

## The Bicentennial Legacy of James Freeman Clarke

In his history, The Unitarians and the Universalists, David Robinson asserts that James Freeman Clarke (1810-1888) was “one of the most important churchmen in nineteenth century Unitarianism and may be thought of as the most representative figure among the Unitarian clergy and leadership.” (Robinson, 1985, p. 234)

Until age 10, he received his education from his grandfather, James Freeman, minister of Boston’s Kings Chapel, and from there it was on to Boston Latin School, Harvard College and Harvard Divinity School. His first pastorate was in Louisville (1833-1840). While there he married Anna Huidekoper of Meadville, Pennsylvania. They were to have four children, one of whom, Herman, died in childhood. In 1841 he went on to Boston where he founded the Church of the Disciples which he served until his death in 1888, except for a three-year period of convalescence (1850-1853) spent in Meadville, Pennsylvania, where he served as an associate minister and taught at Meadville Theological School.

Clarke was an active participant in a number of the social/political movements of his time— anti-slavery, women’s suffrage, temperance, prison reform, poverty relief, and civil service reform, among others. His support for Cleveland in the presidential election of 1884 is considered to be a significant factor in Cleveland’s victory. He served for a number of years as an adjunct professor at Harvard Divinity School, as a member of the Harvard Board of Overseers, and as a member of the State Board of Education. He was also very active in the American Unitarian Association, serving on its board of directors, as editor of the denominational paper and as general secretary (chief executive officer). He was a moving force in the establishment of the Unitarian National Conference of Unitarian Churches in 1865. A prolific and popular author, he published 32 books and contributed more than 1,000 articles to numerous periodicals over his career. From 1873 until his death in 1888, his sermons appeared weekly in the Boston Saturday Evening Gazette, the city’s only Sunday newspaper. More than 500 of his sermons appeared in that venue.

Likely, Clarke was the most read Unitarian minister of his age. Many of his books went through several editions. For instance, the twenty-third edition of his volume, Self Culture, was published in 1898. His celebrated five points served as a widely accepted encapsulation of Unitarianism well into the twentieth century. They were: the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the leadership of Jesus, salvation by character, and the continuity of human development in all worlds, or the progress of mankind onward and upward forever. Why one so prominent in our history is so little known today has long been a mystery to me, and so I am pleased to have the opportunity on the occasion of the bicentennial of Clarke’s birth, to present this series of Minns

Lectures in order to acquaint Unitarian Universalists with an important and inspiring aspect of their legacy. Previous lectures have dealt with Clarke’s theology, his Church of the Disciples, his views on self culture, and the trials and triumphs of his years as a missionary in Louisville. This afternoon I want to distill the essence of his bicentennial legacy and relate it to our contemporary scene. I will suggest

three interrelated aspects of this legacy—his vision for a broad and inclusive faith, his vision for the ideal congregation, and his vision for self culture..

#### VISION FOR A BROAD AND INCLUSIVE FAITH

Clarke's theology may be summed up as his holding to a loving, kind God rather than an angry one, free will as opposed to predestination, Jesus as an exemplary moral model of love and justice rather than being God incarnate and a vicarious sacrifice for human sin, an authoritative rather than an inerrant Bible, ultimate universal salvation and, the potential for human nobility rather than inevitable depravity.

This theology drew upon a very broad inclusive epistemology. As he phrased it: "The Bible, human history, the soul itself, Christian experience, reason,—all are sources of Christian knowledge, but none are infallible, nor were meant to be." (Steps of Belief, 218) Clarke firmly believed that within the context of religious community, a dialogue is possible which uses all of these means of religious knowledge. "The union of many minds in the earnest investigation of truth, will produce deeper and broader results, than the solitary efforts of any individual mind, no matter how superior he is to each of them. The only way in which every side of a truth can be seen, is in the combined investigations of many different intellects. Their varied tendencies of thought, their diverse experience, modify and correct all individual onesidedness and eccentricity." (Principles, p. 19)

Theological inclusiveness was at the heart of the Church of the Disciples founded in Boston by Clarke. The congregation was not founded on a particular belief about the person of Jesus, but rather on the study and the practice of his teachings. Of congregational members, he wrote: "They may differ as to their opinions about his nature. One may think that he is very God; another, that he is a superhuman being made before all words; another that he was a man, made in all respects like his brethren. Yet, as God, archangel or man, all are ready to confide in his power, believe his teachings, obey his commands, and reverence his character. Their belief concerning Christ is very different, but their faith in Christ is the same. (Principles, 12)

It was widely predicted in Boston that the new congregation would soon fall apart because of such divergence. But such was not the case, claimed Clarke, because there was "a common longing for spiritual life as the highest aim We escaped discord on the one hand, and monotony on the other, and our varieties were blended into a happy concord." (Principles, 31).

Clarke's principle of inclusion went beyond the Christian tradition to other faiths. He believed, of course, that the revelation of God's loving and forgiving fatherhood has come to us through the teaching of Jesus as recorded in the Christian Scriptures, but he also believed in a general revelation of God which has been available to those who have not had the benefit of this special revelation. This has come to them by means of the intuitive powers of the human mind. Clarke found these intuitive powers referenced in Matthew 25, Romans 2, and Acts 17. This revelation enabled salvation apart from the Christian revelation.

Clarke engaged in an extensive study of world religions for more than twenty-five years before publishing two volumes on the subject, the first appearing in 1871, and the second in 1883. They proved very popular and went through several editions. The treatment of non-Christian religions was sympathetic. He found much to admire in them.

