitarian approaches to education have changed as we have moved from our traditional theologies. The ones for which we were named through periods of more theistic, deistic, humanistic, atheistic, rational, community focused, multi-faithed and spiritual but not religious, teaching values instead of theology and cultural elements instead of theological traditions. Our journey has been a long and winding one and our curriculum, and classrooms tell the tale.

Having entered a Unitarian Sunday school at age five in 1968, I was a beneficiary of the tail end of the Fahs and New Beacon era, but spent the bulk of my Sunday school years in more free form education, as I think was common through the late 60's and early 70's. These were years when ethics and values were focused on far more than theology. My most memorable Sunday school experience involved a Sunday morning visit from men on a prison release program there to teach us that our actions have consequences. We clearly were being taught the benefit of knowing the difference between right and wrong, but the concepts of sin and hope did not really factor into our lessons.

Today we teach a theology of sin indirectly as we offer our children opportunities to be part of transforming the world and we offer them hope through our principles as we encourage them to

work towards a world community of peace and justice and a world in which all people are recognized as having inherent worth and dignity. I will say, however, that as a UU kid having been raised in a multiracial community and extended family, finding out that this world my family and church taught me about did not actually exist was a painful reality. I think today we do a better job, through stories, curriculums, and methodologies such as Way Cool Sunday School, Workshop Rotation, Spirit Play, and other new approaches at teaching our children both our theology and that the world has not yet become the world we, and our Universalist ancestors were working to make manifest.

Where we have come since merger

Since merger, we have traveled a long and winding theological and educational road. We left the texts created by the CLC and under the tutelage of Fahs for other amazing creations. The biggest change is that many of the most popular programs used in our congregations, to teach our children the theology and perspectives of our faith, are created by individuals and small collectives of religious educators some lay and some ordained. Among the best known of these curriculum and their writers are: Holidays and Holy Days, Adventures of God's Folk, God Images, some of the pillars of this period would be Charlene Brotman, Barbara Marshman and Anne Field, Elizabeth Anastos, Virginia Steel, and Makaanah Morris among others.

The next generation of UU religious education programs are those that have moved away from traditional curriculum and incorporated less traditional classroom structures of learning and less tangible curriculum. First in this group, I will introduce Spirit Play based in the Montessori Method and piloted by Nita Penfold and two colleagues. Spirit Play is much more a methodology than a curriculum, it can be used with a wide array of stories and in fact has incorporated many of the lessons of Holidays and Holy Days into one version. Spirit play is intended to move away from tables and chairs, to a story and individual work approach. This transformation in structure used by Spirit Play makes manifest our principles by treating each person as an individual and encouraging them to learn for themselves. So, instead of teaching anything, we are engaging children in their own learning process, and it is rare that sin is part of this, while our children frequently do share their hopes! Rebecca Parker in her chapter "Deliver Us from Evil" in A House for Hope says "The roof of our theological house is a metaphor for salvation--for safe haven from that which threatens life"(Parker, Rebecca Ann and John A Buehrens. A House for Hope. Beacon Press, Boston, 2010. Pg.61) Our Theological House is also a Spirit Play (appendix B) story based on the words of Rebecca Parker and it ends with these wondering questions which help our children to explore and build their own theological houses:

I wonder if your house is the same or different from this Unitarian Universalist one?

I wonder which part of the house you like the best?

I wonder how it feels to be special?

I wonder if it's easy or hard to include everyone in what we do?

I wonder how you feel about the Spirit of Love and Mystery that some people call God?

I wonder if you know people who think differently than you do about the Mystery?

I wonder if you have ever made the world a better place?

I wonder what you could do to make the world better?

I wonder if you like our Unitarian Universalist house?

I wonder if this lesson reminds you of any of our Unitarian Universalist Promises?

What has come from the UUA is the Tapestry of Faith program. Tapestry of Faith represents a wide array of programs each written by a different person or team. These programs are available online and in that way represent our hope of conserving natural resources and the finances of our individual congregations and the association as a whole. The advent on this online model means we are no longer having to publish or purchase published curriculum. Yet none of these programs directly addresses sin or hope, although one might say both subjects are inherent in some of the justice based programs that are available.

