

GATHERING AT THE RIVER
The Common Theology of Pentecostals and Unitarian Universalists

By Wayne Bergthor Arnason – Prepared for Prairie Group Fall 2012
 (5535 words without the title lines above!)

I. A Love Not in Our Keeping

“We live by our devotions. We live by our love for our god. All alike place their confidence in something, whether it be in human nature, reason, scientific method, church, nation, Bible, or God. This confidence finds explicit or implicit expression in belief and disbelief. As Emerson observed: ‘A man bears beliefs as a tree bears apples’...

The love of God..is a love that we cannot give unless we have first received it. Ultimately, it is not even ours to give, for it is not in our keeping. It is in the keeping of a power that we can never fully know, of a power that we must in faith trust. Humanity’s expression of it is a response to an antecedent glory and promise, the ground of meaning and the ever new resource for its fulfillment”.

‘By your fruits shall ye know them’ is obviously a test that must be applied to love for God. We learn what is meant by any conception of the love of God by observing what sort of behavior issues from it. “

- James Luther Adams¹

I presume that there are many Pentecostals today who would find little to argue with in this selection from the essay that Adams, Unitarian Universalism’s most respected 20th century theologian wrote in 1976. Contemporary neo-Pentecostals, in particular, would be glad to tell you what the love of God means to them as part of a relationship that is a gift they have learned to receive. Yet, most Unitarian Universalists would have difficulty engaging with this text with any personal story. Many would focus instead on the Tillichian part of the text that generalizes the love of God as any devotion which engages our ultimate concern. Most Unitarian Universalist members will also tell you that Pentecostalism and Unitarian Universalists have little in common, that they are standing at opposite ends of the spectrum of theologies.

There are some obvious reasons why our people believe this. It’s a presumption based on Unitarian Universalism’s disavowal of creedal theism as the starting point for a faithful life, in contrast to the Pentecostal presumption of God’s existence and presence in an authentic life of faith. Many more

Unitarian Universalists who came from other traditions originated in Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant faiths than from any Pentecostal community. So the belief that these two traditions share little theological common ground also exists because few Unitarian Universalists know much about the history, evolution, and diversity of Pentecostal belief and practice. So I've been grateful for the opportunity to write this paper, because this description of the attitude of "most Unitarian Universalists" could easily have been applied to me, a life-long Unitarian Universalist with a graduate education in religious studies. It's been a revelation to see in the course of my research how much theological common ground UU's and Pentecostals do share.

II. Shall We Gather at The River?

At the risk of mixing my metaphors, I think of the "common ground" that the two traditions share more as a river than as a plot of land. There is a particular river of theological belief within the landscape of American religion. That river has cut a canyon, and those faithful who have found that river have made their camps on opposite sides of that canyon. They look down at the river from different perspectives and see up and downstream from different angles. Their cultures have developed separately without much interchange across the canyon – but both camps go down and drink from the same river.

The theological river that Pentecostals and Unitarian Universalists camp beside includes assertions that are central and precious to liberal religion, even though they may be articulated, experienced, and acted upon very differently by Pentecostals. We can draw from this river these common theological beliefs :

- That revelation is not sealed. Unlike dispensationalist fundamentalists, Pentecostals share with the UU tradition the belief that God is still actively revealing God's-self in creation, that this

revelation did not end with the life of Jesus. We both believe that this revelation can include direct individual experience of God's presence, unmediated by scripture or church authorities.

