



A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism

John A. Buehrens, Forrest Church

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For those contemplating religious choices, Unitarian Universalism offers an appealing alternative to religious denominations that stress theological creeds over individual conviction and belief. In this new edition of the classic introductory text on Unitarian Universalism, which includes a revealing, entertaining foreword by best-selling author Robert Fulghum (*All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten, It Was on Fire When I Lay Down on It*), a new preface by UU moderator Denise Davidoff, and two new chapters by the authors, John Buehrens and Forrest Church explore the many sources of the living tradition of their chosen faith.

A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism Details

Date : Published June 1st 1998 by Beacon Press (first published July 20th 1997)

ISBN : 9780807016176

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Format : Paperback 256 pages

Genre : Religion, Nonfiction, Spirituality, Philosophy



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Erincaroline says

After a few years in occasionally attending UU Congregations. I bought the book. Such a fantastic introduction to a chosen faith ;). I love how the 2 authors go back and forth chapter to chapter. I'm so grateful to have found this book, and would recommend it to anyone inquiring about the UU Faith. I'm now attending the Inquirers Series @ First Unitarian in Dallas. This book helped me find my spiritual home. :)

Jeremiah says

One of the quotes by Margaret Fuller, "Cherish your best hopes as a faith, and abide by them in action," is probably my favorite line in this book.

Lee Harmon says

I've enjoyed attending a Unitarian Universalist church about every other Sunday for a while, and thought I should know a little more about it, so I picked up this book.

That's a lie. I have no idea where the book came from, whether it was a gift or a request for review or a purchase I forgot I had made. It just appeared on my bookshelf, without getting logged in my review queue. I love mysteries, so I read it.

U.U. is a merger of two denominations—Universalists and Unitarians—and to be honest, I didn't learn a lot from the book. That's because there is no creed to learn, no rituals to perform, no insistence upon a single belief system, while at the same time it demeans none of them. It's pluralism to the extreme. Fits me to a T, right?

U.U. is a sort of common-sense, practical religion. It feels, to me, open and honest. There is no denial of sin, death, evil, and suffering, but rather there is a humanitarian call to ease or overcome them. Those U.U.'s who have a Christian bent tend to lean toward "works" in the great faith-vs-works debate. I've never been good at denying scientific findings (like evolution), and have a tough time believing in any particular afterlife scenario over another, so U.U. fits me there, too. This quote I found absolutely fascinating:

Death is a fairly recent entry in the scheme of evolution. The beginnings of life on this planet were sponsored by single cell organisms, which replicated themselves by division. One generation of beings followed another, each identical to the last. We were immortal, until we became interesting.

But how do I explain the book? I thought I'd just list a few more quotes, and maybe something will resonate with you as well.

Unitarian Universalism might best be described as a life-affirming rather than death-defying faith.

“The Universalists believe that God is too good to damn them, whereas the Unitarians believe they are too good to be damned!” –Star King, p. 34

The light of God (“God” is not God’s name, but our name for that which is greater than all and yet present in each) not only shines down upon us, but also out from within us.

One Truth, many truths; one God, many faiths; one light (Unitarianism), many windows (Universalism).

Stacey says

Not for everyone, it being a mostly spiritual text, but a very good introduction to the seven foundational principles, and history, of UUism (for short). It reminds me why I call myself a Unitarian Universalist, because I don't often have the opportunity to attend services. I would recommend it for anyone interested in broadening their knowledge about spiritual belief systems, and especially for any UU that wants to know more about the basic guidelines of UUism. The authors, both ministers and involved in the administration of the US Unitarian church, are very well-written, and use anecdotes and history to illustrate the meanings of the principles.

John says

This was an entertaining read. As others have mentioned, it is pretty esoteric in nature. Don't expect a bunch of direct answers out of this book as there is no set creed to follow. The religion is based on life's shared morals regardless of country, religion, race, culture, etc.

Have respect for others, preferably as you would respect yourself.

Be wary of placing greater importance on the tangible than the intangible.

If you are not sure what to do, the path of least resistance is probably your best bet.
etc.

