

Article II Study Commission: Story of our Principles

In late December 2019, six months before the 2020 virtual General Assembly, the UUA Board of Trustees was entertaining a charge to a new board initiative called the Article II Study Commission. The Article II Study Commission is the vehicle by which proposed changes to Article II in the Association's bylaws are drafted and presented at General Assembly. Article II contains our principles, sources, and statements regarding the purpose of the Association, our commitment to inclusion, and a freedom of belief assertion. No other section in the bylaws could be considered more sacred, since Article II holds the spirit and heart of UUism. What should be of concern to UUs is the UUA Board's charge to the Commission that indicates it is "free to revise, replace, or restructure" all sections of Article II. The Commission was further directed to deliver its proposed changes to the UUA Board of Trustees by January 2021. The Commission failed to meet this deadline, but the first vote on changes to Article II is still scheduled to be held at the 2022 General Assembly. If a majority vote in 2022 is secured, a vote will be taken at the 2023 General Assembly to either accept or reject the proposed changes to our principles. A two-thirds majority vote in 2023 is required for the changes to be accepted. The final charge to the Article II Study Commission reflected a December 2019 draft that reads in part:

... the Principles and Purposes should lead us into the second quarter of the 21st Century, while honoring the historic roots of our liberal, progressive faith.

We therefore charge this commission to root its work in Love as a principal guide in its work; attending particularly to the ways that we (and our root traditions) have understood and articulated Love, and how we have acted out of Love.¹

Read without knowledge of other concurrent UUA leadership activities, this charge to base the Commission's work on love is warming, embracing, and compelling. Bear in mind, six months later, the same UUA Board of Trustees endorsed the COIC report that condemned UUism as a vehicle for white supremacy, rife with racism and oppression. This is the same Commission on Institutional Change that viewed the "historic roots of our liberal, progressive faith" as mere instruments of white supremacy.

Four Observations About the Article II Study Commission

First, the Article II Study Commission and the Committee on Institutional Change should be viewed as a single coordinated effort under the direction of our UUA Board of Trustees. It is abundantly clear that the individuals behind these efforts have an excellent understanding of the denomination's institutional levers of power. They are well aware, for instance, that by changing the Association's bylaws the impact they want to make on UUism will prevail long after they leave office. Since UU leadership has control over all communication channels, access to the Association's budget, and the ability to set the agenda for General Assembly, it has the wherewithal to succeed.

Second, in the announcement of the Article II Study Commission, there is an assertion that UUism is in an “ethical, moral and spiritual crisis.”² This assertion that UUism is allegedly in the midst of a crisis is the fundamental rationale for the need to revise our principles. As we established, our ethical, moral, and spiritual crisis is the result of the UUA Board’s declaration, after its 90-minute Zoom session in April 2017, that the UUA and the denomination are based on white supremacy. All other events flow from that single decision! The COIC report plumbed the depth of this crisis, observing that “We are on a journey towards redemption. We have lived a year filled with lamentations . . . with the strengths of generations, the failures of everyday, and the deep-down gritty messiness that is the promise of our Salvation.”³ We must, therefore, seek redemption in order to be liberated from our depraved state. “What is at stake is nothing less than the future of our faith.”⁴

Let’s be clear, UUs are under no obligation to unquestionably accept this declaration of white supremacy. It is, however, essential to UU leadership that their white supremacy declaration remains intact and unchallenged. If this assertion of white supremacy is rejected, then there is no ethical, moral or spiritual crisis. Without this crisis, the prime motivator to reshape our principles simply evaporates.

The third observation is that the concept of accountability was downplayed in the announcement of the Article II Study Commission. Such was not the position taken in the COIC report that asserted that a liberation theology was necessary to “call us to be accountable to the legacies of our past deeds and to work for an equitable future. This will lay the groundwork for our work around truth, transformation and reparations.”⁵ It is not that accountability was absent from the Article II Study Commission’s announcement, rather it was conveyed under the guise of covenant.

The most dramatic and public instance of the consequences of the weaponization of covenant and its accountability implications was the action taken against Rev. Dr. Todd Eklof regarding the distribution of his book *The Gadfly Papers* at the 2019 Spokane General Assembly. We have previously cited the Unitarian Universalist Ministers’ Association August 16, 2019 letter of censure, noting the disdain held by the UUMA over Eklof’s use of logic. That letter also shows how covenant has been used as a tool to silence voices and shut down debate. “We believe that you have broken covenant.” Less than a year later, Rev. Dr. Eklof was dis-fellowshipped.

The actions of UU leadership demonstrate that it is incrementally moving UUism to authoritarianism through an embrace of covenant. Right relations teams ensure conformity. With the posting of a Destructive Behavior policy⁶ on the UUA website, there is an intent to push enforcement of accountability down to the congregational level.

