Children of the Same God:
Unitarianism in Kinship with Judaism and Islam
Minns Lectures, 2009
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Lecture Five:
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A handful of years ago, I set out on what I was sure was a doomed mission. I was, however, hopelessly tantalized. Was there a connection between the development of Unitarianism in 16th Century Transylvania, and the liberal Islam of the contemporaneous Ottoman Empire? To paraphrase Rumi (without desperately needed contextualization): why not emulate Noah, and take on a project huge and foolish. I was especially curious about possible liberal Muslim influence on what has been described as Unitarianism's most "most striking and distinguished" achievement from that time and place: the Edict of Torda,[i] issued in 1568, by the newly-minted Unitarian King John Sigismund,[ii] which historian Earl Morse Wilbur praised as the most "perfect" principle of toleration. Rather than compelling his people to adopt his faith as was the custom of kings, Sigismund them to maintain their own traditions, and he went further in allowing congregations to choose their own preachers, and the right of preachers to teach their own understandings.

From our point of view today, the Edict of Torda was not exactly perfect, extending toleration to only four state approved churches, and not to other Christian and non-Christian minorities. It was nonetheless an impressive achievement, and that such a statement should have been issued by Translyvanian Unitarians while the country was under the ultimate political rule of the religiously tolerant Ottoman Muslims, seemed too strong and obvious a connection to be mere coincidence. Yet there was wide spread despair over the possibility of ever finding direct evidence of mutual relation and influence, so I set on my quest with little hope of success.[iii]

I was surprised by what I found. It was not as hard as I thought it would be to uncover the connections between Ottoman Islam and Unitarian development. Nor were the obstacles to doing so what was commonly cited as the difficulties of this work: the deplorable lack of 16th century Transylvanian governmental documents, the resistance of the contemporary Transylvanian church, and the shortage of Unitarian historians able to access documents written in both Hungarian and Turkish.[iv] All these things created their own difficulties, but I came to realize that we had overlooked evidences of mutual influence not because of failures of information, but rather failures of imagination. Historical scholarship, especially church historical scholarship, has traditionally patrolled very sharp borders between East and West, here quite pointedly, and between Islam and Christianity. We have acted as if such boundary lines could only be crossed once at a time, by a few spectacular individuals or ideas. Yet borders are often more impenetrable in theory and on maps than they are in the lives of actual people.

In my work I was able to demonstrate a very direct connection between Ottoman practice and Unitarian development. Simply put, the Edict of Torda clearly stands in direct relationship to both previous edicts and practices of toleration originating with officials of the Ottoman Empire. I have presented an expanded version of this research as lecture two of this series.

As I proceeded with this work I found that I became less interested in these direct trails of influence, and more interested in what I was coming to see as testimonies to the power of certain ways of living.   The basis for the Edict of Torda was established not only in the minds of the powerful men who articulated it, not through European humanist influence, not even primarily through the direct political and legal influence of the Ottoman Empire. The grounds for religious toleration were prepared for in the everyday lives of actual persons, who were already living in deeply multi-cultural and multi-religious ways. These people experienced the negotiations of intermarriage and friendship before any legal proclamation of toleration; and they felt a spiritual attraction to Islam and an appreciation of the safety it accorded progressive Protestants long before the publication of any theological treatise.

And so it was that I became curious to know if there were other times and places that European Unitarians lived in a multi-cultural and multi-religious ways, and I wanted to know to what degree early Unitarian theology supported these experiences.

Here too, I thought of our contemporary movement, and its particular struggles around issues of identity. A creeping suspicion formed. Is it possible that in some senses, we have actually handled some diversities better in our European past than we do today? For at different, numerable points in our history--one poignant example being right now—North American Unitarian Universalism has experienced extraordinary anxiety in relationship to its self-identity. From our very inception, we have expressed concerns about the coherence of our movement. Predictably these issues tend to arise most powerfully in times of changing demographics within our congregations. We tend to think of the generational changes within early American Unitarian as being primarily theological, but theology is never incidentally connected to culture.   It is hard not to be sad and puzzled at how it is that a deliberately liberally religious tradition self-consciously advocating the continuity of revelation should be so often discombobulated by change. Why and how have we done such a good job of standing in our own way?

