

# CONTEMPORARY UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST THEOLOGIANs

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## John Buehrens

With Rebecca Parker, *A House for Hope: The Promise of Progressive Religion for the Twentieth-first Century* (Beacon Press, 2010)

Rev. Dr. John Buehrens was president of the Unitarian Universalist Association from 1993 to 2001. He is now minister of the First Parish in Needham, Massachusetts, and special assistant to the secretary general of the World Conference of Religions for Peace. He is author of *Understanding the Bible*, coauthor, with Forrest Church, of *A Chosen Faith*.

*A House for Hope* affirms that the shared hopes of religious progressives from many traditions can create a movement far stronger than fundamentalism: a liberal religious renaissance. Yet for it to flourish, progressive people must rediscover the spiritual sustenance available in the theological house our liberal forebears built, and embrace what our tradition truly holds sacred, as well as understanding what it rejects.

*A House for Hope* suggests that liberal religious commitment is based on expansive love for life rather than adherence to narrow dogma. With chapters that reveal the political and personal relevance of the enduring questions at the heart of this theology, the book shows how religious liberals have countered fundamentalists for generations, and provides progressives with not only a theological but also a spiritual foundation for the challenges of the twenty-first century.

## Forrest Church

*The Cathedral of the World: A Universalist Theology* (Beacon Press, 2009)

The Rev. Dr. F. Forrester Church (1948-2009) served the Unitarian Church of All Souls in New York City as senior minister since 1978 and as minister of public theology since 2007. He died September 24, 2009, of esophageal cancer.

A frequent contributor to *UU World*, Church is the author of many books including *A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism* (with John Buehrens, 1989; 1993), *So Help Me God: The Founding Fathers and the First Great Battle Over Church and State* (2007), *The Jefferson Bible* (2000), *The American Creed: A Spiritual and Patriotic Primer* (2002), and *Freedom from Fear: Finding the Courage to Love, Act, and Be* (2004). *Love and Death: My Journey through the Valley of the Shadow* (2008) discusses his battle with terminal cancer.

## Richard Grigg

*To Re-enchant the World: A Philosophy of Unitarian Universalism* (XLibris, 2004)

Richard Grigg is Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut. He has served as President of the North American Paul Tillich Society and as Chair of the Issues in the Thought of Paul Tillich Group of the American Academy of Religion.

Dr. Grigg is a member of the Unitarian Society of New Haven. He has written various articles and books on radical religious thought, including *When God Becomes Goddess* (Continuum, 1995).

### **Galen Guengerich**

*The ear of a raindrop: Twelve Sermons* (All Souls Church, 1997)

Called one of the most important contemporary UU theologians by religion historian, Gary Dorrien (along with Rebecca Parker and Jerome Stone), the Rev. Dr. Galen Guengerich is the senior minister of the Unitarian Church of All Souls in New York City.

At GA 2010, Guengerich delivered two talks in the plenary hall to standing-room only audiences. Recent sermons can be found at: [http://www.allsoulsnyc.org/site/c.atJQL8NRJqL8H/b.6333693/k.8B99/Sermons by Galen Guengerich.htm](http://www.allsoulsnyc.org/site/c.atJQL8NRJqL8H/b.6333693/k.8B99/Sermons_by_Galen_Guengerich.htm)). His sermon at All Souls on Sept. 16, 2001—the Sunday after 9/11—was selected for inclusion in *Representative American Speeches 2001-2002*. He has served as Visiting Scholar at Union Theological Seminary. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, serves on the Board of Directors of The Interfaith Alliance Foundation (as Chair), and on the Board of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee.

### **William R. Jones**

*Is God a Black Racist?* (Beacon Press, 1997)

Dr. William R. Jones served as Associate Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Yale Divinity School from 1969 to 1977. A UU minister and theologian, he is an African American who is all too aware of the presence of evil in the world. His contribution to theology has been to work on a black theology of liberation that was not dependent on God.

a Unitarian-Universalist clergyman as well as an associate professor of philosophy of religion at Yale University divinity school – describes the possibility of divine racism as a “threshold issue” for black theology. “My concern,” he writes, “is not to establish the truth of the charge of divine racism. Rather, my intent is to demonstrate that the normative frameworks of the black theologians are questionable, because they raise the issue of divine racism and, once [it is] raised, cannot effectively refute the charge with their present theological resources.”

William R. Jones believes that if black theology is to reflect the authentic experience of the black community and speak to its real needs, it must re-examine its commitment to some of the basic doctrines of biblical faith. The problem of theodicy – the question of God's justice in the presence of human suffering – is the pad from which Jones launches his assault and from which he believes all effective attacks will have to originate. For him, the frailty of classical theodicies in view of massive oppression is symptomatic of fatal flaws in the corpus of Christian theology.