In this new world of covenant, we are no longer free to have relationships with one another; we must now have accountable relationships. Consider the mention of accountability in the announcement of the Article II Study Commission. In a recounting of our principles, all but one of our Seven Principles were praised without editorial comment. The only exception is our Fourth Principle, a free and responsible search for truth and meaning. This principle was restated as “**an accountable love in our call for a responsible search for truth and meaning.**” (bold added)

The fourth and final observation, to be discussed in more detail shortly, was the lack of historic context regarding our principles provided in the Article II Study Commission announcement. Granted the announcement had much ground to cover and an attempt was made to provide some historical contextual information. It is important that when it comes to revamping the core of UU beliefs, our principles, we are all grounded on a commonly understood foundation of the history of our principles and the factors that resulted in changes.

What is remarkable in the nearly sixty years since our UU principles were first established is that the original intent of our principles has remained consistent despite language changes. However, over the past decade, there has been an effort to frame our principles, sources, and other sections of Article II in more ideological language. The most significant introduction of such ideological language was seen in 2013.

If you feel you have a good understanding of the history of our principles, you can skip down to the section entitled “The Making of our Current Principles and Sources.” However, you are encouraged to continue reading.

First Principles

Our first set of Unitarian Universalist principles was established when the Unitarian and Universalist denominations merged in May 1961. Below are the principles as written in Section 2 of Article II of the Constitution at the time of the merger.

In accordance with these corporate purposes, the members of the Unitarian Universalist Association, dedicated to the principles of a free faith, unite in seeking:

1. To strengthen one another in a free and disciplined search for truth as the foundation of our religious fellowship;
2. To cherish and spread the universal truths taught by the great prophets and teachers of humanity in every age and tradition, immemorially summarized in the Judeo-Christian heritage as love to God and love to man;

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3. To affirm, defend and promote the supreme worth of every human personality, the dignity of man, and the use of the democratic method in human relationships;
4. To implement our vision of one world by striving for a world community founded on ideals of brotherhood, justice and peace;
5. To serve the needs of member churches and fellowships, to organize new churches and fellowships, and to extend and strengthen liberal religion;
6. To encourage cooperation with men of good will in every land.⁷

The greatest debate, led by the Universalists, was the lack of emphasis placed on the Judeo-Christian tradition and the absence of wording such as “the truths taught by Jesus.” These references were alternately dropped, then added back, and then modified.⁸ Although the principles were a faithful representation of the two denominations, they also reflected the compromises required to integrate two denominations that had traveled different liberal religious paths.

Liberal Paths of Unitarianism and Universalism

Both denominations emerged as alternatives to the harsh Calvinist dogma that believed in the depravity of humankind and the predestination of souls. Both Unitarians and Universalists considered themselves Christian. Both were roundly ostracized by orthodox Christians for not being Christian. As noted earlier, the Commission on Institutional Change did a good job summarizing the core beliefs of these faith traditions. Universalism believed that a loving God would never condemn any portion of humanity to eternal damnation. Unitarians had a long tradition of discerning truth based on facts, reason, and investigation. There were, however, distinct characteristics of Universalists and Unitarians that would lead one to believe that they would continue on their separate paths.

Universalism appealed to the “common man,” ministers were typically self-taught, members lacked upper socio-economic status by and large and, most importantly, Universalists theologically aligned with a biblical scriptural model. The near opposite could be said of the appeal of Unitarianism to a more educated class with Harvard-graduated ministers serving the elite within society and, most importantly, their theology aligned with rational reasoning.

Unitarians, unlike Universalists, found their theological foundations under constant review and challenge. Shortly after the formation of the American Unitarian Association (AUA) in 1825, Theodore Parker, personifying the transcendentalist movement, challenged Unitarianism with radical views on biblical criticism, theology, and politics. The Transcendentalist movement is mentioned as an example of the state of flux and re-examination that the newly formed denomination faced in its formative years. To address a perceived shortcoming of the American Unitarian Association—that it was merely an association of people and not churches—the National Conference of Unitarian and Other Christian Churches was

organized in 1865. The National Conference of Unitarian and Other Christian Churches had a mission to spur denominational activity, but, as the name implied, it adopted a distinctly Christian platform, affirming that its members were "disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ." Three years later, action was taken at its annual meeting to expand the first mission of the American Unitarian Association from "To collect and diffuse information respecting the state of Unitarian Christianity" to read:

The objective of the American Unitarian Association shall be to diffuse the knowledge and promote the interest of pure Christianity; And all Unitarian Christians shall be invited to Unite and cooperate with it for that purpose.⁹