I've visited a UU church a few times, it was an uplifting experience and the emphasis on community building was encouraging. There was a very noticeable lack of diversity in the congregation but that is not to say the congregants come from very different places and experiences which is its own form of diversity. Some people I met there take their spirituality very seriously, some just say it's a great way to enjoy a safe place to meet with others on Sunday as they are not comfortable with compromising their beliefs in order to be part of another organization.

I am currently taking an intro religious studies course at school, I was asked as one of the first questions "what is religion in your own words?" I would have to say after reading this book "religion is philosophy in action."

It only took 2-3 hours to read

Darin Stewart says

This is a wonderful little book both as an Introduction/Overview to Unitarian Universalism and as a general work on non-creedal religion. Unitarians do not proselytize or evangelize and do not have any formal doctrine beyond seven basic principles (below). As a result, it can be a bit difficult to tease out the core of the faith. This book is a good, basic summation of the religion and its theology by a former UUA president (Buehrens) and one of its most prominent theologians, the recently deceased Forrest Church. It is a good read for anyone interested in moving beyond dogma to practical religion or just getting a taste of a different approach to devotion. Highly recommended.

The Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism

- 1) The inherent worth and dignity of every person
- 2) Justice, equity and compassion in human relations
- 3) Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations
- 4) A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
- 5) The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large
- 6) The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all
- 7) Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part

Richard Palmer says

The book is not presented on a Kindle in a usable form

The book is impossible to read in portrait form on my Kindle. If I want to look something up, it appears to be hard to do so because all of the controls have disappeared.

Nicole says

I didn't particularly care for this book; mainly because it wasn't what I expected. I expected more of a modern take on Unitarian Universalism but it seemed like I received more of a history of how Unitarians and Universalists came together to form UU. There was definitely some contemporary stuff in there, but the book was so dry that I had begun skipping whole sections and I can't really speak to the meat of the book. Not a book I would recommend to beginners wanting to learn about UU.

Kathie says

Unitarian Universalists, and those curious about the faith, wishing to understand the religion's sources, will find *A Chosen Faith* by Forrest Church and John Buehrens useful. I found it a thought-provoking and enjoyable read.

Rich Kooyer says

An essential book for anyone who has interest in the current, living Unitarian Universalist Association. There is some history as you would hope for but much of the information has to do with the here-and-now.

David C says

Read book and went to church

I guess I'm looking for some spirituality. I had heard of the Unitarian church so I bought and read the book and it's just what I'm looking for. I attended one of their masses and it exceeded my expectations. A lot of the parishioners shared similar experiences and had similar views. We'll see what happens.

Anna Shade says

Great book for a new Unitarian Universalist. Through dueling stories between John Buehrens and Forrest Church, this gives a good sample of the spiritual perspectives that make up this faith.

Adrienne says

This is a great introduction to Unitarian Universalism. It's very informative, well-researched, and well-thought. At times it seemed to drag a little for me because the material is pretty heavy philosophically and informationally, but I'm glad I pushed through. It was definitely worth it. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in religion and the nature of spirituality in general, as there are a lot of great thoughts along those lines.

I checked this out from the library but I feel like I should buy it because I just found myself wanting to mark so many passages. I love this book and this organization because they give words to the thoughts and feelings I have had for awhile. Interestingly, that is a common sentiment among UU's, hence the title of the book, "A Chosen Faith". Rather than a faith choosing me, I am finally choosing my own.

"A Chosen Faith" has really helped me look at my own life's losses in a different light, one in which I can more easily accept them. It has brought me a kind of peace that I have not been able to find until now.

Elizabeth says

My first thought upon finishing this book was that I needed to read it a second time, which I plan to do soon. This is partially because the book is sufficiently dense as to require multiple readings. But mostly, I'd like to spend more time with these thoughtful, nuanced essays by John Buehrens and Forrest Church. I particularly admire how they contextualize and interpret traditional Judeo-Christian theology within Unitarian Universalism. I've been attending a UU church lately, and this book makes me even more excited to have found such an extraordinary community.

Alec Justice says

There is very little of describing the actual systems or beliefs of the church, but that's probably because they don't really have them. Most of this is stories of U.U's who fought for various social issues of old, and feels more like an appeal to social activists to join. Those looking to learn more about the church in an intellectual manner would be better served to read the introduction and foreword, then skip the rest.

Kim says

Obviously a slow, thoughtful read. Given to me by my assistant minister a couple of years ago. i studied it more than read it and learned a lot - not all of it i agree with, but that's ok!

