

Covenant

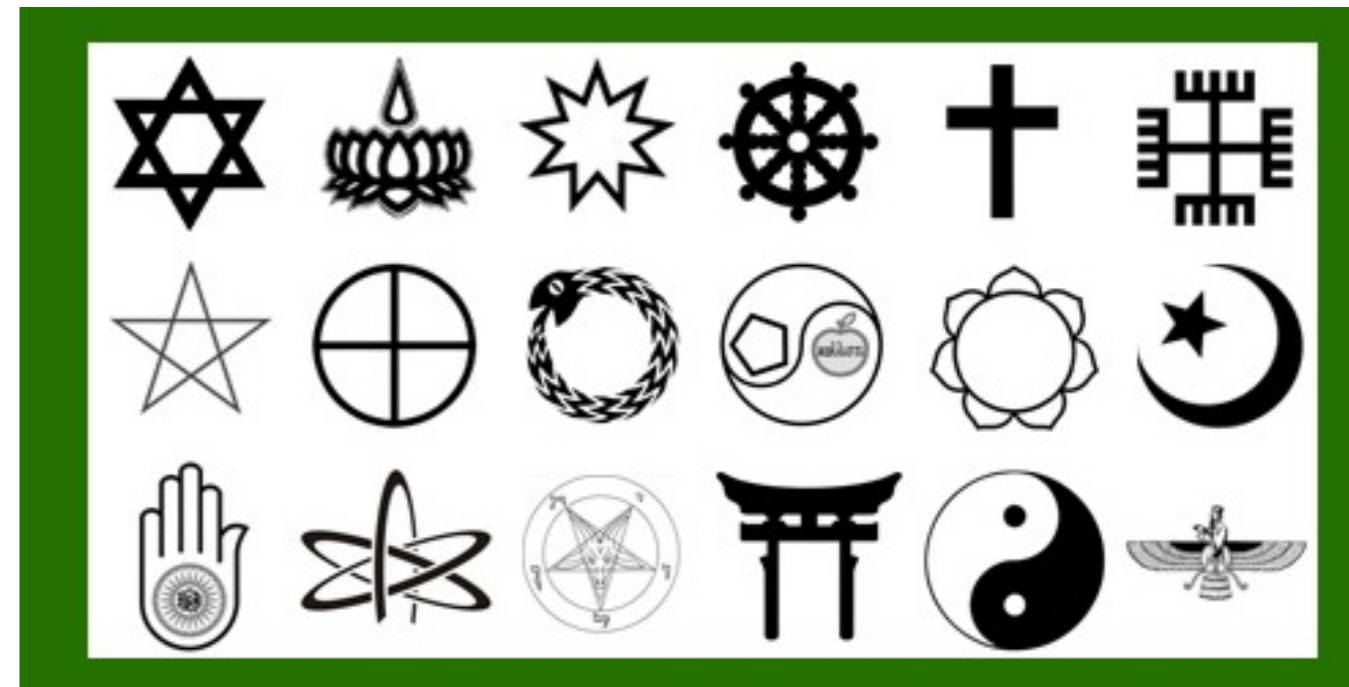
- Use “I” statements—speak from our own experience.
- Ask permission before sharing other participants’ stories outside the group.
- Step-up, step-back: Be conscious of the level of participation that you bring to the conversation. (Step up/back). Allow everyone a chance to speak before you speak again.
- You always have permission to “pass.”