There was reaction within Unitarianism that opposed what some called the creedal demands of the National Conference. In 1866 the Free Religious Association (FRA) was formed "to encourage the scientific study of theology and to increase fellowship in the spirit." The Western Unitarian Conference (WUC) formed in 1852 to promote Unitarianism west of New York State adopted a position similar to the FRA. By 1875 the WUC was at such odds with the denomination's eastern orthodox Unitarians that the WUC was warned it was slipping dangerously far from Unitarianism's commitment to God and worship. That warning was not without merit. Leaders in the Western Unitarian Conference were integral in the writing of the 1933 Humanist Manifesto. The result of these movements was that Unitarians would gradually disconnect their theology from Christianity, biblical scripture, and theism. However, that "disconnecting" was still decades away. The language adopted regarding the mission of the AUA in the early 1930s would remain largely intact up to 1951.

In accordance with the charter, the American Unitarian Association shall "be devoted to moral, religious, educational and charitable purposes in accordance with these purposes."

In accordance with these purposes the American Unitarian Association shall:

- Diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of religion which Jesus taught as love to God and love to man;
- Strengthen the churches and fellowships which unite in the Association for more and better work for the Kingdom of God;
- Organize new churches and fellowships for the extension of Unitarianism in our own country and other lands; and
- Encourage sympathy and cooperation among religious liberals at home and abroad.¹⁰

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Universalists did not experience theological tumult. In 1803 Universalists adopted the Winchester Profession that had even deeper roots from the 1790 Philadelphia Convention of Universalists. The Winchester Profession of Faith remained remarkably stable until the 1961 merger.

Article I. We believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament contain a revelation of the character of God, and of the duty, interest and final destination of mankind.

Article II. We believe that there is one God, whose nature is love, revealed in one Lord Jesus Christ, by one Holy Spirit of Grace, who will finally restore the whole human family of mankind to holiness and happiness.

Article III. We believe that holiness and true happiness are inseparably connected, and their believers ought to be careful to maintain order and practice good work; for these things are good and profitable unto men.

Adding to the stability of the 1803 Winchester Profession of Faith was a clause called the Liberty Clause that was appended to the articles.

Yet while we adopt a general profession of belief and plan of church government, we leave it to the several churches and societies or to smaller associations of churches, if such should be formed within the limits of our General Association to continue or adopt within themselves such more particular articles of faith or modes of discipline, as may appear to them best under their particular circumstances, provided they do not disagree with our general profession and plan.

That clause recognized the conflict between individual rights and the effort to unify people with diverse beliefs under a single profession of faith. “[W]here the brethren cannot see alike, they may agree to differ.”¹ The Liberty Clause remained attached to the Winchester Profession until 1870 and was reinstated in 1899.

In 1933, the same year as the publication of the Humanist Manifesto with 16 of its 34 signatories being current or former Unitarian ministers, the Universalists at their Worcester Convention voted the first approval of an addition to their profession of faith called the Bond of Fellowship. Two years later at the Washington, D.C. Convention, delegates voted 91–0 to adopt this statement that has also become

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known as the Washington Declaration. The declaration illustrates how Universalists, who now interpreted their faith as a universalized liberal Christianity, maintained the centrality of Jesus and love.

The bond of fellowship in this Convention shall be a common purpose to do the will of God as Jesus revealed it and to co-operate in establishing the kingdom for which he lived and died.

To that end, we avow our faith in God as Eternal and All-conquering Love, in the spiritual leadership of Jesus, in the supreme worth of every human personality, in the authority of truth known or to be known, and in the power of men of good-will and sacrificial spirit to overcome evil and progressively establish the Kingdom of God.¹²

Round Two on the Wording of our Principles

The debate over the language of our principles did not end in 1961. The Universalists, dissatisfied with the lack of emphasis on its scriptural foundation, recommended at the 1962 Washington, D.C., General Assembly, the first after the merger, to entirely replace the language in Section 2, with the following.

Uniting in the worship of God and the service of man in the promotion of the knowledge and interest of religion as taught by the master prophets of mankind we affirm our faith:

1. In God, as eternal and all-creative love;
2. In the spiritual leadership of Jesus, and the teachings of Buddha, Moses, Muhammed and all the God-men of all the ages;
3. In the supreme worth of every human personality;
4. In the authority of truth, known and to be known;
5. And in the power of men of goodwill and sacrificial spirit to overcome all evil and progressively establish the Kingdom of God.¹³

This bylaws proposal along with 21 other proposals was considered by the General Assembly with some forwarded to the agenda of the 1963 Chicago General Assembly. One resolution to change the name of the Association to the “Liberal Church of America” was voted down and thus not advanced.

