

**By Their Groups You Shall Know Them**  
**by the Rev. Ann Schranz**  
**Monte Vista Unitarian Universalist Congregation**  
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This summer I returned to Wisconsin for a visit. There is a place for everything, and everything is in its place in my mother's home. There was a place for obsolete technology. Spare pots were in their place. Washed and dried TV dinner trays were nestled snugly in their place.

[Photographs were projected onto a screen during the homily.] I was most interested in the books on the bookshelf.

On this trip, for the first time, I looked over the books that had belonged to my Methodist minister grandfather, the Rev. T.D. Williams. A century ago, did he read anything by or about Unitarians or Universalists? I found treasure on my treasure hunt. I came upon Volumes I and II of *The World's Parliament of Religions*, published in 1893. [I held up the books.] The words and photographs of nearly a dozen Unitarians were included, as were summaries of the proceedings of the Unitarian congress and the Universalist congress. These congresses were scheduled to coincide with the World's Parliament of Religions. The Parliament itself was held in conjunction with the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

As I eagerly searched for Unitarians and Universalists, grateful for but skipping over other voices, I felt the pull of an adopted religious lineage. They did not adopt me. I adopted them. I adopted this liberal religious lineage, with all its strengths and weaknesses, with all its realized potential and its unrealized potential. We are accustomed to think of adoption in terms of an older person adopting a younger person or a stronger person adopting someone in need of protection. However, when it comes to affiliating with a religious tradition, we the living adopt a lineage that began long before our birth. We take on its mantle. We adopt the dreams and habits of our religious ancestors. Once the adoption is final, once we have joined a Unitarian Universalist congregation and begun to explore what it means to be part of a movement of associated congregations, then we can and must alter the dreams and habits of our religious ancestors to fit the circumstances of today.

On Association Sunday, as we focus on the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, hear the contributions of these religious ancestors at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions:

**Edward Everett Hale** -- "Spiritual Forces in Human Progress -- All that the world owes to America it owes to the spiritual forces which have been at work in the United States in the last 100 years . . . I do not believe that Americans of to-day sufficiently appreciate the strength which was given to this country when every man in it went about his business and was told that he must 'paddle his own canoe,' that he must 'play the game alone,' that he must get the best, and that he must not trust to anybody about him to work out these miracles and mysteries . . .

God is nearer to man than he ever was before, and man knows that, and knows that because men are God's children, they are nearer to each other than they were before. And so is life on a higher plane than it was. Men live in higher altitudes because they are children of God, living for their brothers and sisters in the world, a life with God for man in Heaven . . . Life with God for man in Heaven – that is the religion on which the light of the twentieth century is to be formed . . . Universal education will be best for everyone – that is what is coming. That is life with God for man in Heaven.

And the twentieth century is to going to care for everybody's health; going to see that the conditions of health are such that the child born in the midst of the most crowded parts of the most crowded cities has the same exquisite delicacy of care as the babe born to some President of the United States in the White House. We shall take care of the health of every man, as our Religion is founded on life with God for man in heaven.

As for social rights, the statement is very simple. It has been made already. The twentieth century will give to every man according to his necessities. It will receive from every man according to his opportunity. And that will come from the religious life of that century, a life with God for man in heaven. As for purity, the twentieth century will keep the body pure – men as chaste as women. Nobody drunk, nobody stifled by this or that poison, given with this or that pretense, with everybody free to be the engine of the almighty soul.

All this is to say that the twentieth century is to build up its civilization on ideas, not on things that perish; build them on spiritual truths which endure and are the same forever; build them on faith, on hope, on love, which are the only elements of eternal life. The twentieth century is to build a civilization which is to last forever, because it is a civilization founded on an idea.” (p. 523)

That which was unfinished in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is ours to continue working for in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Rev. Augusta J. Chapin. D.D.**, “The world’s first Parliament of Religions could not have been called sooner and have gathered the religionists of all these lands together. We had to wait for the hour to strike, until the steamship, the railway and the telegraph had brought men together, leveled their walls of separation and made them acquainted with each other – until scholars had broken the way through the pathless wilderness of ignorance, superstition and falsehood, and compelled them to respect each other’s honesty, devotion and intelligence. A hundred years ago the world was not ready for this Parliament. Fifty years ago it could not have been convened, and had it been called but a single generation ago one half of the religious world could not have been directly represented.

