



Dictionary of Unitarian & Universalist Biography

The Unitarian Controversy and Its Puritan Roots

For about 25 years, throughout roughly the first quarter of the 19th century, most of New England was caught up in a tangle of theological arguments, since known as the Unitarian controversy. The controversy engaged the best minds of Harvard and Yale and, equally as much, tens of thousands of lay church members. Today most Unitarian Universalists have never heard of the Unitarian controversy, and its themes and threads are still hard to sort out and relate to one another. Yet 21st century Unitarian Universalist congregations are what they are, in large part, due to the historical consequences of those same themes and threads, which so occupied, and shaped the lives of, our North American ancestors.

To tell this 19th century tale, one must begin with an understanding of the churches of 17th century Puritan New England. For the Unitarian controversy grew out of the religious concerns and practices of all the 17th century New England churches.

During the “Great Migration” of the 1630s some 20,000 English Puritans settled in New England and established independent parish (neighborhood) churches. They practiced congregational polity, that form of church governance in which members of the local church are united on an equal footing, not by assent to a creed, but by “entering the covenant.” That is, by signing a promise. Each church wrote its own covenant. Some were long. Most were very short. The covenant of the Salem Church, written in 1629, is a good example. “*We Covenant with the Lord and one with another; and doe bynd ourselves in the presence of God, to walke together in all his waies, according as he is pleased to reveale himself unto us in his Blessed word of truth.*”

The revolutionary thrust of the Puritan covenant and polity is given voice especially in two words, “*unto us.*” This is because the issue of the Puritan mind and heart was contained in a set of closely related questions: Where is authentically commanding religious authority to be found? How is it known? And what are the conditions of its appearing “unto us?” The Puritans’ answer to those questions found expression in the covenant of the local church. They granted ultimate religious authority solely to that *convincing power* of truth evident in the understandings reached and tested over time by a body of loving individuals mutually pledged faithfully to seek and to heed truth together, in ongoing community, so long as their earthly life should last.

Therefore, the Puritans rejected, on deeply held theological principle, the authority of bishops or any ecclesiastical or civil body politic whatsoever other than the local church. Each church elected and ordained its own officers, ministerial and lay. So constituted, all their churches together formed “*the Standing Order*” of “*the New England Way*”: a community of independent churches, each governed solely by the decision of its own members, yet in “fellowship” with all other churches so constituted.

In practical terms the fellowship of the churches meant that ministers frequently exchanged pulpits, traveling all over the region to do so. It meant that members traveled readily and often to participate in other churches’ celebrations, such as ordinations, building dedications and funerals. And fellowship also meant that a troubled congregation, unable to resolve some conflict, could always ask sister churches to send their ministerial and lay leaders to meet in council. That is, leaders from neighboring churches would assemble formally to hear all sides of a dispute and to offer a troubled church, not a ruling, but advice. Such counsel the church often agreed to accept, but sometimes did not. In the New England Way each congregation was complete in itself and carefully guarded against interference. Thus walking in “*the Liberty of the Gospel,*” as they put it, the Puritan churches meant to become a shining example of justice, peace and good order, that “*city set upon a hill*” of Jesus’ teaching.

In their view the world's churches had been corrupted, and had not modelled such a city for more than a thousand years. All those shiploads of immigrants had a calling to reconstitute true churches on the Biblical pattern of liberty and thus quietly to initiate a new age. Governor-elect John Winthrop preached to his fellow "undertakers" aboard the *Arbella*, lead ship of the first group of ships to set sail for New England in 1630, a sermon he titled, "A Modell of Christian Charity." Winthrop declared, that with the "*eies of all people*" upon them, they must be "*knitt together in this worke as one man*" in the bonds of love, that the "*Citty upon a Hill*" might be seen and thus inspire emulation.