I am very grateful to the Minns Lecture Committee and to the Starr King for the Ministry for enabling me to pursue and present the intersections of these hopes and conumdrums. It is my conclusion that Unitarian identity in Europe did emerge in an explicitly multicultural way: specifically, as a defense of the inherent kinship between Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.   This position both enabled and was enabled by creative real world encounters with Jewish and Muslim communities. And while the European Unitarian tradition was formed through creative engagement with actual Islamic and Jewish communities, the North American history in this regard has not been as rich. Specifically, I suggest that the precise social location of early North American Unitarianism dampened for generations what might have otherwise been a natural multi-religious interest, but that this social location is now shifting in encouraging ways.

I do believe that we are living in a time of promise. More people than ever are identifying as Jewish and Muslim Unitarian Universalists, and more people seem

to be approaching their religious identity in newly flexible ways. An increasing number of Jewish Unitarian identified persons are actively practicing both sides of a hyphenated faith. This is also true of an increasing number of Muslim Unitarian Universalists, a number of whom, I have been very touched to learn, have found the close relationship I have described between 16th century Transylvanian Unitarians and Muslims helpful to them as they try to find a way in our congregations.   I have also been honored to be involved in the Starr King School for the Ministry as it proceeds with a redefinition of its educational mission as explicitly multi-religious. I do see in multi-religious education a distinctively appropriate mission for a Unitarian Universalist seminary and indeed, our movement as a whole. If indeed multi-religious expression is a core value for us that also call us to something outside of our lonely selves, perhaps we might find some remedy there for our most troubling neuroses.

These changes are taking place as many inside and outside of the academy are showing new interest in those times and places when and where Jews, Muslims, and Christian have lived peaceable companionship with each other. The late medieval (years 750-1492) Muslim-ruled state of al-Andalus (Arabic for Andalusia, the Iberian peninsula of present day Spain is frequently invoked as one such time and place. In Al-Andalus, scholars from all traditions were frequently fluent in all of the religious languages--Latin, Arabic and Hebrew, and it was common for people to read each other's holy books with respect and interest. Gradually, some of the aesthetics of worship within each of the traditions took on multi-cultural aspects.   Learned and courteous debates were held. Literature, science and the arts blossomed in this place that we so wrongly describe as medieval, which after all means "middle," as in "between" meaningful historical developments.

It is a clear mistake to over-romanticize Andalusia, which did have its own outbreaks of hatred and violence. It is also certainly possible to reify Andalusia to the point of meaninglessness; while writing this very paper, I was distressed to see that Anadulsia is now available as a mixed Roman/Arabic font in Microsoft Office. But I do believe that even if we have over-idealized Andalusia, that idealization is itself helpful, and a useful beacon for our own hopes.[v] Moreover, I like to think that the deliberate Unitarian engagement with Judaism and Islam in Europe is a

lived example of our own Andalusia—a remembrance-slash-hope of what riches are possible when we embrace multi-religious engagement. Ibn Arabi, the theologian most influential on the religious expression of the Ottoman Empire, described one of the realms of spiritual ascension as the imaginal. The imaginal is a place where things are absolutely real and completely true, even though they are perceived not through the senses but through the imagination. I like to think of Unitarian multi-religious engagement and enmeshment as our Imaginal. It has seen variously imperfect and all too brief incarnations in our movement, but it nonetheless lies very close to the heart of our identity, and it waits, I believe, for us to overtly champion multi-religious engagement once again.

But first, some history.

The connections between Unitarianism and multi-religious identity lies deep within the tensions that develop between Judaism and Christianity in the Fourth Century, when Judaism and Christianity, after four centuries of troubled but definite family relationship, began proceedings of divorce. The Council of Nicea in the year 325 represented the first serious separation. The divorce became official at the Council of Constantinople in 381, which made a new doctrine of the Trinity creedal. The early church had supported multiple understanding regarding the nature of Jesus; as a contemporary historian famously observed, to walk the streets of the early fourth century would involve hearing everyone—from the sailor to the monk to the shop keeper—expressing a different understanding as to the human and or divine nature of Jesus. After Nicea, only the belief that Jesus and God shared in the same divine substance was officially sanctioned.