- That restoration of the early church and the experience of early Christians is a goal for which we can strive. Pentecostals, Unitarians, and Universalists have shared a suspicion of historic church hierarchies, especially when they claim the authority to impose doctrinal conformity.
- That salvation is available to all people. This classical Universalist position, broadly stated, is shared by Pentecostals and UU's, in contrast with the Calvinist position that salvation is only available to a predestined elect. The Pentecostals are among the world's faiths that also embody a neo-Universalist ideal that the love of God reaches across lines of class, culture, and nationality, and is visibly manifest in the church as available to all.
- That the church is composed of a "priesthood of all believers". Both traditions affirm that religious leadership can come from anyone called by the Spirit to preach and spread the gospel . Early Pentecostal communities especially shared this non-hierarchical belief that arises naturally from believing that God can be experienced by individuals without mediation from a priestly class. This resulted in women having more opportunities for leadership in the early years of the Pentecostal revival than in the evangelical traditions, and indeed, more than in Unitarianism and Universalism at the turn of the 20th century.
- That any faith practice must take seriously human history and this world as a place where God is active, rather than focus entirely on meaning in a life beyond this one. Grant Wacker frames this nicely in the introduction to *Heaven Below*: "though a vast gulf, both cultural and theological, separated the Holy Ghost revival from the emerging liberal-modernist impulse in mainline Protestantism, both traditions distinguished themselves by emphasizing the nearness and salvific power of God's spirit in history. " ⁱⁱ

- That God is immanent in the world, rather than removed from it. Paul Rasor wonders if this is “the most significant theological shift” in modern liberal theology ⁱⁱⁱ. Unitarian Universalists are more apt to experience this immanence through immersion in nature rather than in listening to the voices inside them during prayer practice, as Pentecostals do, but both affirm an experience of God’s presence.
- That pneumatology, the theology of the Spirit, is important to understanding God’s presence in the world and in our individual lives. The “Spirit of Life” may not be identified with the third person of the Trinity when Unitarian Universalists sing about it, but when we describe the role of the Spirit in our lives and churches, it resonates with Pentecostal beliefs about the Spirit.
- That deeds manifest the spirit. Mere assent to doctrinal belief is not enough for both these traditions. The “fruits of the spirit” are physical actions and manifestations that both traditions believe can offer evidence of God’s presence and action through human beings in the world.

The assignment for this paper did not specify for elaboration any or all of these theological streams that have flowed together into the river that both unites and divides us. Instead, the assignment was to “explore intersections between Unitarianism, Universalism, and Pentecostalism with respect to salvation, Christology, incarnation, (and) sacramentalism”. Here is where we find the river to be wider and deeper, and those seeking to cross it with me will wonder as we enter the theological mist, whether those on the two banks will ever be able to see each other’s side.

III. Salvation: A Mystery Hid?

Pentecostal soteriology is generally Arminian, as is our historic Unitarian and Universalist soteriology. Pentecostals believe that God’s salvation through Jesus is available to all, and not only to a predestined portion of humanity. They broadly believe that this salvation requires a free will response

on the part of the individual to receive the grace of salvation God is offering. In his outline of the three major theological influences on the beginnings of Unitarianism in America, Conrad Wright began with Arminianism, and described the Unitarian Arminian position in a few sentences that most Pentecostals would readily accept: "Arminianism asserted that men are born with the capacity both for sin and for righteousness; that they can respond to the impulse toward holiness as well as the temptation to do evil; and that life is a process of trial and discipline by which, with the assistance God gives to all, the bondage to sin may be gradually overcome."^{iv} Understood this way, the 18th and 19th century Unitarian Arminian soteriology also seems to be focused on doctrines about human nature and capacity to respond to God's grace.

The New England patriarch of this theology was Charles Chauncy, minister of First Church in Boston. Chauncy was careful to avoid preaching that God would grant justification to human beings only on the basis of their works. The Arminian position he represented argued that both faith and works were required as conditions of salvation, and that the covenant God offered to humanity set them both as the "terms" for salvation. Salvation could never be earned, however, as part of this covenant by human action alone, only freely given by God. For Chauncy the sinfulness of individual human beings made it impossible to achieve salvation on merit alone.

Chauncy came to believe that God's salvation was available to all, and not only to the Calvinist elect, a logical conclusion of the Arminian belief in divine benevolence. Chauncy was an early advocate for universalism, although he held back his major theological work *The Mystery Hid From Ages and Generations* (1785) for twenty years after he wrote it, fearing that his arguments for the free will and innate moral sense of humanity coupled with his affirmation of universal salvation would be received badly, and muddled with the new Universalist preaching that was being heard in town.