Even with their careful design and practice, the Puritans could not, of course, maintain a perfectly ordered society. In the "Antinomian Controversy" of the first generation, they argued with intensity and bitterness whether or not people who lived righteously necessarily demonstrated a state of grace. This argument prefigured later arguments between free-will Arminians and predestination Calvinists. The question of church discipline, raised by purists who could not tolerate fellowship with congregations they felt to be impure, was resolved, though only for a time, by the Cambridge Synod of 1646-48. Church leaders affirmed in writing, in a document called the Cambridge Platform, that councils and synods could advise, but not dictate to, individual churches. The Platform also affirmed the Calvinist doctrines of God, of humanity and salvation recently formulated by the Westminster Assembly in England. These doctrines were widely assumed to be foundational for New England's congregational polity, even though that form of church governance was not accepted by the Westminster Assembly.

A decline in church membership by the second generation posed a challenge to Puritan church leadership. To members of the first generation, testimony of personal religious experience, required for church membership, and response to a few questions about the meaning of that experience, seemed natural and easy. The earliest Puritan settlers were a self-selected group who, under very trying circumstances in England, had come to share the same ideals and temperament. When they established their congregational parish church system, their battle had been to win freedom from government and higher ecclesiastical control. Succeeding generations, faced with quite different circumstances, showed a variety of attitudes towards the authority of the parish church itself. Because they did not choose the community as had their parents, but had grown up in the quiet villages of New England, they exhibited a wider range of personality and spiritual aspiration. Though they loved the church and regularly attended its services, many second generation New Englanders were disinclined to admit publicly their sinfulness and need of a conversion experience, which they perhaps had never felt so strongly as their elders. To them, such testimony was an unnecessary ordeal not worth the benefit of full church membership, namely the right to take communion.

To address this problem, therefore, while the first generation of settlers were yet living, in the mid-17th century, many congregations adopted the controversial "Half-Way covenant." The Half-Way covenant granted the privilege of membership to those adults of "upright life" who had been baptized and reared as children in the church, without an account of regeneration. The resultant growth in church membership sufficed to make the Half-Way covenant less controversial. It did not solve, but only deferred attention to the underlying problem, so early apparent, of diverging understandings of the steps leading to spiritual life and the varying ways spiritual life may develop in people of different life experiences. This division between those who believed that there were certain dramatic and specific steps to love and faith in Christian life and those who awaited a slow and individualistic development of mature love and trust would, more than a century later, be at the heart of the arguments in the Unitarian controversy.

Meanwhile, the growing mercantile economy of New England also exerted a moderating influence on New England religious life. Merchants belonged not only to a Puritan congregation but to the international trading community as well. They felt that in markets abroad they labored at a disadvantage, in that a certain stigma of intolerance attached to anyone from New England. One businessman complained that public punishment for heretical belief was bad for business because it "*makes us stinke every where*." The interest of the merchants in promoting free movement of people and goods conflicted with the desire of the Puritan leaders to keep New England isolated and free from foreign influence.

Moreover many merchants chafed under regulations imposed upon them by Puritan authorities. The Puritan ideal called for subordination of individual advantage to the common good. As John Winthrop had put it in his *Arbella* sermon, New Englanders “*must be willing to abridge [themselves] of [their] superfluities, for the supply of others’ necessities.*” Puritan leader, the Rev. John Cotton declared it a false principle that “*a man might sell as dear as he can, and buy as cheap as he can.*” Puritan laws put restrictions on the amount of profit traders were allowed to realize in their sales transactions. A number of store-owners were prosecuted and fined for profiteering. Beyond the civil penalties, churches imposed their own discipline on merchants deemed to have charged too much for their wares.

A number of early New England businessmen, finding they could not operate under the Puritan regime, returned to England. Some of these were replaced in the middle of the seventeenth century by Anglican entrepreneurs from England whose latitudinarian views put them in immediate opposition to the local parish churches. By the end of the century Puritan authority had lost its power to do more than utter ineffective admonitions against uncontrolled capitalist behavior.

During the early decades of settlement, if a merchant petitioned for tolerance or, in seeking to defend his way of life, wrote his own religious treatise, he would have been punished. William Pynchon was driven out of Massachusetts in 1652 after his book, *The Meritorious Price of Our Redemption* was publicly burned. By 1699 the balance of power had shifted. In that year, a group of Boston merchants, led by John Leverett and William and Thomas Brattle, issued a manifesto calling for the organization of a new church along “*broad and catholick*” lines. There was no official suppression. Rather the power of this group was demonstrated when Leverett, a layman, replaced the conservative minister Increase Mather as the President of Harvard College in 1707.