Building Your Own Theology

Tuesdays, 9:30am – 11:00am

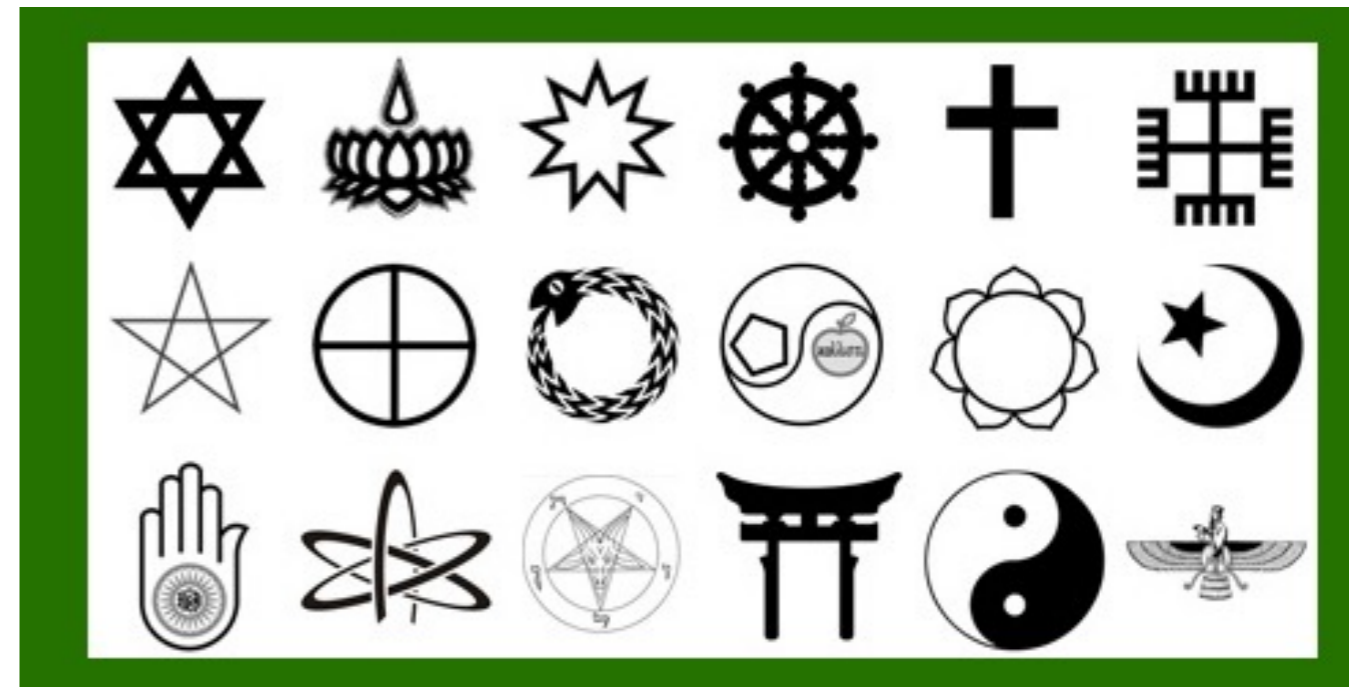
- What do you believe and *why*?
- What is the **meaning of life**?
- What is **human nature**?
- What do we mean by the words “**God**,” “**Sacred**,” and “**Spirit**?”
- Reflect on your **spiritual autobiography**
- Construct your personal **credo** (“I believe”)



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Building Your Own Theology

1. September 13
“**Liberal Turn** in Theology”
2. September 20
“**Autobiography** as Theology”
3. September 27
“Varieties of Religious **Experience**”
“**Human Nature**”
4. October 4
“**God/gods/Spirit of Life/Ultimate Reality/Sacred/Divine/reality**”
5. October 11
“**Ethics**”
“**Future**”
6. October 18:
“**So What?**”
“**Credo: I Believe**”



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Introduction

- Tools for a “Do-It-Yourself” theology
- set free OR cast adrift?
- Freedom *from* OR Freedom *for*





Deconstructive/Constructive Theology

Rainer Marie Rilke

(1875-1926)

“Do not now seek the answers
which cannot be given you

because you would not be able to
live them.

And the point is, to live everything.

Live in the questions now.

Perhaps you will gradually, without
noticing it, live along some distant
day into the answer.”

-Letters to a Young Poet



Living the Questions

- How is BYOT different for theists, atheists, Buddhists, Pagans, Christians, Jews, etc.? (starting point, end point, emphasis, etc.?)
 - Agape, Karuna, fraternite (similar/different?)
 - heaven/nirvana (similar/different?)
- What is your native tongue?
- What language(s)/culture(s) are you drawn to?
- Role of silence/experience?

Traditional Christian Systematic Theology

1. God (*Theology*)
2. Jesus (*Christology*)
3. Spirit (*Pneumatology*)
4. Humanity (*Anthropology*)
5. Sin/Salvation (*Hamartiology*)
6. Church (*Ecclesiology*)
7. Future (*Eschatology*)

The Liberal Turn in Theology

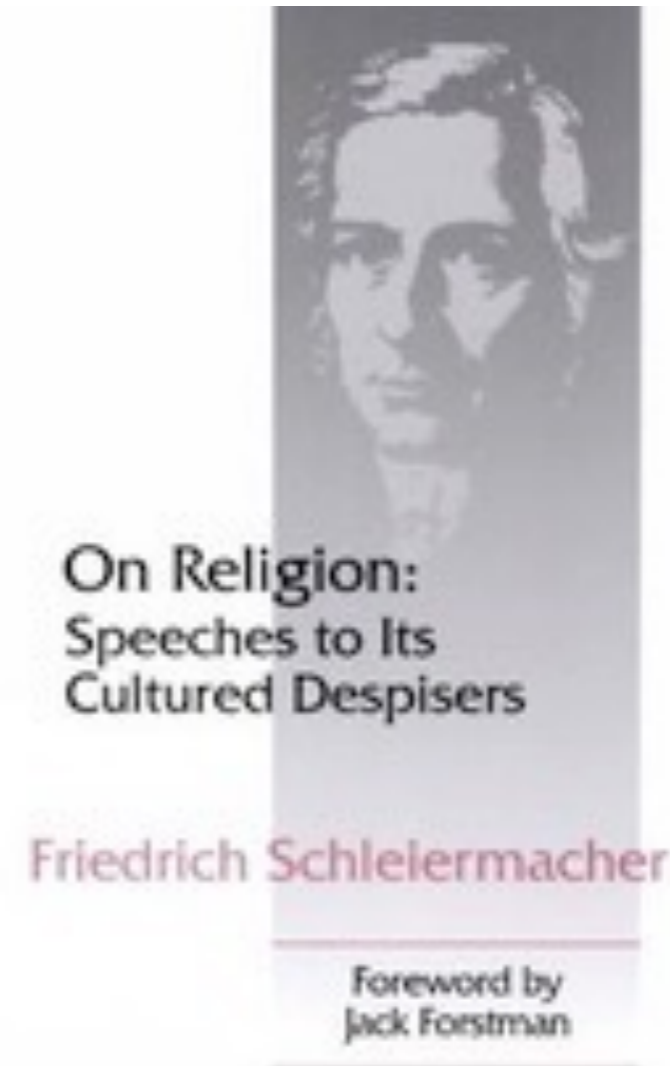
- Latin, *liber* (“free”)
- *from* Tradition/Hierarchy/Community
- *to* Reason/Experience”
- Weslyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, Experience

