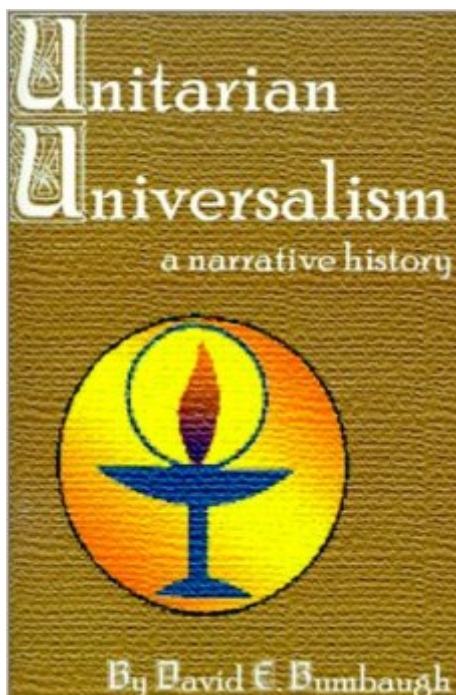


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Unitarian Universalism: A Narrative History



Synopsis

Unitarian Universalism: A Narrative History

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Customer Reviews

On the first page of this book, author David Bumbaugh explains that the UU denomination is peculiar in that it is bound together by a shared history, rather than a shared theology or set of doctrines. He then spends the next 200 pages outlining the histories of the two foundational denominations, the Unitarians and Universalists, from their beginnings in formative Christian discourse to their merger in 1961 to the new challenges facing the secular humanism that has dominated UU since the mid-20th century. This book should be on the bookshelf of every UU, since it provides an easy-to-read overview of our denominational history. Because Bumbaugh does such a thorough job of discussing the various theological actions and reactions of the Reformation, this book is also recommended reading for Christians of all denominations who want to know more about the formation of their faith. After all, as Bob Marley pointed out, "if you knew your history, then you would know where you're coming from." That said, my sole criticism of this history is that it provides much more information on Unitarianism than it does on Universalism. As the author notes in his section on the May 1961 merger of the two liberal post-Christian denominations, the Universalists often feared being subsumed into the larger Unitarian milieu, and this history suggests that those fears were justified. While the author acknowledges that Universalism as a denomination did not really exist in Europe, he also does not go into a detailed exploration of the roots that it

DOES have, whereas he spends scores of pages describing proto-Unitarian trends in European Christendom. Perhaps there really is a paucity of information available on pre-18th century proto-Universalist ideas, and that dearth explains its under-representation in the book. All in all, a good book for historians of Christianity and UU and also for those interested in liberal religion in general.

The book is easy reading and will help you understand how Unitarianism and Universalism evolved. I was raised as a Unitarian and I know more about other religions than I do my own. And certainly if you are not a Unitarian Universalist, but want to understand what it's all about, this book explains the specific ideas behind UUism and where they came from. I should have read this book a long time ago, but I'm glad I read it now!

This relatively short book provides an amazingly in-depth overview of Unitarian and Universalist history. Spending more time on Unitarian history, famous Universalists and their backgrounds are also discussed. This book is unusual in that it is not divided by chapters, and there are typos scattered throughout the text. One that I found particularly humorous was where Ballou's birth year was given as 1771, but then a paragraph later it states he may have held universalist views as early as 1773. Remarkable childhood, if it were true! All in all, this is a very good book for people to read who love religious history and/or want to get a feel for the history of Unitarian Universalism.

This "narrative history" is essentially a short textbook, not the sort of book one would read for pleasure, unless one finds pleasure in being bored. While it is a good overview of the historical development of the UU religion, it is written in a dry, workmanlike prose that doesn't engage the imagination at all. As other reviewers have noted, the book dwells on the Unitarian strand and gives the universalists a briefer treatment. The final piece, on the creation of the Unitarian Universalist Association in 1961 and its evolution since then, is also cursory. I will keep this on my shelf as a reference, but I doubt I would ever feel a desire to read it again without it being to look something up. A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism is a much better introduction to UU.

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