### **Stephanie Mitchem**

*African American Women Tapping Power and Spiritual Wellness* (Pilgrim Press, 2004)

Dr. Stephanie Mitchem is Chair of Religious Studies at the University of South Carolina since 2009 while continuing as Director of the [African American Studies Program](#).

Mitchem has a commitment to liberatory educational practice. She teaches contemporary theology and women's studies, emphasizing the experiences and perspectives of black women. She works actively with the [Women's and Gender Studies Program](#) at USC.

Mitchem is contributing editor of [Crosscurrents](#), a journal and global network that brings people together across lines of difference. In addition, she is co-editor of the [Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion](#), the publication of feminist scholarship in religion and a forum for discussion and dialogue among women and men of differing feminist perspectives.

She is also the author of *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Orbis Books, 2002), and numerous essays. Her most recent publications include: *Faith, Health, and Healing Among African Americans*, co-edited with Emilie M. Townes (Praeger 2008), and *African American Folk Healing* (New York University Press) and *Name It and Claim It? Prosperity Preaching and the Black Church* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press) in 2007.

### **William Murry**

*Reason and Reverence: Religious Humanism for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Skinner House Books, 2006)

Rev. Dr. Murry served as president and academic dean of Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago from 1997 to 2003, was minister of River Road Unitarian Church in Bethesda, Maryland from 1981 to 1997 and has been a college professor and a college chaplain. He holds a doctorate in theology and culture from Drew University and a master of divinity degree from Yale University.

Answering the critics who find humanism lacking the power to inspire, Murry brings a new vision of religious humanism—one that evokes compassion, spirituality and a language of reverence while grounded in reason, community, social responsibility, science and ethics. Along with an accessible account of humanism's historical development, theological

challenges and future directions, on these pages readers will discover a more open and inclusive humanism, one that speaks to the heart as well as the mind.

Murry is also the author of *A Faith for All Seasons: Liberal Religion and the Crises of Life* (River Road Press).

### **Rebecca Parker**

With Rita Nakashima Brock, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us* (Beacon Press, 2001)

Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker is President of Starr King School for the Ministry, Graduate Theological Union as well as an ordained Methodist minister in dual fellowship with the Unitarian Universalist Association. Before assuming leadership of Starr King School in 1990, she spent 10 years as a parish minister in the Pacific Northwest and taught at the Northwest Theological Union in Seattle.

As Starr King's Professor of Theology, Parker teaches the foundational course in thea/ology in culture and context, and convenes advanced seminars in topics such as violence and redemption, process theology, liberal theologies, and religion and education.

Her doctoral studies focused on Alfred North Whitehead's theory of consciousness as a basis for a spirituality that integrates aesthetics and social engagement. Her theological work, sermons and poetry have been published in academic journals, essay collections and anthologies, and frequently appear in the *UU World*.

She is co-author, with John Buehrens, of *A House for Hope: The Promise of Progressive Religion for the Twenty-First Century* (Beacon Press) about which Publisher's Weekly said "This accessible, engaging book may inspire religious progressives to claim their proud history and vital role in contemporary theological conversation." In 2008, she and co-author Rita Nakashima Brock published *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of this World for Crucifixion and Empire* (Beacon Press).

### **Anthony Pinn**

*African American Humanist Principles: Living and Thinking Like the Children of Nimrod* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)

Dr. Anthony Pinn is Agnes Cullen Arnold Professor of Humanities and Professor of Religious Studies, and Director of Graduate Studies at Rice University. He is the Executive Director of the [Society for the Study of Black Religion](#). Areas of teaching include African American Religion; Black Religious Thought; Black Theology; Womanist Theology; Black Religious Aesthetics; African American Humanism.

Because little attention has been given to "how" one should study black religion and "what" is actually being studied, his recent work seeks to address this shortcoming. Through an interdisciplinary and comparative analysis, his recent research projects have attempted to explore the "quest for complex subjectivity" as the fundamental nature of black religion.

His most substantive presentation of this research interest is *Terror and Triumph: The Nature of Black Religion* (Fortress Press, 2003). Pinn is also the author/editor of fifteen other books, including *Varieties of African American Religious Experience; The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era; Why, Lord?: Suffering and Evil in Black Theology*. He is currently working on a book dealing with the aesthetics of black religious experience and a co-edited volume on theoretical and methodological considerations related to the study of religion in popular culture, *The African American Religious Experience in America*, Greenwood Press, (Winter 2005).