The Liberal Turn in Theology

- **Freedom** - unrestricted religious inquiry
- **Reason** - autonomous judgment about truth claims
- **Tolerance** - openness to divergent views

Turn to Liberal Theology

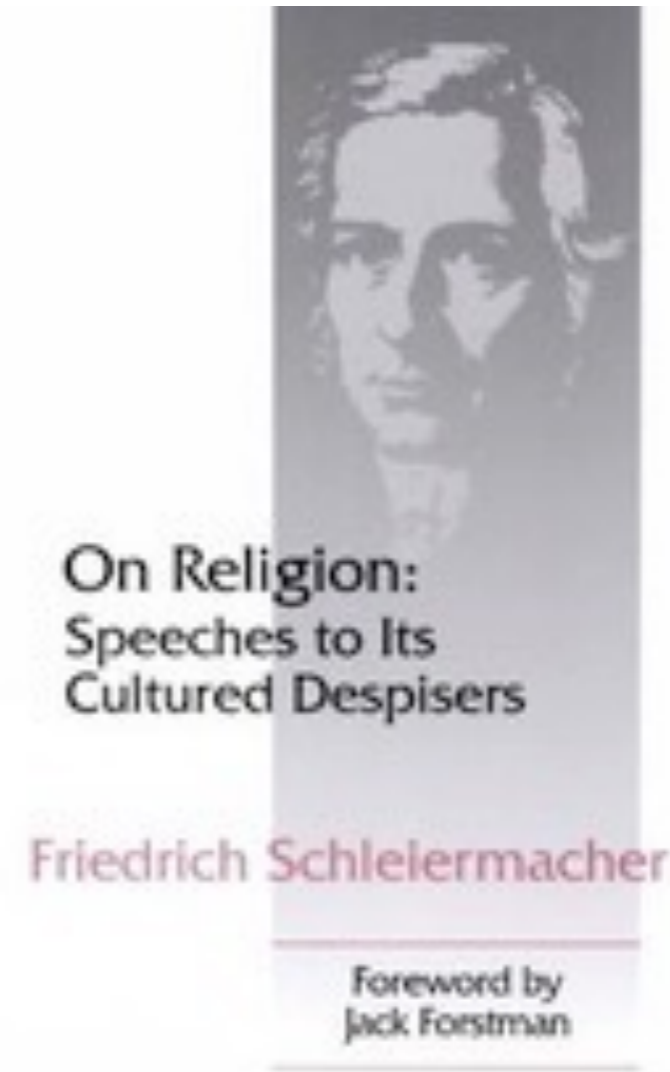
- Father of Liberal Theology
- “Essence of the religious emotions consists in the feeling of an absolute dependence” (106)
- *Feeling* of immediate self-consciousness
- Human finitude (can't know all), but can have sense/taste/intuition for the infinite in the finite.



published **1799**
(lived 1768-1834)

Schleiermacher

- “Religion is the natural and sworn foe of all narrowmindedness, and of all onesidedness” (56).
- “Only feeling and immediate consciousness can belong to religion” (93).
- “Would they but strive to annihilate their personality and to live in the One and in the All! (101)



published **1799**
(lived 1768-1834)

Credo

- What do you believe?
- What do you be-love?
- Defined in opposition to.

*We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is,
seen and unseen.*

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.*

Phyllis Tickle, “The Great Emergence”

- “Believe - Behave - Belong” vs. “Belong - Behave - Believe”
- Centered-set, Bounded-set, Network set



A “Progressive Christian” Credo: Carl Gregg, 2005

I believe in **God**,
who is Present:
the *Lover*,
who is Holy Mystery,
(yet closer to us than we are to
ourselves),
who calls us in the “sound of sheer
silence.”

I believe in **Jesus** the Christ,
who is Peace:
the *Beloved*,
whose way of living opens us
to embrace our belovedness by God
and the belovedness of all creation.

I believe in the **Spirit**,
who is Truth:
the *Bond of Love*,
who is our life together.

I believe in the **Church**,
the body of Christ,
which is called to incarnate the reign
of God by
loving God and neighbor,
forgiving as we have been forgiven,
and participating in the healing of
the world.

