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September 14, 1979

Mr. Samuel L. Blumenfeld  
171 West 7th Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02127

Dear Sam:

It was good to see you and I was delighted to learn that Devin-O'Hair will be publishing your book.

Enclosed is some correspondence that will be of interest to you. I don't know if I have permission to share it with you, so please treat it confidentially. I send it along because I believe that it reinforces my point that the book should in some form or another include documentation for your research.

Sincerely,



GHP:dmj

Enclosures - Adams Letter 2/14/79  
Weston-Jones Letter 2/15/79

February 14, 1979

Reverend Dick Weston-Jones  
Unitarian Universalist Church  
of Jacksonville  
7405 Arlington Expressway  
Jacksonville, FL 32211

Dear Dick:

Over the years, a couple of questions about Unitarian-Universalism have nagged at me. An article I just received brings them back to mind.

I first became a Unitarian in 1951, primarily as an escape from more orthodox religion. Having a chance to ventilate the hostility I had accumulated was a welcome thing. During my early association with the church, I was unquestioningly enthusiastic. I even listened with some degree of amusement at what I thought were peculiar definitions of freedom, advanced by other churches--many of whom seemed to say that freedom was the right to do the right thing, i.e., what we (the Church) think is right. But, gradually, I began to have doubts about the Unitarian concept of freedom as well. I began to wonder whether Unitarians really believe in freedom. Official statements emphasize freedom, at least in religious belief, and Unitarians have always been devoted to civil liberties. But in reality, the First Amendment plays a rather small part in our lives. In most of the important areas of life, Unitarians always seem to come out on the side of using state coercion to solve economic and social problems. I began to wonder whether it was not a little schizophrenic for an organization to talk so much about freedom in religion but practice the opposite of freedom in other perhaps more fundamental aspects of life.

Then I began to wonder if Unitarians really do believe in religious freedom. If Unitarians have any creed at all, it is stated to be the determination not to have a creed. Yet, even here, the Unitarian Church has not seemed to be particularly tolerant. I cite Blanchard's books about

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the Catholic Church that were sponsored and widely publicized by the Unitarians. And then took Unitarians were at least a few years ago the most active force in an organization that went under the name of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. This organization never seemed to me to be fully aware of its stated purpose and often acted in areas not strictly concerned with any real threat by the Catholic Church to religious freedom in America. In short, from time to time I have wondered whether Unitarians have not used the political action to promote their own religious beliefs which don't seem religious simply because they are considerably more secular than those of other organized religions.

I have also wondered about the atmosphere within the Church itself. Although Unitarians have no written creed, a creed exists just as surely as it does in other churches. Although (just as in other churches) the pattern differs slightly from church to church, a strong well-defined pattern exists nevertheless. No traditional Christian could possibly feel any more comfortable in a Unitarian Church than a Unitarian could feel in a Christian church. I recognize that the situation could not realistically be otherwise, but the fact that tolerance may not really be possible doesn't justify using phrases that do not accurately portray reality. As a practical matter the Unitarian Church is not one of real freedom or diversity even in religion.

I have put the foregoing in the form of statements, but in reality, the ideas I have stated have existed in my mind more as questions than definite conclusions. But there was one thing I was relatively sure of; that was, that the Church that once really believed in freedom had somehow changed. As it evolved, it lost sight of its fundamental purpose and became apostatized.

Yesterday, the latest issue of Reason magazine arrived. It contained an article by Samuel L. Blumenfeld entitled "Why the Schools Went Public." The article has a powerful ring of authenticity and frankly clears up much of my confusion about what "freedom" really means (and apparently has always meant) in the Unitarian religion.

What still amazes me is how an organization devoted to a freedom, perversely defined, could have so faithfully maintained its purpose for so long a time. It seems odd that over the years the generous use of the term freedom

Rev. Dick Weston-Jones  
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in describing the purposes of the church would not have attracted more people who know what freedom really means. I hope that there is some possibility that at least in the Jacksonville Church, the Unitarian religion can begin to recognize the social potential of true freedom.