The decline in “regenerate” church membership was reversed by a sudden wave of revivals, now known as the First Great Awakening, which began in 1734. Not all Congregationalists were pleased by the revivals, however. Boston minister Charles Chauncy, in his *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England*, in 1743, deplored the excessive emotionalism, even hysteria, evoked in revival services, which did not consistently lead to a life of good works. It was but a short step from a reasoned and moral critique of revivalism to Arminianism, a modified form of Calvinist thought, in which human will and activity are held to play an important role in salvation. Chauncy and many other Congregationalist liberals took that step to Arminianism over the course of the 18th century. At the same time, they engaged in Biblically based criticism of the trinity and other orthodox doctrines.

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. The Arminian Congregationalists, and many others, saw in Newton’s orderly universe evidence of the work of God. From Locke they learned that human beings are not born with a set of innate ideas, but that all ideas come from experience. Chauncy wrote, “*I am not convinced that we have any ideas, but what take rise from sensation and reflection, or that we can have any, upon the present establishment of nature, any other way.*”

On this basis, Arminians could envision the potential for continuous development in the human mind, including the refinement of morality and other aspects of religious character. From the perspective of the Lockean model of the evolution of reason and also from the orderliness of Newtonian creation, the irrationality of revivalism and the sudden emotional swing of instant conversion had no place.

New England Congregational churches, whether orthodox or liberal, were strongly in favor of the American Revolution. So powerful were the sermons of black-robed Congregational ministers proclaiming the merits of “freedom from tyranny,” that the ministers were dubbed “Washington’s Black Regiment” by the king’s ministers. This unanimity of political purpose masked a deep theological division which had grown within the churches of the Standing Order.

By the close of the 18th century many of the largest churches, especially but not exclusively in eastern Massachusetts, had become markedly liberal in theology. Their ministers and lay members were openly, though not confrontationally, Arminian and unitarian. To these liberals, freedom of the human will was both a reality of common experience and a necessary corollary to the goodness of God, without which the justice of God would be meaningless. They rejected as unbiblical the traditionally held Calvinist doctrines of original sin, total depravity, predestination and the trinity. They adopted positive doctrines of the nature of humanity and the possibility of continuing moral, spiritual, and intellectual growth.

Because the evolution of a distinctively liberal theology during the 18th century was gradual, it was not perceived by liberals as an innovation, but as a natural development in Biblical understanding. Nevertheless, they did not think it necessary or even helpful to argue about these matters with their more orthodox neighbors. Nor did they covet formal recognition of their doctrines, much less their imposition on any who disagreed with them.

In response to the new liberal influence, some more orthodox churches began to insert creedal elements into their covenants, while the liberal churches clung ever more strongly to the old Puritan ideal of “walking together” in Christian love, without the entailments of creedal stipulations. The fellowship of the Standing Order was manifestly under strain. Troubled churches, Calvinist and liberal, no longer called on those churches geographically nearest them for help; they called on churches known to be in their own theological camp. Still, ministers holding quite divergent theologies continued to exchange pulpits and members continued to be glad to hear them, until after the turn of the century.

The sense of crisis deepened after 1805. The Harvard Board of Overseers had long deferred appointment of a professor to the vacant Hollis Chair of Divinity, an appointment contested between liberals and Calvinists. When the Overseers at last appointed the liberal Henry Ware, Calvinists concluded they had lost Harvard and control of the training of ministers. Calvinists organized and founded a new school, Andover Theological Seminary, in 1808. Also in 1808 the Calvinist minister of the Second Church in Dorchester, Massachusetts, John Codman, let it be known that henceforth he would not exchange pulpits with liberal ministers.

In 1815 Calvinist Jedidiah Morse reprinted in his magazine, *The Panoplist*, a chapter from a British Unitarian work, Thomas Belsham's *Life of Theophilus Lindsey*, 1812. The chapter was titled “American Unitarianism.” Morse prefaced his reprint with his own introductory comments suggesting that American liberal ministers dishonestly disguised their real theology and were, in fact, full-fledged Unitarians. More than any other individual, the Rev. Jedidiah Morse prevailed upon his orthodox brethren in the ministry clearly to separate themselves from the liberal ministers, though all served churches of the Standing Order. Morse also organized new associations of church leaders to which the liberals were not invited. Liberal ministers were invited less and less often into the pulpits of Calvinist churches, then not at all. Although the Standing Order yet stood as a system of similarly governed independent congregations, the fellowship of the New England Way was rent in two.