We continue to have curriculum developed by individuals and congregations. One particular subject matter or perhaps more accurately lens of such curriculum is Harry Potter and the world J.K. Rowling created, Hogwart's. Rebecca Parker says that "Liberal religion recognizes that a different theology of sin and salvation is needed if religion is to offer genuine solace and healing, and if it is to empower human beings in the struggle against violence, abuse, oppression, and war. The alternative begins by reimagining how sin and evil are understood." (Parker, Rebecca Ann and John A Buehrens. A House for Hope. Beacon Press, Boston, 2010. Pg.66) I believe that those creating these Hogwart's based programs are doing exactly what Parker suggests is needed a reimagining of sin and evil. One Hogwarts based curriculum called Harry and UU states on its website '*Harry and UU* is based on the *Harry Potter* series of books by J.K. Rowling, books that immerse children in the idea that one can work to make the world better.... The class forms a chapter of Dumbledore's Army and fights against seven Horcruxes during the year . The Horcruxes are real world social action projects." (<http://www.imagine-re.com/harry-and-uu.html>) The reality of these Hogwarts programs is children do re-examine the nature of sin and evil and make determinations of how they will use their own, or our UU values to counter the forces of evil with their own understanding of the power of good.

The final direction I will touch on are ones that in some communities are now combining, that of small group ministry and theme based ministry. At times, each has chosen to focus a meeting or a month on sin or hope, good or evil. Touchstones, a publication of the Pacific Western Region of the UUA in December of 2012 focused on Hope, and in February of 2015 focused on Good and Evil. Each Touchstones publication provides materials for worship, individual reflection and small group ministry and family activities. I have yet to see a group that is providing a clear lifespan connection to programming for children along with theme based ministry. Over the last year the UUA has made it possible to search the tapestry of faith materials by theme. The effort at creating children's curriculum sessions based on these themes falls largely to the individual

Director of Religious Education, or to those who choose to function as a curator of currently and previously existing materials.

Conclusion

The journey continues, and I think in some ways we are returning at least in some small measure to focusing on theological themes in our education. Certainly, the emphasis on theme based ministry opens the door for our ministers and religious educators to lift up themes that address theological issues and the concerns of our congregants of all ages. Additionally, the individual approaches taken by each of our congregations today opens the door for any individual congregation, or religious professional to introduce such subjects. Based on the issues raised in sermons preached in public venues such as General Assembly in 2015 (consider the sermon offered by Rev. Marlin Lavanhar at the Service of Living Tradition, or by Rev. Allison Miller at the Sunday morning public service), I think the likelihood that we will hear more emphasis on subjects such as sin and hope will be greater in the near future. Children in general and UU children in particular are frequently more comfortable addressing these complex theological issues than adults, mainly because they do not bring to such conversations the same baggage that many of our come-inner adults do. Those raised in the UU tradition often bring to our theology a genuine curiosity and a willingness to consider terminology in ways never before considered, largely because they are not conversant in previous established norms of theology.

Appendices:

Appendix A) List of Curriculum Books in the New Beacon Series

Appendix B) A Spirit Play Story: Our Theological House

Appendix C) A Hundred Years Hence

Appendix A)

One minister Dan Harper wrote in his Blog *Yet Another Unitarian Universalist A postmodern heretic's spiritual journey* (<http://www.danielharper.org/yauu/2011/04/a-list-of-curriculum-books-in-the-new-beacon-series/>) "In the Palo Alto church's Sunday school this year(2011), we used the book *From Long Ago and Many Lands* from the New Beacon Series. It has been so successful that I'm thinking of continuing on with the next book in the series. So perhaps some

will even return to earlier Universalist or Unitarian publications as they seek to teach theological matters.

A list of curriculum books in the New Beacon Series. (Thanks to Dan Harper)

Arranged from youngest age group to oldest age group. Sources: "The Educational Philosophy of the New Beacon Series in Religious Education," doctoral dissertation by Robert L'H Miller, Boston University, 1957; books from the series in my collection. Supporting books (e.g., teacher's guides, parent's guides, song books, theory books, etc.) are not included in this listing.

Preschool

Martin and Judy in Their Two Little Houses, vol. 1 of the Martin and Judy series. Verna Hills, 1938 (rev. 1944).

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Appendix B)

Spirit Play Lesson: Our Theological House Lesson

Our Theological House Lesson

Original concept by Rebecca Parker, children's interpretation by Jessica Zebrine Gray, added to by Nita Penfold

Materials Needed: Decide how large you would like to make your house; make a red felt base, rainbow walls, a gold roof, dark blue window and door, and either felt or 3-D tree and flowers. Basket to hold materials with UU symbol on circle and name of lesson. Optional: You may also wish to use the multicultural people from the Flaming Chalice Lesson.

Note: see Theological House Materials as a resource for adult version.

Presentation:

Now watch where I go to get our lesson for today so that if you wish to make it your work you will be able to find it.

Get basket and place on floor to one side of you. Take out the underlay.

Our lesson today is about our Unitarian Universalist faith, not just our church, but all the Unitarian Universalist churches all over the country and the world.