At the Council of Constantinople, for the first time in the history of Christendom, God, Jesus and now the Holy Spirit were defined as sharing equally and fully in the same divinity. Christianity was changed forever, and alienated in a new degree from its closest relatives in the past and present (Judaism and paganism) and in the future (Islam). As Richard Rubenstein has written in *When Jesus Became God: The Struggle to Define Christianity in the Last Days of Rome*, "The real thrust of (this newly defined)… doctrine (of the Trinity) was to differentiate the Christian "Godhead" which now incorporated Jesus and the Holy Spirit from the monolithic God worshipped by the Jews, radical Arians, and later on, by Muslims, Unitarians,

Bahais and others….As a result, Christians who accepted this triune God…no longer shared God [Jehovah (sic)] with their Jewish forebears or the Supreme Being with their pagan neighbors, nor could Jews or pagans claim to believe in the same God as that worshipped by the Christians (209)." [vi]

Many refused and resented this enforced separation, namely Jews; later on, Muslims; and always, a small minority of liberal Christians that it will be our special interest to follow. Jews writing at the time of both the Councils of Nicea and Constantinople made explicit connections between the newly creedal Trinitarianism and newly emerging anti-Semitism. And while Islam dates to three centuries after the Christian Jewish divorce, it too was born into the same family argument.

Like the Jews before them, Muslims were concerned about the power of a rigidly held doctrine of the Trinity to damage what they saw as the otherwise natural kinship between Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Early Muslim understandings of this kinship could hardly have been stronger: insistence on the unity and sameness of a God of many traditions lay at the very heart of the Prophet Muhammad's teaching. At the time, many Arabs practicing their indigenous religious already believed that "the God" or "al-Lah" that they worshipped was the same God as that of the Jews and Christians, but Muhammad's experience transformed this hunch into revelation.   So strong was their conviction in the unity of God that many early Muslims underestimated the number of Christians who felt the doctrine of the Trinity was essential to their faith; the notion that that God had a son, was a belief, that from many Muslim points of view, was clearly pagan and incompatible with any monotheism.[vii]

So how characteristic is it of Christianity to accept or deny it family relationship with Islam and Judaism? Liberal religious people who welcome such ties might recall an odd ally in President George W. Bush, who earned the ridicule of his usual evangelical supporters when, on a state visit to England, he remarked that he believes that Muslims and Christians are the children of the same god. Learned commentators were called in,who, to my bemused amazement, said in the same breath and with no explanation of the contradiction, that Bush's belief was both representative of mainstream American Christianity and incompatible with the

doctrine of the Trinity.[viii] In all fairness, this is not correct, although I note it simply out of my deep appreciation all for efforts to baptize any large mass of people as unwitting Unitarians.

In truth there are multitudes of ways to argue for interfaith relationship from within a Trinitarian theology. However, it has been my intention in these lectures to demonstrate that European Unitarianism was formed in large part through the particular desire to honor Christianity's close kinship with Judaism and Islam, and that in our history, this multi-religious desire tolerance is inextricably bound up with our anti-Trinitarianism. On the positive side, convinced that Christians, Muslims, and Jews were a part of the same religious family, Unitarians emerged as those Christians who purposefully resisted theologies of God that would not travel well across different traditions. On the negative side, various waves of prosecution and intolerance bound the fate of Unitarians quite closely with that of Jews and Muslims.

The first connections between multi-religious tolerance and anti-Trinitarianism were forged at the Council of Nicea in 325, where the historical forces at work were powerful enough to forever wed that Council's rejection of Judaism with that council's affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity.   When later anti-Trinitarian individuals take up the cause of multi-religious kinship (the very most obvious example being Michael Servetus) it was now necessarily coupled with the intention of rejecting a doctrine that alienates Muslims and Jews. And by the time Unitarian congregations gather in community around these beliefs in the 16th century, the more radical theologians are expressing specific theologies of family relations between Unitarian Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

I am mindful that it is not typical to understand Unitarianism as naturally multi-religious. In our scholarship on this matter, it has been customary to follow the lead of the great Earl Morse Wilbur, who so generous gifted our contemporary North American movement with its first serious appreciation of European Unitarian roots and branches. Wilbur assumed that religious tolerance was the last sequential development in the march of Unitarian identity towards what he termed "complete spiritual freedom." In this scenario, tolerance was the result of many long years of Unitarian development, not its impetus. For this reason and others,

Wilbur assumed that the 4th century church councils only influenced or prefigured
later Unitarianism in minor ways, and in his histories he quickly dismisses them,
writing, "such counsels were not calculated to give us great reverence for their
Christian character nor much respect for their opinions."[ix]

