

Notes

- ¹ Conrad Wright, *The Liberal Christians: Essays on American Unitarianism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970); Conrad Wright, ed. *A Stream of Light: A Sesquicentennial History of American Unitarianism* (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1975); Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970); Lawrence Buell, *Literary Transcendentalism: Style and Vision in the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973); William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); Andrew Delbanco, *William Ellery Channing and the Liberal Spirit in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).
- ² Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1955). Further citations from this book will be cited by page number in the text.
- ³ For comment on Wright's work as a historian of Unitarian Universalism, see my "Unitarian History and the Unitarian Universalist Identity: The Work of Conrad Wright," *Proceedings of the Unitarian Universalist Historical Society* 22, 2 (1992-94), 1-11.
- ⁴ Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956). Further citations from this book will be cited by page number in the text.
- ⁵ For an elaboration of this argument about Emerson's struggles with mysticism and turn to ethical action, see my *Emerson and the Conduct of Life* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). For further details on Emerson's theological background and his sense of "grace," see my "Grace and Works: Emerson's Essays in Theological Perspective," in *American Unitarianism, 1805-1865*, ed. Conrad E. Wright (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society and Northeastern University Press, 1989), 121-42.
- ⁶ For an elaboration of this argument, see my essay "The Road Not Taken: From Edwards, Through Chauncy, to Emerson," *Arizona Quarterly* 48 (1992), 45-61.
- ⁷ See "Experience" (1844) in volume 3 of *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Alfred R. Ferguson et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971-), 45.

*Theology in a Liberal, Post-Kantian,
Postmodern Spirit*

Fiftieth Anniversary Address, UUA General Assembly, June 2011

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My subject is liberal theology and the role of Unitarian Universalism within it, past and present, and I'm going to begin with a simple definition: Liberal theology is the idea of a theology based on reason and experience, not external authority, which offers a third way between orthodox authority religion and secular disbelief. It is reformist in spirit and substance; it conceives religious meaning and truth in the light of modern knowledge and ethical values; it is deeply shaped by modern science, humanism, and historical criticism; it is committed to making religious faith credible and socially relevant; and, yes, it is theology.

Right away some of you are thinking, "We shouldn't be talking about this; I joined the UUs to get away from theology." But theology is first-order reflection about matters of religious truth. Any time that we espouse or defend convictions about matters of religious truth, we are doing theology, even if we prefer to call it religious philosophy or something else. In theology we make ample use of history of religion, philosophy of religion, sociology of religion, and other second-order, meta-level, "about" disciplines. But theology ventures into the perilous, cognitive, normative, existential work of adjudicating whatever it is that a religious community stakes its life upon and witnesses to. Its object is whatever concerns us ultimately – that into which we invest religious passion.

The gods of liberal theology are Germans. Immanuel Kant, the most important Western philosopher since Plato and Aristotle, was the first modern religious thinker by virtue of theorizing the creative power of subjectivity and the moral ground of religion. G.W.F. Hegel formulated a post-Kantian idealist system based on the doctrines of

the Trinity and the incarnation. Friedrich Schleiermacher located the wellspring of religion in spiritual "feeling" or intuition. Albrecht Ritschl pioneered a fourth major stream of liberal theology by interpreting Christianity as a socio-historical movement with a distinct ethical-religious character. Most of the great Bible scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were Germans too.

It is ironic that many UUs define their tradition as having no theology, because modern theology began with Kant and Schleiermacher, and the early Unitarian tradition was soaked in the transcendentalism of Kant, Schleiermacher, Friedrich Schelling, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In all of Western thought, there is no tradition that is intellectually richer than the post-Kantian idealism through which the American Unitarians got their bearings. This tradition of idealism is the wellspring of liberal theology as a whole, past and present. Moreover, there is no vital or relevant progressive theology that does not speak with idealistic conviction, however problematic that may be. So I am going to take a sizable risk here, by starting with a pretty strong dose of Immanuel Kant.