Many liberals—among them their greatest pulpit orator, William Ellery Channing—were loath to acknowledge the permanency of the rift. Eventually, however, it was impossible not to accept a *fait accompli*. To own publicly, to lift up and clarify the distinctive tenets of church-goers who must now also become a distinct community of churches, Channing preached in 1819 his great sermon “Unitarian Christianity” at the ordination of Jared Sparks in Baltimore, Maryland. Some twenty or more New England Unitarian ministers accompanied him to make the nature of the occasion clear. The adjective Unitarian would from this time describe certain Christian churches and distinguish them from others. The sermon was reprinted several times; copies sold numbered in the tens of thousands. In 1825 a group of young ministers created the American Unitarian Association, an organization of Unitarian individuals whose aim to promote and plant Unitarian churches was national in scope.

The long, sometimes bitter debate called the Unitarian controversy continued for more than two decades, erupting in particular congregations at different times, most often when a death or retirement required the congregation to elect a new minister. The basic disagreement concerned the extent of the church covenant.

Calvinist Congregationalists insisted that Christian fellowship must be limited to members in agreement concerning many areas of doctrine, including the nature of God, human nature, and the nature of salvation. Liberal congregationalist Unitarians insisted just as strongly that their church covenant could embrace all who wanted to practice a Christian life. At issue, though, were such differing conceptions of human need and human nature, that the liberals and Calvinists couldn't even agree on what to argue about, and so they argued about everything. Following the logic of family infighting, one dispute led to another. Eventually the argument came down to who really owned the communion silver and the building.

Many churches split, with some members remaining and others leaving to organize a new congregation. Something changed even in churches which remained united in a long-standing consensus, Calvinist or Unitarian. Although the sign out front still said "First Parish," as it always had, and the church covenant may have remained the same one its founders had written two centuries previously, the designation of the church in people's minds was different. In general the church was called Unitarian if its members now had a Harvard graduate in their pulpit. It was called Calvinist if its minister was a graduate of Andover or Yale. Eventually, some 250 of New England's original parish churches formally took the name Unitarian, having been in fact unitarian already for 50 or 75 years. By mid-19th century the Calvinist and the Unitarian heirs of the Puritans had gone their separate ways.

Both the Congregationalist and Unitarian churches have continued to change since the time of the 19th century controversy. Congregationalist churches merged in 1957 with other churches whose historical roots were in the German Reformed tradition. Their association is now known as the United Church of Christ (UCC). In 1961 the Unitarians merged with the Universalists, whose beginnings were also in New England. Together these churches now make up the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA).

Ever since the controversy and still today, however, it is not unusual for ministers and lay members to switch about, from one of these associations to the other, and even back again. Moreover, we have always had a few "federated" congregations, usually quite small, who hold membership in both associations. Some members of a federated church identify more with the UCC half of the split of the old Puritan church; others identify more with the UUA. Nevertheless, they govern their church, and worship, together.

Most recently, the UCC and the UUA have cooperated jointly to produce an important religious educational curriculum, called *Our Whole Lives* (OWL). Included are separate adaptations of some sections for use in the still separate traditions.

John Winthrop's "A Modell of Christian Charity" can be found in several anthologies, including Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, *The Puritans* (1938). In *The Puritans in America: A Narrative Anthology* (1985), editors Alan Heimart and Andrew Delbanco provide a version of the sermon with modern spelling. The Salem covenant can be found in the collection, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (1893), edited by Williston Walker.

On the history of Congregationalism: Albert E. Dunning, *Congregationalists in America: A Popular History of Their Origin, Belief, Polity, Growth and Work* (1894); and Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (1986). Bernard Bailyn's *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (1955) tells of the conflict between the values of the Puritan community and its merchant class.