Woman could not have had a part in it in her own right for two reasons: one that her presence would not have been thought of or tolerated, and the other was that she herself was still too weak, too timid and too unschooled to avail herself of such an opportunity had it been offered . . . Now the doors are thrown open in our own and many other lands. Women are becoming masters of the languages in which the great sacred literatures of the world are written. They are winning the highest honors that the great universities have to bestow, and already in the field of Religion hundreds have been ordained and thousands are freely speaking and teaching this new gospel of freedom and gentleness that has come to bless mankind.” (p. 82)

Remember that women could not vote in the United States when the World’s Parliament of Religious took place. At the close of the Parliament, more than 7,000 people were crowded into the main hall and the overflow hall. “It is said that ticket speculators were at work, and that three and four dollars were demanded and paid for cards which admitted only to the Hall of

Washington where the overflow meeting was held and the entire program was repeated.” (p. 158)  
 Today we have access to recorded sights and sounds through electronic communications media which would astound people living in 1893.

**Rev. Jenkin Lloyd-Jones** – He was a Unitarian based in Chicago. He worked very long and very hard at pulling together the Parliament. He and Rev. L.P. Mercer had charge of the Hall of Washington, the overflow hall. The closing speakers in that hall included people from the U.S., India (including Swami Vivekananda), Russia, Japan, China, England, Ceylon, Africa, Spain. When it was his turn to speak, Lloyd-Jones said, “I had rather be a doorkeeper in the open house of the Lord than to dwell in the tents of bigotry. I am sufficiently happy in the knowledge that I have been enabled to be to a certain extent the feet of this great triumph. I bid to you the parting guests the godspeed that comes out of a soul that is glad to recognize its kinship with all lands and with all religions . . . “ The implication was that some of the Christians in attendance looked down upon the representatives from non-Christian religious traditions. Using Christian imagery, Jenkin Lloyd-Jones said “No!” to this kind of bigotry.

**Olympia Brown** – “Crime and Its Remedy -- The causes given for crime are many, such as poverty, evil associations, intemperance, etc. But these are rather the occasions than the causes of criminal conduct . . . What can we do to check this great tide of criminality which perpetuates itself thus from generation to generation, gathering ever new strength and force with time? How stop this supply of criminals?

There is but one answer: men must be better born . . . We must have better mothers . . . The race is stamped by its mothers, the fountain will not rise higher than its source, men will be no better than the mothers that bear them, and as woman is elevated, her mental vision enlarged and her true dignity established, will her sons go forth, armed with a native power to uphold the right, trample out iniquity, and overcome the world” (p. 1077)

Women in 2009 might like to share responsibility for stopping the supply of criminals with men and also with the structural social inequities of our day. That sounded a bit like putting women

on a pedestal, though her intention was probably to say to men that there was something in it for them if women were treated as equals.

**Elizabeth Cady Stanton** – “The Worship of God in Man -- As I read the signs of the times, I think the next form of religion will be the ‘religion of humanity,’ in which men and women will worship what they see of the divine in each other; the virtues, the beatitudes, the possibilities ascribed to Deity, reflected in mortal beings. To stimulate our reverence for the Great Spirit of life that set all things in motion and holds them forever in their places, our religious teachers point us to the grandeur of nature in all her works. . .

The old idea of mankind as ‘totally depraved,’ his morality ‘but filthy rags,’ his heart ‘deceitful above all things and desperately wicked,’ his aspirations ‘but idle dreams of luxury and selfishness,’ are so many reflections on the Creator, who is said to be perfect and to have made man in his own image. The new religion will teach the dignity of human nature and its infinite possibilities for development.” (p. 1234)

I will remember Elizabeth Cady Stanton whenever I sing “Spirit of Life.”

