

Understanding UU views concerning the nature of humanity is the key to understanding the UU system of thought.¹³ But before doing this, one must consider the particular methodological difficulties and concerns involved in determining UU views in this or any other area of study.

METHODOLOGY

UUs take great pride in the fact that their faith is “creedless.” Insofar as UUism neither promotes an “official” list of answers to major theological and philosophical questions nor recognizes any book or ecclesiastical official(s) as being the final authority on religious questions, it is without a creed. In UUism, the answers to such questions are determined by the individual. This accounts for the extremely wide range of beliefs — often mutually exclusive — found under the UU designation.

Despite this great diversity in theological particulars, there are indeed some underlying commitments, ideals, and values shared by all UUs. Their primary allegiances are not to specific theological assertions, but to commonly held humanistic values and an open forum for individual religious searching and “meaning-making.”¹⁴ In general, the emphasis in UUism is on the process of belief formation, not the beliefs themselves.

The nature of these shared commitments is best articulated in the UUA Principles and Purposes,¹⁵ which were adopted in 1985. This is the closest thing that UUs have to a creed,

and along with the “six sources,”¹⁶ they constitute the most authoritative articles in all of contemporary UUism. These must be our starting point for understanding UU belief, but because they are so minimal, they cannot be our last if we are to truly understand UU thought. The accompanying box below offers a hierarchy of authority (moving from more to less authoritative) for contemporary UUism according to two different categories: publications and persons.¹⁷ This list gives us at least a start in helping to understand this group.¹⁸

UU DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY

Given the fact that the Principles and Purposes and the “six sources” serve as the most authoritative documents in all of UUism, they will be used as the starting point for this discussion of UU views on the origin, nature, and destiny of humanity. The principles are:

“We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: The inherent worth and dignity of every person; Justice, equity and compassion in human relations; Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations; A free and responsible search for truth and meaning; The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large; The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all; Re-

spect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

The living tradition we share draws from many sources: 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; Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love; Wisdom from the world’s religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life; Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God’s love by loving our neighbors as ourselves; 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; 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.

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.”²⁰

SOURCES OF CONTEMPORARY UU THOUGHT

Publications:

1. Principles and Purposes; “six sources”
2. *UU Pocket Guide* — published by UUA
3. UUA Pamphlets; John Sias’ *100 Questions*¹⁹
4. *UU World* (formerly *The World*) magazine and other official UUA publications (including on-line information and articles)
5. Beacon Press publications on UUism — owned by UUA
6. Skinner House Publications — affiliated publisher of UU material

Persons:

1. President of the UUA, currently Rev. William Sinkford
2. National UUA Officials/Spokespersons
3. “Star” Clergy; Prolific UU authors; UU “saints” (Channing, Emerson, etc.); Professors or administrators at Starr King and Meadville-Lombard, UU ministerial-training schools
4. Regular UU clergy
5. UU lay persons
6. Non-UU religious liberals