

### Introduction

We assume you are reading this book either because you are intrigued by the main title, or because you are concerned by the subtitle, “The Systematic Attack on UU Liberalism. What You Need to Know. What You Need to Do.” Either way, we, the authors, are hoping you will read this book so we may share with you our understanding of disturbing trends within Unitarian Universalism that may substantively alter UUism. To set a baseline, Unitarian Universalism is the inheritor of values from our heritage denominations. We value self-expression, reason, logic, science, and critical thinking from the first U in our combined denomination. We value compassion and love from the second U. Mostly we have the freedom to pursue our own path, to search or not search. It is not that UUs are rudderless, characterized as some pejoratively suggest by “believing in anything we want.” Our Seven Principles are an expression of our communal aspirations. We are not required to believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every person. We just do. Such is the case with our other principles.

Our principles' strength is that they did not just appear when Unitarians and Universalists agreed to merge in 1961. Liberal values such as individual dignity, justice, equity, religious tolerance, democracy, and personal liberty emerged in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries

in a period called the Age of Enlightenment. That period ushered in the modern era, in which we have left behind the dominion of clerics and monarchs, the sway of religion over science, and the subjugation of individual liberty. We have come to accept the norms of the modern age as enlightened. Unfortunately, change to those norms is occurring in UUism.

The changes to UUism have not been hidden but have been invisible to most UUs. That invisibility is due to our natural focus on our congregations. For most UUs, decisions at the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) level in Boston are distant noise easily tuned out. In many ways, our inattention has contributed to the concerns we wish to raise, the acceptance by UU leadership of ideological theories antithetical to UU liberalism and the atrophy of democracy in denomination governance.

Nearly a decade ago changes to the Association's bylaws weakened the role of democracy in the denomination. Those changes consolidated our nineteen districts into five regions and eliminated the representation of local UUs on the board in favor of at-large members. Can you name, for instance, one currently serving UUA Board of Trustees member? Another significant change was the creation of a central Nominating Committee, as opposed to the decentralized district method, to identify candidates for the UUA Board of Trustees. This centralized Nominating Committee has among its objectives to bring diversity with regard to race, gender, and sexual orientation or identity

to the composition of the board. The Nominating Committee may have achieved its objective of diversity, but, in our opinion, has failed to achieve diversity of thought and now is essentially a gatekeeper to preserve the ideological mindset of the board. Diversity of thought drives rigorous debate ensuring that board decisions are carefully considered. Such debate should inform any board decision since the UUA Board has wide-ranging explicit and implicit powers. Unchecked by competing points of view or constituent voices, the board is unfettered in its decision-making. Consider the 2017 declaration by the UUA Board of Trustees that UUism is based on white supremacy and is racist and oppressive. That decision, rendered in 90 minutes by only a handful of people, clearly was not subjected to critical debate or considerations regarding the ramifications such a decision would have on UUism. That decision charging UUism with harboring white supremacy has set into motion activities that could very well result in inappropriate changes to our principles and upend our congregational autonomy.

We tend not to recognize the real implications of UU leadership decisions because they are typically articulated in the cloak of a social justice endeavor, such as a drive for diversity. You may have heard the outlines of this social justice endeavor expressed in terms such as beloved community and accountable relationships. Few, if any UUs, would disagree with the goal of diversity. Poorly understood, however, is the darker reality that beneath this call for diversity are external

## Introduction

---

ideologies antithetical to UU liberal values that have been woven into the fabric of UU leadership thinking. We will provide more information about these ideologies in this book. For now, it is important only to understand that these ideologies have a very well-defined prescription on how to cleanse the denomination of its alleged white supremacy. The cleansing involves an uprooting of our UU liberal values and a concerted effort to revise our principles.

It is not alarmist to believe, as we do at the Fifth Principle Project, that UUism is under attack. The authors of this book are involved UUs. We have done extensive research, have consulted with others, and have subjected our conclusions to critical debate. We now wish to share our findings. After reading this book we ask that you come to your own conclusion about the threat to UUism. In the end, it may be that a majority of Unitarian Universalists concur that UUism is based on white supremacy and choose to accept limited democracy. However, there is no way to know what degree of consensus there is unless the stresses now being placed on UUism are widely known and debated. Having a denomination-wide conversation is difficult since the UUA Board controls all channels for mass communication, the Association's budget, and sets the agenda for General Assembly. We have no way of communicating with UUs across the nation. Therefore, we wrote this book as a vehicle for UUs to begin, at a minimum, one-on-one conversations. If you are concerned after reading this book, then we urge you to make your concerns known to your fellow congregants and

## Introduction

---

your congregation's leadership. Express your congregation's concern to our UU leadership. Become a delegate at General Assembly and knowledgeably vote on changes proposed to our principles and sources. We want any decisions made to be based on our Fifth Principle, the democratic principle that fosters diversity, of race and gender for sure, but also of thought and individual expression.

When our UU values are threatened, every UU should be engaged.

Frank Casper  
Jay Kiskel  
Founders of the Fifth Principle Project  
March 2021