However, when all was said and done, Clarke envisioned his particular brand of liberal Christianity as supplying the deficiencies of other religions. He believed Hinduism, for instance, to be an eminently spiritual religion whose writings filled the soul with a sense of divine presence but that it was deficient on the human side because its caste system had been the source of oppression.

Buddhism, as a revolt against this inhumanity, has everywhere taught loving kindness to all, but has been deficient in its teaching of that which is infinite and eternal.

Islam has taught sovereignty of God and represented Him as Infinite will. This, however, has not left sufficient room for human freedom.

Christianity, he claimed, has the positive aspects of these religions and has been able to correct their deficiencies: "Thus Christianity has shown itself as a fullness, a pleroma, or to use the modern phrase, an all-sidedness which marks it for still larger catholicity hereafter." (Ten Religions II, 363)

Clarke believed that the Christian teaching of the loving and forgiving fatherhood of God, would eventually, over time, lead to the establishment of Christianity as a universal, world-wide faith

Geographical inclusiveness was also an aspect of Clark's vision. He took this theology to the frontier city of Louisville as a recent graduate of Harvard Divinity School, believing that Unitarianism should spread its influence beyond Boston. It was often said that Unitarians of his day believed in the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man and the neighborhood of Boston. He wanted to challenge this parochialism. He and other ministers to the West founded a religious and literary periodical, *The Western Messenger*, to speak to the frontier in promotion of Unitarianism. In that periodical, he consistently challenged the eastern Unitarians to be more missionary minded, at one point writing: "It was and is the duty of the first men in the eastern pulpits—of the Channings, Gannetts, Walkers, Deweys, &c.—to quit their parishes and go and labor in such places as Pittsburgh until the societies are built up" (Habich, p. 77 quoted from *Western Messenger* 1:803-804)

He was involved in founding churches in Mobile and Chicago, and when he was general secretary of the A.U.A. he promoted extension tirelessly. When he was an emissary for the governor of Mass., John Andrew, to check on Massachusetts Troops in Washington D.C. at the beginning of the Civil War he carried a suitcase full of Unitarian tracts to give to the troops.

In his Church of the Disciples he stressed a broad inclusion of race and class. At the dedication of the church's first building in 1848, Clarke spoke these words: "We wish and intend that these doors may be always open to welcome the stranger, the feeble, and the wretched. We wish and intend that

here the rich and the poor may sit together, and the differences of rank and caste be forgotten. We wish that the fugitive slave, and the penitent prodigal may here feel themselves

welcome, as they always have been. We have always rejoiced in open doors, in free seats, in having a Church composed not of the rich but of the poor as well. (Church as it was, 29)

#### VISION FOR THE LOCAL CONGREGATION

In 1840, Clarke resigned from his Louisville congregation because he felt he had done about as much as he could do in growing that congregation and he had become discouraged by criticisms of his preaching and his insufficient degree of parish calling. He had married Anna Huidekoper of Meadville, Pennsylvania, the year before and she felt uncomfortable in living in a slave state as he increasingly did as well. He spent some time in the fall of 1840 searching unsuccessfully for a pulpit in Boston and so determined to form his own congregation there.

In line with this intent, he took his first steps toward the end of January of 1841, engaging the Swedenborgian Chapel for three evenings at which he delivered sermons on his views of religion hoping that these would elicit enough interest to organize a congregation. On all three occasions, the chapel was full. Regular well-attended services were continued and on April 27, 46 charter members signed the congregation's membership book underneath their pledge of union: "Our faith is in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and we do hereby unite ourselves into a Church of the Disciples, that we may cooperate together in the study and practice of Christianity." (Bolster, 144).

The Church of the Disciples, by Clarke's own admission, was initially composed of malcontents from other Unitarian Churches. Some wanted more zealous congregational social action, some wanted more orthodox preaching and doctrine, some wanted more freedom of thought and action, and some wanted the congregation to be involved in more interesting, inspiring worship. Some were half orthodox in their belief and others felt that so-called liberal Christianity was not liberal enough for them. (Principles, 31)

In the face of this diversity of expectations, the church was held together by their covenant and by common commitment to three principles --the social principle, the voluntary principle, and the principle of congregational participation in worship. We'll consider them one by one.

First, the social principal. In order to cooperate as called for in their covenant, Clarke believed they would have to know each other well and that coming together only on Sunday mornings would not be sufficient for this. So he designed other sorts of social gatherings to engage the three elements of human nature—intellect, affection, and will or as he also phrased it "head, heart, and hand."

Every other Wednesday evening there was a discussion to engage the intellect. These discussions would often take place in the homes of members. Clarke would often begin with a brief introduction of the topic. Among the topics discussed during the winter of 1845-46 were these:

1. What is the true Christian doctrine of regeneration?

2. "There is no instinctive, intuitive, or direct knowledge of the truths of religion, either of the being of God or of our own immortality."—Andrews Norton
3. What is the inspiration of the New Testament?
4. Is sin a negative or a positive evil?
5. "Be ye perfect, as your Father in Heaven is perfect" Is this to be understood and obeyed in a literal or a limited sense?
6. What is the New Testament doctrine of the hidden life?
7. Shall we maintain and urge our opinions always, or sometimes concede for the sake of union?
8. Should the good withdraw from an evil community, or separate themselves from an evil man?
9. What is the sphere of woman, and how shall she be best educated to fill it?
10. What is the Christian idea of the future state, and of the spiritual world?
11. What is the doctrine of Scripture with regard to eternal punishment, and what is the Christian view of future retribution?
12. What views do the Scriptures afford us of a spiritual body?
13. What are the principles and ideas peculiar to Protestantism, as distinguished from those peculiar to the Church of Rome?
14. What is needed by Unitarianism, at the present time, to give it greater influence and success?(Hale, p. 164)(Also Bolster thesis, 273)

This intellectual element is also seen in lectures which were given in the church proper on Sunday evenings. The lineup for the lecture series in 1848 included Temperance Reform (S.H. Chapin), The Peace Movement (Theodore Parker), the Anti-Slavery Movement (Wendell Phillips), and Education Reform (Horace Mann). (Hale 167-168 from Clarke's diary, March 15, 1848).

