

# ***“Unitarian Universalism: 99.9% Right!”***

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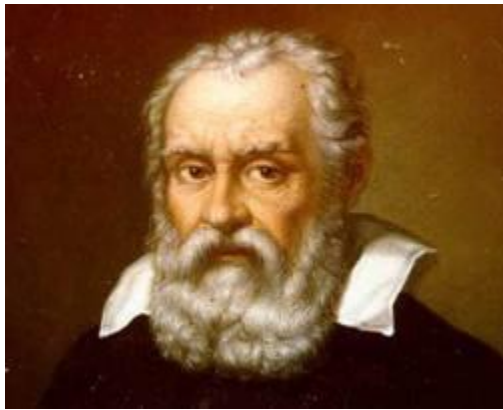
UCN

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To my mind, one of the greatest intellectual tragedies (repeated, sadly, again and again over time) is when a religion (**any** religion) refuses to accept the known laws and undeniable realities (or truths) of science. It's a tragedy because whenever any religious dogma

or belief is put up in rigid opposition to the established facts of natural science (how the world actually works!), in the end the religion (of factual necessity!) “loses” the argument, and ends up looking ridiculous in the eyes of the world. Let me just give a couple of quick examples:

***[Picture and caption of astronomer Galileo  
is projected up on the chancel screen]***



### **The Great Scientist Galileo 1564-1642**

In the year 1632, the great Italian Physicist and astronomer Galileo published a book entitled

***Dialogue on the Two Chief World Systems***

which stated the scientific truth, that -- contrary to Catholic Church doctrine of the time -- **the**

**Earth revolves around the Sun.** This new scientific understanding (which contradicted the old homo-and-earth-centric theological assertion that the Sun revolves around the earth) lead to Galileo being summarily tried and convicted of heresy in a church court, known as an inquisition. The church authorities ordered all copies of Galileo's scientific book destroyed, the great scientist (in spite of knowing full well the astrological truth) was forced to publically renounce his research, and he was sentenced to life imprisonment -- which was eventually commuted to permanent house arrest (because

of his growing fame and importance!). Galileo (still under house arrest for daring to contradict church doctrine, but still churning out scientific insights and innovations) died in 1642. And although soon all astronomers and physicists (not to mention religious leaders) around the world came to accept the fact that the earth did in fact revolve around the sun, it took the Roman Catholic Church until (are you ready for this?) **until 1992** (359 years after the Galileo's heresy trial!) to officially acknowledge the Church's error in its heinous treatment of the scientist.

**[PICTURE OF GALILEO TAKEN DOWN,  
PICTURE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II PUT UP  
ON CHANCEL SCREEN]**



Here is the story from the November 10, 1992  
edition of the New York Times:

***“Moving formally to rectify a wrong, Pope  
John Paul II acknowledged in a speech  
today that the Roman Catholic Church had***

*erred in condemning Galileo 359 years ago for asserting that the Earth revolves around the Sun. The address by the Pope before the Pontifical Academy of Sciences closed a 13-year investigation (“13 year investigation??????) into the Church's condemnation of Galileo in 1633, one of history's most notorious conflicts between faith and science.”*

To make matters even worse, **NPR** (National Public Radio) recently reported that a new poll indicates that (I'm not making this up!) -- one in four Americans (fully 25% of the adult

population) -- when asked about the astronomy of our solar system our earth and Sun -- say that the sun revolves around the earth...God Help Us!

***[PICTURE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II IS TAKEN DOWN OFF CHANCEL SCREEN]***

Here is a second, equally-stark example of how modern scientific fact eventually always trumps old religious dogma. It is a known (and irrefutable) scientific fact that:

- 1) Our planet home (earth – and its countless plant and animal species) has

been in existence for millions of years --  
evolving and changing with the rest of our  
solar system and the countless galaxies  
beyond, and that...

2) Every living thing on this planet today has  
come into its present form because of  
countless generations of biological  
evolution, natural selection, and adaptation  
to ever-changing conditions and  
environments.

The mechanism of **evolutionary biology** has  
(as you all know and understand) come to lie at

the **center** of all inquiry in the natural sciences

as to how life on this planet (and within and among species) works. As famed geneticist

Theodosius Dobzhansky **[theo-dos-ius**

**Dob-zan-sky]** wrote in 1973, “***Nothing in***

***biology makes sense except in the light of***

***evolution.***” Today, every reputable American

scientific organization that has weighed in on

the recent Evolution VS Intelligent Design

controversy has unequivocally affirmed

evolution as “***The bedrock of modern***

***scientific knowledge.***” I quote from the recent

**American Astronomical Society** statement on

the importance of teaching evolution in our nation's schools:

***“Evolution is a valid scientific theory for the origin of species that has been repeatedly tested and verified through observation, formulation of testable statements to explain those observations, and controlled experiments or additional observations to [confirm its universal validity. This scientific theory is the unifying concept] that explains the physical universe.”***

***[PICTURE AND CAPTION OF GOD***

***CREATING THE EARTH IS PROJECTED UP  
ON CHANCEL SCREEN]***



***GOD CREATING “OUR CREATION” IN 7  
DAYS***

Yet in ancient Hebrew scriptures (in the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible which was written and compiled (by many disparate authors centuries before humanity even had

even a vague inkling as to how the universe and life actually evolved) there is a beautiful and poetic description (to me it is wonderful mythic metaphor) of how the world was created (by God...in 7 days...as depicted here in this dramatic, centuries-old painting)

The tragedy here (BOTH INTELLECTUAL AND SPIRITUAL!) – it seems to me – is that (as you know) many fundamentalist (or conservative)

Christians today **insist** that this obviously

FANCIFUL POETIC AND METAPHORIC

description of how our earth came into being (in

7 actual 24 hour days) must be taken as

***“LITERALLY TRUE”***...in other words that we must all believe our planet earth (and everything that lives upon it) was once-and-for-all created in 7 days...7 actual, 24 hour days...about 7,000 years ago...and that this should be taught in public schools as ***“a viable theory of how the universe and humanity came to exist.”***

This belief (called ***“Creationism”***) flies (of course) in the face of **absolutely everything** earth scientists and astronomers know about the slow-and-steady formation of the universe...the long history of our earth...and

the steady-yet-plodding evolution (including the regular processes of adaptation and extinction) of plant and animal species.

**[PAUSE...]**

And so “creationists” – when they look at the world -- are obliged to deny everything:

- 1) From the clear fossil records of the dinosaurs -- which dates them back 230 million years...the last going extinct about 65 millions years ago,
- 2) To the truth that microbes evolve (sometimes in a matter of weeks or months)

to become “resistant strains” that cannot be treated by modern medicines. The undeniable reality of evolutionary biology similarly played itself out with the evolving Covid virus (that broke across the globe 5 years ago) making the virus a constantly “moving evolutionary target” as scientists struggled to develop vaccines to curb the deadly outbreak.

Christian creationists (wedded to the idea that our creation is a fixed-and-final reality created in just 7 actual days) are trapped in the scientifically unsustainable position that God

created the world ***“precisely as it is”*** a few thousand years ago. How much better for their faith it would have been if – when faced with the irrefutable truth of millions of years of evolution – they simply said, ***“Yes, evolution is factually so, this is how our universe mechanically works, but the old, poetic creation story found in Genesis is still true because it beautifully describes (in the literary language of the day) OUR BELIEF that there must have been a spirit of love and holiness involved in shaping this glorious world of ours.”***

***[PICTURE OF GOD CREATING THE WORLD  
IS TAKEN DOWN OFF CHANCEL SCREEN]***

My point here is that **SCIENCE** (the purely-rational pursuit of the facts about this natural world) and **RELIGION** (the more-elusive pursuit of spiritual and ethical truths that can help us live joyously, responsibly and well here on this earth) **need not – indeed ultimately cannot ---stand in disagreement with one another.**

***[PAUSE...]***

This is why I – as someone who believes in the (albeit somewhat separate) importance

**[SCOTT HOLDS BOTH HIS HANDS UP**

**APART FROM ONE ANOTHER ]** of both of 1)

science (which I totally respect and appreciate)

and 2) religion (to which I have devoted my

working life 😊) – rejoiced (a few years back)

when I heard that the genetic scientists

**[PHOTO AND CAPTION OF DR. ELKE**

**JORDAN IS PROJECTED UP ON THE**

**SCREEN]**



### ***Dr. Elke Jordan – N.I.H scientist***

(including a leading member of the UU congregation I served at the time – the River Road Church in Bethesda, Maryland) a wonderfully bright woman named Dr. Elke Jordan) who had just completed mapping **the entire DNA code for our species** discovered that **all human beings (every last one of us, everywhere on the planet)** share an amazing

**99.9%** of our species' genetic markers! Here is the way the ***National Human Genome Research Institute*** put **this amazing news about human oneness and belonging**, ***“When researchers completed the final analysis of the Human Genome Project in April of 2003, they confirmed that the 3 billion base pairs of genetic letters in humans were 99.9 percent identical in every human person [on the planet.]”***

Wow...what an **amazing SCIENTIFIC** and **sacred RELIGIOUS fact!** What this scientific discovery means is that of **ALL** the many (and

sometimes dramatically striking) differences that exist between persons and races – the wide diversities of human hair, eye and skin color...the countless variations in our facial and bodily features...our differences in height, weight, athletic abilities and gait...not to mention all our countless personality and intellectual differences -- **are all accounted for by just one-one-thousandth of what makes us human!**

***[THE FOLLOWING IS PROJECTED UP ON  
THE CHANCEL SCREEN]***

Everything that makes us different from one another can be accounted for by just **one-one-thousandth** of what makes us human!