At the 1963 Chicago General Assembly the proposal to replace the 1961 principles with language proposed at the previous Washington, D.C. General Assembly was defeated. Another minor change to the language of the principles was also defeated on a voice vote. There was, however, far greater debate on a bylaw proposal concerning church membership in the Association (Article II, Section 4 of the Constitution). That section specified requirements that churches must satisfy to be a member of the Association, including the need to make a financial contribution, conduct regular religious services, and

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other criteria. An additional requirement was offered that read “Maintained a policy of admitting persons to membership without discrimination of race, color or national origin.” That additional requirement failed to achieve the two-thirds majority vote required for adoption despite attempts to pass the proposal via two separate votes. The principal controversy centered on whether the amendment would conflict with existing constitutional provisions guaranteeing congregational polity in churches and fellowships.¹⁴ The discussion on this matter did not end with the vote.

After disposing of the remaining bylaws proposals, a vigorous debate resumed on this topic that resulted in a resolution designed to advance the spirit of the defeated bylaws proposal. By a vote of 583 to 6 a resolution was passed that read in part:

WHEREAS, refusal to welcome persons into membership in any of our churches or fellowships because of race, color, or national origin would contradict our historical testimony and the declared constitutional purposes of our Association;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that all member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association be charged to declare and practice their faith in the dignity and worth of every person and that all member congregations of our denomination are hereby strongly urged to welcome into their membership and full participation persons without regard to race, color, or national origin . . .

The resolution also resulted in the creation of a Commission on Religion and Race that was charged “to promote the complete integration of Negroes and other minority persons into our congregations, denominational life, ministry and into the community.”¹⁵

The debate on the language of our principles and the issue related to race, however, was not over. Two proposals were made at the 1965 Boston General Assembly that continued the debate. One proposal, inspired by the Universalists, was to change the wording in the preamble of Section 2 in Article II, essentially replacing the concept that UUs “[unite] in the worship of God” to “unite in the spirit of Jesus.” The second proposal regarding race continued the debate from the year before and targeted the wording in our Third Principle changing the language from:

To affirm, defend and promote the supreme worth of every human personality, the dignity of man, and the use of the democratic method in human relationships;

to:

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*To affirm the supreme worth of every human personality **without regard to race, color or national origin**, to maintain the dignity of man and to promote and defend the use of the democratic method in human relationships; (bold added)*

Neither of these proposals to change the preamble or the third principle was adopted. The first proposal was tabled. The second proposal generated a great deal of debate that was now conducted under the heading of “Open Membership Policy.” Again, a resolution was issued stating the UUA policy that membership was open to all regardless of race, color, sex (mentioned here for the first time), national origin or creedal test. This time a more permanent solution was put into motion that was finalized at the 1967 Denver General Assembly. At that General Assembly, based on a recommendation of the Committee on Congregational Polity and Membership Practices, a new section, Section 4, was added to Article II that specifically addressed the policy and intention of the UUA to be open and welcoming to all. That section read.

In accordance with the purposes and objectives of the Unitarian Universalist Association, this Association hereby declares and affirms its special responsibility and the responsibility of its members to promote the full participation of persons, without regard to race, color, sex, or national origin, in the Association, in member churches and fellowships, in associate members, in the ministry and in society.

Over the years this section was updated with wording to reflect the growing list of individuals and communities welcomed into UUism (e.g., disability, affectional or sexual orientation, age, language, citizenship status, economic status).

The Making of our Current Principles and Sources

Aside from a small modification in 1974 to the wording of the 1961 principles replacing male-centric with gender-neutral language (e.g., “man” to “humankind”) our original principles remained unchanged for two decades.

In the 1980s a bottom-up initiative resulted in a significant update to our principles. Sponsoring this initiative was the UU Women’s Federation (UUWF). The UUWF was formed in 1963 from the merger of two historic women's groups, the Association of Universalist Women, founded in 1869, and the Alliance of Unitarian and Other Liberal Christian Women, founded in 1890. The UUWF, aware that the U.S. had undergone a cultural shift in the use of language and the understanding of gender roles, advocated for further updates to our principles. A draft of the new principles was available by 1982, and votes were taken

in 1984 and 1985 that finalized the process. A revised set of Seven Principles was adopted in 1985 along with the creation of Five Sources.

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

With the introduction of Sources to augment our Seven Principles, the historic influence of Judeo-Christian teachings as a source for Unitarian Universalism was preserved. The Five Sources also reflected that in the two decades since the merger, our religious diversity had expanded. There were now other traditions, both religious and non-religious, that informed Unitarian Universalism.

1. Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
2. Words and deeds of prophetic men and women which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
3. Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
4. Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
5. Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit.

A sixth source was added in 1995: spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature. At the 2018 Kansas City General Assembly, the wording of the second source was adjusted, replacing “men and women” with “people” to reflect a more refined understanding of gender-neutral language.

Despite these updates, our principles have remained remarkably faithful to the spirit of the principles practiced by our Unitarian and Universalist ancestors. We can see the reflection of the 1961 principles in the 1985 principles.

- A “free and disciplined search for truth” appears in our Fourth Principle, a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

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- “Defend and promote the supreme worth of every human personality” appears in our First Principle, the inherent worth and dignity of every person.
- “The use of the democratic method in human relationships” is upheld in our Fifth Principle, the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.
- The aspiration to strive “for a world community founded on ideals of brotherhood, justice and peace” and the encouragement for “cooperation with men of good will in every land” are echoed in our Second Principle, justice, equity and compassion in human relations and our Sixth Principle, the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.

Also included in the 1985 revision of our principles was an update to the less-than-compelling purpose for the Association to “exercise its corporate powers for religious, educational and charitable purposes.” The new purpose of the Association was more clearly stated as “The primary purpose of the Association is to serve the needs of its member congregations, organize new congregations, extend and strengthen Unitarian Universalist institutions and implement its principles.”

2009 Updates to Article II Voted Down

At the 2009 Salt Lake City General Assembly, a vote to advance another revision to Article II to the agenda of the next General Assembly failed. The review of the principles, sources, and other sections of Article II was commissioned by the UUA Board of Trustees in April 2006 when they asked the Commission on Appraisal (COA) to conduct the review.¹⁶ The Commission on Appraisal is a bylaws-defined standing committee of the Association with independent oversight responsibilities to review functions and activities that would benefit the Association. The Article II review was initiated by the board in accordance with Article XV of the Association’s bylaws that specifies that a review of Article II must occur at least every 15 years.¹⁷ Rather than forming an Article II Study Commission, the Commission on Appraisal was a logical choice for the assignment. The Commission on Appraisal had recently completed its report, *Engaging Our Theological Diversity*, that explored several aspects about UUs including our relationships with one another and our willingness to continue our path, spiritual or not, through an ongoing search for truth and meaning.

The Commission on Appraisal is to be commended for approaching the review with the gravity and reverence required by such an endeavor. Lacking a creedal statement, profession of faith, or theological requirement, our principles are central to our Unitarian Universalist identity. They are the unifying glue that holds together the widely diverse, eclectic group of people who collectively call themselves Unitarian Universalists.

Equally commendable is the fact that the Commission did good work. The COA made every effort to engage UUs. They developed guiding questions, such as “What values should guide decision-making

about whether and how to revise the text of Article II?”¹⁸ They designed a curriculum with the express intent to invoke thoughtful reflection and discussion rather than have people engage in “off-the-cuff” comments. Both an online and print curriculum were developed, allowing congregations to hold one-session or five-session workshops to be engaged in the process. They reached out to lay and professional leadership, identity groups, and youth and adult constituents. They sent out surveys and received 1,700 online responses as well as many comments that filled over 450 pages. All very good and thoughtful work.

We also learned from the work of the Commission on Appraisal that a “review” initiative can quickly morph into an overwhelming compulsion to change. The COA initially anticipated resistance to changes to Article II but ended their work with a considerable number of recommended revisions. Some revisions were trivial and some substantive. The trivial changes involved the wording of the principles. Several words in the principles were dropped to make them easier to memorize. The Fifth Principle, the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large, for example, saw everything after “process” trimmed away. All Seven Principles and their order were preserved despite comments to reorder the sequence.

The COA approach to our Six Sources was more aggressive. The bulleted list of our sources was eliminated, and a three-paragraph narrative inserted. In typical UU fashion, the COA received a deluge of comments. Some suggested that the reference to Jewish and Christian teachings should be replaced by a simple reference to “all of the world’s religions.” Others wanted explicit references to more religious traditions such as Buddhism and Islam. Some saw an inference in the ordering of the list. Humanists felt their contribution to UUism was being discounted. In the end, the three-paragraph narrative offered by the Commission on Appraisal had its own faults. We will consider only the first two paragraphs.

The first paragraph attempted to anchor today’s UUism on its inheritance from the religious heritages of Unitarianism and Universalism.

Unitarian Universalism is rooted in two religious heritages. Both are grounded on thousands of years of Jewish and Christian teachings, traditions, and experiences. The Unitarian heritage has affirmed that we need not think alike to love alike and that God is one. The Universalist heritage has preached not hell but hope and courage, and the kindness and love of God. Contemporary Unitarian Universalists have reaped the benefits of a legacy of prophetic words and deeds.