Every other Wednesday evening they held meetings at the church intended to engage the heart rather than the intellect. Clarke described them as follows: "At these prayer meetings, and conference meetings, where we endeavor to speak from our inward experience, rather than from our reflections, a holy influence often seems to extend itself, as one speaker after another, in a few simple words, unfolds his deep convictions and trials, joys, and hopes. (Principles, 19)

A third class of meetings designed to enable the exercise of the will involved more practical effort. Women of the church met on two afternoons every week during the winter to cut out material to be given to poor women to make clothes for their children (Principles, 19) The money from collections on Communion Sundays, the first Sunday of each month, enabled the purchase of yarn and material which the poor woman used to knit and sew. About 60 women were regularly helped. Most of the women were Roman Catholic Irish whose husbands were unemployed or underemployed. (Bolster, 148).

The discussion meetings and lectures also led to exercise of the will as well. Benevolent programs such as the founding of a temporary home for the destitute, the establishment of a retirement home for African American women who had worked as domestics, and a home for pregnant unmarried

women. The congregation strongly supported the Emigrant Aid society which sent anti-slavery New Englanders to Kansas in the effort to keep that state free. In 1856 members of the Disciple Church gave over \$1,500 (\$36,200 in today's dollars) to the effort and in the fall of 1856 they began a clothing drive and were able to ship 29 cases containing 4200 garments, 15 cases of boots, 5 cases of blankets." (Bolster 242-243)

The disciples were also very active in the work of the New England Educational Commission to provide schools and teachers for the children of former slaves working on former plantations on the Sea Islands off the Carolinas. (Bolster, 275 and Bolster Thesis, 273) Another project involved significant financial and volunteer support for the New England Hospital for Women and Children. By the 1880's they were giving \$4,000 yearly to charity which was in addition to the gift of many goods and personal services. (Bolster, p. 301). This was approximately one-third of their total budget.

At times political action was taken by the church as when it sent a protest to Congress against the Mexican War and when it published widely distributed tracts against the annexation of Texas. At the arrest of John Brown after the Harper's Ferry raid, the church raised several hundred dollars for his legal defense.

The second overall principle was the voluntary principle which read: "The expenses of the church shall be defrayed by a voluntary subscription, and pews shall not be sold, rented, or taxed." (Principles, 21). Selling or renting of pews was the way Unitarian churches were commonly financed. To Clarke's thinking this tended to be undemocratic and un-Christian because it vested control of the congregation in those who had financial means, shutting out the poor. It was an impractical system, he contended, because the well-to-do often did not attend services and those of limited financial means often did not attend for fear of trespassing on the property of others

In many congregations pew holders governed the congregation. Clarke thought it important to have a single organization united on a religious basis in control all the affairs, spiritual and financial. (Clarke, *The Pew System and the Free System*, 1876). Standing committees included a Pastoral Committee, A Committee on Benevolent Action, A Committee on the Young, a Committee on Music, and A Committee on Finance. It is interesting to note that the bylaws called for the Pastor to be a member of all of the committees except the finance committee and that the Pastoral Committee which dealt with the religious interests of the church was to be composed of five men and five women. The benevolence committee was to be composed of six men and six women. There was no mention of the women/men ratio in the committee on the young. The Finance committee was to consist of six gentlemen charged with handling the business aspects of the church. ( *Service Book for the Use of the Church of the Disciples*, pp. 178-179)

Thus, the congregation relied on voluntary contributions of members. In 1844, their third year, 152 of them gave \$1727. This paid Clarke's salary of \$1,000, (\$23,271 in today's dollars) rent of \$170 per quarter for their use of the Masonic Temple, and little bit left over for contingencies and incidental expenses. Clarke's \$1,000 salary was supplemented by a \$1,000 annual gift from his father-in-law Harm Jan Huidekoper. In 1844 he made a gift to \$20,000 to Anna, followed by gifts in years to come

so that by 1849 James and Anna had over \$40,000 in investments, the income from which allowed them to live quite comfortably. By 1855, they had \$71,300 invested, bringing in more than \$5,000 a year in dividends and interest. They were able to employ two maids (\$2.00 each per week), and a handyman who did regular chores for \$1.75 per month. A governess for their children was paid \$6.00 per week. Financial security enabled Clarke to give full attention to his fledgling congregation. (Bolster Thesis, 295-296) His salary did grow to \$5,000 by 1873 (equivalent to \$86,000 today).

A third principle was that of congregational worship. Conventionally in Unitarian congregations, lay people took no part in worship. Professional musicians provided organ and choir music. There was no congregational hymn singing. The minister read the Scriptures, recited the prayers, and preached the sermon. Clarke instituted congregational hymn singing (actually produced his own hymnal), responsive reading of the Psalms, corporate recitation of the Lord's Prayer, and a time of meditative silence and an extempore ministerial prayer after the sermon. Communion on the first Sunday of the month was open to all present. Clarke hoped to develop a tradition of lay preaching, but was not successful in getting too many lay takers except for a few notable exceptions, such as Julia Ward Howe, and John Albion Andrew, wartime governor of Massachusetts. Occasionally, the sermon would be dispensed with and short affirmations given by members.