Now...I must pause here to issue one crucial caveat...when I preached on this subject a few years ago in Vero Beach, the member of the congregation who is a Cornell-trained microbiologist, came up to me as soon as the service was over and said to me, ***“Not so fast Scott, as you may be aware, the recent***

***discoveries about the complexity of the so-called ‘Junk DNA’ complicates this picture about the 99.9% human commonality research, there may be far more genetic variables that account for human differences than we earlier recognized.”*** And so I will wait for further news about what the ***“Junk DNA scientists”*** FINALLY say to all this, but the basic fact remains...in terms of the ***“3 billion base-pairs of [human] genetic letters”*** we human beings are **99.9% identical, one-with-another!**

And the really neat part of this **undeniable scientific fact** (about the human family's overwhelming **biological connectedness, belonging and oneness** to one another) is that **this is EXACTLY** what our Unitarian Universalist religious tradition has been **SPIRITUALLY** saying about humanity for **more than 500 years!** Since their very beginnings as organized religious and intellectual movements in Europe during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries, both Unitarianism and Universalism have faithfully proclaimed **the oneness of humanity.** The early Unitarians

(most noticeably the Transcendentalists of early New England) saw all persons everywhere as mystically connected together as one sacred HUMAN family...and the early Universalists saw every person as a beautiful child of God that could not (EVEN BY SIN AND WRONGDOING) be separated from God's holy family. Listen to the way the Rev Kenneth Patton poetically summarized this affirmation in a reading entitled ***"Our Common Bonds"*** written in the 1950's, before gender-inclusive language was used...so please excuse his exclusive use of the male pronoun:

***Know the bonds by which we are bound  
to one another, for we are not alone.***

***A man is a road where his brothers may  
walk...***

***His body is the bed of a stream through  
which flow the many waters of his world  
and his race...***

***His heart is a city where his brothers  
may build their dwelling...***

***A man is many wires strung in the wind,  
and he must sing the song of the air that  
flows over him...***

***Tears awaken tears and laughter  
awakens laughter: another man's sorrow  
takes up lodging within us...***

***When the stranger weeps at the death of  
one he loves, we too must weep, for the  
death of one is the symbol of the death  
of all, and no man can escape its  
meaning...***

***When one baby is born it is the symbol  
of all birth and life, therefore all men  
must rejoice and lose their hearts to a  
child...***

***Hunger bites all men, and desire afflicts  
us all alike...***

***All men are opened by love and moved  
by the ecstasy of another...***

***One enveloping air gives breath to the  
men of all continents, and one sun  
shines on us all...***

***From the same river of time has come all  
the waters of life...***

***All men smile with their lips and weep  
with their eyes...a smile disregards the***

***color of the face, and the moaning of  
grief is alike in all tongues.***

***Pity and compassion are the deep  
workings of man: they speak forth the  
completeness of his being.***

And listen to the way American Universalist  
and Chicago Poet Carl Sandburg expressed  
the same vision of human oneness in his  
preface to the classic photographic  
collection entitled ***“The Family of Man”***:

***Everywhere is love and love-making,  
weddings and babies from generation***

***to generation keeping the family of  
man alive and continuing.***

***Everywhere the sun, moon and stars,  
the climates and weathers, have  
meanings for people. Though  
meanings vary, we are alike in all  
countries and tribes in trying to read  
what sky, land and sea say to us.***

***Alike and ever alike we are on all  
continents in the need of love, food,  
clothing, work, speech, worship,  
sleep, games, dancing, fun. From the  
tropics to arctics humanity lives with***

***these needs so alike, so inexorably alike.***

This vision of human oneness (and the accompanying ethic of responsibly belonging to one another) is perhaps **the most durable and sacred legacy of our free faith**. Unitarian Universalism has always...always...been animated by the theological and ethical affirmation of **human belonging and connectedness**...and as I have already pointed out, this theological and ethical affirmation is profoundly confirmed by **human genome**

science....**SCIENCE AND RELIGION**

***[SCOTT HOLDS HIS HANDS TOGETHER]***

**SEEING THE SAME TRUTH!** Again, the scientific evidence is irrefutable...when it comes to the genetic markers that determine who and what we shall be...human beings are 99.9% alike, and are only one-one-thousandth different...one from another as human beings sharing this earth.