The Council of Nicea, which I describe in greater detail in Lecture One of this
series, certainly does not inspire much confidence in church politics, but it is
central to our history. Called by Emperor Constantine himself and held at one of
his own palaces, the council did involve a lot of unsavory mixings of church and
imperial power as invited bishops basked in their new, luxurious legitimacy. The
council was the first ever to require Christians to subscribe to a particular creed, in
this case, a creed regarding the nature of Jesus on which even those attending had
only the most marginal of agreements. One point of view at the Council was
represented by the beloved Bishop Arius, who argued that Jesus was of a different
substance than God; the other, represented by Athansius, the Bishop of
Alexandra's right hand man, argued that the substance of God and Jesus were the
same. In the middle were Eusebius and his followers, arguing that Jesus and God
were similar.   With the Emperor throwing his weight to the Athanasius' side, the
required creed became that position. It would be decades before those with the
non-orthodox position were completely eliminated from the church, but these
persons, now called Arians and later known as anti-Trinitarians, were now in a
dangerous and oppressed minority.

Wilbur and subsequent historians have assumed that the importance of the Arians
to later Unitarianism lay simply in the degree to which they modeled resistance to
an imposed creed—the nature of the creed itself not mattering so very much. But
it is my argument that the Anti-Trinitarian debate has always been inextraxably
engaged with issues of multi-religious tolerance, and that we should have forgotten
so suggests much about some troubling complications that come with American
Unitarian racial and class alliances, which I will discuss later.

For sadly, the Council of Nicea was as intentional in its exclusion of Jews from a
shared religious family as it was in its creedalization of an exaggerated
Trinitarianism—and these two things were not accidently connected.   Arians were
not just those whose understanding of the nature of Jesus fell into a vulnerable

minority, they were those whose fates through the actions of the Councils became tied to that of the Jews. The business at Nicea in addition to the conversation about the nature of Jesus also included an uncoupling of the date for the celebration of Easter from the Passover calendar—and these two actions were connected in the very least by the imperial intention.   As Constantine himself explained in a letter he sent to clergy unable to attend him at Nicea: "We ought not, therefore, to have anything in common with the Jews…and…we desire, dearest breather, to separate ourselves from the detestable company of Jews."[x]

The anti-Semitic theology of the council had been carefully laid out by Athanasius, who contrasted the "flesh" of the Jews to the 'spirit" of the new creedal Christianity.[xi] Jews were "flesh" in so far as he saw their embodied particularity—their very difference, here as a racial identity—as a threat to the "Spirit" of a church newly homogenized and hoping to advance beyond ethnic boundaries. Not only did this theology come to inform the anti-Semitism of Nicea and later councils, but it also made it possible to employ anti-Semitic bias against those who resisted the church's new direction. It does not take long at all before Arians are also denounced as "flesh" in the way of "spirit." The Arians thus associated with harmful particular difference, it became possible plot Arians onto existing anti-Semitic stereotypes. Many widely celebrated hymns of the time deployed this tactic, employing the same tropes in anti-semitic and anti-Arian ways.   A diverse Christendom was replaced by a monolithic Christianity and it Others, the Others now comprising both Arians and Jews, fates and histories now aligned.[xii]

The eventual eradication of Arianism is something I treated at length in my first lecture. For our purposes here, it is enough to know that because of this history, when anti-Trinitarianism becomes articulated once again in early sixteenth century Europe, most famously by Michael Servetus, the discussion is necessarily part and parcel of the negotiation of Jewish-Christian relations.

And so we turn now to this part of the story, where anti-Trinitarianism breaks out in the Christian world after a long and persecution-induced slumber, once again intimately connected to Judaism.

By August of 1492, the European anti-Semitism that had been alarmingly growing for some three centuries culminated in the expulsion the large Jewish community from Spain, the very place that was previously characterized by tolerant multiculturalism. Earlier that year, the last Islamic ruler of Al-Andalus, Muhammad XI, was forced to hand over the Iberian pennisula to Queen Isabella and Ferdinand of Spain in a surreal ceremony for which the Catholic nobility donned Islamic costume.[xiii] It was only a few months later that Isabella and Ferdinand issued the order to expel the Jews. Approximately one half of a million Spanish Jews left for the safety of the Islamic-ruled Middle East. An equal number declared their conversion to Christianity in order to in their native land. In 1502 Muslims were given the same choice of exile or forced conversion.