Of the singing, Clarke wrote: "The singing by the whole congregation is often very sweet and touching. The united tones of several hundred singing the praises of God in company, gives a feeling of reality to worship, not otherwise attained. It is desirable, when the singing is thus congregational, that there should be an experienced chorister to lead it, a man of musical taste and religious feeling, with a good voice and judgment in selecting tunes. It is also desirable that there should be regular singing meetings, to be attended by as many of the society as possible, to practice tunes, and thus improve the music continually." (Principles, 26)

Clarke established an eclectic liturgical calendar of special days dedicated to commemoration of such events as the births of Swedenborg, Washington, and William Ellery Channing, the deaths of Joan of Arc and John Brown and to such events as the laying of the Atlantic Cable and the Hegira of Mohammed. Forefather's Day (December 22) commemorated the landing of the pilgrims and the Reformation was commemorated on the Sunday closes to Oct. 31. (Hutchinson, 150).

Many of the established Unitarian clergymen in Boston looked upon Clarke as a "disturber and Innovator," who led a "Caryall Church", a collection of Radical Reformers, Come-Outers and Transcendentalists of every sort. They criticized him publicly for his free pew system, his congregational organization, his permission of lay preaching, and his allowance of anyone who was a self-described follower of Jesus to partake in Communion even though they were not members of his congregation or any congregation. (Bolster thesis, 275-276, from Barthol, Sermon Tribute to James Freeman Clarke)

In the first year an additional 101 people joined, 32 the following year and an additional 58 by April of 1845, bringing the total after normal attrition to 200 members. Many more people attended the services. At the start of 1845, regular attendance averaged around 700. The congregation

developed quite nicely, dedicating its first building in 1848. Then, in January of 1850, Clarke came down with typhoid fever and nearly died. He was in poor health during ensuing months and finally in August he decided to take his doctor's advice and ask his congregation for an indefinite leave of absence.

They sold their Freeman Place Chapel to Second Church. The Clarke family then headed for Anna's home in Meadville, Pa. where they stayed for three years. While there he taught courses at Meadville Seminary, was an associate minister at the Unitarian Church, and did extensive writing—three books written, one book translated and fifty articles published. His health restored, he returned to Boston and the Church of the Disciples in the fall of 1853. Membership had dwindled to 67 people and the treasury was low. They began a slow process of rebuilding, reestablishing their church program on their founding principles. They merged with the Indiana Place Church and thus had a building which seated 500 hundred people. The first services there were held in January of 1855. This was their tenth home in fifteen years.

Sunday attendance and membership slowly built until by 1867 a larger church was needed. A new church was built on Warren Street and dedicated, debt-free on February 18, 1869. The total cost of the building and land was \$70,000. It seated 1500 people in the sanctuary. The downstairs area housed a large hall, a small hall, Sunday School, library, and minister's office

For the last 19 years of his ministry, Clarke had a facility which was a fulfillment of his dreams. All his basic congregational theories remained intact, except for the fact that lay preaching had not become as established as he hoped it would be. Attendance often exceeded 800 and on occasion the sanctuary was filled to its 1500 seat capacity. (Bolster, 302). Membership increased to 598 in 1871 (Colville, according to Church Records)

The Sunday School had a weekly attendance of 400 with 50 teachers and a library of more than 2,000 volumes. A social club of eighty young people met twice a month and a young adult group numbered between 300 and 400. Courses of lectures were given. One entitled "What is Being Done in Boston", concerned "varying classes of unfortunates." Another series dealt with one of Clarke's perennial themes—cooperation and mutual appreciation among various religious groups in Boston. It was entitled "The "True Universal Church," and featured a" Roman Catholic priest, an Episcopal bishop, Methodist, Baptist, Universalist, and Swedenborgian ministers, a member of the Society of Friends, and a Free Religionist. There were Bible classes and seminars in comparative religion, as well. given by Clarke." (Bolster, p. 301).

Edward Everett Hale, a contemporary ministerial colleague claimed that there were two sorts of people who filled the Church of the Disciples: "First there was the 'old line' of the Church of the Disciples, a body of worshipers, recruited from almost every class of society, who were interested in his studies for the truth, and followed them in the order they took in his mind. The fundamental principle of a 'Free Church' made it easy for people who had few other social ties in Boston to feel at home in the Church of the Disciples, and the congregation had probably a larger share than is usual of new-comers to the city, who began their attendance because attracted by its ready hospitality, and continued it because drawn

by the sturdy, straightforward earnestness of the preacher, and his entire indifference to popular opinion or the arts of sensation (Hale, 1891, p.314 )

After Clarke's death in 1888 from intestinal cancer (Bolster's best estimate), the church called Charles Gordon Ames who served the congregation for 23 years until his death at age 83 in 1912. Ames' ministry was followed by that of Abraham Mitrie Ribany who served as an associate during the last year of Ames' tenure and then went on to serve the congregation as minister until his retirement in 1938. He was the congregation's last settled minister. Membership had begun to dwindle by that point and their building was sold in 1940. On March 26, 1941, they voted to accept the cordial invitation of the Arlington Street Church to join them in worship and service while continuing their existence as a legal entity. On May 25, 1941, a union service of the two congregations was held at which Samuel A. Eliot, minister of the Arlington Street Church and former president of the AUA preached a sermon on "The Disciples and the Apostles."

Thus, the Church of the Disciples existed as a separate entity for 100 years and continues on as a merged entity with Arlington Street Church.