***[PAUSE...]***

So why is it – I spiritually ask with all my heart– why is it that so many religions (and other human organizations) seem to devote so much spiritual time and effort to unnecessarily **divide** humanity along this or that **arbitrary fault line**? Why is it that so many religions – in the face of the scientific evidence which confirms **our radical oneness and belonging to one another** – spend so much spiritual capital trying to separate people along the lines of:

***“the sheep from the goats,”***

***“the saved from the damned,”***

***“the righteous from those that are  
deemed the unrighteous,”***

***“the true believers from the false  
believers,”***

***“people of the light from people of  
the darkness”***

***“God’s people from those they label  
the people of the Devil,” ???***

I might as well be right out and say it this morning, folks, this Unitarian Universalist

***[SCOTT POINTS TO HIMSELF]*** believes that it is a profound spiritual tragedy that so many religions refuse to take **the reality and beauty of our radical human oneness and belonging** into their hearts and into their beliefs.

This is, of course, only natural for me, for I am a third generation Unitarian Universalist who grew up having our faith tradition's belief in the oneness of humanity repeatedly affirmed to me. I find the assertion that humanity must be spiritually divided (no matter which ever imagined "fault-line" the

dividers use) as spiritually repugnant and wrong...and may in fact someday lead to the undoing of our species?

This is why (as I suggested in my sermon title this morning) that, when it comes to understanding humanity [and the unity of human condition] at least:

***[THE FOLLOWING PHRASE IS***

***PROJECTED UP ON THE SCREEN]***

**Unitarian Universalism is 99.9% right!**

**We are right** when we see the same universal beauty radiating out of every

human individual's eyes. **We are right** when we refuse to deny our care and concern for those who (outwardly at least) appear different from ourselves. **We are right** when we fight for social and economic justice for persons everywhere, no matter how far around the globe they may be. **We are right** – by God we are right -- when we proclaim that every man, woman and child is a part of our human family and deserves respect...deserves dignity, protection, justice, compassion and love.

And look where we all are right now, in early March of 2025. I know you all feel the terrible weight and tragedy of what is sadly happening in America right now upon your hearts and minds. We now find ourselves living in a mean and angry culture (and nation) that is increasingly (and tragically) finding ways to DEMONICALLY DIVIDE AND DISTANCE HUMAN BEINGS, ONE FROM ANOTHER...along one arbitrary “fault line or another. Over recent months in particular -- and from words and actions coming from some of the highest offices of

the land -- Americans are allowing themselves to cynically being pitted against one another: Black, Brown and White...Gay, Bisexual and Straight...male, female and transgender...Privileged and Poor...immigrant and native-born, young and old...able bodied and disabled – pitted against one another for cynical political and economic gains. What is happening right now in America is not only **spiritually wrong** it is **morally corrupt**....it is **hateful** and **unholy**. We are being told (by some in power and privilege) that WE **DO NOT**

IRRETREIVABLY BELONG TO ONE  
ANOTHER AS FELLOW HUMAN  
BEINGS...AND THAT WE **DO NOT** HAVE A  
MORAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE  
WELL-BEING OF ONE ANOTHER...THAT  
WE **DO NOT** NEED TO BE (AS THE BIBLE  
TEACHES SO PROFOUNDLY) “***OUR  
BROTHER’S AND SISTER’S KEEPER.***”

As Unitarian Universalists – LIVING IN THIS  
MEAN AND DIVISIVE TIME -- we have a  
moral and spiritual duty to offer a **different**  
**(and more inclusive and caring) view of**  
**what it means to be a human family, WE**

**HAVE A DUTY TO REMIND HUMANITY  
THAT IT IS 99.9% CONNECTED BOTH  
SCIENTIFICALLY AND SPIRITUALLY!** As  
citizens in this troubled human space and  
time, we must (day in and day out) speak,  
live, and defend the **HOLY AND HEALING  
TRUTH** of our fundamental human  
belongingness, one with another.

I believe that in the long history of humanity, the  
time has come for us to put away all of our

**FALSE DOCTRINES OF HUMAN**

**DIVISIVENESS**, and embrace only those

spiritual and theological beliefs, understandings

and ethical imperatives which support and remind us of our holy/human/unitary belonging to one another.

For me the heart and soul of our Unitarian Universalist faith is beautifully summarized in these lines with which poet Carl Sandburg ends his epic poem, ***"The People, Yes!"***...it is permanently posted on the door to my office for all to see. May America, and all its leaders, including those now in the White House, let this spiritual awareness **inform, animate, and save**) their hearts:

***There is only one horse on the earth***

***And his name is All Horses.***

***There is only one bird in the air***

***And [her] name is All Wings.***

***There is only one fish in the sea***

***And his name is All Fins.***

***There is only one man in the world***

***And his name is All Men.***

***There is only one woman in the world***

***And her name is All Women.***

***There is only one child in the world***

***and that child's name is All Children.***

***There is only one maker in the world***

***And [that maker's children] cover the  
earth***

***and they are named All God's  
Children."***

AMEN.