

**Unitarian Universalists and the Fight for God Talk:  
Speaking in Rainbow Tongues to a Red and Blue Country**

Anthony F. Lorenzen

Rev. Roy Phillips

Our Theological House

Starr King School for the Ministry

December 2, 2005

### **Unitarian Universalists and the Fight for God Talk: Speaking in Rainbow Tongues to a Red and Blue Country**

A graphic circulated on the Internet following the 2004 presidential election. It was a map of the United States showing all states as a shade of purple. The map's creator, Jeff Culver of Seattle, was demonstrating that we weren't a country of red states and blue states. We were a purple country.<sup>1</sup>

*Sojourners* ran an ad campaign leading up to the 2004 election that tried to draw attention to the fact that people of faith were not all in the Republican camp. Their bumper sticker read: "God is not a Republican. Or a Democrat." I agree. God isn't a Green or a Libertarian or an Independent or a Socialist or a Communist or a member of the Working Families Party. God isn't a Christian, either. As for Jesus, he was Jewish.

Jim Wallis, an Evangelical Christian writer and speaker, has gotten a lot of mileage recently with his work *God's Politics: How the Right Gets it Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It*. The overall theme of Wallis's work is that the political right has used the language of faith to further their political agenda and the political left ignores faith and the language of faith almost entirely. Wallis's work is a major one. He sees both Democrats and Republicans as basically one party of rich, powerful corporate interests. He makes an argument for a consistent ethic in public and private life, such as pointing out the hypocrisy of being anti-abortion, but pro-death penalty. He asks important questions such as: "When did Jesus become pro-war?" and "When did Jesus become pro-rich?"

Yet while Wallis is concerned that people of faith have been co-opted by the conservative political agenda, his worldview is limiting. He sees people of faith as largely Christian, operating largely in a Judeo-Christian heritage, and he limits the political field to only Democrats and Republicans. As a Unitarian Universalist and someone who has run for public office as a member of the Green Party, I'd like to make an argument as to how Unitarian Universalists and other religious liberals can speak not only purple, but in rainbow tongues to a red and blue country. It's beyond obvious that our voice is sorely needed.

The topic for a segment on CBS's *The Early Show* on Friday, October 14, 2005 was "Is God Mad at Us?" A major earthquake had just rocked Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan. The northeastern U.S. was

---

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A for graphic and related resources

experiencing localized flooding and landslides. Katrina was but the worst of a record Atlantic hurricane season. Following the tsunami in Asia last year, and these latest disasters, CBS had assembled Rev. Jerry Falwell, Bill Nye the Science Guy, and comedian Andy Borowitz to answer the question on the minds of many God-fearing Americans: “Was God mad at us?”

Rev. Falwell said it would behoove humanity to watch their behavior. Bill Nye noted that messing with the planet’s environment will get you more hurricanes, and as long as we’ve had records the earthquake rate has been constant. Rev. Falwell then attempted to refute global warming. Andy Borowitz blamed it all on Paris Hilton.

It was funny, and it was achingly pathetic. A morning news program had just framed a theological question as a parody. No one raised the issues surrounding the problems of an entire society thinking apocalyptically. Yet, how many Americans take the question “Is God mad at us” seriously? The answer, it turns out, is quite a few. Later that night, a more serious program, NPR’s *On Point*, tackled the same question. Callers from across the nation argued back and forth that yes, God was indeed angry with us. Others argued that it was nonsense. Only at the very end of the program did we hear from Bill Leonard, Dean of Yale Divinity School, who got in the last words, saying people shouldn’t read scripture literally and cautioning listeners about the dangers of apocalyptic interpretation. Might that not have gone first? Might there have been non-Christian worldviews to temper the apocalyptic cries on the phone lines?

The political right has systematically and successfully employed appeals to religious faith in pushing a conservative political agenda for well over twenty-five years now. Where have the liberals been?

Keeping our heads down and our mouths shut, it seems. No one on the left wanted to be lumped in with the likes of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson...So religious liberals started secularizing their language and compartmentalizing their church-going selves...as groups like the Christian Coalition became more vocal, these religious liberals withdrew further from public view. The parting gift they gave Christian conservatives was an uncontested public square (Sullivan 19).

