

Embracing the Unitarian Paradox

Nancy Jay Crumbine

THE 2005 ESSEX HALL LECTURE

This is the Essex Hall Lecture for the year 2005. It was delivered at University College Chester on Thursday 07 April 2005. Essex Hall is the London Headquarters of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches and stands on the site of the building where the first avowedly Unitarian congregation in an English-speaking country met over two hundred years ago. The lecture was founded in 1892 and many distinguished persons in various fields have contributed to the series. The delivery of the lecture is one of the leading events during the General Assembly's Annual Meetings.

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Essex Hall, 1-6 Essex Street, LONDON, WC2R 3HY

Tel: (020) 7240 2384 Fax: (020) 7240 3089

Email: ga@unitarian.org.uk

Web: www.unitarian.org.uk

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I. A Revolutionary Patience

On my computer is a post-it which reads in my scribbled hand: "a revolutionary patience," my definition of the spiritual life, of the call of Unitarianism in our time, the paradoxical vision we must hold up to ourselves and to the world.

The phrase is contradictory. It self-destructs much as the question "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" dissolves the rational mind of one who would try to answer. This is the point of the spiritual, to get us beyond what makes sense and is controllable to what lies deeper, to what we understand when we finally get away and sit still. Whitehead reminds us: "All religion begins in solitude." To which I add, when talking to Unitarians: Solitude is not a cerebral event.

Through all the tears and dread of stillness we feel our immense power no longer as control or combat but as patience, the greatest revolutionary force humans know. Not a patience of acquiescence, not a patience even of mercy, but a patience that means to change everything, not only psychically but materially, economically, in matters according to our Unitarian tradition, of this world here and now.

From the 16th century through the 19th, on through our own century, Unitarian thinkers and social activists have transformed and often created the landscape of our intellectual and social history. At the cutting edge of the movements for religious freedom, abolition, women's rights, public education, civil rights, reproductive rights, and gay and lesbian rights, Unitarians and Universalists have long stood for the inherent worth and dignity of every person in the context of the interconnected web of all existence.

For all our diversity, we agree that love particularized into action, in both our public and private spheres, constitutes the moments when the holy is present, when the eternal is held in time. The theological reflection that informs this commitment emerges from deep roots in the richness of many strands of our culture dating back at least to Micah's charge: do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with your God. A revolutionary patience.

Two other post-its stand in line beneath this first one. They read:

"Take off your Shoes," and "Go to Pharaoh." A third reads: "Don't forget to sing."

Why was it, again, that April
is the cruelest month?
Why was it that the wings of death
passed over certain households
in this particular time of year?
And what is it exactly we the living
are supposed to do
with our salvaged, resurrected lives?

With snow melting around crocuses,
with the long days stretching
across matted leaves, and
half-frozen forgotten toys,
April becomes those possibilities
first revealed as loss
in the melted clarity of the equinox,
in the wandering scent of hyacinths,
in the birthing of lambs in our midst.
For this God passed us by, for this.

I do not want to skip over
the cruel desert on the way to home,
the Friday before the Sunday,
the dark grief
before the winter's final passing.

These April days I want to cherish
with my fullest heart, not as morose regrets,
but as themselves,
nurturing the seeds and roots
that will burst forth for those of us
passed over, again, this year.

I want to cherish these days
that guarantee our salvation,
secure our covenant,
bring us into the light
of another summered year.

I want to feel the losses
and in the midst of the terrible passage
have the courage to wave the comet
on its infinite way.

II. Take Off Your Shoes

The angel of the Lord appeared to him
in a flame of fire out of a bush;
he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.
Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight,
and see why the bush is not burned up."
When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see,
God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!"
And he said, "Here I am."
Then he said, "Take off your shoes."

Winter is such a relief from the pressure to experience life. I love the dark, the fact that I can be inside without guilt, without a sense that I am missing something. Not that life is not experienced inside. I build a fire, cuddle up with a book. I get to talk to my children perhaps a little longer in these darker months. But the experienced life is taken at a slower pace.

Life happens to us more self-reflectively in the dark than when we walk out into a spring morning and ask what we are going to do with our "one wild and precious life." (Oliver) The other seasons demand that we do something, that we be the initiator, that we make our mark. Voices call us in the spring. Bushes burn. Dreadful thoughts call us to action. Winter simply leaves us alone.