### **Paul Razor**

*Faith Without Certainty: Liberal Theology in the Twenty-first Century* (Skinner House Books, 2005)

The Rev. Dr. Paul Razor is the Joan P. and Macon F. Brock Jr., Director of the Center for the Study of Religious Freedom, and Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at Virginia Wesleyan College. He is an ordained UU minister and also holds degrees in music and law from the University of Michigan.

Razor's professional career has included six years of law practice in New Mexico and three years of church ministry in Lexington, MA. His academic career includes 14 years as a full-time law professor at three different law schools, as well as 9 years teaching theology and religious studies at a range of institutions, including Andover Newton Theological School, Harvard Divinity School, and Pendle Hill Quaker Study Center. He has published widely in both law and theology.

Paul has also been active in various forms of community service. He went to El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua several times during the war years of the 1980's, doing both educational and human rights work.

### **Starhawk**

*The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*, 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (Harper San Francisco, 1999)

Starhawk is a theorist of Paganism and known for her work on ecofeminism. A writer and an activist, she is a columnist for Beliefnet.com and On Faith, the *Newsweek/Washington Post* online forum on religion. Her book, *The Spiral Dance* (1979), was one of the main inspirations for the Neopagan movement. She also works with Reclaiming, a tradition of Witchcraft that she co-founded in the late 1970s.

Starhawk was influential in the UUA's decision to include earth-centered traditions in the UU sources of faith. She has led numerous workshops for CUUPS in which she was an active member. She is currently working with United for Peace and Justice, the RANT trainers' collective, Earth Activist Training, and other groups. Starhawk has contributed to the films *Signs Out of Time: The Story of Archaeologist Marija Gimbutas*, *Goddess Remembered*, *The Burning Times*, and *Full Circle*. On Youtube, Starhawk speaks about UU spirituality and activism.

## Jerome Stone

*The Minimalist Vision of Transcendence: A Naturalist Philosophy of Religion* (SUNY Press, 1992)

Dr. Jerome Stone, Professor Emeritus, William Rainey Harper College, is currently Adjunct Faculty of Meadville Lombard Theological School. While a graduate student, he served as minister of Congregational and United Church of Christ congregations. He is currently in Preliminary Fellowship with the UUA.

Stone is best known for helping to develop the religious movement of Religious Naturalism. This once-forgotten option in religious thinking is making a revival. It seeks to explore and encourage religious ways of responding to the world or at least ways that are analogous to what is traditionally called religious. The difference between religious naturalism, as he defines it, and the classical humanism of the Humanist Controversy in the 1920's or the Humanist Manifesto of 1933, is a richer sense of human response to the world. Words like "mystery" and "openness" are more likely to be used by religious naturalists. In the debates between humanists and theists (classical or revisionary) religious naturalism has once again become a viable option.

## Thandeka

*Learning to Be White: Money, Race and God in America* (Continuum, 2000)

Rev. Dr. Thandeka has taught at Meadville Lombard Theological School, San Francisco State University, Harvard Divinity School, Brandeis University, and others. She is also a UU minister. Her current research focuses on the nature, structure, and meaning of human affection and empathy in religious communities. Her approach is interdisciplinary, drawing on historical theology, contemporary self-psychology, race and class theories, gender and cultural studies.

Thandeka's *What Moves Us: Unitarian Universalist Theology* curriculum recently became available online through the UUA's Lifespan Faith Development staff group's Tapestry of Faith program. It provides a framework to engage in theological reflection as a process of meaning-making. It explores the life experiences and theological writings of historic and contemporary UU theologians. Using primary source documents, the workshops engage the thought of William Ellery Channing, Hosea Ballou, Margaret Fuller, George

deBonneville, Charles Chauncy, James Luther Adams, Sophia Lyon Fahs, Forrest Church, William F. Schulz, and Thandeka.

### **Sharon Welch**

*A Feminist Ethic of Risk, rev. ed* (Fortress Press, 2000)

Dr. Sharon Welch is Provost and Professor of Religion and Society at Meadville Lombard Theological School. She is also a Senior Fellow of the Institute for Humanist Studies, a member of the International Steering Committee of Global Action to Prevent War and a member of the Unitarian Universalist Peace Ministry Network.

Welch has held positions as Professor and Chair of Religious Studies, Professor of Women's and Gender Studies and Adjunct Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri. She was assistant and then associate professor of Theology and Religion and Society at Harvard Divinity School.

Welch is the author of: *Real Peace, Real Security: The challenges of global citizenship*, *After Empire: The Art and Ethos of Enduring Peace*, *Sweet Dreams in America: Making Ethics and Spirituality Work*, and *Communities of Resistance and Solidarity*. She is also a regular contributor to Tikkun magazine, and is the author of many articles.