One reason the political right has been so successful in using the religious right as allies is that both have a clear political and religious message.<sup>2</sup> Both the political left and the religious left seem fractured and incohesive by comparison. That neither the political left nor religious liberals move in lock-step to hierarchical authorities or in subservience to orthodox dogma can be considered a great strength, but so far in the fight for God talk in the popular imagination, both in the pew and on the campaign trail, it has been a weakness. This weakness can be corrected or overcome if religious liberals and the political left were to make a few basic changes: 1. Articulate a religious platform. 2. Make a claim on the Bible. 3. Know and use our Unitarian Universalist and liberal religious history and orientation to our advantage. 4. Evangelize and play politics.

### **Articulating a party platform**

William Ellery Channing's famous Baltimore Sermon of 1819 "provided the liberal Christians of his day with a party platform" (C. Wright 3), outlining the theological differences between early New England Unitarians and their Calvinist counterparts. This sermon was a demarcation point in a public theological battle. Religious liberals need to make such a statement again today in the fight for God talk in public policy discourse.

The religious left needs to recognize how imperative it is to be easily understood in the religious and political marketplace. The religious right understands this. This is why "Liberal" has become a dirty word in popular cultural context. The UUA's principles and purposes are fine and dandy inside a hymnal or a brochure. They're just too long for a contemporary theological "party platform." They are not John 3:16. As our society moves further to the right politically and a major vehicle for this move continues to be the U-haul of fundamentalist Christianity, the UUA must come up with a more concise statement of covenant, themes, beliefs or binding principles. We need more than a bumper sticker and less than *Engaging our Theological Diversity*, less even than the principles and purposes. My experiences with political campaigns tell me it should be three bullet points long, short enough to deliver on a doorstep, and accurately reflect what we're about. Considering we are about much, that we cover wide-ranging theological ground, it won't be easy, but it will be worth the effort.

I will try my hand at such a statement, but offer it up to amendment from the beginning:

---

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent study of this see Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas?* Pp 90-99 about the anti-abortion Christian.

We believe in religious freedom and support each other in the search for truth and meaning. We believe in community and interdependent relationships. We value diversity and democracy both in our congregations and in society at large.

### **Reclaiming the Bible: Taking Back the Prophetic Imperative**

Rev. Suzanne R. Spencer begins her paper “Grounding the Prophetic Imperative: The Bible in Unitarian Social Thought” with this question: “To what extent might the Bible be useful today, among Unitarian Universalists, as a basis for social action?”

Fundamentalist Christianity stakes a claim to Biblical language, metaphor, stories and quotations, thus giving them and their political supporters almost sole and exclusive right to interpret the Judeo-Christian heritage in the realm of popular culture and the Op-Ed pages. This religio-political agenda is intolerant, pro-war, pro-big business, anti-gay, anti-labor, anti-woman, often openly racist and quite often works against the best interests of many American voters who support it.<sup>3</sup> The left cedes the fertile soil of Biblical language to the religious right for fear of sounding like “Bible thumpers” amidst their own supporters and thus turning off or alienating the base. Yet within the last half century, Martin Luther King, Jr. cited the prophet Amos, calling for “Justice to roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream” (Amos 5:24) and prophetically, eerily, in the speech he gave in Memphis the night before he died, alluded to the last line of, Ha'Azinu, the Song of Moses (Deut 32:1-52), when God tells him he won't lead his people into Canaan, “I've looked over, and I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land” (King). This type of use of Biblical quotation and allusion has all but disappeared from the rhetoric of the political left and the rhetoric of religious liberals engaged in social justice work. Where are Unitarian Universalists making prophetic use of the Biblical tradition?

They fill our history. Spencer points out that Channing doesn't pay much attention to specifics in the Bible, rather he grounds “great truths” in the social vision of the Gospels, and in this Channing is “helpful in setting out a profoundly religious basis for social concern” (Spencer 15).

---

Conservatives taking over the state Republican Party is compelling

<sup>3</sup> See Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas?* for a discussion of how right-wing politicians use religion to get fundamentalists to vote against their own economic self-interests.