Those who remained became the so called "New Christians," and they included all kinds of people—some of whom came to be called by the derogatory term "marranos". Marranos secretly practiced Judaism while outwardly adopting Christian observance, and they became the first target of the Inquisition. Other New Christians tried negotiate for themselves an authentic religious practice by accepting Christianity but while not engaging in the more divisive and doctrinal side of the faith. This last category included New Christians, "conversos" who helped to define a rich Catholic humanism, with its inspiration focus on everyday spirituality, self examination, and love. Other New Christians wrestled more overtly with the doctrines that were the most offensive from a Jewish point of view, the chief of which proved to be, not surprisingly, the doctrine of the Trinity.

The most famous anti-Trinitarian of the day was Michael Servetus, who served as the chief theological inspiration for the founders of Unitarianism. Servetus was not technically a New Christian, but, he was intimately familiar with the Jewish commentators from both the time of the early church and of his own time, and their arguments against the Trinity. He was also well read in the radical critiques on the Trinity coming from the exiled Jews living under the protection of the Ottoman Empire. In other words, if Servetus was not literally a New Christian, he was well thoroughly enculturated as one.[xiv]

A large part of Servetus' motivation in taking on the Trinity was his concern that the doctrine unnecessarily separates Christianity from Judaism and Islam[xv]

While jokes of the time suggest that substantial numbers of Spainards shared Servetus' point of view, the expanding focus of the Inquisition soon forced vocal dissenters such as himself from the country. Servetus' post-exile career comprises the most fabulous story among the many fabulous stories that emerge as so many brilliant and independent thinkers were forced to leapfrog across Europe in search of toleration. Servetus worked under an assumed name as an editor, then, as a physician in France (with the local archbishop his patient and major supporter!). He could not, however, stop himself from theologizing, publishing his work, and even sending it on to John Calvin. So it was that Servetus was famously martyred by John Calvin in Geneva, Switzerland in 1553.

The next generation of anti-Trinitarians, most notably Niccolo Paruta, Jacob Paleologus, Szymon Budny, and Georgi Biandrata, would seal the connection between Servetus' theology and for the first time, the purposeful establishment of Unitarian churches. For these men had formed the deliberate intention of gathering religious communities around anti-Trinitarian ideas, specifically in Poland, Translyvania, and Lithuania.[xvi]

The most comprehensive articulation of a Unitarian theology of the natural religious kinship between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam from this time comes from Jacob Paleologus (c. 1520-85). Paleologus was a Dominican monk born in Greece. He took refuge in Prague in 1559 when a theological paper he wrote on revelation attracted the interest of the Inquisition. There he lived as a scholar of the Middle East and of the Qu'ran. It was through his study of the Qu'ran that he began identifying as a Unitarian, entering into a correspondence with Francis David, the leader of what would become the Transylvanian Unitarian church. Much later, he would accept David's invitation to serve as rector of the Unitarian school in Kolosovar.

One of Paleologus' more extraordinary works is his *Dispuatatio Scholastica*, written in 1570. At the heart of the work is an imaginary church council, which includes not only representatives of the different Christian confessions, but also Jews and Muslims. In a fantasy that must have given Paleologus great satisfaction, Pope Pius (who was Grand Inquistor during Paleogus' own persecution) is

summoned from the very deepest level of hell, and made to admit that he exercised his authority ruthlessly and unfairly, and that he never really understood much about the Bible.

This imaginary council includes a debate between Trintiarians and Anti-Trinitarians. Heavenly elders, including Jesus himself, have asked God to intervene to prevent the church's attempts to establish Jesus' divinity. Defending the anti-Trinitarian point of view are Nicolo Paruta (famed Italian anti-Trinitarian) and Johann Sommer (son in law of Unitarian church founder Francis David). Representing the Trinitarian argument are Theodore Beza (John Calvin's successor) and other popes summoned from various hell for the purpose: Gregory VII and Boniface VIII. Somewhat unfairly, the debate is presided over by the Transylvanian Unitarian King John Sigismund. Not surprisingly, the anti-Trinitarians win the argument.

The significance of this piece for scholars of the 16th century has been how it has prompted a reconsideration of the motivations behind early anti-Trinitarianism. [xvii] Where once scholars found anti-creedalism to be the motor of anti-Trinitarianism, increasingly tolerance can be read as a primary motivation. In the same set of papers as the *Disputatio*, included is also *De Tribus Gentibus*, which suggested a radical basis for understanding Jews, Muslims, and Christians as members of the same, actually Jewish family tree. And interestingly, Paleogus' theology of such kinship was not merely theoretical, but based on actual experience.