Brendan says

My family has started attending the local Unitarian Universalist church in the last couple months and I've found it quite invigorating and interesting. As part of the process, we took the "Introduction to UU" class and I bought a book about the religion. Having finished it now, I'm happy to report that I'm even more interested in this community than I was previously.

A couple general thoughts:

* UU started as a Christian sect that held views believed by other sects to be apostasy. Its commitment to reason and science and human values intrigued me, and its renunciation of dogma was the clincher. The value of being able to belong to a faith community that doesn't demand allegiance to a specific view of the afterlife is intriguing.

* I like the idea of showing concern for this life. The one, as the authors of this book put it, that we know for sure we have.

* The introduction starts with these two sentences: "All Theology is autobiography. As are most sweeping generalizations, this one is false." It struck me that the second sentence there was a fractal spiral of meaning, a kind of mobius strip that could stand on its own, like "Ceci n'est pas une pipe."

Below the fold are a few passages I marked that I find particularly enlightening or interesting.

Regarding Unitarian minister Ellery Channing's experience after going to a revival with his father:

By bedtime, young Channing had an insight that led to questions. His father did not really believe the revivalist at all! Neither did most people. Did people really become better because of fear? He thought not. Was God really so harsh and cruel? Then why praise God in worship? Why did people say they believed one thing when their actions showed they believed something else? Is doctrine the most important thing in religion? or is it the way people live? (27)

Regarding the challenge of humanism:

Too much mercy can squeeze out justice; and too much attention to our better nature can blind us to the awesome human capacity for evil. (43)

Regarding the difference between morality and moralism:

Moral posturing gives us a sense of accomplishment without our having actually done anything. In short, we feel that we have washed our hands every time we wring them. It's like a mock purification ceremony which gives only the appearance of cleansing. (49)

Regarding prophecy ("liberal" here refers not to political ideology but lack of dogma):

The prophetic liberal church is the church in which all members share the common responsibility to attempt to foresee the consequences of human behavior, both individual and institutional, with the intention of making history instead of merely being pushed around by it. (67)

Regarding reason

No matter how much we value the use of reason, no matter how lofty our spiritual ideals, our common concern is to bring those ideals down to earth and into practice in our daily human lives. Morally, we recognize that our lives are mortared together by our common mortality. (181)

Regarding flexibility of belief

Knowing that we need not think alike to love alike, we acknowledge the integrity of spiritual insights that differ from our own, so long as our neighbor returns the favor. (193)

Lexie Frensley says

I started attending a UU church back in November after the election and wanted to learn more about the history and tenets of the church. This book does a great job of outlining both in a way that also held my attention.

I particularly liked this quote, "Faith is not ultimately about believing some proposition in spite of the evidence; it is more like living with courage, gratitude, and integrity despite life's inevitable losses. And hope is not a matter of knowing that everything will turn out all right, either for oneself, or even for all of us on Earth together. It is more like directing your life toward a point on the horizon beyond which none of us can see, but toward which we all have to journey if there is to be a worthwhile future for any one of us."

Krystal Racca says

The Unitarian church is one of the few churches where I feel totally comfortable and at home; even invigorated and refueled with life after the service. Their sentiments are in line with my own, both spiritually and socially. They stand for social justice and acceptance of all walks of life, all religions, they aren't preachy or dogmatic in their sermons -which I love.

This book gets into the history of the sect (did you know that Ralph Waldo Emerson was a Unitarian??), as well as the principles and values the church strive and stand for. I picked it up because I am trying to get into the natural habit of bringing my family to their Sunday service every week; it's just not something I think about on Sunday mornings, but I'd like to start-and this book simply confirmed my desires.

Here's a link to our local UU site, the home page lists a few of the churches inherent values:
<http://www.uufsc.org/index.php>

"Finish each day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day; begin it well and serenely and with too high a spirit to be encumbered with your old nonsense."

~Ralph Waldo Emerson

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."
~Ralph Waldo Emerson

Jessica Smith says

A wonderful introduction to Unitarian Universalism - a "religion" that my soul has been seeking. The chapters are basically sermons on each of the principles shared by UU congregations and the six sources of faith. At long last, a faith that doesn't exclude or discourage individualism and thought!