In normal conversation, when we use the term idealist, we usually use it in an ethical or political sense. An idealist is someone who holds to an idea of a moral or political ideal. This usage is deeply related to what the term usually means in theories of knowledge, where the "ideal" can refer to spiritual or mental ideality as contrasted with the material or physical, or it can refer to a normative ideal as contrasted with the substantive. The first type of idealism is subjective; it is the idea that there is no reality without self-conscious subjectivity. Subjective idealism binds the forms of experience to what Kant called "the transcendental subject," the knowing human self that employs a priori categories of understanding. In subjective idealism, the transcendental subject is the precondition of the forms of experience, and the ideal is subjective or spiritual.

The second type of idealism, objective idealism, is the idea that everything is a manifestation of the ideal, an unfolding of reason. All reality conforms to the archetypes of an intelligible structure. Here the forms of experience are detached from the transcendental subject, applying to the realm of being as such, and the ideal is archetypal and structural, as in the idealism of Plato, Augustine, or Leibniz.

It is possible to read Kant as a subjective idealist, as many scholars have done; and it is possible to read Kant as an objective idealist, as many others have done; and some like me contend that it was part of his genius to hold these theories together. But however one construes Kant's idealism, he revolutionized philosophy and religious thought by showing that the mind is active in producing experience out of its transcendental categories.

Kant argued that we view the world as spatial and temporal because time and space are necessary conditions of experience, not because they are out there somewhere as objects of perception. We can only experience in and through the pure forms of sensibility, which are space and time. These representations are unified by the understanding, which contains pure concepts that Kant, following Aristotle, called categories. Human reason makes sense of the world by applying its a priori categories of quantity, quality, relation and modality to phenomena perceived by the senses.

Until Kant came along, philosophers viewed the mind as a passive receptacle, and the triumph of materialistic empiricism seemed unstoppable. The key to Kant's enormous importance in modern thought is that he stopped Enlightenment materialism in its tracks, dethroning the things of sense, offering a new way to color the world religiously, by showing that powers of mind are fundamental to human life and experience. On the one hand, metaphysics had a limited role in Kant's thought, and so did religion. On the other hand, Kant rehabilitated metaphysical reason around two conceptual pivots: the ideality of space and time, and the idea of a knowable and yet supersensible freedom. For Kant, the idea of freedom belongs to practical reason; it is the basis of true morality; and morality is the basis of religion.

Emphatically, Kant based religion on morality, not the other way around, because religion is essentially moral and it has no claim to knowledge except by its connection to moral truth. In the realm of moral faith, Kant argued, something has to happen. Faith is personal and subjective, holding to crucial convictions in full awareness that we cannot prove them to be true. To act as moral beings, Kant argued, we must postulate the idea of God as a condition for the possibility of the highest good, the ground of moral truth. We cannot pursue the good if we do not believe it is real and attainable.

Kant put it personally: "I am certain that nothing can shake this belief, since my moral principles would thereby be overthrown, and I cannot disclaim them without becoming abhorrent in my own eyes." He could not imagine living with himself if he did not live in a moral universe. The alternative was moral nihilism and despair. Life has no meaning on these terms, and his passionate endeavors would have been pointless.

Above all, Kant argued that reason is a vault whose keystone is freedom. All other ideas gain reality only by attaching themselves to the idea of freedom. Even the idea of God becomes real only through the reality of freedom. If we do not insert the keystone of freedom, the vault will not work. Freedom is autonomy, the self-originating of moral law. It is a type of causality; it determines laws for the intelligible world and it causes actions with knowable effects in the sensible world. I am certain that Kant, had he lived sixty years later, would have greatly admired Charles Darwin. But he would have stressed the limitations of a Darwinian theory that has no room for freedom, powers of mind, and the problems of subjectivity. If we do not believe in our freedom, we cannot trust anything that our reason tells us. Kantian idealism is obsessed with the moral necessity of freedom and the necessity of freedom for reason, notwithstanding that it was grievously infected with white supremacism and cultural chauvinism.