Theodore Parker's voice would be welcome on any contemporary news program where a Biblical literalist is railing against the evils of contemporary society.

“Modern Criticism is fast breaking,” – we can now say broken – “to pieces this idol which men have made out of the Scriptures... That their authors, wise as they sometimes were; pious as we feel often their spirit to have been, had only that inspiration which is common to other men equally pious and wise” (Parker qtd in Wright 126-7).<sup>4</sup>

A Biblical prophet read the signs of the times. Parker used the heritage of the Hebrew prophets to rail against the social ills of his day, including poverty, slavery, and the hypocrisy of civil piety (a modern scourge of the religious right in politics):

Christians lie when they call Jesus “master” and men “brothers.” Every jail is a monument, on which it is writ in letters of iron that we are still heathens and the gallows, black and hideous, the embodiment of death, the last argument a “Christian” state offers to the poor wretches it trained up to criminals stands there, a sign of our infamy...” (Parker qtd in Spencer 20)<sup>5</sup>

In the fight for God talk in popular culture, the use, respect and honor given the Bible is not going away. Although mainline churches and scholars embrace historical criticism, and humanists and atheists make that the only way to consider the text, if they consider it at all, we must avoid what Spencer calls a “reverse fundamentalism.”

“Fundamentalists believe that their expectations have been met by the Bible, while Unitarian Universalists believe that these expectations have not been met. A related assumption that I have encountered with UU's is that any authoritative source should be able to provide ‘answers’ – that one should be able to ‘look it up’” (Spencer 10).

We must remember that the Bible has “been a light to the world for thousands of years, that is has been the means of awakening the human intellect and heart, of reforming society, and purifying life... [people] cannot and would not emancipate themselves from the traditions in which they were born, nor cut off the history behind them...” (Clarke 1 qtd in Spencer 21).

---

<sup>4</sup> From Parker's sermon *The Permanent and Transient in Christianity*

<sup>5</sup> From Parker's “True Idea of a Christian Church” 1846 in *Collected Works*

Clarke makes an important point that still rings true. The Bible holds a place of veneration due to its age and importance in the traditions and the lives of so many families and religions. Its stories are so well known that even secular America is versed in the basics. To dismiss it and or wish it away, to pooh-pooh it as myth and fairy tale because its chief proponents are fundamentalists with right wing, conservative political agendas is the wrong strategy. The Biblical literature needs to be embraced as a prophetic grounding point for popular liberal religion and political action.

Making prophetic use of the Bible in popular political debate will lead to our being able to make prophetic use of other sacred writings in popular political debate. It won't happen overnight. Because we have among us many who are able to honor religious traditions and scriptures outside the Biblical tradition, we can't expect the general population to readily climb aboard for that ride, nor can we look down upon those who are not ready to do so, for that is spiritual and intellectual arrogance of the highest order. Starting with the Biblical tradition however, should lead us to many more teachable moments in the popular religious and political discourse than we've been able to achieve to this point.

### **If You Know Your History, You'll Be Pleased to Repeat It**

There was once a very outspoken and activist public face of Unitarian and Universalist Christianity in the debate around the most virulent and topical issues of the day. Unitarian and Universalist theologians, preachers, and lay people were among the leaders and initiators of some of the most profound, lasting, and successful social and political movements in American history. The first public schools (Horace Mann), the abolitionist movement (Theodore Parker among many others), the women's suffrage movement (Julia Ward Howe, Susan B. Anthony), the labor movement (Stephen Fritchman), and more recently, the peace movement (Linus Pauling) and civil rights movement (Pete Seeger), were all fueled by Unitarian Universalist leadership, membership and participation. Today, UU's stand at the forefront of the fight to legalize gay marriage.

Knowing and using history grounds us as religious liberals in the American tradition without giving away commitments to diversity, falling into false patriotism or substituting Americana for America. In an age of pedophile priests, rip-off artist televangelists, and fundamentalist Christianity, the denomination that brought America public schools, an end to slavery, and the right of women to vote, now brings you spiritual freedom - a home for your soul and your family free from hierarchy and dogma. Come

as you are. You are sacred, you are holy, and you are welcome here. Whoever you are, wherever you are on your journey, you are welcome here. This can be an appealing message.