In 1573 Paleogoeus had taken a journey to Constantinople, where he had been highly impressed by the lived examples of religious toleration that he saw within the Ottoman Empire. His own account of his travels is unfortunately both inaccurate and grandiose; he was very concerned to list all of the impressive contacts he claimed to have made with officials of the Ottoman Empire (many of whom were dead at the time of his trip). And yet his story opens up an exciting chapter in early Unitarian history, where sometimes the theologies of multi-religious toleration yield to actual creative cultural exchanges with contemporary Jewish and Islamic communities, and where sometimes, the multi-religious multi-cultural life experiences within diverse communities gives rise to accepting theologies.

The most dramatic examples is I believe, the case of interrelationship between Ottoman Islam and Translyvanian Unitarianism , although in lecture three of this series, I focused on the intense and fascinating relationship of our early Unitarian churches in Poland with their Jewish neighbors.

As early as 1569 Jewish leaders were active and welcome participants in the frequent meeting of the Unitarians. There were still differences of theological opinion about the nature of Jesus within the Minor Reform (unitarian) Church, but all parties had their own reasons for pursing the dialog with Judaism. Church historians classify some of these Unitarians as "Judaizers" or "semi-Judaizers." These terms are problematic, as they have a history of being employed in anti-Semitic ways. But it does capture how it was that many radical Reformation figures were deliberately moving towards Judaism.   Protestants attempting to return to the earliest days of a Christianity uncontaminated by imperial concerns, church hierarchy, and late addition creeds, were naturally interested in the Jewish practices and belief that would have been Jesus' own. For this reason, sometimes they were moved to adopt aspects of Judaism into their own observances. Others in the Minor Reform Church were not as drawn to Jewish practices. Even so, they felt that as advocates of the unity of God, they did indeed exist in close kinship to Judaism, and for exactly that reason, sympathetically differentiating themselves from both Judaism and Judaizers became an important part of their developing identity.

Indeed, early European Unitarianism had enormous aspirations for their connections with Jewish communities, but alas, a variety of oppressions began to trouble this dream. For that began in the mid 16th Century as both close and well-differentiated relationships between Unitarians and Jews were complicated by the end of the century by increasing waves of both anti-Semitism and anti-Unitarian persecution. This pressure caused some Unitarians to distance themselves from Judaism for safety and survival, but interestingly, it also caused others to identifying themselves both with and as Jews. The so called Szkeley Jews of Translyvania had originated as Unitarians interested in Jewish practice, but who eventually, over time, became the only community to completely adopt Jewish practice and identity without previous historic or cultural ties to Judaism.

Historians often refer to this interesting and unique group of chosen Jews as the happy result of the creative Jewish and Unitarian interchange. That it certainly was. And yet I find the suppression of the Judaized form of Unitarianism extremely sad. With it, the understanding of Unitarianism as a specifically liberal Christianity that holds one of its highest values to be its kinship with Judaism and Islam was also obscured. But perhaps, only for a while, which brings us to the curious lack of multi-cultural interest within North American Unitarianism.

In lecture four of this series, I have detailed how it is that our potential relationships with Judaism and Islam in this country have been troubled by racialization of both Judaism and Islam. Early Northern American Unitarianism's conservativism, which, highly valuing social coherence and conflating actual social order with divine order, was likewise not particularly interested in crossing race divides.

My favorite image for this reluctance built into our identity comes from Perry Miller, that delightfully snarky historian of the New England Puritans. After writing about the failures of American theologians after Jonathan Edwards to fill the old bottle of Calvinism with a new wine worthy of the interest of the younger generation, he goes on to mention a brand new vintage:

"Unitarianism was an entirely different wine from any that had ever been pressed from the grapes of Calvinism, and in entirely new bottles, which the merchants of Boston found much to their liking. It was a pure, white dry claret that went well with dinners served by the Harvard Corporation, but it was mild and guaranteed not to send them home reeling and staggering."—Perry Miller*, "From Edwards to Emerson.*