Sincerely,

WHA:dp  
Enclosure



# UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF JACKSONVILLE

7405 ARLINGTON EXPRESSWAY

JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA 32211

15 February, 1979

Mr. William H. Adams III  
Mahoney, Hadlow & Adams  
Post Office Box 4099  
Jacksonville, Florida 32202

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Dear Bill:

W. H. A.

Thanks for your letter and the copy of the article by Blumenfeld. I am certain I would not have been aware of it if you had not brought it to my attention. However, I'm afraid I have to tell you that Blumenfeld is at best a poor historian.\* And reading it from my perspective, I caught a somewhat paranoid flavor to his writing and adoption of the "Conspiracy Theory" to explain how educational statism was foisted upon us in the years of innocence shortly after the birth of our nation.

Briefly, there was no Unitarian movement from 1805, when he says "the most important (intellectual event) in American history: the takeover of Harvard by the Unitarians" took place - to 1818 when he credits Unitarians with "the beginning of the organized movement that was to culminate in the creation of our compulsory public educational system." It is clear from his article that he is talking about a highly organized, well-coordinated group of religionists with a consistent philosophical position that empowered them through their leaders, the "Harvard-Unitarian elite," to reverse the social structure of the country in a few years. There had been a gradual transition in many of the parish churches of Massachusetts toward Unitarian beliefs (primarily non-trinitarian in their most essential statements) from the late eighteenth century until 1825 when the American Unitarian Association was founded. At that time it was very weak. Most local churches refused to join it because they distrusted the organizational and theological pressures they thought would come with the new denomination. In fact, the American Unitarians were so disorganized as a body at the time that Blumenfeld says that Owens' ideas were "music to the ears of the Boston Unitarians" (only 5 years after he started publishing in Scotland) that they were not even aware of the existence of the British Unitarians who were slowly emerging on the other side of the ocean. Both the American Unitarian Association and the British and Foreign Unitarian Association were officially formed within one day of one another in 1825, though they were not aware of the existence of one another at the time (one of the most remarkable, and trivial coincidences in religious history). Yet they knew immediately about Owens' teachings?

Of course the Unitarians did not burst, full-blown, into existence in 1825. There was an important event at Harvard in 1805 when the Rev. Henry Ware was appointed to the Hollis Professorship. He was

\* at least in regard to Unitarianism



the liberal candidate. There is no confusion about that. But the definitive history of Unitarianism, by Earl Morse Wilbur, says "Ware was known to be an Arian, but when the orthodox charged that he was a Unitarian, the charge was indignantly denied as a calumny." It was another 10 years before the term Unitarian began to be used by the liberals to describe themselves, and not until the decision in the Dedham court case in 1820 did the emerging Unitarians gain the right to control the church property of local churches in Massachusetts where the orthodox had withdrawn from the churches. Throughout this period, the liberals-to-become-Unitarians were much more interested in defending their rights in theological arguments, and maintaining their own rather privileged positions in society than they were in changing society. According to Wilbur:

In belief they had with one accord abandoned the doctrine of the Trinity, and were rapidly leaving Arianism behind; but on other doctrinal points there was great diversity, since they were liberal and undogmatic in spirit, though adverse to the dogmas of Calvinism. In fact they valued Unitarianism more for its freedom than for its doctrine. Belonging generally to the conservative class, socially and politically they were disposed to be complacent and self-confident, and felt moved by no eager desire to make converts to their religion or to urge it upon others; but their main emphasis was upon uprightness of moral character, while they were given to philanthropic causes and the general welfare, were devoted to general interests, faithful to civic duties, and generous to cases of private need. (A History of Unitarianism, In Transylvania, England and America, p. 436)

In short, they were the least likely, as a body, to try to bring about the social change Blumenfeld credits them with. There were, of course, individuals among them who promoted various social causes, many of whom we honor today for their foresight. Those people did work to establish public schools, universal suffrage, improved living conditions in prisons and treatment for the mentally ill, abolition of slavery. But in every case they were opposed by many of their fellow Unitarians, often by the majority of those with power in the churches. There simply was no Unitarian social position with a "Harvard-Unitarian elite" leading the people of the church. Furthermore, Blumenfeld is completely wrong in ascribing certain beliefs to those early day Unitarians and suggesting the direction their leaders were trying to go. In regard to education, I can only point to the remarks by William Ellery Channing to the Sunday School Society in, I believe 1837, though my copy is not dated. Channing was the pre-eminent leader of the Unitarians from 1819 until his death in 1853:

Never forget that the child is a rational moral free being, and that the great end of education is to awaken rational and moral energy within him, and to lead him to the free choice of the right, to the free determination of himself to truth and duty. The child is not a piece of wax to be moulded at another's pleasure, not a stone to be hewn passively into any shape which the caprice and interest of others may dictate; but a living, thinking being, made to act from principles in his own heart, to distinguish for himself between good and evil, between truth and falsehood, to form himself, to be in an important sense the author of his own character, the determiner of his own future being. This most important view of the child should never forsake the teacher. He is a free moral agent, and our end

I don't claim to be a historian of Unitarianism, but I know that Blumenfeld is wrong in much of what he says about Unitarians and their position in the first half of the 19th century. The information to prove that is readily at hand, and well documented. Furthermore, my own position on the question is radically opposed to his. I do not lament the development of public education, and I would be delighted if he could show that Unitarians were the important group that brought it about. His comments smack of the kind of charges that those early day liberals had to put up with from the orthodox, and I suspect they are the sources he used. Responsible scholarship would not have permitted the kind of suggestion of monolithic or coordinated belief structures that he makes.

In the field of education, I believe he is equally distant from the truth. His interest in proving a novel position permits him to turn his own lack of background into an advantage ("It took me a full year to get a handle on all of this, mainly because nothing in my previous reading or education had prepared me for what I was to uncover.") I cannot take the time to check his claims, and frankly, given his irresponsibility in treatment of the Unitarians, I don't have much interest in doing that. However, I believe he is incorrect about his claims that "parents had the freedom to choose whatever kind of school or education they wanted for their children" for the first 50 years after the formation of our nation. He quickly glossed over the black children trapped in the institution of slavery, and he ignored the female children who were not permitted in many schools, or beyond certain grades. He accepted at face value a Boston survey in 1818 which he claims showed that 90 percent of the children attended school. He says nothing about how children were defined for the purpose of the survey (males only or males and females), how schools were defined (we know that many Boston schools met one day a week only, as an extension of church school), how the statistics were controlled and verified, or how children were even found who were not in schools (we know that many surveys today are notoriously incomplete in spite of our much improved survey methods - and that even the U.S. Census is estimated to miss a significant percentage of people who don't want to be surveyed). He says nothing about the quality of education, a key point in the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education decision which outlawed so-called "separate but equal." And of course he says nothing about children needing special education - the emotionally disturbed, mentally retarded and physically handicapped - who were not even considered educable until recently.

Bill, I think Blumenthal is a salesman for a particular point of view who has dabbled in history in order to come up with some quotes and doubtful data to justify the position he had already come to, namely, that state education is the evil that has brought us all the problems of Statism, and that it all goes back to the liberal "Harvard-Unitarian elite" who put this on us. It smacks, in its anti-intellectualism, of Spiro Agnew's pointing to the "Radic-Libs" who have caused our problems. I personally would be much more impressed with a philosophical article on why he believes state education to be evil, and how private education would free all children - or at least those who want to be freed - to define and fulfill their own destinies.

MY. Page 4. That article certainly touched a nerve in me.

Let me bring my comments to your letter, a much more valid expression of a position, in my opinion, than the Blumenfeld article.

Unitarians have struggled with freedom as much as anybody, keeping a fine tension between our parochialism in the specifics that it seems good to us to believe, and the faith in freedom itself as a Good. In an interesting novel I have just read (The Magus), the author, John Fowles says in the foreword:

God and freedom are totally antipathetic concepts; and men believe in their imaginary gods most often because they are afraid to believe in the other thing. I am old enough to realize now that they do so sometimes with good reason. But I stick by the general principle, and that is what I meant to be at the heart of my story: that true freedom lies between each two, never in one alone, and therefore it can never be absolute freedom. All freedom, even the most relative, may be a fiction; but mine, and still today, prefers the other hypothesis.