It could be argued that the Unitarian heritage is poorly if not misrepresented. The 2020 Commission on Institutional Change did a better job capturing the essence of the Unitarian heritage, with

its reference to a tradition of discerning truth based on facts, reason, and investigation. The reference to the Universalist tradition that preached “not hell but hope” was an awkward reference to an incorrectly attributed quote by Rev. John Murray, “Go out into the highways and by-ways of America, your new country . . . Give them, not hell, but hope and courage,” something Rev. Murray never said!¹⁹ The standard for the scholarship in Article II must be impeccable and beyond reproach.

The second paragraph invites two criticisms. One, the attempt to list religious traditions by name faced the inevitable question, “Why include that tradition and not this tradition?” The second criticism is the questionable and controversial reference to “liberation theologies.” The second paragraph, nonetheless, had a good start:

Unitarian Universalism is not contained in any single book or creed. Its religious authority lies in the individual, nurtured and tested in the congregation and the wider world.

If the COA had simply stopped here, clarity and completeness would have been achieved. The narrative, unfortunately, continued with a list of religious traditions such as Humanism, earth-centric and Eastern religions and concluded by highlighting the influence of liberation theologies. The inclusion of liberation theologies is problematic due to its linkage back to postmodernism and Critical Race Theory terminology.

Faux Democracy on Display

Although the final version of the Fifth Principle Task Force report would not be produced for another half year, the outlines of the report’s conclusions about the failure of General Assembly to be truly representative and the lack of delegate knowledge about the implications of the business being decided were already well known. At the 2009 General Assembly, only a tiny percentage of UUs participated in the decision on new UU principles. Of the denomination’s 164,684 members,²⁰ only 0.7% of UUs were engaged in that decision, the final vote being 573 to 586.²¹ This General Assembly also had a marquee vote for a new president of the Association that pre-occupied many delegates. That raises the question of just how much attention was devoted to a decision impacting our principles and sources.

We have only a narrow window into the decision process of one delegate, a first-time delegate who blogged their General Assembly experience.

The other vote I cast was against the by-law changes, which failed by such a small margin that I practically decided the issue myself. And that is a scary thought, I guess, because I am what the pros call a “single-issue, low-information voter.”

*Like the guy in the voting line, I had read the revised UU Sources and I didn't like them.*²²

2013 Article II Change - Ghost of 2009

Four years later at the 2013 Louisville General Assembly, two changes to Article II were again offered for initial approval so that they could be advanced for a final vote at the 2014 General Assembly. The first change was to Section C-2.3 known as the Non-discrimination section.

The Non-discrimination section, as we have learned, was added to Article II at the 1967 General Assembly after several years of debate to determine how best to affirm the Association's special responsibility to promote the full participation of people regardless of race, color, etc. As noted earlier in this chapter, the list of communities was expanded over the years. At the 2013 General Assembly, the process was initiated to relocate this Article II Non-discrimination section to the Rules section of the bylaws (G-2.3. Non-discrimination). The procedure for amending a bylaws rule is less onerous than Article II, thus enabling the list of communities covered by the intent of the Non-discrimination language to be more readily updatable. This change appears to be a sound and reasonable amendment.

The second change to Article II was the replacement of the Non-discrimination section with a section called Inclusion. There had been discussions that the use of "inclusive" language was a better way to promote a positive and affirming messaging of UUism openness to all people. "[S]ome of our favorite examples" of inclusive, welcoming language were provided on a UUA website page. One example is provided below.

*Inclusivity and Diversity: The society strives to foster a climate of purposeful inclusion of all people. We value the diversity of racial and cultural identity and background, nationality, sexual and affectional orientation, gender identity and its expression, religious background and belief, marital status, family structure, age, mental and physical health and ability, political perspective, and educational and class status.*²³

The language adopted in the Association's Article II Inclusion section took, however, a different direction, employing a less welcoming tone. "Systems of power, privilege, and oppression have traditionally created barriers for persons and groups with particular identities, ages, abilities and histories." This language choice, with its Critical Race Theory ideological phraseology, may be a harbinger of what we might expect from the current Article II Study Commission. So how did such wording come to be selected to be included in the same bylaws article where our principles and sources are found?