A great deal of liberal theology has been Kantian in a narrow sense of the term and virtually all of it has been Kantian in a broad sense. Horace Bushnell, the greatest American theologian of the nineteenth century, once recalled that as a young man, in his early thirties, he realized one day that he had apparently become an atheist. He had never really intended this outcome, but he realized that he had lost any real conviction of divine reality. The world looked blank to him, and he felt that existence was getting blank to itself. The heavy charge of his possibly immortal being oppressed him, and he found that a kind of leaden aspect overhung the world. Finally, one day, he asked himself, "Well, in that case, is there nothing that I do believe?"

As soon as he said it, Bushnell realized that he did have one belief, a moral intuition. He did believe there is such a thing as moral truth. He could doubt God, but not the good, which raised a question. Had he ever given himself to the good? Did he act like someone who believed that the good, whatever it is, is transcendently important? No,

he had never done that. His life was superficial and pretty selfish. Well then, he thought, this gives me something to do! The idea of venturing forth in faith to pursue the good struck Bushnell as a kind of revelation. Devoting himself to the good was good in itself, and if he gave himself to it as he understood it, perhaps he would find God on the way. If he had lost God in selfishness, perhaps he would find the divine in giving himself to the good.

That is the Kantian option, and a great many liberal Christians and religious humanists have followed Bushnell in taking it. Theodore Parker was one of them. Parker's idea of true religion rested on three claims, which he called transcendental. The intuition of the divine creates consciousness of divine reality; the intuition of moral right creates consciousness of a moral law transcending human will; and the intuition of immortality assures the continuity of individuality. To be sure, Parker was not as good a Kantian as he thought; like his fellow Emersonian Transcendentalists, he spiritualized Kant's categories and his regulative concept of reason. But in taking this post-Kantian option, the Emersonian transcendentalists had very good company, and some of them blended Kant with Schleiermacher's understanding of religion.

This is the second great tradition of liberal theology, the one that eventually outshone all the others. Friedrich Schleiermacher accepted about 85 percent of Kant's system, but he argued that Kant misconstrued religion by reducing it to moral intuition. The wellspring of religion is spiritual feeling. True religion, Schleiermacher reasoned, consists of an immediate relation to the source of life, a sense for the spirit of the whole. Spiritual feeling is a deeper aspect of human experience than Kantian pure reason, Kantian practical reason, and even sensation. Rationalists looked down on feeling as a lowly form of cognition; Kant described feeling as a third faculty alongside pure and practical reason; Schleiermacher countered that both were wrong. Feeling is not a form of knowing and it is not a third faculty. It is self-consciousness as such, the autonomous, unifying dimension of the self that pre-reflectively apprehends the world as a whole. Kant reduced religion to moral control, the ordering impulse. Schleiermacher replied that true religion is not fundamentally about grasping something. It is openness to the mystery of the whole and a sense of its infinite nature. Religion is about awe, worship, appreciation, mystery.

In any moment, Schleiermacher argued, we are aware of our unchanging identity *and* its changing character. Self-consciousness always includes a self-caused element and a non-self-caused element, the Ego and the Other. The Ego expresses the subject for itself; the Other expresses the coexistence of the ego with an other. The self is an active subject and an object that is acted upon. This double movement of self-consciousness makes possible the feeling of being in relation with God, which Schleiermacher called the feeling of absolute dependence. We exist as feeling, active creatures in coexistence with each other. The world is the totality of being, to which all judgments ultimately refer, and God is the idea of the unity of being, to which all concepts ultimately refer. Thus, the idea of God is inherent in that of the world, but the two ideas are not the same. Both are transcendental terms marking the limits of thought; each is the terminus of the other; and they meet at what Thandeka calls "the common border" of God and the world – the unity of God and the world in feeling. Experience comes into being by feeling the feelings of one's world. For Schleiermacher, religion stands for a person's position as the being on whom God and the world converge.