Credo: Sara S., 2001

- I believe in the capacity of faith to heal, to penetrate and dissolve the shackles of beliefs and creeds the human psyche so fiercely needs to attach to it;
- I believe in the power of acceptance to bring peace, to free the mind from its fears and frustrations not by disproving them but by encouraging their exploration so that they may someday be outgrown;
- I believe in the power of humility and awe to overcome the perceptual limitations of the human intellect, as well as the power of the human intellect—through its ability to invent and sustain happiness—to overcome the encompassing sense of insignificance often brought about by humility and awe;
- I believe in the miraculous contingency of human life and the capacity of infinitely small, subtle events to spark massive growth, upheaval, or destruction and change the course of history;
- I believe in the inevitability of chance, the futility of resisting it, and the importance of recognizing that my beliefs themselves are subject to their own consequences and are therefore no more permanent than sandcastles on the beach; And when life's complexities wear me down,
- I believe in the wisdom of childhood, of the capacity of an anonymous five-year-old to forever remind me of the simple joy that comes from watching the tide roll in and building something anyway.

Credo: James C. Edwards

I am a religious skeptic. I don't believe in Yahweh, Allah, Krishna, or Ogun; nor do I believe in the resurrection of bodies two days dead and buried, nor water changing into wine, nor men walking about unharmed in fiery furnaces. Likewise for angels, ghosts, demons, statues that weep milk, and miraculous cures effected by the blessed water of Lourdes. About my skepticism, I feel neither pride nor shame; it's not an achievement, nor is it a failing. It's just a fact about me . . . a fact that doesn't have much to do with the way I actually live my life....

Ogun — a deity in the Yoruba religion from the region around modern Nigeria.

Credo: James C. Edwards

Given what we . . . know about the world, all these things just don't seem sensible to me. Crucial evidence for them is lacking, and important contrary evidence is routinely ignored or patronized.... I used to believe in some of these things, I admit, just as I used to believe in [Old St. Nick] and in the value of intercollegiate athletics; but for good or for ill, the world I've come to inhabit in my mid-fifties hasn't supported my earlier — and somewhat nicer — conceptions of it.

Credo: James C. Edwards

Not that I think that all who do still believe in the things I've mentioned are crazy or irrational or naive: there are perfectly good anthropological and psychological explanations for such belief (and for my unbelief too, naturally).... [N]one of us — skeptic or believer — is in a position to throw large stones. Each of us has to live in the world she thinks she sees, staring and squinting to the limits of her vision. Lots of us will turn out to be wrong about some of the things we think are most important to us. But finally we have to call 'em like we see' em, and then live with — and of course argue about — the results.

Credo: James C. Edwards

My failure to believe in some large things (such as God) doesn't necessarily mean that I do believe in some other large things (such as "Humanity" or "Science" or "Reason." [in the sense of those concepts transcending a historical context]) If I can be said to "believe in" anything at all, it's a series of fairly small things: I believe in keeping the Kirtland's Warblers alive, in keeping (most of) one's promises, in cultivating a decent regard for the truth, in offering kindnesses to strangers (including the strangers within ourselves), in making things better for the sick and the poor, in preserving a healthy vulgarity, and so forth.

Credo: James C. Edwards

“We need and luckily still have available to us, practices that can contain, concentrate, and transmit the sacramental energies – energies for limitation in the face of hubris and for transformation in the face of complacency – that used to be bound up in the stories of the gods.” What should it mean *for us* to be religious? I have answered it thus: to dwell poetically on the earth as a mortal. That the question and its proper answer might at some time be unintelligible or trivial is not the point, so far as I can see. This is *our* life: Should we not live it as simply and sincerely and joyfully as we can?

The Plain Sense of Things: The Fate of Religion in an Age of Normal Nihilism

James Blake (Unitarian, 1894)

Griswold Williams (Universalist, 1933)

Love is the spirit of this fellowship,

The quest for truth is our sacrament,

And service is our prayer.

To dwell together in peace,

To seek knowledge in freedom,

To help one another,

To the end that all souls shall grow into harmony with the Spirit of Life.

Thus do we covenant.

Unitarian Universalist 7 Principles

(Revised 1985, 1985 General Assemblies)