**Evangelizing and Playing Politics: Speaking in Rainbow Tongues to a Red and Blue People<sup>6</sup>**

Part of the problem in reaching people with this message is the inability to speak in a unified theological voice. With such a diverse theological house, it is difficult for the Unitarian Universalist movement to speak with a unified voice in the public forum without sounding like just another secular drum keeping the liberal beat. A Unitarian Christian voice, however, could be a powerful one in the current debates raging in the popular political consciousness over issues such as gay rights, evolution-creationism, the death penalty, foreign policy, education, health care, and a myriad of social justice issues including poverty, the social safety net, civil liberties, and racism.

Unitarian Universalist Christians are steeped in a theological and spiritual tradition that roots itself in the Jewish and Christian scriptures as does the fundamentalist religious right. Yet Unitarian Universalist Christianity is also grounded in a history of religious, spiritual, and intellectual tolerance that separates it in spirit and lived experience from the Christian right. Coming from a common base and scripture gives the Unitarian Universalist Christian a knowledge of the language and custom of a shared faith tradition with which to help the political left understand, if not reach, the political right - a political right that counts for its base a Christianity steeped in a theology not unlike the Calvinism against which the early Unitarian and Universalist Christian theologians and preachers rebelled. Unitarian Universalist Christians have, in a very real sense, fought this battle before.

Might we be able to use the Unitarian Universalist Christian tradition to help the political speak in our culture learn to speak purple instead of red state and blue state, so that eventually we might speak in rainbow tongues that reflect not only all of our religious traditions, but all of the cultures that make up our society? Might the Unitarian Universalist voice grounded in a Christian tradition be the one to open the dialogue into a multilogue, so that not only will Judeo-Christian voices be heard as voices of faith, but others will as well, be they Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, or Pagan?

It is imperative that Unitarian Universalists be more vocal in the debate for God talk; more easily heard in the public theological discussion that quite often now spills into political sound bites and our

---

<sup>6</sup> For tips on playing politics see Appendix B

society's "culture wars." Our absence means the absence of a voice of reason, compassion, and justice. Often, as is the case with left leaning political opinions, people who hold them assume reasoned views such as the ones they hold on the environment, reproductive rights, peace, evolution, or gay marriage are such common sense viewpoints that they don't bother to make their opinions or the reasons behind them known to their elected officials, their friends, family, and their neighbors.

Whether speaking to friends or neighbors or to the radical religious right. It is important to ground political discussion in religious values. By and large Americans share our liberal religious values, so name them as American values: fairness, responsibility, cooperation, respect, honesty, tolerance, interdependence, diversity, and equality.<sup>7</sup>

It is also imperative to be conscious of the language we use to communicate our values and our positions on issues. George Lakoff's work on reframing makes this abundantly clear. How a political issue is framed is more important than facts and data supporting an issue. The same holds true for theologically related issues. How the religious issue is framed is more important than dogma, doctrine or tradition in popular discourse.

When engaged in political or theological discussions avoid the term abortion. Reframe with the term reproductive rights. Avoid the term pro-life, but reframe with a real pro-life stance in favor of pre-natal and post-natal care, and health insurance for poor children. Turn the same-sex marriage question into a statement about how much you value life-time commitments and that if there is anything this country holds sacred, it is love and commitment.

A recent *Boston Globe* article points out that when it comes to ordaining gay clergy, "Many religious leaders and scholars agree that at the heart of the controversy over whether to ordain gays is a more basic question: Is homosexuality a sin or a God-given trait? The question may have been answered in much of secular America, they say, but it remains explosive and largely unresolved among religious groups" (Radin). Here in the UUA we say, "What's the big deal?" We must remember that our theological home is not representative of other houses of worship. Going door-to-door illustrates this, and the need for us to be more active.