Thandeka's thought is deeply rooted in Schleiermacher, but to hear the early American Unitarian tradition speaking in Schleiermacher's voice, listen to William Ellery Channing in 1828. Channing still believed that scripture is a rationally coherent whole and that biblical miracles prove things. But he said that he didn't need to believe these things, because he knew that he was a spiritual being. That was the one thing that he knew immediately. In the language of belief, we speak of God as mind; in the belief-language of revelation, God is described as spirit. But what do we know of mind or spirit apart from their unfolding in our experience? Channing declared: "That unbounded spiritual energy which we call God is conceived by us only through consciousness, through the knowledge of ourselves. The idea of God, sublime and awful as it is, is the idea of our own spiritual nature, purified and enlarged to infinity."

I do not have time to run through the other two foundational traditions of liberal theology, the Hegelian and Ritschlian traditions, even though I have a great deal invested in both, and the Social Gospel was mostly a Ritschlian theology. Hegel synthesized the riches of German idealism, developing a philosophy of Absolute Spirit; and the Ritschlian

School gave birth to the history of religions approach advocated by Ernst Troeltsch, which is the dominant method in religious studies today. But I am eager to get to the current time, and it must be said that very few Unitarians, or Universalists, or Unitarian Universalists, have gone for Hegelian or Ritschlian theology. Even Troeltsch is too Hegelian for most UUs. So I move on.

Before we get to the present, there is one more tradition of liberal theology to consider: the religious humanism and empiricism of the Chicago School, out of which American process theology developed. Here the transcendental a priori of German idealism were swept aside, and here the Unitarians played a major role.

By the early twentieth century, liberal theologians from many denominational traditions had disposed of biblical literalism, infallibility, and substitutionary atonement. More importantly, they denied that religious arguments should be settled by appeals to an infallible text or ecclesial authority. Nineteenth-century liberals accepted Darwinian evolution, biblical criticism, and an idea of God as the personal and eternal Spirit of love. Every mainline Protestant denomination had a battle over these issues, and most had a major split over them. Fundamentalists charged that liberal theologians betrayed the faith and broke the line of continuity with historic Christianity. Liberals replied that Christianity had no future if it did not come to terms with modern science and historical criticism, and they usually denied that they broke the line of continuity with historic Christianity.

But the University of Chicago liberals gave up this claim about continuity. The founders of the Chicago School – Shailer Mathews, George Burman Foster, Edward Scribner Ames, Shirley Jackson Case, Gerald Birney Smith – were routinely accused of being Unitarians. In the second and third generations of the Chicago School, some of the leading theologians actually were Unitarians, notably Henry Nelson Wieman, Bernard Loomer, and James Luther Adams. All of them argued that modernity is a revolution. If theology was to become truly modern, it had to rest on modern experience and critical tests of belief. The Chicago theologians were committed to humanism, historicism, pragmatism, radical empiricism, and religious naturalism.

Humanism we already know about in this crowd. Historicism is the doctrine that all knowledge has an irreducibly historical character;

Wieman's relationship to Whitehead was complex and conflicted; he later broke away from Whitehead's overly metaphysical position, though not as much as he claimed. Under Wieman's influence, Chicago theology became more objective, tracking the flow of experience, in the manner of a dynamic organicism, describing empirical patterns of events. In the mid-1940s the Chicago School took another turn, this time in a pure Whiteheadian direction, which gave birth to the process school of theology.

Today Whiteheadian process thought is the major school of liberal theology, and it has a following among UUs, so I need to say something about it. But first we need to know what happened to liberal theology in the 1930s and 1940s. In Europe, World War I obliterated the moral idealism and cultural optimism that fueled liberal theology, but the United States experienced World War I very differently, and thus the war did not destroy liberal idealism here. It took the Great Depression to do that. By 1932, a new generation of American theologians had begun to say that liberal theology was not a good idea. Reinhold Niebuhr was the leading debunker. Niebuhr's favorite epithet was "stupid," followed closely by "naïve." Repeatedly he charged that liberal Protestantism was both. Liberals actually believed that the world could be saved by reason and good will, Niebuhr complained: "Liberal Christian literature abounds in the monotonous reiteration of the pious hope that people might be good and loving." Niebuhr replied that that was pathetic. To make any sense in the 1930s, American Protestantism had to move sharply to the left politically — he was a radical Marxist at the time — and to the right theologically, although he was vague about what that meant.