If, in all our efforts to build religious community, if in all the hours of dedicated work, we forget to go home and stare at the fire, gaze out the window, sit still while the talkative child goes on, then all of our work is for naught.

Before I had children and before I had found the work to which I feel so committed, I spent hours walking up the dirt road by my house, hours staring at my sheep. I would not talk to anyone for days at a time, hammering fencing, building stalls, napping with a good book, getting up at four in the morning to help a ewe give birth.

For all the spiritual power of family and community -- and I would not give either up now that I have found them -- I look back on those quieter days as central to my spiritual development, as a reminder that the days of vital work and communal effort have to be balanced with days of solitude, with that stillness only the darker months can afford.

I pray not only for the light of our precious tradition but for the darkness of our planet's delicate turning, the quiet of our own sweet turning, inwardly and with peace.

The word religion means, at its roots, overcoming separation, from each other, from other species, from God, separation from goodness, from a moral life, from wholeness, from Being, from ourselves. The symbols and myths of religion, the cultural pageantry, foster some of this overcoming, but it is with the small acts of love and courage in which separation is overcome.

Unitarianism is a religious community committed to an openness and fostering of critical understanding, creating new maps as we go. We understand religious community as an educating community, where to educate means to lead forth, to lead out of ignorance, to lead out of bondage, to lead out of isolation, to lead out into the light. Not with one leader at the helm do we educate but in a caring community educating itself, each other, listening and learning, not only with the mind but with the heart.

Religion, when it is not being destructive, is "out in the country that has no language." (Rich) To dare to be human in a system that wants us to pretend, to dare to want to belong to something real, this is the spiritual journey. Religion means a binding together by belonging in a real and human way to the country that has no language.

When, on occasion, I have been moved to explain Unitarianism as an anti-religion, my sermons as anti-sermons, it is the more traditional engulfing/exclusive definition of religion I have had in mind. The traditional sermon is an apology, a defense, a jeremiad on behalf of the community's creed. The job of a minister of a non-creedal religion is to watch that no creed develops, to be ever on guard against ideology. In this way Unitarianism is the poetic wing of religion, on the far end of the spectrum of discovery. Ours is a commitment to revelation that continues to unveil itself. Ours is a loving of questions and a dedication to the questions not yet imagined. Ours is the deepest insistence that the spiritual must lead us not to answers, not to the reduction of life's complexity, life's chaotic magnificence, but out into the country beyond what we can grasp, out into the country that has no language, settled in the revolutionary patience by which we can all live in peace, by which the earth can survive.

Staying true to this heritage while opening to new uses of language is the art of our unique community. We are challenged with the range of religious diversity we find at our door. We talk about embracing diversity and rarely get down to admitting that the details of the language, in truth, offend and threaten. When all is said and done, it is safe to say that throughout a Unitarian service, no matter what you are saying, you are offending someone. Our linguistic diversity is a wealth we do not always fully appreciate. The tensions that arise from our various ways of expressing our theologies are opportunities that enrich our movement.

Instead of offense, we are called always to respond with curiosity; not tolerance, but a pro-active reaching out. Difference always is an opportunity to learn as well as a chance to protect that difference. Our task as Unitarians is to make sure nothing endangers that diversity, on an ecological level or a sociological level. We have been committed to this since the first murmurings of religious toleration 500 years ago.

A few years ago I had the honor of representing my congregation in the ceremonial walk in which the Jewish community moved their Torah from their old home to their new beautiful building. We walked from one end of the town to the other, singing and dancing behind the ancient velvet-covered scrolls.

How similar, I thought, our paths, our values and our work. Here at the center of this ancient immortal religion was this language, this sacred language, mysterious, poetic, archaic: Language that at its best has pointed to the country that has no language.

Everyone on that walk belonged to a small tribe that dared to stay together, that dared to resist culture after culture, that resisted the easy language of their neighbors for the one language that asked for more, the language that pulled the speaker and hearer beyond words.

We walked together bound in memory, memory of times and countries where such a celebration could never have taken place, where such a gathering was at best forbidden, at worst slaughtered. We were bound in memory of a holocaust and a war our parents and grandparents suffered and died in, the war in which our parents and grandparents, Jews and non-Jews, fought to preserve freedom, for better or for worse, under a banner of language that we believe in still: the requirement to do justice, to love kindness, to walk humbly with our God.