---

<sup>7</sup> Values and reframing examples from seminar handout How to Speak What You Believe (2) Rev. J Wright et al

This past summer, after learning that my own state representative, a 29- year old Democrat, hadn't made up her mind yet on how to vote on a bill that might amend Massachusetts's gay marriage law, I went to work on Mass Equality's canvass campaign. I was fascinated by how many people who supported gay marriage and equal rights for all citizens had never taken any action to ensure these rights would be protected. Meanwhile, the fundamentalist Christian churches, the Catholic churches, and right-wing politicians had been organizing and campaigning to make sure their voices were heard in public on this matter.

Perhaps the most compelling reason for UU's to get more involved in the fight for God talk is the rise of the Dominionists. The Study/Action Issue Resource Guide for 2005-2007 *Moral Values for a Pluralist Society* that came out of the 2005 UUA General Assembly in Fort Worth, TX, highlighted the clarion call of the Dominionists in its call to action:

Dr. D. James Kennedy, Pastor of Coral Ridge Ministries, speaking at a "Reclaiming America for Christ" conference in February, 2005:

“Our job is to reclaim America for Christ, whatever the cost. As the vice regents of God, we are to exercise godly dominion and influence over our neighborhoods, our schools, our government, our literature and arts, our sports arenas, our entertainment media, our news media, our scientific endeavors -- in short, over every aspect and institution of human society” (6).

At the Clara Barton District 2005 Fall Meeting, Rev. Dr. Judith E. Wright and members of her UU congregation from Northboro, Massachusetts discussed how they are already responding to issues such as gay marriage and the evolution-questioning argument of “intelligent design” and creationism. Gay marriage, creationism, the death penalty, civil rights, economics and war and peace, are all issues where people with conservative, evangelical Christian, and even fundamentalist world views are very vocal in the political arena. While religious leaders, ordained and lay, need to be careful about being overtly partisan because it is important to be able to criticize all sides in any debate when they need to be taken to task, it is necessary that the liberal religious voice be more easily heard in the public square on these and other issues. It is time our soapbox got bigger.

*Moral Values for a Pluralistic Society* recommends avoiding, "routine discussions of liberal politics vs. conservative politics, or liberal religion vs. conservative religion." I agree, and yet there is no doubt we are indeed engaged in public and political discourse with those whose explicit aim is to make the United States of America a fundamentalist Christian theocracy. "By explicitly linking the desire for political power with a single religious worldview, with the expressed purpose of imposing that view on the whole country, the Dominionist approach is beyond the traditional exchange of ideas and public debate that characterizes US democracy. If and how we should respond is the central question posed by this Study/Action Issue" (6-7).