John Murray was preaching in New England during most of the last decades of Chauncy's ministry. Murray represents one founding strand of Universalist Arminian soteriology, although Conrad

Wright calls him a “Calvinist Arminian”, because the pattern of his argument for universal salvation was closer to Calvinism than Arminianism. The pattern was this: Humanity is inherently sinful *as a whole*, in solidarity with the sin of Adam. Thus, we have all been saved by Christ’s union with humanity and his assumption of all our sin into himself, and by his paying the price for that sin. Unlike Calvin, Murray contended that Christ’s atonement paid humanity’s debt in full, and paid it for all humanity. What was needed now was to announce this good news, and for human beings to recognize it so they could be reassured and act accordingly as good and grateful Christians. Murray believed, after his teacher the British theologian John Rely , that Christ was the head of humanity and a “new Adam”. His atonement pushed the re-set button on human nature and the human story.^v

18th Century Universalist Arminian soteriology had a second and different doctrinal emphasis, represented by Elhanan Winchester and George de Benneville, that focused on the eschatological restoration and salvation of humanity, although not without a period of purgatory for some. George Hunston Williams summarizes these “disparate and disproportionate” doctrinal emphases this way:

“ the universalism of Winchester..*looked forward* to an eschatological restoration of all creatures..whereas the universalism of Murray..*looked back* to the definitive and decisive recapitulation of the human race by Christ as the Second Adam.^{vi} A key difference was that Murray was preaching the benefits of realizing that this salvation had occurred for the present life, and not in a life to come.

Comparing the historic Pentecostal affirmations of Arminian soteriology with the historic Unitarian and Universalist affirmations leads through some familiar territory for 18th century liberal religious theologians, but also through territory that they did not travel or think important. Pentecostals largely came out of Wesleyan holiness congregations and believed in the basic distinctions Wesley made in the process of salvation. Through faith in Jesus as the gateway to salvation, which is an act of free will, God offers justification to human sinners. This justification is not the entirety of salvation, but rather a first step, God’s pardon. Justification is followed by sanctification, a process of purification

through living a Christian life that gradually removes the stain of sin from our lives. Here John Murray has already departed from the Wesleyan path. Baptism as a Christian, sincerely received and understood, was all that was necessary for Murray. It meant being received into the church, which gathered and supported those among humanity who had received and understood the news of their salvation and were willing to live in grateful response to it. Neither Chauncy nor Winchester would be willing to agree that humanity's corruption was already gone, but rather that it continued to reside in each individual and needed to be subjected to ongoing purification.

If coming to Jesus in faith was a first stage in receiving salvation, the emerging Pentecostal tradition identified three more stages, making up a "foursquare" gospel of salvation. The second stage was sanctification, a familiar stage in Wesleyan-Holiness soteriology, but described differently by various early Pentecostal "schools" ^{vii}. Sanctification could be experienced as a cleansing, either as a sudden event that followed conversion, or as a lifelong process of cleansing through experiencing the fruits of living a justified Christian life. This sanctification process was often referred to as "Baptism in the Spirit" in contrast with the ritual water baptism that marked conversion and justification. Some Pentecostals also believed that this Baptism in the Spirit involved developing the capacity for extraordinary feats of witness and power.

The remaining two components of the "Foursquare" were of little interest to the theological founders of Unitarian and Universalist Arminian soteriology: Divine healing, and anticipation of the Lord's soon return. While miraculous healing had been manifest during the Great Awakening, it was not an important theological emphasis of its leaders, and 18th century Arminian preachers viewed it with suspicion. The Arminian preachers were more interested in the ways that God's Kingdom could be made manifest on earth and did not live their lives in anticipation that Christ would return in their lifetimes to bring that about.

IV. Supernatural Rationalism and Sanctification

The process of sanctification, therefore, is where we should focus in appreciating where both our historic and our current Unitarian Universalist soteriologies match and diverge from that of the Pentecostals. Sanctification is a pragmatic and verifiable stage of the salvation process for Pentecostals. Even when considered as an ongoing process of cleansing which goes on after baptism throughout life, and in the life to come, it is a necessary evidential step in anyone's life to be able to achieve salvation.