#### VISION OF SELF CULTURE

Orthodox religion of Clarke's day declared that at death, an eternal destiny was permanently assigned to everyone—either heaven or hell. Clarke didn't view heaven and hell as places. Rather, he viewed them as states of the soul experienced both in this life and the life to come. One enters into heavenly existence or salvation when one is true to God's laws and communes with Him, is filled with an altruistic love and translates that love into benevolent action. It is a state of peace and joy. Hell is a state of rebellion against God and his law of love. He described this state of hell as being "willful, hard, selfish, stubborn; willfulness instead of energy, stupid prejudice instead of insight, hard selfishness instead of generosity." (Everyday Religion, p. 370).

Clarke believed that God is luring individuals and societies, nations and confederations of nations forward toward this salvation or heavenly existence. As he phrased it as one of his Five Points: "The Continuity of Human Development in all worlds, or the Progress of Mankind onward and upward forever." On the societal level Clarke believed that ultimately an era of universal peace and justice would be instituted. "Christ will at last become in reality the Prince of Peace, putting an end to war between nations, war between classes in society, war between criminals and the State. In trade, instead of competition we shall have co-operation, and all industry will receive its just recompense. Capital will be reconciled to labor; science to religion; reason to faith; liberty to order; the conservatism which loves the stable past to the spirit of progress which forgets what is behind and reaches out to that which is before." (Essentials, 100-101).

On the individual level, Clarke termed this development "self culture," or the growth of physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual powers. He believed this mandate for personal growth was

taught by Jesus in the parables of the talents and the pounds. It is not enough to return back what we have received, unimpaired. We are called upon to bring back more than we have received

### Physical Self Culture

It is possible for a powerful soul to triumph over bodily ills, claimed Clarke, but usually someone sick in body is also sick in thought. He gave as an example John Calvin who was in ill health for much of his life and developed a very gloomy, morbid theology. Clarke did not believe the claim that if we all obeyed the laws of healthy living we would always be healthy, but he did believe that a vast amount of illness is due to intemperance in eating and drinking, breathing bad air, living in damp homes, and getting insufficient exercise, sleep, and rest. He was also concerned about the increase in “nervous diseases” due to “too much brain-work, too little social reaction, too great anxiety and care”(Self Culture, 58). He counseled that patience, equanimity, trust in Providence, contentment with our lot, and a good conscience would help to keep the body from disease.

When he began his studies at Harvard College he had frequent attacks of fever and pulmonary trouble but credits deliverance from these maladies to the gymnastic exercises introduced by Dr. Follen when he joined the faculty. Follen began with a large room filled with apparatus and later added outdoor equipment which included a 70 foot mast held in place by guy wires. Halfway up the mast was a platform reached by a ladder. The rest of the way to the top required climbing the bare mast aided only by a knotted rope. Clarke was very fond of climbing this mast all the way to the top and then standing upright on the little iron cap on the top. (Hale, 44)

He kept up this fondness for scaling of heights by climbing up to the top of Cathedrals he visited. In 1849 at age 39 while visiting the Salisbury Cathedral in England, Clarke set out to climb to the top of the spire, some 400 feet above the street. The first 370 feet he ascended by means of ladders that led to a little window. This was as far as visitors were usually allowed to go. When he got this far, however, he spied a series of lead handles leading to the weathervane at the very top of the spire. He swung himself out so he could grasp the lead handles and climb up until he reached a large metal ball just below the weathervane. He pulled himself up onto the top of the ball.

At this point there is a difference of opinion. Biographer Edward Everett Hale reported that, according to most versions of the story he stood on top of the ball with as much support as he could get by hanging on to the weathervane. Bolster says that he sat atop the ball. After surveying the scene for awhile he lowered himself down over the side of the ball while holding on to the vane in order to find the lead handle. To his dismay, he learned that he had come down on the wrong side of the ball and had to work around the ball, hanging by his hands until he was able to place his foot upon the lead handle. All this time, friends watched from the street in great dismay. Clarke climbed to the top of the spires at Cathedrals in Antwerp and Strasburg as well, and when in Nanzing, England, at age 64 he climbed to the top of the tower in the church there.

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### Intellectual Self Culture

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First , in this area, Clarke counseled the development of the reflective power of thinking involving the categories of comparison, causality and adaptation. These are used in the every-day concerns of life—housekeeping, sewing, carpentry, and plumbing—as well as higher intellectual pursuits. “Everything which exercises the reasoning powers, whether it be the study of a science, a debating society, a game of chess, or an intellectual game of questions and answers, helps to develop these faculties. Perhaps one of the best methods is to read books in which important questions are discussed, and carefully to examine the reasons and arguments as you proceed; not hurrying, but going very slowly, thinking out everything as you advance.” (150-151) Central to the whole practice of reflection is the love and pursuit of truth.

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Clarke believed that God has revealed truth and that He has given us our reason with which to ‘examine, investigate, define, and arrange it. The best and highest view of Christianity must come from the general exercise of reason in regard to it.” (149)

Clarke also counseled development of the powers of observation, similar to Buddhist mindfulness “He {God} has made this earth so rich and so lovely, with its sights and sounds, its mountain precipices, its rolling prairies, its vast blue lakes, its tumbling cataracts, its ocean with long swell, rolling night and day on the shore, like the perpetual beating of the human heart. He has made the varieties of plants, leaves, flowers, trees; the birds, fishes, insects. Since he has thought it fit to create this vast and wonderful world, shall we not think it worth our while to see it? Is there not an irreverence in this?” (Self Culture, 123)

He suggested that every child ought to learn how to sketch so that he or she is able to record that which he or she sees and wishes to remember. He asserted that the ability to draw in perspective can be acquired in a week and lead to a lifetime of satisfaction. Clarke took a course in drawing as adult and often sketched natural scenes. When travelling he would often include a sketch of his environs in a letter to his wife.