Within American Protestantisms, to know one's relationship to staggering and reeling is key. To stagger and reel openly would group one with the old enemies of the New England Puritans, the Antinomians. Puritans famously dismissed as Antinomian those who, like Anne Hutchinson and the Quakers, felt that their inward connection with God was strong and sure enough to justify the defiance of human law when it proved to be at odds with personal conscience. Drunkenness

was a frequent trope employed by the Puritans to explain the danger of this approach, which as one minister wrote, is "like strong wine, it makes men's judgments to reel and stagger, and which are drunk therewith." [xviii]

The Puritans of course hated the potential disorder that could be wrought upon society by people (women, perhaps especially) claiming a religious truth independent of the church, the state, social convention, or reason, at least as it was defined by established authorities. Nor were these objections merely prudish and controlling, as too people often incorrectly assume about Puritans. The New England elders were nation and community builders who could see the very real downside of a trend that could so easily be fractious and could and did lead to a variety of irresponsible individualisms. And indeed, how many plagues of such individualism have troubled and trouble Unitarian/Universalism still.

This is important to our story, because Unitarianism is in many ways the inheritor of both the Puritan inspired sense of indwelling divinity and a new manifestation of Puritan caution. Puritans believed in the radical regeneration of the soul in Christ, a potential for a staggering that they kept a cork in through the application of strict adherence to doctrine. Puritans and Unitarians were both averse to staggering and reeling, but for the Unitarians, a new tempering force was in effect: specifically, a class and racial location that conflated the social good with the status quo. What was once held at bay by inflexible doctrines was now controlled by the very fineness of that white claret.

Specifically, early 19th century Unitarianism represented a marriage between families of money with families of background. In short, persons of great economic capital but with little cultural capital established mutually beneficial alignments with persons of cultural but little economic capital. This match of cultural and economic capital was not permanent agreement, but a negotiated and changeable settlement that would have been void if Unitarian staggered and reeled over too many significant class, political, or racial lines.

Moreover, our potential engagement with Judaism in this country has been complicated by particular inheritance from the Puritans in the form of a tendency to assign Jews a particular role in even liberal Christian triumphalism. Joseph

Priestly embodied his dynamic in his insistence on the importance of establishing Unitarian Churches precisely in order to facilitate the conversion of Jews to some form of Christianity. Priestly was after all, a millenialist; he felt the conversion of the Jews was the signal of the hoped for end of times.

One might think that such an attitude could not have lived much past Priestley's day. And yet….As Arthur Verslius so convincingly argues in his work on American Transcendentalists and Asian Religions, the Transcendentalists' understanding was also colored by a millenarian attitude. While not as explicitly Christian as Priestley, the Transcendentalists nonetheless also looked towards the arrival of an entirely new period of hitherto unimaginable progress and deep understanding. Moreover, they continued to maintain that this period would be recognizable by the Jewish adaptation of Transcendentalism's own liberal post-Christian position.

This same belief persists throughout late 19th century Unitarianism, as formal and informal exchanges between Unitarians and Reform Jews grew. These rabbis and ministers felt that they shared a common hope for "the imminent arrival of a 'religion of humanity' characterized by the belief in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man." [xix] But this agreement, as broad as it was, would eventually prove divisive. For while both Reform Judaism and Unitarians each looked forward to a day of religious universalism, each continued to see their own tradition as the only possible host for that universalism.

Indeed, as I detail in lecture four of this series, much potential for multi-religious engagement in North America was actually seriously impeded by the various strands of American religious universalisms that argued that all of the worlds' traditions speak a similar truth. This is of course, the famous weakness of the Transcendentalist inspired approach, which was to borrow from especially Muslim sources without overt concern for religious or cultural specificity. As Arthur Versluis has pointed out: "for many Transcendentalists, Saadi, Hafiz, and other Islamic poets represented literary or poetic interchangeability." [xx]

But for now, I would like to fast forward to the present, and to a particular hope I see expressed in our contemporary Unitarian Universalist position. I believe that

the increasing presence of Jews and Muslims in our congregations, as well as the anti-racist work that we have done and of which we have so much left to do, is both the result and the cause of hopeful fractures in our not so very helpful allegiance to a long moribund social location

It is my hope that it might now be possible to claim the multi-religious aspect of our ideals more fully.   Not because the friendship of Jews and Muslims shows us a triumph, not even because doing so might allow us to escape our neurosis in relationship to our identity, although I pray that it might; but because we will finally have realized that it is impossible to serve justice, not to mention a shared God, without some staggering and reeling.   I hope that the good news will be that we have no further to fall than into our own collective past.