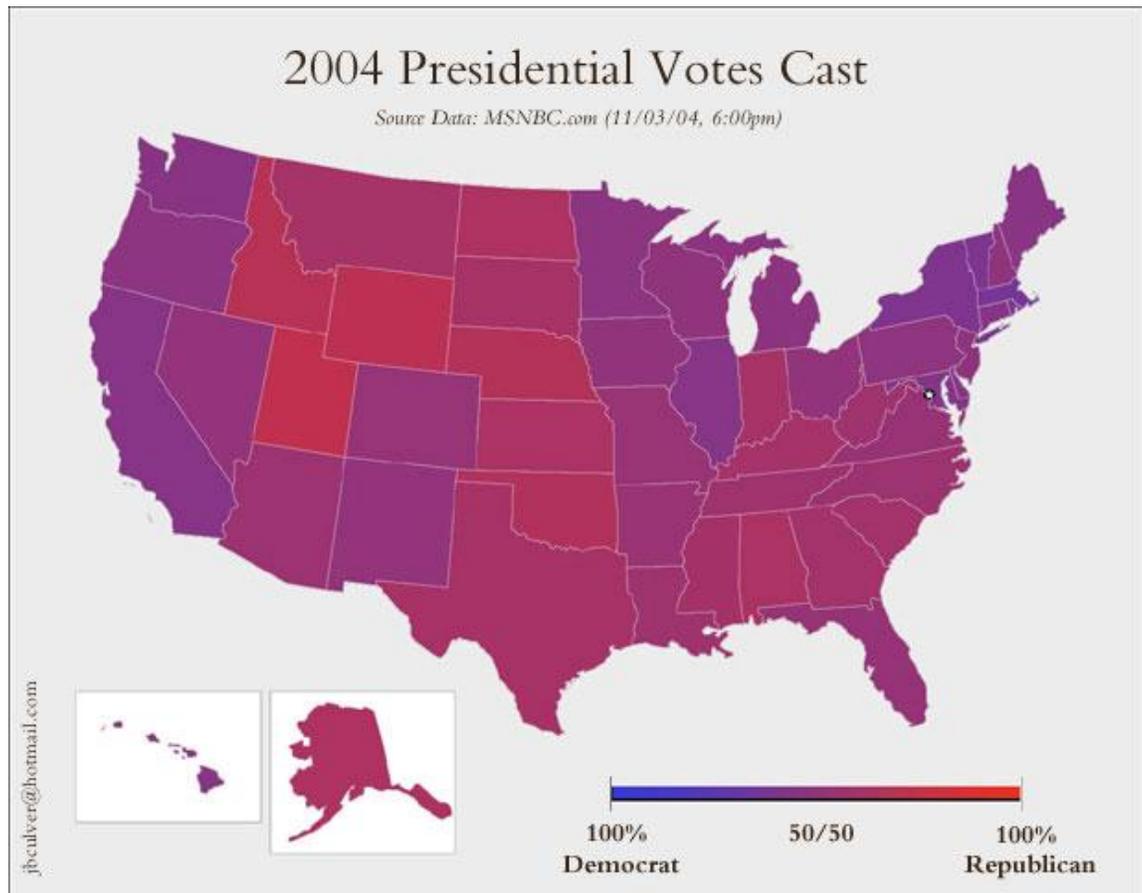
I believe we need to respond by engaging in the fight for God talk, knowing our own religious history, making claims on the Bible, having a religious "party platform", evangelizing and playing politics. *Moral Values for a Pluralist Society* notes that the aim is not to become just a political voice, and keeping in mind there are many political and religious "conservatives who ardently reject the Dominionist approach," we must accept the fact that our liberal religious values compel us to defend certain positions in the public debate on political issues, especially around social justice concerns. Although our voice is small in the public arena now, perhaps UUs are best equipped for this fight, for we will not be pushing, ultimately, another brand of Christianity, for our theological house is too roomy. And ultimately will not be trying to get red-staters to speak blue state or blue-staters to speak red state or even trying to get everyone to speak purple, for the ultimate goal, our goal as UU's, is to teach our society to speak in rainbow tongues.

### Works Cited

- Clarke, James Freeman. *Orthodoxy: Its Truths and Errors*. Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1866
- Commission on Appraisal of the Unitarian Universalist Association. *Engaging Our Theological Diversity*. UUA 2005
- Culturalcreatives.org. 19 Nov. 2005. BigMindMedia <http://www.culturalcreatives.org/home.html>.
- Frank, Thomas. *What's the Matter with Kansas? – How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*. New York: Metropolitan, 2004.
- “Is God Mad at Us.” *The Early Show*. CBS. WBZ, Boston, 14 Oct. 2005.
- King, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther Jr. I See the Promised Land. Bishop Charles Mason Temple, Memphis Tennessee, 3 April 1968.
- Lakoff, George. *Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004.
- “Living in a World of Woe.” *On Point* WBUR 90.9 FM, Boston. 14 Oct. 2005.
- Muder, Doug. “Who's Afraid of Freedom and Tolerance?: A look at the competing worldviews of fundamentalists and religious liberals.” *UU WORLD* Vol. XIX No. 4 Fall 2005: 24-29.
- Parker, Theodore, “The Transient and Permanent in Christianity.” Hawes Place Church, Boston, 19 May 1841. (presented in Conrad Wright, *Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism*)
- Radin, Charles A. 29 “V Debate over gay clergy is testing many faiths: Vatican Expected to Announce Ban” *The Boston Globe* 29 November 2005 <http://www.boston.com>
- Ray, Paul H. and Sherry Ruth Anderson. *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People are Changing the World*. New York: Harmony Books, 2000.
- Spencer, Rev. Suzanne R. “Grounding the Prophetic Imperative: The Bible in Unitarian Social Thought.” *The Unitarian Universalist Christian* Vol. 42, Nos. 2-3 Summer/Fall, 1987: 5-42.
- Sullivan, Amy. “‘Out’ Inside the Beltway” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* Vol. 33 No. 2 Autumn 2005: 18-19.
- Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. *Moral Values for a Pluralist Society*. Study/Action Issue for 2005-2007. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 2005.
- Wallis, Jim. *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It – A New Vision for Faith and Politics in America*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2005.
- Wright, Conrad. “Introduction” *Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1961.