I cannot take the time here to explain the ironies and complexities of American neo-orthodoxy, or the fact that Niebuhr was not neo-orthodox. But I must say a word about the liberals of that generation who kept their tradition alive. They were a stubborn bunch — Wieman, James Luther Adams, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Edgar Brightman, Benjamin Mays, Georgia Harkness, George Buttrick, Norman Pittenger, Bernard Meland. They identified with Fosdick's self-description; for them it was either liberal religion or no religion at all. They believed in the liberal faith of reasonableness, openness, modernity, and the social gospel.

The old liberals understood that their language of progress and idealism seemed like sentimental mush in the Depression era

of collapsing economies and political turmoil. But the "mystery X" dialecticism of Karl Barth and neo-orthodoxy was not an option for them. Liberal theology, whatever its problems, was still the only option that held together reason and faith. It had the right project, even if it did not have all the answers. If liberalism was too deferential to modern culture, it had to be more critical. If the Social Gospel was too idealistic and sentimental, maybe it needed a dose of realism. If liberal theology read too much of its middle-class moralism into the gospel, that could be fixed. The mid-century liberals were willing to make adjustments of that kind, but they would not disown liberalism, because to them, there was no better place to go.

To the Christian liberals, the atonement was powerfully important, but strictly as a means of moral and spiritual transformation. They affirmed that the spiritual nature of Jesus was divine, but they also accepted biblical criticism of the gospels. Most of them never bought the apocalyptic Jesus of German scholarship, although for decades they were ridiculed for holding out. Most importantly, to the liberals, the main thing was to be able to follow Jesus and worship God as the divine Spirit of love without having to believe any particular thing on the basis of authority. Some alternative to orthodox over-belief and secular unbelief was still needed, even if liberalism needed better answers. In that mood they helped to keep liberalism alive, and passed it to our time.

James Luther Adams, the leading Unitarian in this part of the story, epitomizes this stubbornly liberal spirit. When JLA was a student at Harvard Divinity School in the 1920s, he was frustrated by the scholarly remoteness of his teachers. In a student address at the school's graduation ceremony, he remarked that he had no idea if the divinity professors were committed to anything besides scholarship. Twenty years later, when JLA founded the Ethics and Society program at the University of Chicago Divinity School, he remembered that frustration.

JLA put his beliefs on the line. Though he wrote essays on a small scale, he was attracted to religious thinkers who thought on a big scale — Troeltsch, Whitehead, Paul Tillich, Rudolf Otto. For JLA, the exemplary religious thinkers were religiously and philosophically deep, broad in their intellectual vision, and they had a sense of transcendent mystery. He loved his acquired Unitarianism, but he lamented that twentieth-century Unitarianism was intellectually and religiously

There is a rationalist Hartshornian stream of the process school, and a large contingent of feminist process theologians, and schools of environmental and social ethical process thought, and a Catholic tradition. There is a UU stream of process thought led by Thandeka, Rebecca Parker, and Galen Guengerich and an ongoing religious naturalist or religious humanist stream that is as deeply influenced by Wieman, Meland, and James as it is by Whitehead. Nancy Frankenberry and Jerome Stone are proponents of this latter variety of process thought. In a broad sense of the term, process thought is defined by its metaphysical claim that becoming is more elemental than being because reality is fundamentally temporal and creative. Broadly speaking it includes all theologies and philosophies that conceptualize becoming, event, and relatedness as fundamental categories of understanding.