Clarke was a keen observer of the night sky and became an accomplished amateur astronomer and even patented and marketed an illuminated lantern which helped the novice locate stars.

His descriptions of stage coach travels cross-country from Boston to Louisville, his first sight of Niagara Falls, and his first glimpse of the Alps are all inspirational as he recorded them. It is evident that he received keen enjoyment and appreciation by these observations.

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Moral self culture

Foremost in this area is education of the conscience, the instinct, or power within every person, in all cultures, showing the distinction between right and wrong. Clarke thought of an educated, trained and enlightened conscience as the cornerstone of society, but believed a diseased and ignorant conscience as being worse than no conscience at all: “Many of the worst actions done in the world have been done by honest people, who conscientiously believed that they were doing right.”(Self Culture, 210) He gives as examples the Apostle Paul before his conversion, Cotton Mather in the Salem

Witch Trials, and the Spanish Inquisitors. The instruction of the conscience is therefore of the utmost importance. But where is the code? What is the standard?"

Clarke answered that there is no systematic code of ethics for all purposes given in the New Testament, but that general principles are given such as is the golden rule of doing to others as we would wish them to do to us. Other important admonitions are: "Overcome evil with good;" "Speak the truth in love;" "Love God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself;" "Let your yea be yea, and your nay nay;" "Love your enemies, bless those that persecute you;" "Forgive, that ye may be forgiven;" "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted;" "It is more blessed to give than receive." (Self Culture, 210).

After the instruction of conscience comes its training which requires self knowledge and discipline. Everyone has moral strength and a special moral danger, a besetting sin and might profitably arrange one's life to maximize the strength and minimize the danger. "If a man is indolent, he should put himself where he will be obliged to work. If he is irritable, he should avoid occasions will excite his temper. If he is tempted to insincerity and falsehood, he should surround himself with all possible influences and helps to keep him to the strictest verity. And in all this he needs the help of religion, of daily prayer, and of living always in the great Taskmaster, eye." (Self Culture, 215) Clarke claimed that The best exercise for conscience is to hold fast to integrity in small things. The real temptations in life are to tell the small lie, utter an unkind word, or to cheat in some small matter.

It is interesting to note Clarke's ideas as to moral development and money. All in all he does not decry wealth. He wrote: "To be rich means to be able to have a comfortable house in a healthy situation, with plenty of sunshine and air; to have good books to read, fine pictures to look at: to go to the mountains or to the sea in summer; to travel in Europe; to have time and leisure for study; good society, pleasant acquaintances, recreation of all sorts,--horses, sail-boats and the like." (p. 263) This is a very accurate description of the scale of Clarke's wealth. He went on to say, however, that being rich also enables one to be generous, not in thoughtless ways which take away recipients' self reliance and self respect but in ways that enable people to help themselves.

"Instead of giving money in the street, we establish societies which visit those who are in want at their own houses; which provide work for those out of work; which provide hospitals for the sick, homes for the aged; industrial schools for young men and women; model lodging-houses, where comfort and health can be secured at reasonable rates; homes where inebriates can be saved; reform schools, farm schools, help for discharged prisoners, bright and cheery holly-tree inns instead of drinking saloons; free music, free libraries, free baths in summer. This is all a movement in the right direction, for it is the practical form of the doctrine of the atonement, the reconciliation of love and truth; it is thought put into our love; it is mercy and truth met together; it is the happy conjunction of good nature and good sense. (279)

We know that Clarke raised money for such efforts and contributed himself. He believed in the moral responsibility to do so and suggested that the person with a \$1,000 annual salary give \$50 to charity (5 percent), the person with \$10,000 give 20% and the person who has \$20,000 give 25% to 50%.

Clarke also believed in self culture by means of amusement, an area generally frowned upon by orthodox religion in his day. He was enthralled by the play of children: “The intense enjoyment of play enables Children to support pain, teaches them to obey rules, to control themselves, to submit to discipline, to bear fatigue without complaint, and so largely helps in the formation of character.” (386)

He believed that this desire for play continued into adulthood but that the Christian church had not properly recognized this and had been much too ascetic and untrue to the spirit of Jesus whose first miracle was to make wine at a wedding, thus adding to the gaiety of the occasion. He said of himself, “The Son of Man comes eating and drinking.” For doing so was called a glutton and winebibber.

Clarke thoroughly enjoyed the theatre and thought it could be a powerful influence for good. He staged Shakespearean play readings at his congregation, on occasion playing a role himself. He called upon Bostonians to support theatrical productions which were wholesome—without vulgarity, profanity, and immoral plots.

Clarke believed that “Amusements are good and not evil in proportion as they are (1) inexpensive, and so within the reach of all; (2) Not exclusive, but social; (3) Not leaving one exhausted and with distaste for work, but more able to return to work; (4) Not degrading the tastes but elevating them.” (Self Culture, 388)

He thought that these conditions were fulfilled by the many free public recreations available in Boston—public gardens, libraries, concerts, zoological gardens, museums of natural history and science, and art galleries.. He also was a proponent of large community halls for conversation, reading, and games, open to the poorest people in order to compete with the saloons. He saw to it that an article regarding public coffee houses in London which provided such social centers was reprinted and distributed around Boston.

Throughout his writings, one sees his commitment to the theme of enjoyment in life. He believed that people were created to be happy. Learning, the quest for moral and spiritual growth, , family life, and recreation should all be enjoyable. He was constantly encouraging people to lighten up. He had great admiration for his ministerial colleague, Ezra Stiles Gannett, William Ellery Channing’s successor, but felt that his overwhelming sense of duty robbed him of a sense of joy.