Historically, New England Arminians and Unitarians were more uncertain about whether outward signs of sanctification could and should be required or trusted. In this regard, we return to Conrad Wright's threefold typology of theological influences on New England Unitarianism. The first was Arminianism and the second was "Supernatural Rationalism", the belief that "unassisted reason can establish the essentials of natural religion...But unlike Deism, it insisted that natural religion must be supplemented with a special revelation of God's will^{viii}." What kinds of special revelations of God's will would be acceptable? The scriptures, of course, and the special revelation of the life of Christ, to be sure! But what about special revelations in the lives of individuals? For the establishment Arminian clergy of New England, there were obvious answers to the question of what would constitute the outward behavior of a justified person. A pious outlook and spiritual practice, church attendance, and good works would certainly qualify – but emotional and supernatural outbursts in worship, or claims of spiritual power and prophetic understanding were not only unnecessary, but uncertain in their origin. Were they truly from God or could they be from the devil? If they disrupted the order of worship and the peace of the church, as was the case during the Great Awakening, how could they be from God?

No such concerns troubled the Pentecostals who grappled with the meaning of the Azusa Street revival. The Bible was God's primary revelation of His salvation through Jesus, and almost immediately after Jesus had left this world, God's revelation of the path to salvation continued in the Pentecost events described in the Book of Acts. Sanctification was process well-documented in scripture, and the

ways that God could act to cleanse you were enumerated, but not limited, by the descriptions in scripture. In emphasizing Spirit Baptism as a condition of salvation, the Pentecostal and Arminian conceptions of salvation part ways most dramatically.

By the turn of the 20th century, when the Azusa Street revival began, Unitarianism and Universalism had become thoroughly modernist faiths. A Spiritualist theological wave had crested and retreated, particularly in Universalism, in the mid-19th century, but had not left a lasting impact on the denomination's culture. Liberal religionists were dropping the "supernatural" prefix of their former selves, and committing only to rational religion. There is no evidence of anything but disdain for and alarm at the rise of Pentecostal religion in America in the sermons and writing of and about Unitarians and Universalists of that era. In the 20th century, however, there was an influential current in the theological river shared by Pentecostal and Unitarian Universalist represented by the empirical theologians and particularly the early work of Henry Nelson Wieman. He affirmed and prioritized "knowledge by acquaintance" with God over rational description in conceptual categories.^{ix} Wieman's influence notwithstanding, for most 20th century Unitarians and Universalists in the pews, the idea that "supernatural experiences" might be a part of Unitarian Universalist worship or seen as evidence of spiritual renewal among us, let alone as evidence of salvation, was incomprehensible.

In contrast, in his summation essay concluding his book on the The Future of Pentecostalism in the United States, Eric Patterson states that "the greatest contribution of Pentecostalism to twentieth and twenty-first century Western Christianity is the rediscovery of the supernatural^x". Patterson goes on to describe the most important of the charismata that different Pentecostal traditions embraced as evidence of Baptism in the Spirit, particularly speaking in tongues, and laments their decline and absence in contemporary Pentecostal traditions. Patterson sees the ambiguous place of supernatural agency as a crisis for Pentecostals, and has great doubts about the ways that the charismata of Pentecostalism have become mere charisma in the successful seeker-oriented Neo-Pentecostal

churches. If there is any possibility for intersection between contemporary Pentecostal attitudes towards salvation and emerging Unitarian Universalist questions about what salvation means to us, it may be in the realm of worship experience. The youngest generation of Pentecostals has become less culturally distinct and isolated in their charismatic experiences in worship, embracing accessible charismatic signs in worship that are not unfamiliar to a popular culture that grew up embracing “spirit-filled” arena music and sports events. Neo-Pentecostals no longer point to these experiences in public worship as necessary conditions for salvation, and have turned away from these corporate experiences to more individualistic personal experiences of relationship with God through disciplined prayer practice. In doing so, are they moving more in the direction that Unitarian Universalists are trying to go with our theology of worship? Insofar as we believe that participation in the life of the church is part of the salvation we offer, the message of our worship has tended to be focused on analysis of social or life issues and how we can perform good works to make ourselves and our families happier or make the world a better place. Our worship is not about transformative experience that is generated experientially within us by participation in a corporate experience of celebration. Because Neo-Pentecostal worship has become more accessible to us and has messages about how to live a happy and productive life as part of their salvation narrative, messages that we can recognize and embrace, we are in a better position than ever to learn lessons about transformative worship from Neo-Pentecostals.