Salvation: what everyone seems to want and need except us. How presumptuous. Salvation. A preacher preaches, waving his arms, pointing his finger: "I offer you salvation." Who offers what to whom? I shout back at him: The soul you are after is your own.

We Unitarians are not born into original sin. Our task is to think through to an ethical life. Our task is active, something we have to do, to take on the Sartrean responsibility of one who does not believe that Christ is going to come down to save us. We have no passive need to be saved: We act.

And yet. We are here this week in Chester, I dare to say it, precisely to be saved. We long to be saved from the mad hurly-burly of 21st century life, to be saved from the madness of environmental destruction, from globalised capitalism, from the profane behavior this culture promotes. We long to save and to be saved, inseparable. We long to save ourselves and our children from the meaningless compulsion of acquisition, to save others from the hopelessness and loneliness of arranging their lives around their check book, to save the culture from destroying all of us and to save the earth from ourselves.

As when God mentions shoes, first thing.

Suppose we imagine what it would be like if we sought daily something we might think to call holy, that we might think to call redemption, that we might think to call salvation. A burning bush, for instance.

Suppose we were here because in our heart of hearts we knew we needed help. We don't know what kind but we know we might be just a little in need. Just maybe something might make sense, here, amidst people who come to sing and read and think together. Salvation is a multiple flowing of energy from which we too can thrive.

A religion that works intoxicates. A religion that works calls us to this possibility, this unbinding, this freedom. But the shoes aren't the half of it. Listening to the word of God is one thing, but then to do what that voice tells us to do: Go down to where your people are bound and set them free. This is the charge to the philosopher in Plato's cave, the Bodhisattva's task in Buddhism. Once we take off our shoes we are in some serious trouble. We return to the darkness to help others toward the light.

We who have bothered to come here today in fact believe that we have soul work to do and that we can help others do that work. Good news can be shared without the audacious self-righteousness of dogma. We can go to our fellow travelers and share with them the possibility of this faith, this faith that refuses oppression, however familiar, that believes in the salvation of all souls, however different and foreign they might appear.

Why do we so readily forget about the spiritual? At best, it is as if we listen for the cry of a child sleeping, attending all the while to other things. At worst, we forget we have a child at all.

A few years ago, I met a nun, who said she spoke with God all day long. She was surprised that I did not. She wondered at my curiosity and with patient smiles answered my persistent questions.

She was not only in the presence of spirit but always in active dialogue. She sought advice, expressed gratitude, wondered with this, her companion, her spouse. She was, quite clearly, a woman of God, one whose devotion was to interpreting everything she experienced through the lens of the spirit.

A tradition, a way of being in the world so different from my own, she yet walks with me in mine. On every political issue I can imagine, we would disagree. From many of the decisions I hold dear, she would recoil, as I recoil from her obedience to the decisions of her church. Deeper than these places of disagreement and repulsion, though, something abides. She is one of my teachers, one of many who have stretched my imagination to the possibility of a life in which the cry is not anticipated as a secondary interruption but sought after and cared for, even in its silent peaceful sleep.

III. Go to Pharaoh

Then the Lord said: "So come, I will send you to Pharaoh."
Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?"
God said, "I will be with you."

Poor Moses. Once he turns, once he removes what is binding him and listens, once he pays attention, the most terrifying task is set before him. He argues, but to no end. Failing to return to Egypt he remains a shepherd, a nomad without a vision and without a people. Once having heard the voice, if he refuses to go, he lives within a difficult and dangerous denial. He perishes no less than his people will perish without him.

Moses poses the Unitarian challenge to each of us:

Do not pretend to not have heard the voice.

Do not pretend the bush has not burned before you,
that you have not heard the plight of your people:

8 billion in poverty

30,000 children who die each day of preventable disease

global warming / environmental devastation

slavery

genocide

famine and disease on the forgotten continent

war

How can one proceed without tuning out the realities of our post-apocalyptic world, without escaping into one's mutual fund reports, into the general "consensual hallucination" that life is good, that all is right with the world.

