

“A New Unitarian Universalist Primary Source Collection: Brainstorming Session”

My session at Collegium will be the first step in a multi-year collegial process that I hope will culminate in the publication of a collection of primary sources in Unitarian Universalist history, suitable for use in seminary courses and adult education in congregations. To this end, I ask you to do three things in preparation for this session:

- Brainstorm the five or ten primary sources you regard as *most* essential to a full understanding of Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist history. By “primary source” I mean any text written by an actual participant in history, rather than by a historian, such as Hosea Ballou’s *Treatise on Atonement* or William Ellery Channing’s “Unitarian Christianity.” Please note that “most essential” doesn’t necessarily mean “most famous.” Think about the sort of texts that would illumine both the famous and the forgotten aspects of our history.
- Think about how you would like to see a multi-volume source collection structured. What organizational principles would be most helpful to you?
- Think about how you might wish to be involved personally in this project. You don’t need to make any commitments now, but I anticipate bringing together a core team of 3-4 editors and a much larger circle of advisors by fall 2012.

Thanks for your help! For more information, see the preliminary proposal I shared with Skinner books a few months ago, attached below.

Dan McKanan

A New Collection of Primary Sources for Unitarian Universalist History

Informal Proposal for Skinner Books

Dan McKanan

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I propose to initiate a four or five year collaborative process that will culminate in the publication of a jointly edited collection of primary sources for Unitarian Universalist history. Ideally, this collection will include three or four volumes of roughly 200 pages each, suitable for use in both seminaries and congregations. My hope is that this project will be formally sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist History and Heritage Society (UUHHS) and published by Skinner Books.

Rationale

In the fifty years since consolidation, no one has attempted to create a comprehensive collection of Unitarian Universalist primary sources, comparable to David Parke's *The Epic of Unitarianism: Original Writings from the History of Liberal Religion* or Ernest Cassara's *Universalism in America: A Documentary History of a Liberal Faith*. Indeed, it seems unlikely that any single person could do justice to the separate but interwoven stories of Unitarianism and Universalism and the complex narrative of the past fifty years. A collection suitable for seminarians and lay historians would need to take into account the rise of "history from below" and the imperative of including voices of all genders, classes, and cultures. It would need to address both theological and institutional history, as well as come to terms with the deep engagement of Unitarians, Universalists, and Unitarian Universalists with the broader culture. It might be modeled on the Parke and Cassara texts, as well as more thematic collections such as Sydney Ahlstrom, *An American Reformation: A Documentary History of Unitarian Christianity*, Joel Myerson, *Transcendentalism: A Reader*, or Dorothy Emerson, *Standing Before Us: Unitarian Universalist Women and Social Reform*.

Structure

Given Skinner's preference for short, affordable books, I anticipate that this project might best be structured as a series of collections. The volumes might be organized chronologically (18th century and before; 19th century; 20th century and beyond), thematically (theology; social justice; institutional history), or by genre (sermons; catechisms; manifestos; fiction and poetry). It might be appropriate to develop a web-based dimension to this project as well.

Timetable

Fall 2011 Informal conversations with scholars will begin with a special session dedicated to this purpose at the annual Collegium meeting. Thereafter, I will seek input from the Ministerial Fellowship Committee, all persons currently teaching UU history at the seminary level, officers of the Unitarian

Universalist History and Heritage Society, Universalist Heritage Foundation, Religious Educators History Group, and as many other interested parties as I can identify.

Summer 2012 I will report on the preliminary conversations to the board of the Unitarian Universalist History and Heritage Society, and ask them to determine what level of formal sponsorship they would like to take for this project.

Fall 2012 By this time, I hope to identify a team of core editors, as well as a much larger circle of advisors. Over the following year, the editors will determine the overall structure of the collection, identify the list of sources to be included, and determine who will be responsible for editing each selection and writing introductions.

Fall 2013 The UUHHS board has identified this as the likely time for the next UU History Convocation. This will be a logical occasion for the core editors to have a face to face meeting to finalize the structure of the project and prepare a more formal proposal for Skinner Books.

Fall 2015 A full manuscript of the first volume should be available by this time. Ideally, subsequent volumes will be finished at one year intervals thereafter.