V. Oneness and Unitarian Theologies

We’ve used Conrad Wright’s three major theological influences on the beginnings of Unitarianism in America as a jumping-off point for exploring theological intersections of UU’ism and Pentecostalism, and now we come to the third one, which (appropriately) is anti-Trinitarianism. UU readers of the history of Pentecostalism may be surprised to discover, as I was that a significant

Pentecostal tradition, the Oneness movement, is anti-Trinitarian. David Bernard summarizes Oneness doctrine in two propositions:

“1) there is one indivisible God with no distinction of persons in God’s eternal essence, and
 2) Jesus Christ is the manifestation, human personification or incarnation of the one God. All the fullness of God dwells bodily in Jesus Christ, and all names and titles of deity properly apply to him.”^{xi}

The Oneness Pentecostals base their belief on scripture, and separated from other Pentecostals over their interpretation of the nature of God between 1914 and 1916. The most visible expression of this theological difference between them and other Pentecostals is in their baptism ritual, which invokes the name of Jesus Christ only, rather than the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Theological disputes about Oneness theology have continued across the last century, and most recently erupted into a very public controversy about the teachings of T. D. Jakes, senior pastor of the Potter’s House in Dallas, an large independent Oneness congregation that also preaches a “prosperity gospel”. As Jakes’ presence in the mass media has grown, evangelicals and Pentecostals alike demanded that he explain whether and how he is a Trinitarian, and he has been forced to respond to this pressure.

Oneness Pentecostals encompass almost ten per cent of the Pentecostal population of the United States. Their soteriology is not distinct from many other Pentecostal traditions. They believe that repentance leads to justification, ritualized in water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and in signs (including speaking in tongues) as an expression of sanctification which is necessary to receive the grace of salvation through faith. Unitarian Universalists are unlikely to look for theological cousins among their members and ministers.

Looking at their Unitarian theology, however, distinct from their soteriology and worship practices, we can see readily how it matches up with the evolution of unitarian thinking in our tradition. New England Arminians were not necessarily unitarians, but when they were, they were more likely to be Arians, who believed that Christ was a divine but subordinate being, existing before time began, but

subordinate to the one God. Charles Chauncy, and most leading 18th and early 19th century Unitarians held this view. The other 19th century Unitarian position was Socinianism, which saw Christ as the perfect man, above all others in exemplifying what humanity could be in relationship to God, but not part of God. James Freeman of King's Chapel and Joseph Priestley, two ministers outside the fellowship of the Standing Order clergy of New England, held a Socinian view. Even though they were far outnumbered, their Socinianism gradually became the norm among Unitarians, Transcendentalists, and Universalists by the mid-19th century as supernatural rationalism held sway.

Oneness Christology is not the same as either the Socinian or the Arian view. It is not Socinian because Jesus is understood as fully God, manifested in flesh. That's different than being a pre-eminent human being. It's not Arian because Jesus Christ is in no way subordinate to God, but is God, dwelling bodily in a human form. Oneness Christology's roots are in the ancient heresy known as "Sabellianism", which taught that God's essence was one, but that God operated in the universe in three different modes and could be called by three names. "Modalism" is a term frequently used by critics to describe Oneness Christology. The Sabellian heresy would have been familiar to historic Unitarian and Universalist Christians but was not popular or advocated in theological debate. The fierce debate about whether a powerful and popular Pentecostal minister like T.D. Jakes is a Trinitarian is worthy of note here. Although he still baptizes in the name of Jesus Christ, Jakes claims to have a Trinitarian theology as he defines it. He knows that preaching the details of Oneness Theology is not where the strength and power of his ministry lies. Jakes' responses to his detractors have been tempered with admonitions of humility about how far our language can take us in speaking about God, admonitions that would not be unfamiliar if spoken in a Unitarian Universalist pulpit.