You know, when you build a house you need many parts to help the building stand strong and be a comforting place. Our Unitarian Universalist church is like a house.

Place red felt base of house in center of underlay near children.

At the base, the foundation, we believe that human life is sacred so we promise to respect all people. We believe that each person is special and important.

Place rainbow house shape or two rainbow walls above base.

The walls are the promises we make to each other to make sure that we get along and do what's right. These promises help to hold us together as a community in good times and bad.

Place golden roof on top of walls.

Under this roof there is room for everyone because we are connected to all people and interdependent with them. We promise to learn about and accept ourselves, others, and the Mystery which inspires us to do good work.

Place dark blue window and door on house.

Our windows and doors are open to all people. We make space for many ideas about the Mystery and we celebrate the many ways that people think and live and work together.

Place flowers and trees on either side of house.

Optional: Add some of the multicultural people from the Flaming Chalice Lesson inside and outside the house.

We promise to work together to make this world a better and more beautiful place with peace, fairness, and freedom for everyone. We want to create a heaven here on earth where all have what they need to grow and to prosper.

Wondering Questions:

I wonder if your house is the same or different from this Unitarian Universalist one?

I wonder which part of the house you like the best?

I wonder how it feels to be special?

I wonder if it's easy or hard to include everyone in what we do?

I wonder how you feel about the Spirit of Love and Mystery that some people call God?

I wonder if you know people who think differently than you do about the Mystery?

I wonder if you have ever made the world a better place?

I wonder what you could do to make the world better?

I wonder if you like our Unitarian Universalist house?

I wonder if this lesson reminds you of any of our Unitarian Universalist Promises?

Now watch how I put this lesson away, so that if you make it your work, you will be able to get it ready for the next person.

Place each object back into the basket in reverse order, naming them as you go, and then fold up the underlay and place on the basket before you take the basket to the shelf.

Now watch where I go to put this basket away so that you will know where it is found in the classroom.

Our Unitarian Universalist Theology

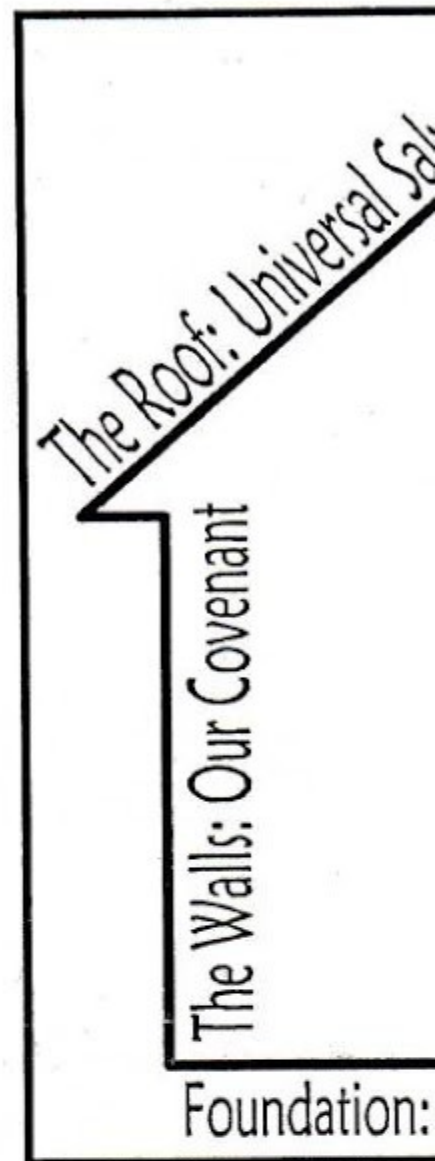
By Rev. Rebecca P.

Foundation: Inherent Worth & Dignity
Theology (nature of God) & Anthropology (nature of man): Human life is sacred. Original blessedness rather than original sin.

The Walls:
Our Covenant
Our Ecclesiology (nature of church). The promises we make and keep hold us together

The Roof:
Universal Salvation

Soteriology (nature of salvation) All life with



Place basket on shelf.

Appendix C

13.

A Hundred Years Hence

Tune: St. Denio

John Ro

Frances Dana Gage, 1852, revised

1. One hun - dred years hence, what a cha
2. Our laws then will be un - com - p
3. All cheat - ing and fraud will be la

pol - i - tics, mor - als, re - lig - ion
pris - ons con - vert - ed to na - tion
will not get drunk, nor be bound up

states - men who wran - gle or ride on
plea - sure of sin - ning 'tis all a
all live to - geth - er, good neigh - bors

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