

## **PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE UUA BYLAWS ARTICLE 2 A Pro / Con Review and Analysis<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction**

The Article 2 Study Commission's 2<sup>nd</sup> draft of proposed changes to Article 2 has been approved by the Article 2 Study Commission (A2SC) and approved by delegates at the 2023 General Assembly.<sup>2</sup> This essay presents the main arguments in favor and against the proposed changes. Article 2 contains the official description of what UUism is, what we believe, the purposes of the UUA and how we are governed. Significant changes in UU theology, purpose, and governance are being proposed. The final proposal will be voted on again at the 2024 General Assembly and must pass with a 2/3 majority to be adopted.

This essay is an attempt to provide an accurate, even-handed, discussion of pro and con arguments. If there are better arguments or other important points to be made, please share them with me at [anne.schneider@asu.edu](mailto:anne.schneider@asu.edu).

### **Support for the Change**

#### **Unifying Theology**

Support for the new Article 2 has emphasized from the beginning the need for Unitarian Universalism to find a theological core. Paula Cole Jones (chair of the Article 2 Study Commission) explained that UUs have embraced so much theological diversity that they have no common core.<sup>3</sup> However, she emphasized, the one thing UUs agree on is social justice. Thus, social justice should become the theological core and the proposed rewrite of Article 2 is intended as a step in that direction.

#### **Center Antiracism, Antioppression, Multiculturalism (ARAOMC)**

Supporters of the change want to intensify the UU antiracist work, not just as a political call to action, but as the theological core of UUism. This was made explicit in the charge to the committee.<sup>4</sup>

#### **More Community, Less Individualism**

Remarks at the 2023 General Assembly where the proposed change was endorsed by an overwhelming majority, asserted that the current Article 2 places too much importance on individualism and not enough on the collective. The revisions that replace the 7 principles with the new section on "values and covenants" is intended to help emphasize the collective and de-emphasize individualism as is the elimination of an individual freedom of belief.

### **More Interdependence, Less Independence**

Closely related to the move away from individualism toward the collective is the effort to increase a sense of interdependence with a corresponding decrease in independence and individual freedom. Attempts to amend the revised Article 2 at General Assembly to restore the Freedom of Belief clause were struck down by overwhelming majorities as the delegates showed their support for interdependence.

### **More Action**

People who have opposed the current Article 2 and support the rewrite are fond of saying that “the 7 Principles have no verbs!” They say to be part of a healing world, UUs need a more articulate and more action-oriented statement in Article 2. The revisions address this by having members covenant to “do the work” that supports the new “values and covenant section.” These values are: Love (in the center), equity, transformation, pluralism, generosity, justice, and interdependence.

### **More Accountability**

Another issue with the current Article 2, according to supporters of the revision, is the lack of accountability. The rewrite is intended to see to it that “people do what they have promised” by saying that “we are accountable to one another for doing the work...” “We covenant to...” is a stronger statement than “affirm and promote.” Each of the values has its own covenant. Proponents of the change say the UUA needs the authority to hold people and congregations accountable. Even though the change is not as explicit as some of the earlier proposals, the statement of accountability can be interpreted to mean that UUs can hold other UUs accountable. The specifics have not been identified yet.

### **Other reasons are sometimes given by those who support the change.**

One of the arguments heard repeatedly at the 2023 General Assembly was that it has been too long since there was an actual review and Article 2 should be revised to meet the current needs of the society. There was a review in 2009 but the recommendations did not pass at the General Assembly. Others have said their support lies in their confidence in the new generations of leaders who are championing these changes.

## **Opposition to the Change**

### **Hierarchical Control**

Opponents are concerned that the changes will invert the authority and governing relationship between congregations and the UUA. The UUA's role under the new Article 2 would no longer be to serve the needs of the congregations – as

defined by the congregations – but will become a hierarchy like other denominations. Other changes in the rewrite demonstrate that this is already happening. The revision, for example, eliminated the statement in the purposes section that said, “the primary purpose of the association is to serve the needs of its member congregations...” Instead, the purpose now says the UU’s purposes are to assist congregations in their vital ministries...heal historic injustices....”