Clarke was concerned that Unitarians, with their stress on the moral law, had almost left out entirely the positive, joyful experience of salvation: “Hence a Unitarian congregation usually consists of intelligent, virtuous, well-meaning people, but destitute of enthusiasm, and with little confidence in the new birth or religious life. Unitarians believe in obedience as the one thing needful; and in this they were right. But they are wrong in not expecting the influences which God is always ready to give, which change the heart, and fill it with peace passing understanding, which makes duties easy, which fill life with joy, and take the sting from death. (Orthodoxy, p. 186)

It is regrettable that more of Clarke’s humor did not find its way into his sermons. I don’t know how much of his humor and wit was evident in social contact with his congregation, but we do know that he shared it with his fellow ministers. Rev. S.W. Bush and six other ministers travelled in a railway

parlor car to a conference and Rev. Bush claims that he was a charming companion: “While he never lost his grave and slow manner of speaking, he was a very interesting storyteller. He was a keen observer of men, and what he saw as well as what he read was stored in his retentive memory. He had the dramatic talent of impersonation and flashing wit and playfulness, so that in his talk of men he reproduced admirable portraiture of character.” (In Hale, 404).

Clarke, along with his fellow transcendentalist Christopher Cranch drew a number of cartoons poking light fun at transcendentalism. In his Journal, he wrote, “Cranch and I amused ourselves with illustrating some of Mr. Emerson’s queer sayings—such as “I expand and grow in the warm sun like corn and melons”—“I become a transparent eyeball.” We drew some twenty of thirty between us, those of Cranch being executed in much the best style, and I happening on a good idea only now and then.” (Journal for 1839-1840, in Coleville, p. 50) One of them was inspired by Emerson’s dictum, “Do you not see that if the single man plant himself indomitably upon his instincts and there abide, the huge world will come round him?” Their cartoon showed the planted man and the world transformed into a racetrack.

Clarke ended his treatise on amusement with these words: “ Let us try to be like God, who opens his hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing. He sends abounding pleasure to childhood and youth in the mere exercise and development of their faculties. He makes everything beautiful after its kind and its time; he covers the prairies with flowers, the dawning sky with rosy clouds, and fills the early air of morning with the songs of birds. He nowhere leaves the bare skeleton of utility uncovered by the rounded forms of grace.” (Self-Culture, 395)

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### Spiritual Development

Clarke believed that the highest experience of reverence is to feel the presence of God in all things—“in nature, history, providence, our own lives, and in all the good and great souls who have lived. It is to be filled with awe, wonder, and love, in view of the greatness and goodness everywhere. It is to cherish a habit of looking upward, and seeing what is noble and good in all things.” (Self Culture, 253)

Clarke, himself, was very adept at the practice of prayer and was assured of the presence of God with him while at prayer. Representative of several passages regarding his spiritual experience is one coming from his book Steps of Belief: “Only by communion with God, speaking to him, receiving his answer and beholding his face in righteousness, do we become at last as sure of the real presence of God as we are of the reality of the world (Clarke, Steps of Belief, pp. 50-51)

In this practice of prayer, Clark believed that he was engaging an aspect of his brain which had been identified by phrenologists: “Phrenologists say that on the very summit of the brain is an organ, which they call the organ of veneration, which impels men to look up and adore higher beings; which prompts to the worship of God;” (246)

This aspect of Clarke's religious experience reminds me of the research done by University of Pennsylvania neuroscientists Andrew Newberg and Eugene D'Aquili who deal with such experience in their 2001 book Why God Won't Go Away in which they report on their study of eight Tibetan Buddhist and several Franciscan Nuns. They plotted the brain activity of these subjects at the height of their meditative or prayer state. What they noticed is that a portion of the brain in the posterior superior parietal lobe which undergoes significant change. The primary function of this portion of the brain is to orient the individual in physical space, drawing a sharp distinction between the individual and everything else. (Why God Won't Go Away, 4)

During baseline scans of the brains of their subjects this area of the brain showed furious activity. At the height of the meditative or prayer state, this area underwent a dramatic reduction in activity level. The researchers wondered how the brain would react to this lack of activity. "Would the orientation area interpret its failure to find the borderline between the self and the outside world to mean that such a distinction doesn't exist? In that case, the brain would have no choice but to perceive that the self is endless and intimately interwoven with everyone and everything the mind senses. And this perception would feel utterly and unquestionably real." (6) This is exactly how the Buddhists described their peak, meditative moments. The Franciscan nuns at prayer "tended to describe this moment as a tangible sense of the closeness of God and a mingling with him." (7)

"As our study continued, and the data flowed in, Gene and I suspected that we'd uncovered solid evidence that the mystical experiences of our subjects—the altered states of mind they described as the absorption of the self into something larger—were not the result of emotional mistakes or simple wishful thinking, but were associated instead with a series of observable neurological events, which, while unusual, are not outside the range of normal brain function. In other words, mystical experience is biologically, observably, and scientifically real." (7).