Wright, Rev. Judith E., et al. Saying What We Believe Seminar Clara Barton District Fall Meeting. Nichols College, Dudley MA, 30 October 2005.

## Appendix A

**Jeff Culver's Purple States**

SOURCE: [http://www.boingboing.net/2004/11/03/purple\\_haze.html](http://www.boingboing.net/2004/11/03/purple_haze.html)

Reader Jeff Culver in Seattle says:

"I was thinking today about how the 'red v. blue' states graphic is really misleading considering the slim margins that the candidates won some of those states by, so I sat down and created the map that's attached. In the dozens of hours I've been watching the news I haven't seen one like it, but thought that you and the *BoingBoing* readers might find it interesting. I think it definitely portrays our fellow states far differently than the extreme way we've been seeing to date."

See also <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mejn/election/>  
[http://www.esri.com/industries/elections/graphics/results2004\\_1g.jpg](http://www.esri.com/industries/elections/graphics/results2004_1g.jpg)

## Appendix B

### **A Former Candidate's Tips on Playing Politics**

Before I was a candidate for the UU ministry, I was the Massachusetts Green Party candidate for Lt. Governor (2002). I have also been a campaign manager for a state legislative race and helped run the Green Party's presidential effort in Massachusetts. My political campaign experience on the far left has taught me some things that apply to the fight for God talk from the perspective of religious liberals. I would offer these suggestions that make sense both for engaging in public discourse on "hot" topic issues and for general evangelization efforts and spreading the good news about Unitarian Universalism.

#### **1. Know your audience**

Who are we trying to reach? We are not trying to convert the fundamentalist, nor are we speaking to the churchgoing UU or member of a UCC congregation. We are trying to reach the un-churched or under-churched. These are people who either don't go to church or go through the motions of going to church because they've given up on religion or because they've given up on the religion in which they were raised.

Breaking the religious and political spectrum down into a liberal-conservative linear progression is not the best way to either image or engage the fight for God talk. I think the analysis of social and cultural grouping offered by Paul H. Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson in their work *The Cultural Creatives* offers a better framework for this purpose. Ray and Anderson divide America into three subcultures: The Traditionals, the Moderns and the Cultural Creatives. The Traditional path is backward leaning and countercultural, reacting against the modern and secular worldview. The Modern path is a neutral, status quo stance, making the best of the modern world and none too upset with it. The Cultural Creative path is forward leaning and countercultural, inwardly departing from the materialistic modern world, but not reacting against it in the fearful way of the Traditional. The Cultural Creative rather seeks to create a new culture. Many UU's are Cultural Creatives and many Cultural Creatives would probably feel at home in our UU congregations.

## 2. Know where to start a conversation and where you want it to end

I always maintained a rule during my Green campaigns. I always asked (myself, if not the campaign), “What would my neighbors think?” Often a campaign volunteer or staffer or even a candidate would want to focus on the Iraq War or speaking out about Bush. My neighbors voted for Bush and largely, even still, support the war in Iraq. It would be a bad place to start the conversation. Better to start with something we share, that my neighbors can relate to, such as the fact that they feel their taxes are too high, they have to pay \$100.00 for their kids to ride a public school bus, or they can’t afford health care. Now, there’s a place to start a conversation where they might be able to listen to some ideas on fair taxation, education, or universal health care. Eventually, maybe we’ll talk about how the war in Iraq is draining money away from these things. Maybe, maybe not.