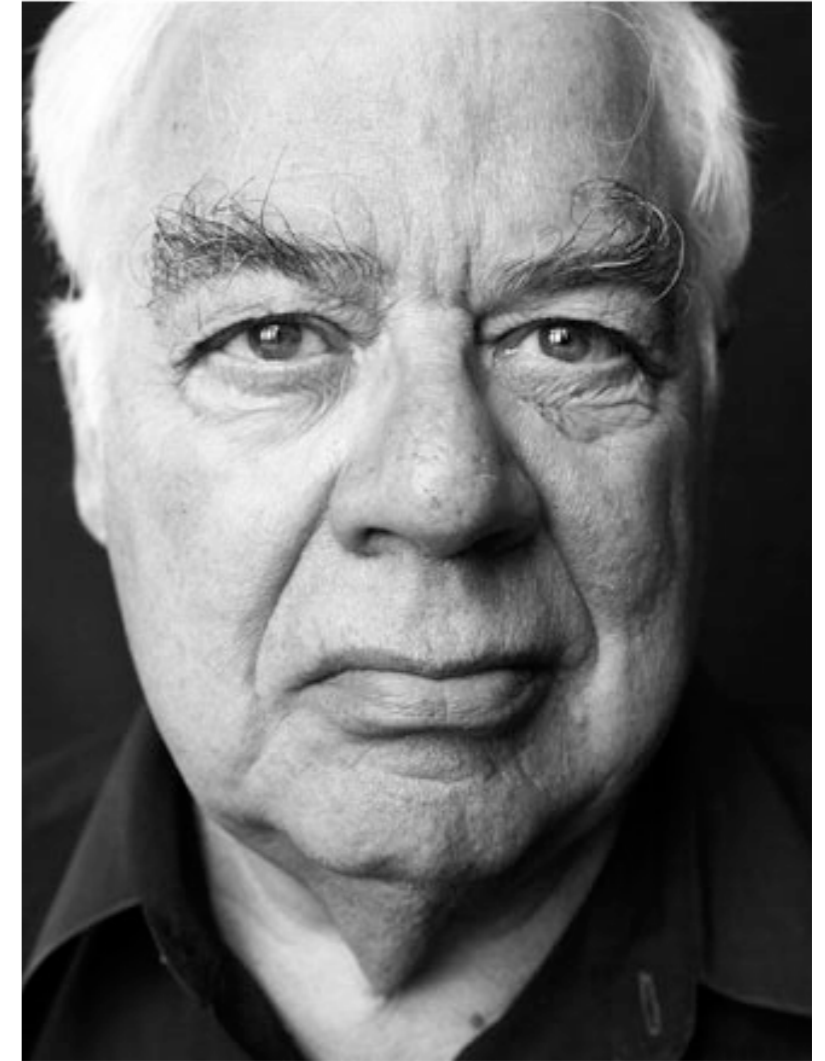
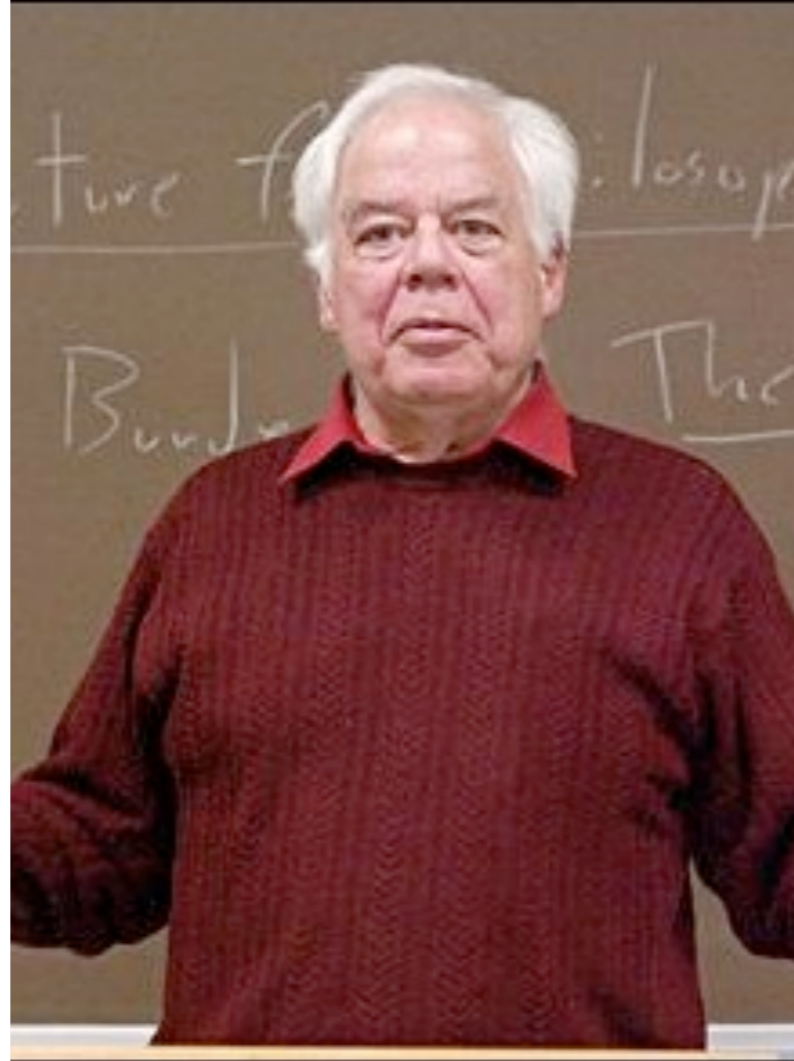
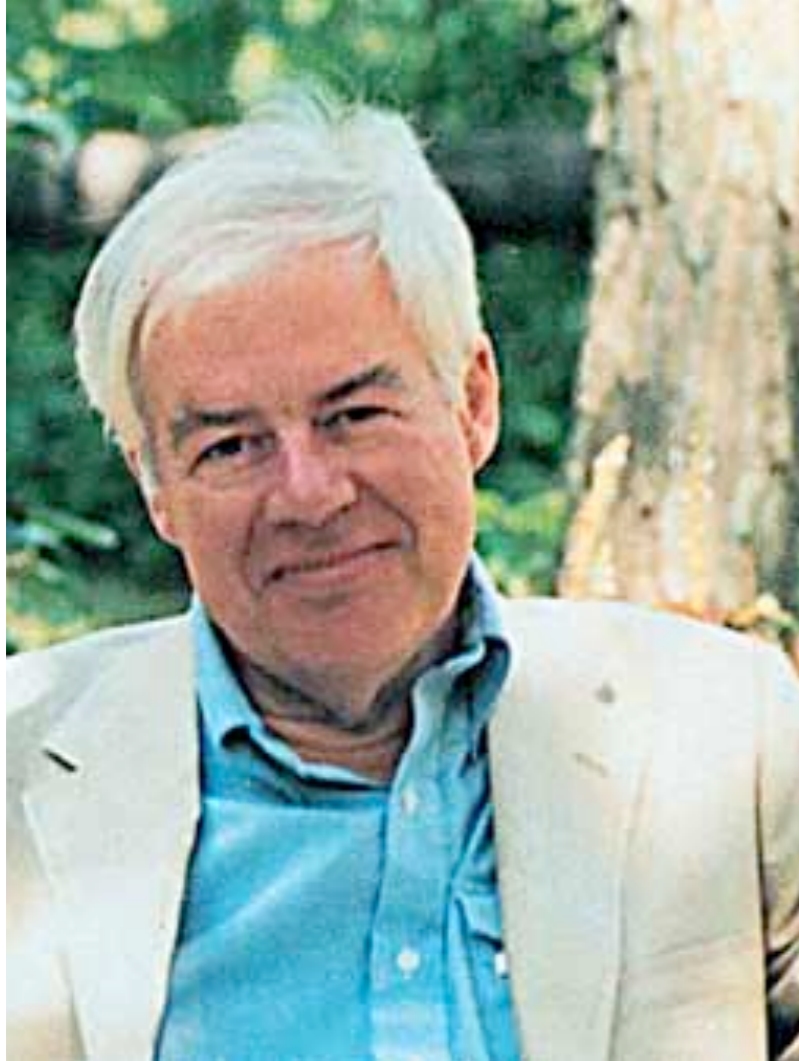
1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic 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.

