EDITOR'S PREFACE

A significant battle took place during the first six months of 2009, culminating in a vote at the Unitarian Universalist Association's General Assembly—to turn down a major rewrite of our "Purposes and Principles," or more accurately of Article II, section C-2.1 of the UUA Bylaws.

To understand why it was a battle, and not just the result of a "recommend(ation of) appropriate revisions, if any," as mandated at least every fifteen years by the UUA Bylaws, take a look at this issue's Heritage article, which traces in broad terms (and some longish leaps), the development of stated principles for our predecessor organizations, the Universalist Church in America and the American Unitarian Association, as well as the UUA. That article concludes with the text of the proposed (and rejected) revisions.

The Bylaw amendment needed a simple majority approval by delegates at the June, 2009 Salt Lake City Assembly, followed by a two-thirds vote in favor at the 2010 Minneapolis Assembly. The proposed changes struck many UUs, chief among them Humanists and Pagans, as downplaying our theological diversity, and retreating (under the guise of paying more attention in our Sources statement to the historical origins of the AUA and The UCA) to a formulation of the UUA "brand" as "Protestantism Lite."

Many participants from the HUUmanists' chat lines took part in the electronic conversations sponsored by the UUA Commission on Appraisal, the body charged with conducting the Article II review and recommending revisions. Despite sincere efforts by the COA to keep the process open and transparent, it was not as successful as the 1981-85 process (which resulted in the previous major rewrite of Article II), in involving large numbers of individual members or their congregations in a substantive discussion. Many of those carrying petitions calling for an extension of the study period on these proposals, reported hearing repeatedly from individual UUs, and sometimes from their congregational leadership, that they had been provided with little or no information about the revisions.

Reflecting the view of many on the HUUmanists' chat that the revisions delegates would be asked to consider in Salt Lake City did not accurately describe the Sources of contemporary UUism, and in particular relegated humanism to an ancillary role, several of us last spring began circulating petitions calling for a tabling of the proposal to allow another year of conversation. Over 1300 people from more than 140 congregations signed.

When it became clear through conversations at GA with the UUA Moderator and Parliamentarian that a tabling motion could not be allowed, we changed our request to the delegates to one of "vote no." That was indeed the outcome—the proposed revisions failed their initial vote by a slim margin 573 in favor and 586 opposed.

Where, then does this leave us? No substantially similar rewrite of the UUA Bylaws can be proposed for at least two years, and if a different proposal were to be brought forward,

it would take, with two required votes and a study period, a total of at least five years to be enacted. Given that this revision fell short of a simple majority, it seems unlikely that any similar attempt would garner two-thirds support in that time frame. The Principles and Sources that have defined us since 1984-85 (and which many, humanist and otherwise, see as a default humanist perspective) seem likely to continue as our foundational document for some time to come.

But UUism (more so than many religious bodies) is defined far more by its members than by any Bylaws statement. We are the eclectic mix of beliefs, philosophies and practices that our active members bring each week to our churches and fellowships. We may hold together certain underlying assumptions that we define as primarily Humanist, but we have an ongoing challenge: together with those UUs who consider themselves Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Pagan, Theist, spiritual and Naturalist, we must continue to explore what it is that we hold in common—what it is that makes us all UUs? That makes us religious?

The four main articles in this issue come at that question from different angles.

Hollis Huston invites us to look at our Christian history, and suggests that we cannot simply extend the increasingly liberalizing influences in theology we find there into a satisfying UU Christianity for the modern age, without redefining Christianity to such an extent that few other Christians would recognize us as such. But he challenges us, both self-described UU Christians and other UUs, and particularly humanist UUs, to do what the complexities of those developing theologies have so often kept us from doing—simply re-interpreting the teachings of Yeshua for our own age.

His claim that "Yeshua is the originating humanist," will sit uncomfortably for many readers, but he offers us a new way to look at the history to which we often see little or no connection.

Tim Barger calls himself a religious humanist—with a Buddhist meditation practice. He sees the Buddha as a Freethinker, and Buddhism as hospitable to non-supernaturalistic humanism, and wants to offer other humanists as much as he can of the insights of this religion, perhaps the most popular western up-take among Eastern faiths.

He assumes the reader has a basic knowledge of the life and teachings of the Buddha, and moves quickly to a consideration of the bodhisattvas, those figures who "actively guide others along the path to Buddhahood." A focus on these actual and mythological practitioners allows Barger to pose a challenge to skeptical humanists: can we find useful parallels between their lives (considered as archetypes) and our own life experiences?

As a further challenge, he asks us to consider the differences between Eastern and Western humanism.

Another, less-specific aspect of modern UU diversity is the drift to spirituality, often set up as an implacable argument over personal religious methodology, as in "rationality vs.

spirituality," or as an ongoing war between armed camps—"theism vs. humanism" is the historical title for this conflict. Linda Hart frames this approach as the "gap too large to bridge," and offers us a new path: seeing both sides of these battles instead, as aspects of "the human enterprise," with which, she points out, humanists are supposed to be fascinated.

Hart encourages us not to pick sides, but to (in the words of Thomas Ferrick) "know and love (that which) gives joy and purpose to our lives." The responses to that challenge, she implies, are so much richer and more varied than anything upon which we might individually stand.

Her approach is to use a strong historical narrative with a central humanist thread, and bring insights from contemporary UU ministers John Weston and Frederick Muir as parallels to spiritual popularizers, Frederick and Mary Ann Brussat, author Annie Lamott and poet Wendell Berry. A final section uses autobiographical revelation to tie things all together nicely.

Folks who pursue Judaism in a humanistic vein, for its ethical framework and/or its cultural identity, have several choices for a community in which to make that pursuit. Some Reform and Reconstructionist congregations, as well as temples and smaller groups of the Humanistic Judaism movement, Ethical Culture congregations and many UU churches and fellowships, all offer a home for such a religious path. UUs for Jewish Awareness adds a national membership community similar in structure to HUUmanists.

Rabbi Kenneth Schuster is appreciative of these options, but wants to add something more—a Religious Humanistic Judaism, built on consistent, thorough Jewish practice, in which religious concerns do not take second place to secular ones.

The distinction is a subtle one, and Schuster returns to it persistently, reworking ancient and contemporary Jewish understandings in the language of religious humanism. To what might be considered a well accepted list of Jewish contributions to the wider religious discussion, he adds such ritual practices as rest on the Sabbath, the keeping of a kosher home, and the wearing of *tallit* and *tefillin.*

The implication is that to pick and choose which aspects of Judaism might fit with your individual humanism, is to lose a holistic strength that makes the practice, *in toto*, religious.

This is a fascinating proposal, and leads one to wonder if individuals and families following it would fit in and find a welcome in UU congregations?

Finally in the issue, Karen Quinlan, who has graced these pages previously with an article on Darwin Day, completes our religious diversity survey with her review of Jerome Stone's excellent *Religious Naturalism Today: The Rebirth of a Forgotten Alternative.* Noting her appreciative challenge to Stone (and to all of us really), to explain more than justify, seems a good place to leave this introduction. Read, enjoy, and when you find

yourself nodding in agreement, wishing to expand upon a point, or saying—"I'm not so sure about *that,*" *keep* Quinlan's caveat in mind.

Roger Brewin