### **Freedom of Belief is Essential**

The revision states that “congregational freedom of belief and the individual’s right of conscience are central to our Unitarian Universalist *heritage*. (Emphasis added.) That statement does not provide for a continuing commitment to individual freedom of belief, individual right of conscience or to congregational freedom! The title of the section implies freedom of belief, but the text does not endorse it except as a part of UU heritage.

### **Eliminates the 7 Principles and Sources**

The change eliminates the 7 Principles and the Sources that undergird them. Allegedly, the “values and covenant” section incorporates the principles’ core ideas, but it mentions them almost as an after-thought, and too narrowly. The Principles and Sources have served as the theological core of UUism. There is no indication that the new values and covenants will serve as a better theological core than the 7 principles. Their elimination not only destroys the current theological core of UUism but moves this denomination away from being a liberal religion to being a social justice organization focused mainly on politically-oriented calls to action. Opponents do not want to lose the religiosity of UUism—its profound essence of spirituality, awe and wonder, care for one another, and inspiration from the natural world.

### **Social Justice Priorities / ARAOMC**

The changes prioritize ARAOMC over other strategies to combat racism. Again, the UUA is usurping the previous authority that congregations and individuals had to use their best judgement on where to focus their efforts. This is viewed as just one example of the multitude of changes that are likely to occur because of the shift in authority from congregations to the UUA. Furthermore, opponents disagree with the choice of antiracist strategy, ARAOMC. Opponents point out that social science and behavioral research has shown “guilt-based” strategies to be ineffective and sometimes counterproductive in reducing racism.<sup>5</sup> The current UUA guilty-based strategy emphasizes “shame and blame,” “confess your racism,” “all white people are racist,” and accusations of “white supremacy culture” oppression within congregations.<sup>6</sup> This is not worthy of an inclusive, tolerance (as in “abide with), reason, science, compassion and fairness.

Opponents want to avoid “safetyism” where people are once again segregated by race with each advocating for its own cause, but instead create alliances so that black, brown, and white people all work together. Opponents tend toward the ideas and strategies of Martin Luther King rather than those of critical race theorists. There are alternatives to ARAOMC, such as “asset-based” anti-racism, or others that are consistent with UU values such as those used by Martin Luther King and the “poor People’s campaign” rather than those of critical race theorists.<sup>7</sup>

### **Accountability**

Accountability is emphasized in the rewrite as well as in the publications and words of UU leaders. This is contrary to our Universalist and Unitarian heritage of respect for persons, individual freedom of belief and freedom of conscience. Who would be anointed to judge individual UUs and congregations for their beliefs, conscience, best understandings, priorities, and responsible search for meaning. Are we not an egalitarian faith of mutuality and shared priesthood? What would be the consequences for violations? What sort of appeal processes would a person have? Would the UUA hold individuals accountable, or whole congregations? Would congregations be expected to set up “accountability” boards to see if members are “doing the work” of achieving the values? The accountability parts of the rewrite are a total violation of UU values.

### **Democracy**

Democracy is a crucial issue as UUs have witnessed numerous incidents of disregard for democratic processes by UU leadership.<sup>8</sup> Rather than strengthen the commitment to democracy, the rewrite eliminates the 7 Principles and relegates the democracy commitment to a one-line statement buried within one of the values.

### **“Out of Covenant”**

The revision requires that members covenant to “do the work” of living out the seven values rather than just “affirm and promote. UU leaders have de-fellowshipped at least two ministers on the grounds that they are “out of covenant” because of specious claims that books written or things said are inconsistent with UU values.<sup>9</sup> This is an insertion of authoritarianism that is completely out of step with our UU heritage.

### **Inclusion**

This section now limits our welcome to “all persons who share our values.” The current statement says we truly welcome all persons. Critics are unhappy with this limitation and its rejection of tolerance and inclusion which have always been hallmarks of UUism.

## Inspirations

This section no longer describes our rich theological history and sources of inspiration, and replaces it with a summary. This eliminates specific mention of Christian, Jewish, earth-centered, humanist, and prophetic people.