UU 6 Sources *[What are your sources?]*

1. Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
2. Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
3. Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
4. Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
5. Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;
6. Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Richard Rorty (1931-2007):

Autobiography as Theology



Richard Rorty: *Autobiography* as Theology

When I was 12, the most salient books on my parents' shelves were two red-bound volumes, *The Case of Leon Trotsky* and *Not Guilty*. These made up the report of the Dewey Commission of Inquiry into the Moscow Trials.

I never read them with the wide-eyed fascination I brought to books like Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, but I thought of them in the way in which other children thought of their family's Bible: they were books that radiated redemptive truth and moral splendor. If I were a really good boy, I would say to myself, I should have read not only the Dewey Commission reports, but also Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, a book I started many times but never managed to finish.

For in the 1940s, the Russian Revolution and its betrayal by Stalin were, for me, what the Incarnation and its betrayal by the Catholics had been to precocious little Lutherans 400 years before....

Richard Rorty: *Autobiography* as Theology

I grew up knowing that all decent people were, if not Trotskyites, at least socialists....

Working as an unpaid office boy during my twelfth winter, I carried drafts of press releases from the Workers' Defense League office.... On the subway, I would read the documents I was carrying. They told me a lot about what factory owners did to union organizers, plantation owners to sharecroppers, and the white locomotive engineers' union to the colored firemen (whose jobs white men wanted, now that diesel engines were replacing coal-fired steam engines).

So, at 12, I knew that the point of being human was to spend one's life fighting social injustice.

—Richard Rorty, “Trotsky and The Wild Orchids”