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You will recall at the 2009 Salt Lake City General Assembly, an initial vote to advance changes to Article II for a final vote was defeated. Those changes were drafted by the Commission on Appraisal team as part of their mandate to perform a required 15-year review of Article II. Like the current Article II Study Commission, the Commission on Appraisal took full license “to revise, replace or restructure” all sections in Article II. Among the sections the Commission on Appraisal revised was C-2.3. the Non-discrimination section. It is from the work done by the Commission on Appraisal from 2007-2009 that the language of “systems of power” was first offered for the Inclusion section in Article II. This use of ideological language by the Commission on Appraisal is not unexpected given the findings contained in the Commission’s published report *Engaging Our Theological Diversity*. Chapter 7, “New UU Orthodoxy” covers this topic in more detail.

It should be noted that the Commission on Appraisal also made a substantive change to the intent of another section in Article II called Freedom of Belief. The Freedom of Belief statement continues to read in our bylaws as:

Nothing herein shall be deemed to infringe upon the individual freedom of belief which is inherent in the Universalist and Unitarian heritages or to conflict with any statement of purpose, covenant, or bond of union used by any congregation unless such is used as a creedal test.

The language offered by the Commission on Appraisal at the 2009 General Assembly replaced the concept of “individual freedom” with “congregational freedom.”

Congregational freedom is central to the Unitarian Universalist heritage.

Congregations may establish statements of purpose, covenants, and bonds of union so long as they do not require a statement of belief as a creedal test for membership; nor may the Association employ such a test for congregational affiliation.

Although the changes to Article II presented at the 2009 General Assembly were voted down, a second life was given to the Inclusion section by a responsive resolution that requested the UUA Board of Trustees to continue to pursue the adoption of the “systems of power” language in the Inclusion section.”²⁴

Lessons from this Experience

Since the UUA Board both commissions study groups and reviews/approves the output of these study groups, one can see that over the past decade there has been an intent by our UU leadership to

reshape UUism by altering the language in Article II. Given the language in the 2020 Commission on Institutional Change report on congregational polity and congregational autonomy, there may be attempts to alter these long-standing pillars in our Association's governance model. Given the sweeping administrative powers of the UUA Board and its control over the agenda of General Assembly, we can see that even after congregational delegates at a General Assembly reject changes to Article II, that vote can be administratively challenged. In the case of the Inclusion section of Article II, those changes were resurrected and brought forward again. With the structural brokenness of our General Assembly to be a truly representative body, will the character of UUism eventually be worn down simply by the persistence of an unresponsive leadership team?

However, if we take a long view from the history of our principles, we can see the norms that should surround the process for modifying our principles, sources, and freedom of belief statement in Article II. The process must be respectful of the heritage intent of our principles and the complex, maybe even cumbersome, decisioning structure to alter our principles. Our principles belong to all UUs and keeping them free of the dogma or ideology of a particular group is a triumph for all UUs.

Another important lesson is that congregational polity is to be as deeply valued as our principles. This observation is particularly germane given that our UU leadership has thrown the bureaucratic power of the Association and its assumed ecclesiastical power behind a revision of our principles. It does not appear that our Boston-based leaders value the independence and autonomy of congregations. These concepts of independence and autonomy, like our principles, reflect our religious heritages, were enshrined in our denomination's original constitution, and continue to be supported in our current bylaws. Changes to our bylaws should be a holistic effort, not a single-minded focus to impose a narrow interpretation of our core UU beliefs.

Lastly, reflecting on the failure to advance their efforts on Article II in 2009, the Commission on Appraisal conceded that unlike in 1985, they did not have grassroots support. "There was only the Bylaw section mandating review every fifteen years."

Since we are headed for another vote on bylaws changes to Article II in 2022, we should all become aware of the scope and impact of these bylaws changes. Admittedly, getting excited about bylaws changes has all the appeal of eating dry desert sand, but upcoming bylaws changes will impact our principles and sources and most likely our guarantee of congregational polity, autonomy, and independence. Let us not allow our principles to slip away simply for a lack of attention. It is important that all UUs read everything from the Article II Study Commission, no matter how dry the sand.

¹ “Article II Study Commission,” <https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/article-ii-study-commission>. Note: The contents of this URL have changed.

² “Article II Study Commission”

³ “Theology,” in *Widening the Circle of Concern, Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change*, (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 2020), 7. This quote is from an address Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt delivered at the Service of the Living Tradition in 2018.

⁴ “Trends,” in *Widening the Circle of Concern*, 5.

⁵ “Theology,” in *Widening the Circle of Concern*, 16. The term “equitable future” carries two meanings. People can interpret equitable to mean fair or an ideal state of being just and impartial. However, in context of the COIC report, “This will lay the groundwork for our work around truth, transformation and reparations,” the term “equitable” could be interpreted as the need for a reparation for past acts so that everyone could be considered as having started from the same place.

⁶ “Destructive Behavior Policies,” Unitarian Universalist Association, <https://www.uua.org/safe/destructive-behavior-policies>.