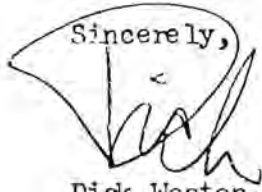
At any given time, some of us get very invested in the specifics of some freedom - or more precisely, moral demand - that they feel will lead to greater freedom on the part of human beings. Thus, opposition to authoritarianism by Blanchard (who I believe is not a Unitarian though his books were published by Beacon), opposition to the Vietnam War, support for sex education in the public schools, etc. Some of the specific moral demands get murky; one could almost as well claim the goal of Freedom for one side as the other, or freedom from some problem such as hunger is used to justify the imposition of state control.

In my opinion, the Unitarian Universalist movement believes more in freedom than at any time in the past. During our earliest history in this nation, the Unitarians insisted upon their right to disbelieve in the trinity, and in their right as individuals not to have a specific statement of belief imposed on them from outside. (That did not, however, stop them from adopting such statements themselves from time to time which, not creeds in the strict sense, were certainly restrictive in defining either the heritage or the usual belief structure existant at that time in the church. The Free Religious Association, the theological left-wing of the Unitarians, walked out of a national Assembly in about 1865 and stayed out for about 30 years because the majority insisted upon defining Unitarians as "disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ.") Today most Unitarian Universalists would probably agree with my statement that we believe that we grow through our differences shared as well as through those areas in which we agree with one another, and no standard of belief would be acceptable as a condition of membership or as a definition of what Unitarians usually believe. There is a high tolerance for life styles and beliefs in a wide range, much wider than ever before. It is true that some persons would not feel comfortable with us, but that is not the same as being tolerated by us or accepted as having rights equal to us. I think one of the problems is that it takes a fairly high level of self-respect and comfortableness for an individual to assert beliefs that differ from those of others around him/her. Most people seek others who will reinforce the specifics of their beliefs, or flee to isolated individualism rather than living in the ambiguity of a diverse group. Often, me too.



Sorry I can't find the "ring of authenticity" in Blumenfeld's article as you do. I went into rather great length to explain why. I believe the Unitarians were always a much more diverse folk than he does; I think they still are. We do indeed have great commonality in our shibboleths, the goals that we value highest. But the ways we hope to achieve those goals remain very diverse, as is obvious to me in the ways that Unitarian Universalists invest their lives.

I've gone on so long I may have to re-write this for a sermon. Don't be surprised if you hear it some Sunday.

Sincerely,  
  
Dick Weston-Jones

September 17, 1979

Mr. George H. Pearson  
P. O. Box 2256  
Wichita, Kansas 67201

Dear George:

Thanks greatly for sending me that fascinating correspondence. If the article alone could generate such profound and lengthy controversy, imagine what the book will do! It will be good to have these issues aired in lively debate after the book comes out.

Your advice about documentation is well taken and greatly appreciated. My intuition has told me that the book had better be well documented because of the controversy it will undoubtedly raise. Most people don't have the time, inclination, or research facilities available to check on sources. In fact, that's why I put some rather lengthy quotes in the book, so that the reader would know that I was not inventing anything and had no personal axe to grind.

In any case, I found the Adams letter very heartening and encouraging. If the article was able to do that much for one intelligent, thoughtful man, then I know that the book will be able to do much more. The Weston-Jones letter, on the other hand, indicates why the true history of public education has never been written by the liberals. They want to take credit for public education but not for the loss of freedom that came with it. So instead they have given us a fairy tale in place of history. I'll be very happy indeed if my book stimulates additional research into the areas I touch on, particularly the origins and nature of modern statism.

Incidentally, when the revised manuscript is completed, will I still be entitled to the \$2,500 of the fellowship due on completion of the book? I would like to use some of that money promoting the book. Judging from the impact the article has had, the book has a good chance of stimulating a good deal of debate over educational statism vs. educational freedom. It's an issue whose time has come!

I did not expect that it would take me more than two years to find a publisher. But finally I found one, and it took Devin-Adair eight months to decide! Hopefully the book will draw wide and serious attention to the educational aspect of libertarian thinking.

It was good to see you at the Convention. I have a feeling that the movement is on the threshold of a great period of expansion.

Best regards,