Religiously, I wouldn’t invite my neighbors to church or begin to explain Unitarian Universalism or liberal religion by saying that even pagans and witches belong to my church - atheists, too! It’s not that I’m ashamed of that fact, but if I am talking to *my* neighbors, especially to one who has mentioned feeling alienated from church, but wanting to go, missing the connection to a community, it’s not where I’d begin the conversation. I’d start off with the great potlucks. Maybe our church is the place for them, maybe not. But let’s not eliminate any chance of being heard by starting with the atheism (*with my neighbors* – another audience, another story – another starting point).

## 3. Go door-to-door

I recently attended an anniversary celebration of the UU congregation in Watertown, MA and was treated to a marvelous history (any time Rev. Mark Harris is involved how could one not be) of both Watertown and its congregation. I was struck by the fact that at one point in its history a minister kept the congregation alive by going door to door to increase membership. How many of us are ready to do that? It’s a campaign tactic that’s still tried and true in the age of email lists and meet-ups. If you can walk a ward, you can win an election. If you can walk a town, can you increase your congregation? Would a walk through your neighborhood produce neighbors who have given up on church or synagogue, but just might find the religious community you have to describe to them appealing? If you can describe it for what it is instead of what it isn’t, and if you can do it in two or three sentences, just maybe.

#### 4. Means and Ends Must Cohere

In his article “Who’s Afraid of Freedom and Tolerance”, Doug Muder cites James M. Ault Jr.’s work, *Spirit and Flesh: Life Inside a Fundamentalist Congregation* and notes that Ault locates the “heart of the Christian worldview in its overall vision of family life – not just the position it takes on a handful of specific “family values” issues like abortion or same-sex marriage” (25).

Muder contrasts commitments assumed by a village mentality enforced by congenital family relationships passed down through the generations and commitments made by choice, but notes that the difference between the worldviews is more than choice and no choice, it is an assumption that there is a choice to tolerate or not tolerate that assumes an arrogance on the part of the religious and culturally liberal.

A different tack was taken by Mass Equality in their campaign to keep gay marriage rights in Massachusetts. Mass Equality’s political team, headed by Marc Solomon, approached legislators in MA with results of door to door canvassing that showed citizens approved gay marriage, but they also set up face to face meetings between legislators and gay families in their districts. They arranged for gay and lesbian couples, as well as their children, parents, siblings, friends and allies to contact and meet their legislators. This provided the opportunity for legislators to get to know who these gay and lesbian families were and what their lives are really like, and more importantly what rights as spouses, parents and families they will lose should the equal marriage law be changed. What Mass Equality sought to do was to re-define family one legislator at a time by personal contact. It was a fascinating, and on-going exercise in love thy neighbor. It was playing politics. It has been hugely successful so far. Mass Equality could have chosen to vilify the enemy and portray the opposition to gay marriage as ignorant, insensitive, intolerant red-state backwaters in a blue-state legislature. They didn’t, and they’re winning by loving their enemies. Oldest kindness in the book.

#### 5. Reframe: Think of a Chalice

Are you thinking of a Chalice? A Flaming Chalice? Good. Now, don’t think of one. See, George Lakoff was right. It is all about reframing the debate. Other lessons from Lakoff include (and I agree with them and add my own emendations):

- Always remain cool, collected, dignified and in control when discussing things with a conservative, especially an ideologue. The knock on liberals is we are uncivil, out of

control, and will let the world get to hell in a hand basket. We offer hope in a hand basket. Reframe, reframe, reframe.

- Never use the conservative frame. If you are asked about abortion, talk about reproductive rights. If you are asked about the war in Iraq, talk about the unlawful invasion of Iraq (reframe, reframe, reframe).
- Always start with your values and stay away from what you don't believe in. Define yourself and your positions positively.
- Dress well and know your facts. Know one is going to listen to someone who reinforces their image of a liberal, granola munching, bad-sweater wearing tree-hugger. Wear a suit or a dress. It won't kill you. Slogans and sound bites don't replace facts.
- Know your sound bites and frames. All the facts in the world do nothing if you let the opposition frame the debate.

Are you still thinking of a Chalice? Good.