**Julia Ward Howe** – “What is Religion? I think nothing is religion which puts one individual absolutely above others, and surely nothing is religion which puts one sex above another. Religion is primarily our relation to the Supreme, to God himself . . . And any religion which will sacrifice a certain set of human beings for the enjoyment or aggrandizement or advantage of another is no religion . . . Any religion which sacrifices women to the brutality of men is no religion.” (p. 1250)

These are strong words and fitting from the women who wrote “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

**Celia Parker Woolley** – “The World’s Religious Debt to America -- Personal integrity, this was the root of the Puritan ideal in public and private life, one which this nation must continue to observe if it would prosper, which will prove its sure loss and destruction to ignore . . . Where

except under republican rule can the experiment so well be tried of a personal religion, based on no authority but that of the truth, finding its sanction in the human heart, demonstrating itself in deeds of practical helpfulness and good will? If the world's religious debt to American lies in this thought of opportunity or religion applied, it is a debt the future will disclose more than the past has disclosed it. If ours is the opportunity, ours is till more the obligation. Privilege does not go without responsibility; where much is bestowed much is required." (p. 1268)

I was excited to see for the first time a photograph of Celia Parker Woolley in the book. At a time when I felt discouraged while on the journey to ministry, I came upon a quote of hers that lifted my spirits: "Every good cause needs all its prophets." That kept me going. Thank you, Celia Parker Woolley.

**Anna G. Spencer** – "Religion and the Erring and Criminal Classes --

The radical changes in the treatment of the criminal and erring classes which mark so conspicuously the last forty years, changes which have revolutionized this branch of social relation, all proceed, whether consciously or not, from one fundamental principle, namely, that every man and every woman, however criminal and erring, is still a man and woman, a legitimate member of the human family, with inalienable rights to protection and justice . . . The new scientific element in religion has given us social science of which enlightened penology is a part. The relation of this new religion to the criminal and erring classes is not only the tenderness of human sympathy which would not that any should perish; it is the consecration of human wisdom to social betterment that shall yet forbid that any shall perish. In this ideal the call is not only to justice for the criminal and erring after they come within the scope of social control, but it is a call also to the study of those conditions in the individual and in society which make for crime and vice . . ." (p. 1030)

We see in her words a call to regard everyone with inherent worth and dignity.

I conclude with a Unitarian Universalist perspective on the words of Jesus in chapter 7 of the book of Matthew. Jesus warns his followers about false prophets. How could they tell which people have wisdom to share and which do not? "By their fruits you shall know them," Jesus

says. “Do men gather grapes from thorns? Do they gather figs from thistles?” Unitarian Universalist theologian James Luther Adams put his spin on these words. As reported in the *UU World* magazine, “Sometimes Adams offers his ideas by cleverly distorting a proverb: He recast Jesus' famous saying, ‘By their fruits you shall know them,’ into ‘By their *groups* you shall know them’ to emphasize that our ethics are revealed not in our intentions or even in our individual actions but in the relationships and institutions we commit ourselves to.”<sup>1</sup>

Adoption of the religious lineage of Unitarian Universalism is commitment to a set of relationships and institutions that challenge us to shape a more just world, to help create heaven on earth. Our religious ancestors did their part. Now it is our turn. The offering this Sunday will help the Unitarian Universalist Association of congregations in three ways:

- 1) To expand the anti-racist and multicultural [\*Building the World We Dream About\*](#) curriculum and associated resources and training.
  
- 2) To support congregations that are working to create a Unitarian Universalism that is racially, culturally, and economically diverse; a part of this support will be in the form of grants.
  
- 3) To enable congregations and districts to minister effectively to youth and young adults who identify as people of color or multiracial, and to their families, in the areas of spiritual development, racial/cultural identity development, and leadership development.

May we remember with gratitude the men and women who came before us. May the fruits of our group be nourishing to all. May it be so!

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<sup>1</sup> See “James Luther Adams’s Examined Faith” by Christopher Walton, <http://www.uuworld.org/ideas/articles/2871.shtml>