Whitehead argued that the basic units of nature, which he called "actual entities," have experiential features. The fundamental elements of which all enduring things are made are moments of feeling. More precisely, the irreducible constitution of the things that make up the universe *is* their experience; they are moments of feeling. Actual entities are experiencing subjects that realize some value and pass out of existence in the process of being succeeded by similar entities or occasions. Individuals do not have feelings; we become through feeling. The subject emerges by feeling its way into being. Thus, in Whiteheadian theory, every self is a complex unity of feeling that emerges in response to one's feelings of the world.

With a nod to Leibniz, Whitehead coined the term "prehension" to designate the process by which an actual entity grasps another entity as an object of its experience. He described the becoming of an actual entity as a "conrescence," the merging of various aspects of experience into a unity. He distinguished between two kinds of actual entities, which he called "actual occasions" and "God." In Whitehead's thought, God is an order in the process of creativity, not the cause of the process or the ultimate reality.

Whitehead was deeply impressed by the mysterious fact that the evolving universe, for all its chaotic randomness, possesses a high degree of order. To account for the creative, somehow orderly process of life, he distinguished between creativity and God. Creativity is the advance into novelty that pervades the universe, and God is the concrete actual

entity that envisages pure potentials, which Whitehead called "eternal objects." The world never reaches completion and neither does God, for both are in the grip of the ultimate ground, creativity. God lures us to make creative, life-enhancing choices, but God does not negate our freedom to make choices.

The Whiteheadian system offers a picture of a divinely-influenced universe oriented toward beauty and the intensification of experience, in which the universe demonstrates an inherent tendency toward increasing complexity, self-organization, and the production of emergent wholes that are more than the sum of their parts. From a common sense standpoint, the world consists of material things that endure in space and time, while events are occurrences that happen to things or that things experience. In the process view, events are the fundamental things, the immanent movement of creativity itself. God constantly absorbs the passing world and retains its variety in the immediacy and final unity of God's everlasting present. God is always in process with creation as the lure for feeling and creative transformation, the eternal urge of desire that lures us to make creative, life-enhancing choices.

In case you are surmising otherwise, I am not a process theologian, at least in the school sense of the term. I don't believe that God and creativity compete for space; and I do believe that anything we understand is not God. Whitehead's God is an aspect of a system. I am with the apophatic mystics of all religions who stress the incomprehensible mystery of the holy. Whitehead's thought contradicts one aspect of Einstein's special theory of relativity; and it has a bigger problem with the second law of thermodynamics. In process thought, divine knowledge grows simultaneously with the growth of the universe, but according to Einstein, absolute simultaneity is impossible. Any meaning that might be ascribed to "simultaneity" is necessarily relative to some particular space-time system. Whitehead's doctrine of creative complexity also has a problem with the second law of thermodynamics, that energy differentials average out in a closed system. If that is right, evolution is moving toward entropy, not complexity.

But no cosmology fits with everything we know, which is vastly exceeded by everything we don't know. In modern theology, no perspective surpasses the process school in grappling creatively with the hardest problems, sustaining high-order intellectual ambitions, and

comparative theology, inter-cultural feminist and liberation theologies, and theologies of world religions. For millions of progressive Christians and religious humanists the church remains a spiritual home, a community of fellowship, and the place where we live out our idealism. For us it remains distinctive for its capacity to inspire community and a sense of transcendent good. And so, liberal theology does not fade away, even though people keep saying that it is bound to do so.

Unlike Unitarianism, the Universalist tradition has not had much direct impact on the development of liberal theology. The difference mostly shows the difference in social class and educational access that existed between these two traditions, but there is a better reason. Universalists hung everything on one doctrine, the magnificent idea of universal salvation. But this idea was never distinctive to them, even at the beginning. Charles Chauncy was a major universalist in the 1750s, as a liberal Congregationalist. There have been universalists in the Unitarian and liberal Protestant traditions for as long as these traditions have existed. Moreover, in liberal theology as a whole, there is a tendency to stop talking about eternal salvation after one moves to the idea of universal salvation. But all of that abounds to the credit of the tiny American denomination that wholly identified with the idea that a good and gracious God calls all of God's children to eternal flourishing.