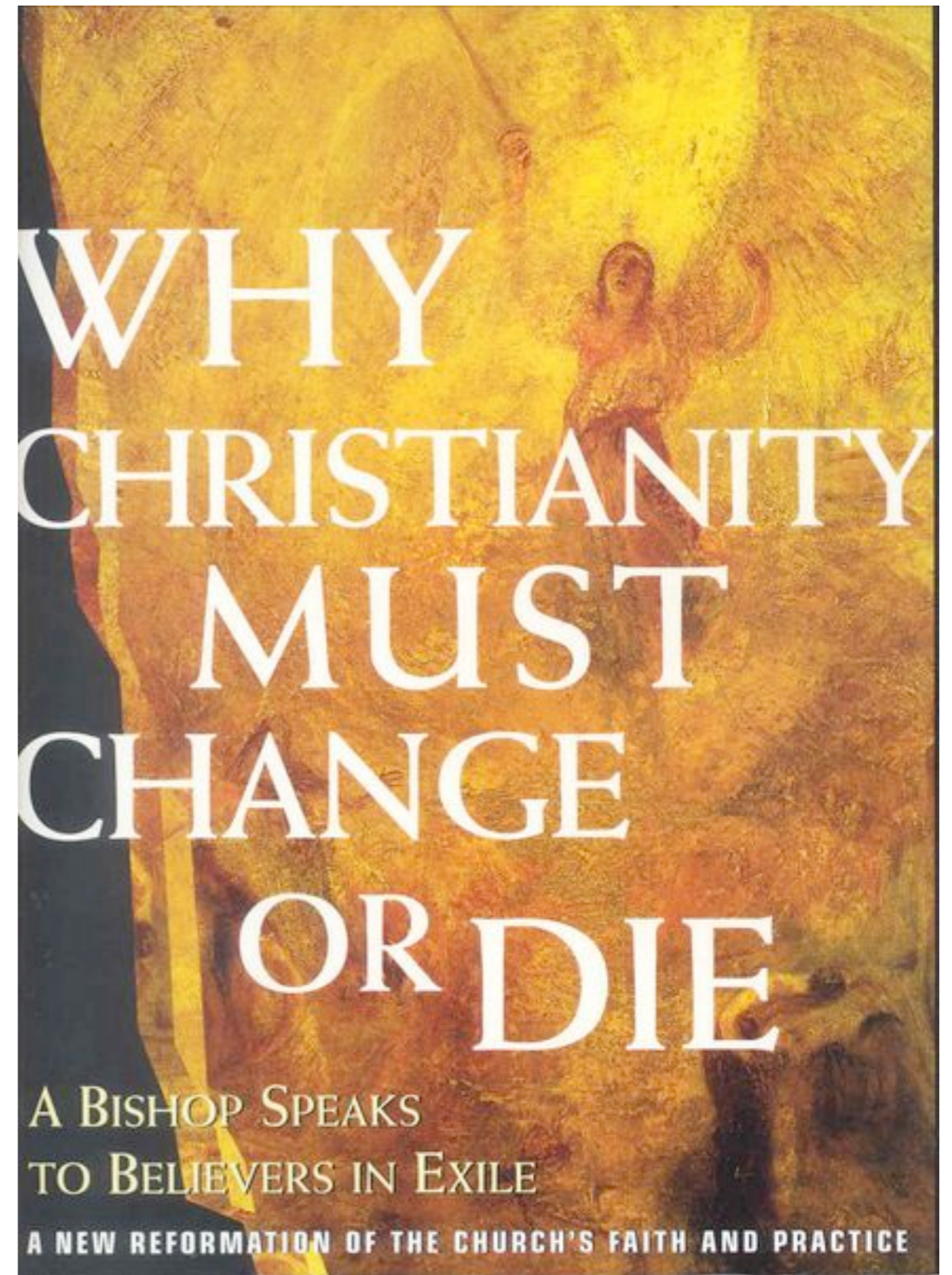
Philosophy and Social Hope (5-6) or in *The Rorty Reader* or

http://cdclv.unlv.edu/pragmatism/rorty_orchids.html.

Carl Gregg:

Autobiography as Theology

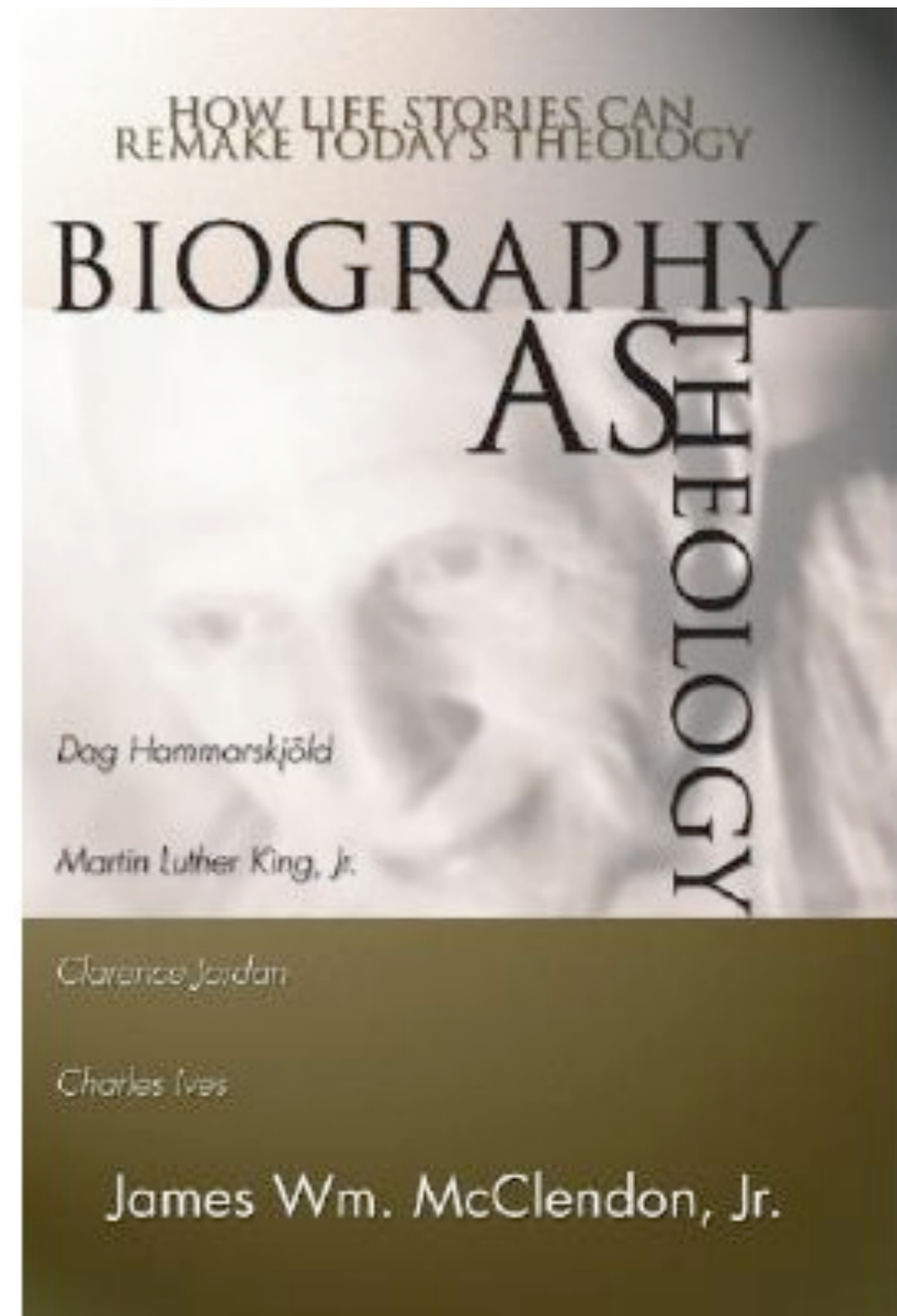
- SBC Seminary: Gospel of Matthew course
- 1 Samuel 16:14, “But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him.”
- Apocrypha
- 1995-1996: Staff Bible Study at Camp
- 1998: Spong
- Decenterings: Copernicus, Darwin, Freud, Einstein



Carl Gregg:

Autobiography as Theology

- Learning about the size and age of our 14 billion year-old Universe with its more than 400 billion galaxies, forced me to believe that **any theology that does not account for these discoveries is inadequate for our twenty-first century, postmodern world.**
- Seeing women in leadership and hearing powerful sermons from women convinced me that restrictions based on gender were about **misogyny, prejudice, and patriarchy, not about biology.**
- Likewise, seeing same-sex families convinced me that they are **neither more nor less dysfunctional than opposite-sex families**, and that restrictions against them were about heterosexism and bad theology.



Carl Gregg: *Credo*

“Theology of Ministry” (9/25/2001)

I believe that I am entrenched in Baptist life by my history, but my beliefs tend more towards those of the Unitarian-Universalists.

This drift towards Unitarianism is more understandable when seen in light of Martin Marty’s term “baptistification,” which he employs to describe religious movements characterized by “freedom, choice, and volunteerism.”



David Foster Wallace, “This Is Water” (Credo)

An outstanding reason for choosing some sort of God or spiritual-type thing to worship — be it J.C. or Allah, be it Yahweh or the Wiccan mother-goddess or the Four Noble Truths or some intangible set of ethical principles — is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things — if they are where you tap real meaning in life — then you will never have enough. Never feel you have enough. It’s the truth.

Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you. On one level, we all know this stuff already — it’s been codified as myths, proverbs, clichés, bromides, epigrams, parables: the skeleton of every great story. The trick is keeping the truth up-front in daily consciousness.

Worship power — you will feel weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay.

Worship your intellect, being seen as smart — you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. And so on.

David Foster Wallace

[youtube.com/watch?v=pfw2Qf1VfJo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfw2Qf1VfJo)

The **capital-T Truth**

is about

life before death....

It is about **simple awareness** —

awareness of what is
so real and essential,
so hidden in plain sight all around us,
that we have to keep reminding ourselves,
over and over:

“This is water, this is water.”

- What is one significant religious belief you **cherish**?
- What is one significant religious belief from your personal history that you have **rejected**?
- What is one religious issue with which you are currently struggling and would like to **explore**?

Belief-o-matic

beliefnet.com/entertainment/quizzes/beliefomatic.aspx

- Even if YOU don't know what faith you are, Belief-O-Matic® knows.
- Answer 20 questions about your concept of God, the afterlife, human nature, and more.
- Belief-O-Matic® will tell you what religion (if any) you practice...or ought to consider practicing.
- WARNING: Belief-O-Matic® assumes no legal liability for the ultimate fate of your soul.



Spiritual Autobiographies

- 90 minutes / 20 = 5 minutes each (~500 words)
- First step in Building Your Own Theology (journal)



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