The standard general work on Unitarian history remains George Willis Cooke's *Unitarianism in America* (1902). Three works of Conrad Wright, *Walking Together* (1989), *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (1955), and *The Unitarian Controversy* (1994) are essential reading for the understanding of the origin and development of American Unitarianism. Along with Wright's *Beginnings of Unitarianism* Robert J. Wilson III, *The Benevolent Deity: Ebenezer Gay and the Rise of Rational Religion in New England, 1696-1787* (1984) explores emerging 18th-century liberal Congregationalism. In *The Transformation of Charity in Postrevolutionary New England* (1992) Conrad Edick Wright looks at the changes in religious thinking about charity. The essays in Conrad Edick Wright, Ed., *American Unitarianism 1805-1865* (1989) pay particular attention to the social, psychological, and economic issues underlying the religious controversies of 19th century

New England. *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* (1970) is a classic study of the Unitarian domination of antebellum American intellectual life.

Article by Alice Blair Wesley, Peter Hughes and Frank Carpenter - posted October 13, 2000

Source: <https://uudb.org/articles/unitariancontroversy.html>

Ed. Note: There are much deeper reasons for the controversial split between Unitarianism and not only Puritanism but Christianity as a whole than this article would imply, as outlined in the following material, also written by and for Unitarian Universalists (UU).

Unitarian views of God

Not all Unitarians believe in God or even use the word. Some find the word “God” meaningless, others believe it is too burdened with wrong ideas to be useful. But many Unitarians continue to believe in God in a real sense, or use the term with a more limited meaning.

God is one

Unitarianism rejects the mainstream Christian doctrine of the Trinity, or three Persons in one God, made up of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

They typically believe that God is one being [**Ed. note: hence the name Unitarian**] – God the Father, or Mother. Jesus was simply a man, not the incarnate deity. For some, notions of the Holy Spirit offer a closer fit with their understanding of the divine.

God the Father or Mother

Unitarians may accept many ideas of God as valid - for example:

- the principle that unites all things
- the ground of existence
- the source of original and ongoing creation
- the ultimate good
- the ideals and aspirations of humanity
- a loving (parental) power with which human beings can have a personal relationship (some see this power as masculine, others as feminine)
- the still small voice within each of us
- a great mystery

Jesus Christ

Many Unitarians, particularly in North America, do not identify themselves as Christian. Those Unitarians who continue to regard Jesus as central to their faith will typically hold some or all of the following views about him:

- Jesus was a man, not God
- Jesus was not physically resurrected
- Jesus was a Jewish prophet with a mission of reconciliation
- Jesus was filled with divine inspiration
- Jesus is a supreme example of living with integrity and compassion
- Jesus' life is reflective of the divine potential in all of us

Unitarians maintain that Jesus didn't think of himself as God – and although he sometimes seems to speak of himself as God in the Bible, they are inclined to say that this is based on a misunderstanding of the text and the culture of his time. Jesus did not survive in a physical sense. He survives in a poetic or metaphorical sense in that his spirit lives on in the churches and believers inspired by him.

Source: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/unitarianism/beliefs/god.shtml>

Our life's ultimate meaning

“Salvation” isn’t a word Unitarian Universalists use much anymore.

Hosea Ballou was Universalism’s greatest American preacher and theologian in its early years; in his 1805 *Treatise on Atonement* he explained that he read the Bible as supporting universal salvation; that is, in the afterlife all human beings will be saved and none damned to hell. He also rejected the traditional view that Jesus’s crucifixion atoned for human sin, presenting God instead as an unconditionally loving parent who cares infinitely for every single one of his human children, regardless of their moral status. Likewise, Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing taught that God is infinitely good. Channing rejected the orthodox Christian doctrines of human depravity, salvation of the few, and eternal damnation of the rest, insisting that any doctrine of atonement claiming that Jesus died to appease God’s wrath at human sin is not only unscriptural but also immoral and absurd.

This is all very interesting as a matter of Unitarian Universalist history, but frankly irrelevant to most modern Unitarian Universalists, who do not believe in the afterlife anyway, much less in heaven and hell or Jesus’s atonement for humankind before God. In fact, when Tufts University professor Robert L’H. Miller conducted a massive national survey of almost 2,000 Unitarian Universalists in 1976, asking how important eighteen different religious values were to them, “salvation” ranked dead last. There’s no evidence that it’s fared any better since, based on the 2005 Unitarian Universalist Commission on Appraisal Report “Engaging Our Theological Diversity”, which re-examines Miller’s values without even referencing salvation. So what can we really say about salvation, and how can we have conversations with mainstream Christians about what it means to be saved?