Today we need forms of community that arise out of but transcend religious affiliation, culture, and nation. All our religious traditions have prejudices that must be uprooted. If those of us who are Caucasian fail to interrogate white supremacy — a structure of power based on privilege that presumes to define what is normal — we will resist any recognition of our own racism. The same thing goes for males who fail to interrogate our complicity in sexism. If we fail to oppose anti-Semitism and Christian supersessionism, we will perpetuate the evils that come with them. If heterosexuals fail to stand up for the rights of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered persons, we will have oppressive religious communities and an oppressive society. If we swear our highest loyalty to our nation, we will perpetuate American imperialism. We need a wider community of the divine good.

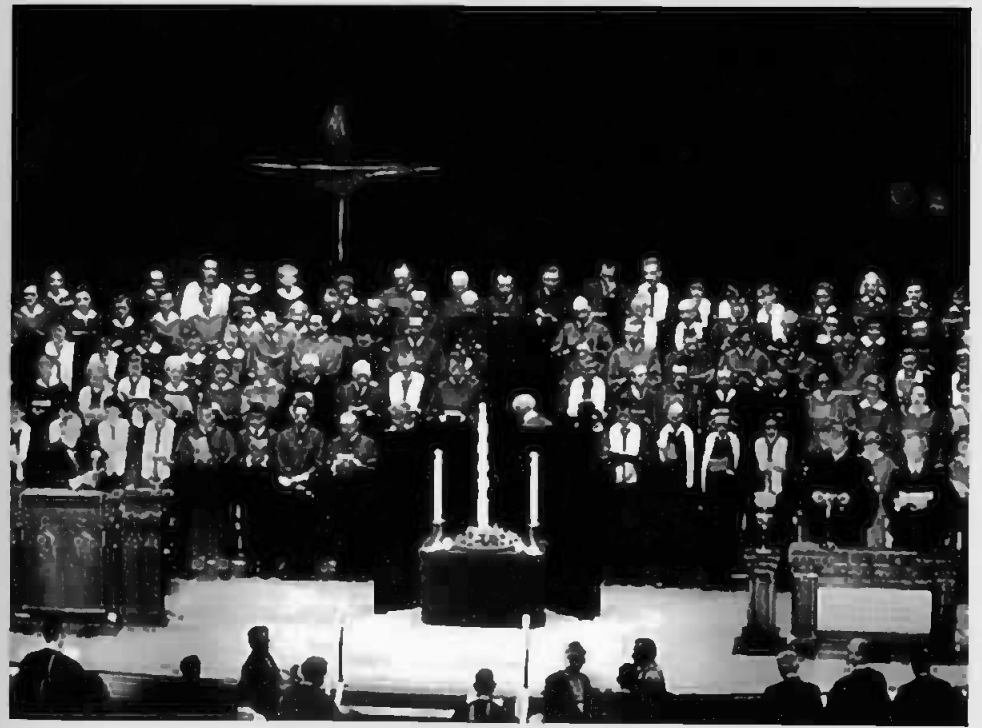
Spiritual conviction and the struggle for social justice go together, each being indispensable to the other. For liberal Protestants who have a fond memory of being in the mainline, marginality is hard

to swallow. It is discouraging to lose power; even the most good-spirited progressives get conflicted about it. But we should not need the promise of success or prestige to discern what God, the personal spirit of love divine, is doing in our midst; or to be open to the presence of God in the oppressed, the marginalized, the hurting and the vulnerable.

If liberal theology were not capable of changing in the light of liberationist and postmodern criticism, it would not be a living tradition today, or something with which I could identify. Today liberal theology needs to be a type of liberation theology. No one can know if any of our efforts will succeed, but the necessity of struggling for the divine good is certain. And that is a conviction that ties us to William Ellery Channing and James Luther Adams.

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