

Citation for Jacob Frank Schulman
Degree of Doctor of Divinity, honoris causa
Originally conferred at Emerson Unitarian Church, Houston, Texas
December 4, 2005

Each generation of Unitarian Universalism must respond to the problem of tradition. That it is so, is built into the very nature of our faith. We come to new religious understandings and practices and we wonder, “What shall become of the old understandings and practices?”

The question, in its various forms, is posed by ministers in monthly meetings, by theological students in their classrooms, and by laypersons in really, really good coffee hours. Ministers ask, “In this day and age, when personal experience is so emphasized, is there is still a role for the once common minister/scholar?” Students experiment with new worship forms and are asked by their instructors, “What is the theory of worship behind your creation?” Lay people wonder aloud if there is more that defines us theologically than the stock of our purposes and principles.

Rev. Jacob Frank Schulman, Meadville Lombard Theological School honors you today for conducting an exemplary ministry, a ministry that leads individuals, congregations and our entire liberal movement to a clearer understanding of the function and value of tradition.

When your ministry began in 1954, your aims were modest. You wished simply to “be a good minister.” You could not see then that you were destined to that which was far less modest. As a fully fellowshiped minister, you directly served four congregations fulfilling the offices of preacher, pastor, and community leader; guiding people through their difficult times and offering them the promise that comes from a deeper acquaintance with religion and the spirit. You demonstrated that there is no separation between the spiritual life and the life of the mind. Throughout, and still today, you lifted up the lesson that history and tradition cannot be left to those who came before us. When properly understood they can yield a fuller religious life in the here and now.

It is not possible to carry out a ministry of excellence in isolation. You have had hundreds of partners in your work, none as pivotal or beloved as your wife Alice who cares about the work and values your embodiment as the minister/scholar.

You are a scholar and, as such, you have never been content to simply read to your own end or at your own pace. You have sought the confirmation of earned academic degrees. This is because you understand fully the need for academics to have recognized standards. It is the acceptance of those standard that stretch the scholar beyond individual whim and fancy. With seven

such degrees from some of the most exacting institutions in the world, you have been well stretched. You met standards. Indeed, you exceeded them.

Neither have you been content to keep your research to yourself. A true scholar understands that the solutions to problems that he or she works on are only as effective as they add to the common store of knowledge. This you have done through writing and publishing. You have written five books which have opened up the lives and thinking of theological giants such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and James Martineau. To this day you hold the position of permanent president of the Martineau Society. And you have a sixth book, a much needed worship manual, which is soon to go to the printer. Genuine scholarship is not a retreat from the world, it is something that adds to the world.

Someone who is known to us both is Franklin Chester Southworth. He was Alice's grandfather and he was one of my predecessors as president of Meadville Theological School. He once wrote these words, "Let us so conduct ourselves as to be worthy of those who have preceded us." Had he been here today, presenting this honorary degree on behalf of the school, he would have easily pronounced his judgment that you are a minister who conducts himself with just such a worthiness. Whether it is Emerson or Martineau, an unsung minister or a faithful church attendee, you never lose sight that there is no Unitarian Universalism without them, there is no ministry without them, and you conduct yourself in a way that suggests your gratitude for them.

Because we believe that the past and tradition have a part to play in shaping the future, because we are convinced that scholarship and ministry go hand in hand, and because we admire the joyful and grateful conduct of ministry, Meadville Lombard considers it a great privilege to award you this honorary degree. For you are among the finest of all these and more. We are grateful that you are helping to shape this whole liberal faith in that that visionary image.