VI. So What? Answers from Pneumatology and Anthropology

The efforts that T. D. Jakes has made to downplay the importance of his views about the Trinity remind me to raise the “So What?” question about the focus of this paper, the theological intersections between Pentecostalism and Unitarian Universalism. What difference does it make if we have learned something about the theological river that we both camp alongside and draw from? Does it mean we will cross the river more often to visit? Does it mean that we have reason to believe we could expand our camp to the other side?

In her book Christianity After Religion, Diana Butler Bass makes case that “belonging” and “behaving” are much more important reasons than “believing” for people in America to be involved in any religious community today. She has spent much of the last decade documenting the vitality of some churches in the face of a “religious recession” in America, and her conclusion is that their vitality arises from their religious practices, rather than from any obvious and deep engagement with their distinctive theological beliefs. In contrast, we find anxiety expressed among authors exploring the future of Pentecostalism in America about a loss of theological distinctiveness, as different Pentecostal denominations play down the most dramatic aspects of their original worship style that was rooted in their theological belief about what God could and would do through worship to create sanctification among God’s people. In this tension, I find two responses to the “so what” question within two of the theological intersections between Pentecostalism and Unitarian Universalism that have been described briefly in this paper but have not yet been explored in any depth. One intersection is pneumatology, our theologies of the Holy Spirit. The other is our anthropology, our theologies of human nature. At these intersections I find some answers to what difference this inquiry into the Pentecostal/UU intersection has made for me.

Pneumatology in the Pentecostal traditions is notoriously imprecise. Is the Holy Spirit a “person” of God? Oneness Pentecostals don’t think so, but they will tell you what it feels like to be

baptized in the Spirit, as will millions of other Pentecostals who think of the Spirit as a “person”. Those who think the Holy Spirit is a person of God don’t focus on this distinction when they describe what it means to experience talking to God in their prayer practice. Neo-Pentecostals are interested in the Holy Spirit as an expression of God’s love and relationship with us, and are interested in knowing how to identify and respond to the manifestations of that love in the world, and in their own lives, rather than in discussing God’s love as a theological concept. The words of James Luther Adams that opened this paper resonate with these concerns: “We learn what is meant by any conception of the love of God by observing what sort of behavior issues from it. “

Attending neo-Pentecostal worship services, I am always struck by the power-pop love songs to God and to Jesus that begin and end worship. The behavior that they want to invoke is the same behavior that we see on the part of anyone who falls in love. The lover wants to spend as much time as possible with the beloved, share life intimately, work, play, and be joyful with the beloved. This is one of the most important ways that the Holy Spirit is experienced in Pentecostal worship. But it isn’t the only way. In Adams’ references to the Holy Spirit, he most commonly identifies the Spirit as available to all humanity and experienced primarily in the context of community:

“Every child of God has the guidance of conscience, for the Holy Spirit is available to every child of God. But this conscience and the living presence of the Holy Spirit is found in the mutuality of community. The individual transcends himself..through life with others.”^{xii}

Our “sung scripture” written by Carolyn McDade invoking the Spirit of Life identifies it with roots and wings, with a beloved community of tradition that invites and creates individual transformation, and that leads to giving life the shape of justice. The trajectory of today’s Pentecostal churches in their relationship to the Spirit is no different.

Pentecostals have found effective ways to bring people into their communities, to have a transformative experience in worship, to sit in small groups with fellow members and seekers and learn

a spiritual practice, and to have that practice reinforce and amplify the experiences of transformation in service within and beyond their own congregations. So even though we may not currently have contexts or a desire for theological conversations with Pentecostals about their pneumatology, we have a need to watch and learn how the Spirit of Life moves among them.

Where we do have a context, a desire, and a need for theological conversations is among ourselves. Another segment of the opening quote from James Luther Adams says: “We live by our devotions. We live by our love for our god.” He goes on elsewhere in the same essay to say: “..the total human condition is to be understood as a manifestation of God’s love, and ..participation in community is our responding love for God^{xiii}.” Over the last century, Pentecostals have been among the most effective religious traditions in demonstrating the truth and the reality of these statements by Adams. The thesis of Adam’s essay on the “love of God” was that this theology, well understood and well-lived, illuminates social experience and bring depth to practical social questions. It is the love of God that “gives life the shape of justice.” Adams acknowledges that the “love of God” may not be a theological construct that all UU’s will embrace, but that it does point to an ultimate confidence and devotion that even secular people can find by giving themselves away in community.