Starting in the eighteenth century, the Universalist tradition in America denied the doctrine of eternal damnation. Universalists argued that this was not a new doctrine in their time, but dated back to teachers at the very beginning of the church, and had been later reinforced by church fathers like Origen in the third century and Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth. Augustine had acknowledged in the fifth century that “very many” believed in the ultimate reconciliation of all people to God. The Winchester Profession of the Universalist creed, adopted in 1803, states, “We believe that there is one God, whose nature is Love, revealed in the one Lord Jesus Christ . . . who will finally restore the whole family of mankind to holiness and happiness.”

The doctrine of universal salvation [**Ed. note: hence the name Universalist**] has been in the American religious news in recent years, primarily through the influence of a dynamic Christian evangelical pastor in the Midwest, Rob Bell. In his 2011 bestseller, *Love Wins*, he explains that he published it to combat the “misguided and toxic” belief that “a select few Christians will spend forever in a peaceful, joyous place called heaven, while the rest of humanity spends forever in torment and punishment in hell with no chance for anything better.” Unfortunately, he says, “it’s been clearly communicated to many that this belief is a central truth of the Christian faith and to reject it is, in essence, to reject Jesus.”

Bell reminds his readers that “nothing in this book hasn’t been taught, suggested or celebrated by many before me.” Indeed, it has been said primarily by us Universalists. I appreciate that Bell isn’t claiming a fresh new approach here, but it’s ironic that a concept central to our historical Universalist tradition has come to popular awareness now through a conservative, evangelical Protestant Christian.

Bell also reminds his readers of the biblical notion that we were all made in the image of God. The spark of the divine is always there within each of us, waiting to be fanned into flame. Our free will allows us a choice, however: “We can nurture and cultivate this divine image, or we can ignore, deny and stifle it.” Rob Bell believes we must wake up “to the timeless truth that history moves forward, not backward or sideways. . . . Jesus passionately urges us to live like the end is here, now, today.”

Salvation, in the final analysis, is about seeing our current life as ultimately meaningful. We need to be as present to it as possible, which means being aware not only of ourselves, but also of the people and larger environment surrounding us. Jesus stated this in terms of being alert to the in-breaking kingdom of God (taking

place “on earth, as it is in heaven,” as stated in the Lord’s Prayer) and alert to its call for all-embracing love from self to neighbor to enemy. A fitting conclusion to a discussion of salvation and its universality is this passage, usually attributed to the eighteenth-century Universalist preacher John Murray, but actually written by one of his biographers, Alfred S. Cole: “Go out into the highways and by-ways. Give people something of your new vision. You may possess a small light, but uncover it, let it shine. Use it to bring more light and understanding to the hearts and minds of men and women. Give them not hell, but hope and courage. Preach the kindness and everlasting love of God.”

Source: <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/our-lifes-ultimate-meaning>

The Six Sources and Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism

Six Sources: Unitarian Universalist congregations affirm and promote seven Principles, which we hold as strong values and moral guides. We live out these Principles within a “living tradition” of wisdom and spirituality, drawn from sources as diverse as science, poetry, scripture, and personal experience. These are the six sources our congregations affirm and promote:

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 people 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;
6. 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.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/sources>

Seven Principles: As Rev. Barbara Wells ten Hove explains, “The Principles are not dogma or doctrine, but rather a guide for those of us who choose to join and participate in Unitarian Universalist religious communities.”

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

The seven Principles and six Sources of the Unitarian Universalist Association grew out of the grassroots of our communities, were affirmed democratically, and are part of who we are.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/principles>

Ed. Note: Unitarian Universalism is essentially a liberal religious form of secular humanism with a modest membership of about 150,000 in the U.S. (most highly concentrated in central New England and around Seattle, Washington). Some observers count UU to be a fringe sect of Christianity, but it is more accurately recognized as a non-Christian belief system.