I mention to my Dartmouth students the illusion at the heart of our everyday lives. They look at each other uncomfortably. They have never heard it put so bluntly. "All is not right with the world. We are on the brink." They laugh nervously, as if I didn't really mean it. I smile to let them know that I won't ruin their day with it. Just a passing comment, a humorous aside.

We are sitting on an ecological disaster that is already full blown and has only just begun. But it is impolite to talk about these things for too long. We witness the context of our lives burning around us and, though we might send money, vote, and work for change through government, relative to the catastrophe, we are fiddling away as we watch the biosphere collapse. I am not interested in guilt or shame here. The truth is I am interested in my own salvation, in being able to live with the answer I will inevitably have to give my children when they ask what exactly did I do to try to save the planet.

Our Unitarian tradition calls us to action as if our salvation depended upon it, as it does.

Our tradition calls us to act as if others' salvation depends upon it, which it does.

Our tradition calls us to act as if the earth's existence itself depends upon it, which it does.

First we take off our shoes. We sit still. We listen. Then we put our shoes back on and walk out the door.

Who or what is Pharaoh today? Each of us can come up with a list. Here is part of mine:

The first image that jumps out at me is Rupert Murdoch; the man who has perfected the demonic insight that fear sells. His total audience now numbers 4.7 billion people. His Fox news alone has eliminated journalism as we have known it since our country began. (DVD *OutFoxed*).. Our very democracy is imperiled by his rapid take over of so many of our media outlets.

The second image of Pharaoh is America's relationship to time and money. Here are a few snapshots: In the last twenty years, working time has increased by 15% and leisure time has decreased by 33%. On an average day, there are 17 million meetings in America: 90% of the people attending those meetings are daydreaming, 60% of meeting attendees are taking notes to appear as if they are listening. 95% of the books in US are purchased by 5% of the population. Our average working person spends less than 30 seconds a day in meaningful communication with their children. The average American watches 28 hrs of television per week, children, 7.8 hours per day. Americans spend 95% of their time indoors: We are a be-wildered people, i.e., severed from wilderness, severed from ourselves.

According to the Federal Reserve, 3/5 of American families have credit card debt. The average net balance of debtor households is now about \$12,000. (Manning, *Credit Card Debt*) Unitarian Universalist theologian, Essex Hall Lecturer of 2002, Thandeka writes: "Many middle class Americans are pretending to be something they are not: well off. They live in houses they cannot afford, drive cars they do not own, and wear clothes they've bought on credit. Worse yet, toward the end of each pay period, they use credit cards to buy food. My term for this is middle class poverty. This late 20th century phenomenon has crippled the American soul."

The third Pharaoh is our present political leadership. As you well know, the United States is under assault from within on every issue held dear to Unitarians: peace, the environment, education, health, poverty, information access, academic freedom, and, as I have mentioned, the media, the nervous system of democracy itself. Most changes have been made in the name of fear and in response to the terror-enflaming rhetoric raised to a new height since 9/11.

* * *

Terrorized by the yelling soldiers, the children and I are grabbing things in the hallway as we flee the house. Outside everyone is running, holding on to pieces of clothing they too have grabbed. The noise of guns and shouting is unbearable: The direction in which to run is unclear.

I wake in a sweat, turn over, fall back asleep. Yelling to Matthew and Jacob to stay close, I run down an open meadow scattered with people and refuse. I wake up again, turn, fall back asleep: The soldiers barging through the front door, again, the terrified flight.

The next morning I stare again at the Natchwey photographs from Kosovo, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Iraq. Their clothing our clothing, their faces our faces. Then I hear my children laughing. I wonder to myself as if in another dream somewhere between war zones and home: What words might I craft to lead us toward peace? What effect might I have in the midst of war, have on the generation for whom our courage and our mistakes will have such irreversible consequences?

When Jacob, my eldest, turned eighteen, I went with him to the local Post Office where he had to register for the Draft. Now when I dream I am huddled in a corner. Terrified technologised soldiers are searching my floodlit bedroom, stepping over my grown children shaking, weeping, clawing against my breast.

August 6, 1945

United States Secretary of War Henry Stimson vacationing in the Adirondacks on the day that the Enola Gay dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

I imagine him on the porch of one of the great lodges built in the early days of the first camps, transformed into an elegant resort for the privileged class. It is early evening; he is sipping his ritual cocktail, surrounded by friends and colleagues. He is glad that his refusal to let the Generals drop the bomb on Kyoto prevailed. He is particularly glad to be away from Washington for a while.