## MORE RESOURCES:

Here's a link to the "save the seven principles web site" that is trying to save the 7 principles, which are eliminated by the proposed revision. <https://savethe7principles.wordpress.com/>

Link to the fifth principle project website that opposes the rewrite: <https://fifthprincipleproject.org/>

**Here's a link to the UUA report that supports the revisions**  
<https://www.uua.org/files/2023-02/article-ii-study-report-2021-23.pdf>

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<sup>1</sup> Originally drafted by Anne Schneider with assistance and rewrites from Karen Brown, Lincoln Baxter, Susan McWethy, Rebecca Pace, Ken Ing and others. Send corrections, suggestions to [anne.schneider@asu.edu](mailto:anne.schneider@asu.edu).

<sup>2</sup> The old and new text can be found on the "savingthe7principles" website along with other documents about the proposed change. Here's the link <https://savethe7principles.org/what-is-changing/>

<sup>3</sup> Paula Jones made these remarks when she presented the Commission's work to the board.

<sup>4</sup> See the UUA Board's charge to the Commission:

<https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/article-ii-study-commission/charge> . For an early critique of the UUAs anti-racist strategy, see "[Why Anti-Racism Will Fail](#)" by Thandeka (a black female UU minister).

<sup>5</sup> Research has shown that many of the diversity, equity, inclusion anti-racist programs, particularly those that emphasize guilt-based anti-racism are not effective in changing attitudes or behavior (see Anne L. Schneider, "The Emergence of a White Supremacy Culture in Unitarian Universalism," and "(Dis)Continuing Racial Inequality," (both available from amazon). On the other hand, positive, asset-based anti-racism has been shown effective, see for example: <https://assetbasedantiracism.com/> and <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273597830> [Of saints and sinners How appeals to collective pride and guilt affect outgroup helping](#). Not all people of color embrace the "blame and shame" approach of anti-racism. See the 1997 essay by Thandeka (Why Illiberalism Will Fail); and John McWhorter, "Woke Racism" (Books are available from Amazon. Thandeka's essay can be found with google, on or at this link: <https://files.meadville.edu/files/resources/thandeka-why-anti-racism-will-fail-447.pdf>

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<sup>6</sup> This basically is the anti-racist strategy advocated by Robin DiAngelo in her books, “White Fragility” and “Nice Racism” (Both available from amazon).

<sup>7</sup> See , <https://assetbasedantiracism.com/> and [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273597830\\_Of\\_saints\\_and\\_sinners\\_How\\_appeals\\_to\\_collective\\_pride\\_and\\_guilt\\_affect\\_outgroup\\_helping](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273597830_Of_saints_and_sinners_How_appeals_to_collective_pride_and_guilt_affect_outgroup_helping). Not all people of color embrace the “blame and shame” approach of anti-racism. See the 1997 essay by Thandeka (Why Illiberalism Will Fail); and John McWhorter, “Woke Racism” (Books are available from Amazon. Thandeka’s essay can be found with google, on or at this link: <https://files.meadville.edu/files/resources/thandeka-why-anti-racism-will-fail-447.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> This deserves an essay on its own. The most recent and astounding violation is the violation of the bylaws in electing the new UUA President. The bylaws require a competitive election. Instead, the Presidential Search Committee nominated only one person and Rev. Sofia Betancourt ran unopposed. In earlier years, changes that disregarded democracy or made it more difficult include the elimination of UU districts and regions that provided democratic connections within the organization; the de-fellowshipping of Rev. Todd Eklof and Rev. Kate Rohde for their disagreement with some UUA decisions especially the “confession” of being a white supremacy culture; the by-laws change that makes it extremely difficult to get enough signatures to run for UUA President by petition; and the repeated denial of a GA booth for the [Unitarian Universalist Multiracial Action Council](#) (UUMUAC). For more detail, see “Used to Be UU” by Frank Casper and Jay Kiskell, “Against Illiberalism” by David Cycleback, and Anne Schneider’s book “The Self Confessed White Supremacy Culture,” all available from Amazon.

<sup>9</sup> Rev. Todd Eklof’s de-fellowshipping over his book, “The Gadfly Papers,” (available from Amazon) is the example usually given, although Rev. Kate Rohde also has been de-fellowshipped without due process over her defense of Rev. Eklof. UUMUAC is led by Rev. Dr. Finley Campbell, PhD, a black minister whose focus is mainly on social class rather than racism and has been a long-time critic of the UUA’s anti -racist strategy.