There are common human experiences underneath theological conversation and theological commitment. Admittedly, this basic assumption of classical liberal theology has been challenged by post-modern theologians but will continue to serve us well if we seek interchange and learning with Pentecostals. Unitarian Universalists and Pentecostals believe in common that human beings have the capacity and the freedom to receive the embrace of a power beyond ourselves and to respond to this power with faith and trust. Traditions that instead place their confidence in the authority of scripture and religious hierarchy limit this exploration and the conversations that are possible about this experience. Religions whose anthropology presumes the freedom to respond to God’s love, in whatever way that love is experienced and understood, also must teach that human beings have a special

responsibility to engage theologically. Taking theology seriously as a longing that our people have and with which they want to engage may be the most important theological intersection that we have with Pentecostals and where they have the most to teach us. I have been inspired by efforts that a few of our colleagues have made to create city-wide or regional theological conversations among lay leaders and clergy about theological issues that matter – not just another round of UU identity conversations, but engagement with theological questions for which common language exists across the spectrum of belief and non-belief in God. I wish for more of them.

Early Pentecostals cared deeply enough about theology and its meaning to risk their eternal salvation and their worldly fortunes on a church community that reflected the truth they knew about God's love. Some early Unitarians and Universalists did the same. We don't feel like the stakes of our theological conversation today are anywhere near that high, and as we read about the changing face of Pentecostalism maybe more of them feel the same way too. Perhaps we need to inject the fear of hell back into our theological engagement, not the Christian hell, but the hell of Jean Paul Sartre in No Exit, where nothing exists but meaningless conversation among people with no bond of community who share nothing but the room within which they pass their days .

Rather than end this paper with such an image, let me gather us again at the river of common theology with which I began, and expand that image. Rather than simply being currents in that river, some of the theological commonalities we share with Pentecostals are solid enough, mutually visible enough, and accessible enough to both Pentecostals and UU's that they are starting to look to me more like islands, than currents. Perhaps those islands are the places where we can pitch some tents and have a camp meeting together that would expand our mutual understanding and respect. I hope so.

ENDNOTES

i. Adams, J.L. "The Love of God" in On Being Human Religiously, Max Stackhouse, ed.. Beacon Press, Boston (1976) p. 99

ii. From Heaven Below: Early Pentecostalism and American Culture, by Grant Wacker, Harvard U Press, Cambridge MA 2001.

iii. Rasor, Paul Faith Without Certainty, Skinner House Boston (2005) p. 20

iv. . Wright, Conrad The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America; Starr King Press, Press Boston (1955) p. 3

v. An essay detailing responses to evangelical pastor Rob Bell's universalist conversion in the June 27, 2012 issue of Christian Century by religious studies professor Paul Daffyd Jones entitled "A Hopeful Universalism" captures the essence of Relly and Murray's Universalist theology and proposes it as a solution both for Christians tempted to follow Bell's lead and for those who condemn him outright.

vi. Williams, G.H. American Universalism, Skinner House, Boston (1976 2nd ed) pp. 10-11

vii. As described in Wacker, op. cit. Introduction to Heaven Below.

viii. Wright, op. cit . P.3

ix. See Rasor, op. cit. pp 109-119.

x. Patterson, Eric and Rybarczyk, Edmund The Future of Pentecostalism in the United States; Lexington Books, Lanham MD (2007) P. 194

xi. Bernard, David: "The Future of Oneness Pentecostalism" in Patterson, Eric and Rybarczyk, Edmund, op. cit. P. 123

xii. Adams, J. L. "Guiding Principles for a Free Faith" in On Being Human Religiously, op cit. p. 9

xiii. Adams, , J.L. "The Love of God" in On Being Human Religiously, op. cit. p. 97