I have always been curious about the elite at play, their decisions left to wreak havoc as they relax in the ways that they do, the cats preening on their laps, the mice, necks broken, still alive at their feet.

Regardless of how we remember the decision in which Stimson was involved, what haunts me is the distance we human beings allow ourselves, or require of ourselves, in our decision making process.

Perhaps one way to describe the spiritual task in response to war is that it has something to do with bridging the distance between the porch of the Adirondack lodge and the too often tragic consequences of political will, that it has something to do with the possibility of discovering in those woods something of humility and self-criticism that might allow for genuine change.

How to remember the paradoxes of religious insight, how close we are to each of them, how much easier it is to find the paradoxes in our neighbor's actions than the contradictions in our own.

June 12, 1963

Fannie Lou Hamer was brutally beaten and left to die in a Mississippi jail for having dared to try to register to vote. Medgar Evers, a veteran of World War II, Mississippi's first Secretary of the NAACP, and investigator of violent crimes against blacks, was gunned down on the front porch of his home.

Since September 11, the United States seems to be talking about terror as if we were experiencing it for the first time, but Americans, have experienced terror for generations: in the lynchings, in burned churches, in schools, restaurants, in drive by shootings, in police dogs, and, of course, in war.

Americans have known terror because the theology of hate is very much alive and well in organizations across our country, organizations such as Christian Identity, Aryan Nation, Neo-Nazi National Alliance, Ku Klux Klan, Christian Crusade for Truth, the CAUSE Foundation, Citizens for Christ.

The theology of hate is alive and well not just on race but in issues of religion, class, in matters of gender and sex, and in the matter of nationalism.

Terrorism is not over there in this or that country, it is by our side, and dare I say it, if we have learned anything from the social scientists over the last 60 years, it is in each and everyone one of our souls.

The theological underpinnings of the hate groups in our country lie in the Biblical revisioning that can so easily be used to reduce complex questions into deadly final solutions, even by well meaning believers. The fear mongering of Murdoch's media empire and the Bush administration has its roots in this Biblical revisioning.

February 26, 1965

Jimmy Lee Jackson, an African American civil rights worker, is killed by a state trooper during a voter's rights march in Marion, Alabama. On March 11, Rev. James Reeb, a Unitarian Universalist minister, one of 450 white clergy who answered the call from Rev. King to come to Selma, is killed in front of the Silver Moon Café by a white mob. On March 25, Villa Liuzzo, a Unitarian Universalist from Detroit, is shot to death by a Ku Klux Klansman in Montgomery.

The great Rabbi Abraham Heschel, good friend and fellow activist with King, after walking the 54 miles from Selma to Montgomery, said of his experience: "I felt my legs were praying."

Martin Luther King in Montgomery asks: "How long before we can be a society that can live with its conscience?"

1968: Riverside Church, Martin Luther King, speaks out against the American war against Vietnam. The FBI begins their effort to destroy him.

This history is not behind us. This history is at our side. Michael Servetus, Faustus Socinus, Francis David, John Biddle, Norbert Capek, James Reeb.

We must continue our legacy in prayer...in remembrance...on our feet. Religious liberals must answer the Biblical right wing revisionists. We are the only ones that can.

Our actions must be rooted in the simple complexity of remembrance, the quiet revolutionary patience of a theology of nonviolence; a theology based on courage against impossible odds, the prayer of nonviolent action for the sake of justice and for the sake of peace.

* * *

The Pharaoh of our time is a complex web of time, money, media, and war. In its heart are our children and the dying planet that they will inherit.

In most of the schools in the U.S., it is understood to be inappropriate to discuss religion, sex or politics. Or, if one must, only in the most innocuous, vague, and meaningless way. Unitarian question: If we are not talking with the young about religion, sex, and politics, what are we talking with them about? If we are not talking about these things, it is little wonder that by age 13 they have no interest in talking with us.

Here's another Unitarian question: Is success what we want for our children? If we are educating for democracy, don't we want them not to be successful but to be able to make a difference. People out for success, we know too well, do not necessarily make a positive difference. In fact, as David Orr points out in his book, *Earth in Mind*, the well-educated successful elite of our world are precisely the problem. After outlining the state of the planet in a paragraph he writes:

"The truth is that many things on which our future health and prosperity depend are in dire jeopardy: climate stability, the resilience and productivity of natural systems, the beauty of the natural world, and biological diversity.

