

Editor's Introduction

This issue of the *Journal* addresses several issues that are both current in liberal religious circles and important for religious liberals to be dealing with. It starts with two essays on the thought of James Luther Adams, followed by two articles that address the question of religious diversity, an article on religious naturalism, an article that examines the question of religious violence and concludes with two essays on liturgy, a subject not often dealt with by religious liberals. I believe the reader will find much here to stimulate her or his thinking and perhaps to evoke some responses which the editor welcomes for possible future publication.

Without doubt James Luther Adams was the foremost Unitarian and later Unitarian Universalist theologian and ethicist of the 20th century, and twelve years after his death he continues to speak to religious liberals through his writings. The two essays dealing with JLA in this edition of the *Journal* were originally presented at the UUA General Assembly in June of 2005 and deal with the important recently published book, *Transforming Liberalism: The Theology of James Luther Adams* by George Kimmich Beach. One essay is by Beach himself, well known as the editor of three volumes of the writings of JLA, and the other is by Robin W. Lovin, Cary Maguire University Professor of Ethics at Southern Methodist University. Both essays are valuable contributions to understanding Adams' thought.

A perennial question among Unitarian Universalists has to do with our religious pluralism and theological diversity. Two articles deal with this issue, although from quite different points of departure. Lex Crane's article ("Transcendence, Survival, and UU Religion in the 21st Century") is a fine analysis and critique of religious ethnocentrism and a powerful plea for Unitarian Universalists to transcend our own ethnocentric complacency. David Tarbell ("Meaning and Difference: Pluralism Among U(U)s") wrestles with the question of how people in a pluralistic faith community can understand one another even though they hold somewhat different perspectives. Drawing on Unitarian history and his background in science and mathematics, Tarbell provides us with a thoughtful and constructive analysis.

Religious naturalism in both its theistic and non-theistic expressions is a growing theological perspective among Unitarian Universalists and other religious liberals. The formation of the group called Unitarian Universalist Religious Naturalists (UURN) that grew out of the Star Island week on religion and science and the popularity of Ursula Goodenough's book *The Sacred Depths of Nature* are two examples of interest in religious naturalism. The article by Roger Gillette ("Theology Of, By, and For Religious Naturalism") constitutes another installment about this theological perspective and follows Jerome Stone's article on the subject ("Is God Emeritus?") in our last issue. Gillette's essay was prompted by Goodenough's book and was originally presented to Collegium, the liberal religious scholars group. As a physicist and a student of religion, Gillette gives us both a scientific perspective and an interpretation of the religious meaning of religious naturalism, all in a clear and concise form.

Joseph Hoffmann examines the question of religious violence in Islam, Judaism and Christianity from both historical and theological perspectives and asks whether violence is inherent in the very nature of these western religious traditions. It is instructive to read this powerful article in conjunction with Crane's essay on ethnocentrism.

Two essays, both from Meadville Lombard ministerial students, explore the role and power of liturgy in worship. Colin Bossen discusses the transformative power of what one scholar has called "temporary autonomous zones" and the role liturgy can play in that empowerment and in theological formation. Aaron McEmry discusses the theological, affective and psychological dimensions of liturgy and offers several interesting and innovative liturgical examples each of which

receives a perceptive analysis. Religious liberals interested in developing theologically well-grounded liturgies will find these articles to be very helpful.

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