ENDNOTES

[i] Earl Morse Wilbur, A *History of Unitarianism in Transylvania, England, and America*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952): 164-165.

[ii] John F. Cadzow, Andrew Ludanyi,, and Louis J. Elteto, *Transylvania—The Roots of Ethnic Conflict* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press. 1983).

[iii] Naná Kratochvil, "The Influence of Islam in Transylvania: A Speculative Reconstruction," presented to the Ohio River Study Group of Unitarian Universalist Ministers, Akron, Ohio, Oct.5, 1999.

[iv] On the lack of governmental documents, see Katalin Péter, "Tolerance and Intolerance in Sixteenth Century Hungary," Ole Peter Grelle and Bob Scribner, eds. *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) on the denial of influence, see Kratochvil, "The Influence of Islam in Transylvania."

[v] Harold Bloom, "Introduction" to Maria Rosa Menocal, *Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerence in Medieval Spain* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2002).

[vi] Richard E. Rubenstein, *When Jesus Became God: The Struggle to Define Christianity during the Last Days of Rome* (Orlando, Flordia: Harcourt, 1999): 260.

[vii] Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992): 159.

[viii] See, for example, the remarks of Jack Miles, author of *God: A Biography* in "The God of Abraham, Jesus and Muhammed," a special article for beliefnet.com at

http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/2003/12/The-God-Of-Abraham-Jesus-And-Muhammed.aspx?p=1, accessed Feb. 18, 2009.

[ix] Wilbur, Our Unitarian Heritgage: 52.

[x] *The Nicene and Post-Nicean Fathers* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark) Vol XIV p. 54.

[xi] David Brakke, "Jewish Flesh and Christian Spirit in Athanasius of Alexandria*," Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9:4 (Winter 2001): 453-481.

[xii] Christine Shepardson, "Exchanging Reed for Reed: Mapping Contemporary Heretics onto Biblical Jew in Ephrem's Hymns on Faith," Hugoye*: Journal of Syrian Studies* (electronic) 5:1 (January 2002): http://syrcom.cua.edu/Hugoye/Vol5No1/HV5N1Shepardson.html.

[xiii] Described in Maria Rosa Menocal, *Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerence in Medieval Spain* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2002): 49.

[xiv] Richard H. Popkin, "Marranos, New Christians, and The Beginnings of Modern Anti-Trinitarianism," *Jews and Conversos at the Time of the Expulsion*, Yom Tov Assis and Yosef Kaplan, eds. (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1999): 143-160.

[xv] *De Trinitatis Errobus*, 42b-43a; 56b. As cited in Roland H. Bainton, H*aunted Heretic: the Life and Death of Michael Servetus 1511-1553* (Providence: Blackstone Editions through the Beacon Press, 2005): 8.

[xvi] The conscious efforts of these men to establish Unitarianism is discussed by Massimo Firpo in *Antitrinitari nell'Europa orientale de '500: Nouvi testi di Szymon Budny, Niccolo Paruta e jacop Paleologo*, summarized by Anne Jacobson Schutte in *Rennaissance Quarterly*, 33:2 (Summer, 1980): 242-244.

[xvii] Peter Schaeffer writes, "…other early dissenters had not so much rejected a belief in the Trinity as the codification of this belief in abstract unscriptural terminology such as substance, essence, hypostasis and relation, and its ruthless imposition by persecution and terror, yet here the Trinity is rejected as the emblem of tryrany and intolerance, whether seated in Rome, Wittenberg, Geneva, or anywhere else." Peter Schaeffer reviewing *Disputatio Scholastica* by Jacob Paleologous, Edited by Juliusz Domanski and Lech Szczucki (Ultrecht: Bibliotheca Unitariorum, 1994) in *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 27:2 (Summer, 1996) pp 493-494.

[xviii] Miller, 596.

[xix] Benny Kraut, "Judaism Trumphant: Issac Mayer Wise on Unitarianism and Liberal Christianity," *American Jewish Studies Review* 7-8 (1982-3): 179-230; 180. See also Benny Kraut "The Ambivalent Relations Between American Reform Judaism and Unitarianism in the Last Third of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 23 (1986): and Benny Kraut, "A Unitarian Rabbi? The Case of

Solomon H. Sonneschein," Todd M. Endelman, Editor, *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1987): 272-308.

[xx]Verslius, 83.