⁷ “Constitution and By-Laws, Constitution,” 1961, Article II, Section 2, p 24 (seq. 3), Unitarian Universalist Association, Directory. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, [1961]-2009, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard University, <https://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:DIV.LIB:30758222?n=30>.

⁸ Russell E. Miller, “And Flow on Together: Unitarian-Universalist Consolidation, 1937-1961,” in *The Larger Hope, The Second Century of the Universalist Church in America, 1870-1970*, (Boston, MA: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1985), 659. Miller’s original footnote reads, “Three reports were made by the Commission at the Syracuse meeting. It was the ‘Third Syracuse Report,’ including all amendments, that was finally adopted.”

⁹ “Amendments to the Constitution,” *The Monthly Journal of the American Unitarian Association*, 9:5, June 1868, 286, https://books.google.com/books?id=51Y2AAAAMAAJ&newbks=1&newbks_redir=0&dq=%22bylaws%22%20of%20%202American%20Unitarian%20Association%22&pg=PA286#v=onepage&q=%22bylaws%22%20&f=false.

¹⁰ “By-laws of the American Unitarian Association, as Revised and Adopted at the Annual Meeting, May 23, 1951, p 13, (seq. 15), Unitarian Universalist Association. *Unitarian Year Book September 1, 1951 – August 31, 1952 and Annual Report for 1950 – 1951*, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard University, <https://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:DIV.LIB:32542353?n=15>.

¹¹ Russell E. Miller, “Establishing a Theological Base,” in *The Larger Hope* (Boston, MA: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1979), 45-47.

¹² “Universalist General Convention, Minutes, Boston: The Convention 1935,” October 23-25, 1935, p 3, (seq 3), Unitarian Universalist Association, Directory. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, [1961]-2009, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard University, <https://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:DIV.LIB:33682357?n=3>. The Universalist Convention was held in Washington, D.C.

¹³ “First General Assembly of Unitarian Universalist Association,” May 24, 1962, p 237, (seq. 247), Unitarian Universalist Association, Directory. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, [1961]-2009, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard University, <https://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:DIV.LIB:30758460?n=247>.

¹⁴ “Second General Assembly of Unitarian Universalist Association,” 1963, 58 (seq. 64), 1964, Unitarian Universalist Association, Directory. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, [1961]-2009, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard University, <https://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:DIV.LIB:30758764?n=64>.

¹⁵ “Second General Assembly of Unitarian Universalist Association,” p 62 (seq 68), Unitarian Universalist Association, Directory. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, [1961]-2009, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard University, <https://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:DIV.LIB:30758764?n=68>.

¹⁶ Donald E. Skinner, “Time to Review the Principles,” *UUA World*, April 21, 2006, <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/reexamination-uaa-principles-announced>.

¹⁷ “Unitarian Universalist Association Bylaws and Rules,” Article XV, C-15.1, c, 6, “If no study process of Article II has occurred for a period of fifteen years, the Board of Trustees shall appoint a commission to study Article II for not more than two years and to recommend appropriate revisions, if any, thereto to the Board of Trustees for inclusion on the agenda of the next regular General Assembly.”

¹⁸ “Report of the Unitarian Universalist Commission on Appraisal, On the Mandated Review of Article II of the UUA Bylaws,” December 19, 2008, 6, https://www.uua.org/files/documents/coa/o81219_boardreport.pdf.

¹⁹ Peter Hughes, “Beloved Quotes Produced by the UU Rumor Mill,” *UU World*, September 17, 2012, <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/uu-rumor-mill-produces-quotes>. The quote “Give them, not hell, but hope and courage” first appeared in a pamphlet published in 1951.

²⁰ “UUA Membership Statistics, 1961-2020,” Unitarian Universalist Association, <https://www.uua.org/data/demographics/uua-statistics>. Demographic and Statistical Information about Unitarian Universalism.

²¹ Christopher L. Walton, “General Assembly Narrowly Rejects New 'Principles and Purposes',” *UU World*, July 6, 2009, <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/ga-rejects-new-principles-purposes>.

²² Doug Muder, “Confessions of a Virgin Delegate,” blog, June 28, 2009, <http://ga2009.blogs.uua.org/2009/06/28/confessions-of-a-virgin-delegate/>.

²³ “Welcome, Inclusion, Affirmation, and Non-discrimination Statements,” Washington Ethical Society, Washington, DC., <https://www.uua.org/lgbtq/welcoming/ways/welcome-statements>.

²⁴ “Responsive Resolution on Inclusions,” Minutes, Forty-eighth General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association Held in Salt Lake City, June 24, 2009, 6, <https://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/GA-Minutes-2009.pdf>.