It is worth noting that this is not the work of ignorant people. Rather, it is largely the results of work by people with BAs, BSs, LLBs, MBAs, and PhDs.... If one listens carefully, it may even be possible to hear the Creation groan every year in late May when another batch of smart, degree-holding, but ecologically illiterate, Homo sapiens who are eager to succeed are launched in the biosphere."

In a democracy, the personal is political, the political personal. If I, as a citizen of the United States, ignore the fact that the children of East St Louis are playing at recess in toxic dumps, and have no water to run their chemistry labs or flush their toilets, then I fail as a citizen. If my students find out I ignore the children of East St Louis I fail as a teacher. If my children find out I ignore the children of East St Louis I fail as a parent. Morality is a contagious dis-ease.

Since Emerson gave up the Unitarian ministry to write poems and essays about nature, we Unitarians have all been a little skeptical about anything viewed out of its biospheric home. We have had "earth in mind" for a while. Our more Christian congregations have been on the forefront of the ecological revision of Biblical text. Our pagan congregations have been on the forefront of new ritual and myth that puts earth first. We are deeply committed to environmental issues, despite what I would call a national clinical depression about this issue, deeply worsened by the current administration.

Crucial to this struggle is imagination and hope. To overcome separation, means necessarily that one has hope. Not that "foul deceitful thing" of melodrama (Anouilh) but the prophetic hope of Jeremiah, the hope of one who sees the hopelessness and speaks nevertheless a call to action.

Religious people have hope. Perverted though it can become in some organized creeds and rituals, religious people have hope. They have vision. They do not give up.

Despite what some of you may think, and despite how sometimes we act, we Unitarians are a religious people. We are a religious people devoted to education, education for a planet that needs to be loved in new and creative ways. In Alfred North Whitehead's famous essay, *The Aims of Education*, he denounces inert and disconnected ideas, mental dry-rot - the information glut. He reminds us that genuine education is religious education, duty and reverence, a remembrance that the past and the future are in the present, making the present precisely so precious, requiring our full intelligence.

IV. Embracing the Paradox

Of the imagination Wallace Stephens writes:
I am the necessary angel of earth,
Since in my sight, you see the earth again.

If religion is worth anything it must be on the side of peace. We know, of course, that it often is not. If Unitarian tradition is to play a religious role, we must embrace the paradox that allows for peace. The truth of our faith is as simple as this: human love is wholly particular and specific. It arises only in the contradiction of the best of us. Love's opposite, fear, is wholly unspecific, arising when all hope of understanding has left and only the reactive self-defensiveness of hate remains.

It is the task of our times, after more than a half century of genocide, environmental devastation, arms sales, and the ubiquitous development of weapons of mass destruction, to speak and act only in this one direction, only with this one faith: the way of peace, with faith in complexity, the embracing of paradox and the refusal of reductionism and fear.

Our tradition calls us to build webs of understanding, holding up diversity as glorious rich complexities to enliven us, to challenge us, to empower us to be more ourselves, to strengthen the web of diversity and paradoxes that make life so joyfully full and intellectually alive.

This is true in families, in communities, in nations, and between nations: When the paradoxes of human behavior and belief are embraced, we leap over reductionism, ride on imagination right into the other's world view. We get it. We can sit down now and talk. We can truly love the other's differences. When we refuse to embrace paradox, when we reduce the other to what appears, even to what the other says, we inevitably reduce ourselves and the other to an either /or, a line in the sand, an "or else."

When the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001, the entire world held us, with all our contradictions, with all our impossible ways, held us with faith and courage that we would grieve, that we would reach out to other countries that had lost so many in the World Trade Center, that we would bring the perpetrators to justice and that we would grow from the experience to learn what so many other countries have known for so long: how to live with terrorism, how to fight back without killing more innocents, how to live with fear in a way that does not retaliate blindly, does not debilitate and reduce one to the terrorist that has attacked. Our allies expressed faith that we would learn to live with fear in a way that embraces the paradox that yes, a terrible deed was committed, but why? Always we must ask, in the awkward office situation, in the family squabble, in international relations: What is the small part of the truth of this situation I have to own? Tragically, this was precisely the one hope for peace the President did not pursue.

* * *

A paradox is an apparent contradiction. The divine become human: Paradox. The infinite brought into time: Paradox. Most of modern physics: Paradox. Order in the midst of chaos: Paradox. I stand before you, one massive pile of paradoxes. I am both smart and dumb, both faithful and sinful, I am old and young, gay and straight, beautiful and worn. I am never anything but contradiction, to myself and to anyone who truly looks at me. I stand before you speaking, free to think out loud. But I could easily be in a death camp in 1944, taken from an attic in Amsterdam, terrorized and tortured and about to die. I could

easily be an African American in a gigantic Houston church listening to my neighbor's prayer. I could be a hit man, a fundamentalist Christian, Muslim, Jew, a fanatic ready to sacrifice myself for my faith. I could be any and all of these people. I am all of these people.

As implicated as religion is in the causes of war, religious vision alone embraces the complexity that can deny the fuel of war. Here is where liberal religion is so crucial: it alone can answer the reductionism with paradox, it alone understands and can articulate the fact that forgiveness trumps revenge, that children are more important than adults, that the Sabbath is more sacred than the work days, that love conquers fear with intelligence not sentimentality, with poetry not cliché.

It takes imagination.

It takes faith that the paradoxical is real and good.

It takes faith that when you speak to Pharaoh you will not be alone.

Imagination and faith.

Institutes around the globe are studying nonviolent resistance.

Stories abound:

Against all evidence, India achieved independence.

Against all evidence, segregation in the United States ended.

Against all evidence, the great Lake Erie, so polluted by industrial waste it was declared dead, is today clean, swimmable, teeming with life.

Against all evidence, apartheid ceased and forgiveness offered.

Against all evidence, gay marriage has been and will continue to be legalised in countries across the globe.

Stories abound:

Stopping the building of a nuclear power plant in New Hampshire

A small French town of LeChambon saving more than 4000 Jews

Students stopping the United States war against Vietnam

The women of Greenham Common

The Co-op Movement

Amnesty International

The largest international peace demonstration in the history of the world

These successes took imagination. These people leapt across the reductions and imagined themselves in the other's skin. They imagined and understood that any behavior, however bizarre and dangerous it may seem, is not without some cause and some meaning. (Durkheim) They attended to that meaning and kept attending to that meaning until they knew what action they had to take to "do justice"...to do the justice they had been called to do, with humility and with grace.

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The Rev. Dr. Nancy Jay Crumbine is a Unitarian Universalist minister, a professor at Dartmouth College, a writer, actor, and public speaker.

She holds a Ph.D. in philosophy and Masters degrees in philosophy and religion. She completed a chaplaincy program at Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center, UUA preliminary fellowship, and was ordained in 1993. She served as parish minister for twelve years, and received Final Fellowship from the Unitarian Universalist Association in 1996.

She has lectured widely under the auspices of the New Hampshire and Vermont Humanities Councils, the National Council for the Aging, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and religious and education conferences, both in the US and the UK. She has received several grants for research and teaching projects and has published a number of papers and articles. A generous grant from the Unitarian Sunday School Society for her writing in religion and education fostered the publication of her book, *Humility, Anger, and Grace, Thoughts on Education and Time*, a book that addresses issues central to the Unitarian perspective.

While finishing her book, she was the keynote/theme speaker for the following RE conferences: Star Island 2002, Hucklow 2002, New York District Conference 2002, Shelter Rock Retreat Weekend 2002. She was a speaker at the UU General Assembly in Boston, 2003 and the Jeanne Blank Memorial Lecturer October 2003 at the Silver Bay UU Weekend, a conference that attracts some 400 UUs to upstate New York.

In addition to her speaking engagements, she has given workshops at Star Island, at the Nightingale Center in Great Hucklow, England, in various churches in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Ohio, and New York, as well as in her home state of Vermont.

What interests her most is "the interdisciplinary moment when the individual knows humility for the first time: in literature, in philosophy, on stage, in the classroom, in public discourse." She writes: "The integration of humility into the anger of a particular life, and the grace which follows, constitutes the depth of soul we Unitarians seek and sometimes actually achieve."