Clarke found this same sort of spiritual communion in the area of human affection which he believed to be among the greatest of human gifts: "'Let us not be ashamed of our affections for these are the best gifts of heaven. Without them our life, as Cicero has said, is not really living. But what moments will compare with those in which persons become really intimate with each other; when the barriers of reserve are removed; when the deepest thoughts are kindled by the magnetic touch of a common thought; when all that is highest within the soul is made to flow freely like brooks in June, leaping down the side of the mountain! Only in such hours does man become really himself, seeing and feeling what really is. Such communion lifts him above his average days of mere routine into a better sphere.'" (Self Culture, 237)

Clarke thoroughly enjoyed social gatherings. One of the core principles of his Church of the Disciples was the social principle which called for many different sorts of social interactions. He enjoyed visiting with a wide circle of friends and also attending the meetings of many societies and clubs to which he belonged—"the ministers' association, the Radical Club, the Shakespeare Club, the Thursday Club, the Saturday Club, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the New England Historical and Genealogical Society. Additionally there were the Harvard Class of 1829 reunions and the get-togethers of old Free Soilers in Hingham." (Bolster, 295).

So there you have it. The physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions of self culture according to James Freeman Clarke.

#### SUMMARY OF CLARKE'S LEGACY

I will now enumerate the ways in which Clarke's legacy is related to contemporary Unitarian Universalism.

1. It seems to me that the genius of Unitarian Universalism has been its ability to accommodate wide diversity within a commitment to core principles. Our current Purposes and Principles are an example of this. We have seven basic principles drawn from six differing religious traditions. James Freeman Clarke was a very significant exponent of this approach. I sometimes wonder how he would respond to those contemporary Unitarian Universalists who do not identify themselves as Christian. Perhaps he would respond much the same as he did to the controversy within the AUA when a self-described Free Religionist Rev. William T Potter wanted to be retained in the Unitarian Yearbook even though he didn't consider himself a Christian. Clarke thought he should be retained because he was doing Christian work even if he didn't call it that. Our first two Unitarian Universalist Principles—the Inherent worth and dignity of every person, and justice, equity and compassion in human relations-- he believed to be Jesus' core principles. Very possibly, he would consider that in following these principles we would be doing Christian work.
2. Contemporary Unitarian Universalists of many different theological stripes can find something amenable among the many strands of Clarke's thought. Those of a mystical bent will be cheered by his honoring of intuitive experience. Those in agreement with his traditional theism may find his way of dealing with the problem of evil satisfactory. Those informed by process theology will be impressed with Clarke's God as a lure to moral progress. Those of a humanist bent will be very comfortable with the confidence Clarke had in human powers to affect human destiny positively. Those of a Christian persuasion will find him a first rate exponent of Unitarian Christianity who had a great knowledge of and love for the Christian Scriptures. Those drawing upon the wisdom of non-Christian traditions will be pleased with the honor and significance he afforded them.
3. It is remarkable the degree to which Clarke's novel features of congregational life have become commonplace among us. I don't know of any UU congregations raising money by renting or selling pews. A pledging system is the general means of raising money. Most congregations have a social justice committee to organize social justice and social service activities. The organizational structure of our congregations is very similar to The Church of the Disciples. In the congregations I have served there has been an attempt to achieve gender balance on the board and various committees. There are various degrees of involvement of the congregation in worship. There is lay preaching from time to time and many congregations have a worship associates program where lay people take part in various parts of the worship service. Congregational democracy with every member having a vote was very important to the Church of the Disciples and is a core principle in contemporary Unitarian Universalism. Their committing one-third of their budget to outreach is a challenge to us and something most of us deem admirable.

4. The widespread use of “covenant groups,” or small group ministry in our congregations is very much in line with Clarke’s social principle of providing opportunities for people to get to know each other well and to develop supporting relationships. It also is a means of refining religious knowledge and experience. In practice his system of group discussion of an issue refined individual perceptions and attitudes, so that the group process came out with a superior product—often, as Clarke believed in Hegelian fashion—thesis, antithesis, synthesis. It is very much in line with our Unitarian Universalist Principle of promoting a “free and disciplined search for truth and meaning.”

5. Clarke’s abolishing of pew rental enabled those of limited means to feel comfortable within the congregation and broadened the base of membership and participation. How do we extend ourselves in welcoming newcomers of all economic levels? Some of our practices hinder such a welcome, I believe.. One that has bothered me is the practice of having a water communion at the start of the congregational year where everyone is encouraged to bring water from their summer travels and to pour it into a common container while saying something about the place they visited. When we practiced this ritual in two of my former congregations, many expensive vacation trips were mentioned. How does this register with the person unable to afford such a vacation? I began to think about this when I heard someone relate his experience as a child at the start of the school year when everyone was asked to share with the class something about their summer vacations. His family hadn’t been able to afford a vacation, but when it came his turn to share he made up a story about fabulous vacation his family had taken to Washington, D.C. How many low-cost or no-cost activities are provided in congregational programming? Are congregations built in areas easily accessible by public transportation?

6. I’m very impressed with Clarke’s insistence on maintaining religious fellowship with those with whom he differed.. He was so sure of the ultimate triumph of truth that we was non-defensively open to ideas contrary to his own. This non-defensiveness is attractive to a certain segment of folks, but I don’t think it is as appealing to those whose tolerance for ambiguity is more limited. Both Clarke, in his day, and we in ours often puzzle over why more people are not attracted to our broad Unitarian Universalist faith. The answer, perhaps, is that a large portion of the population is looking for more specificity when it comes to religion than they find in us. That being said, I do believe that we would be larger and more influential than we are if we would take Clarke’s missionary zeal to heart and support extension of our faith—maybe even pack a good supply of tracts as he did. I was initially attracted to our faith by a Unitarian Universalist handing me a tract.

7. Clarke’s theology is one of the gradual progress of human society to a golden age of peace and universal justice. His principal biographer, Arthur Bolster, wrote in 1954, “To our modern taste such an unbounded faith in the eternal process of betterment savors strongly of naiveté and narrowness of viewpoint.” (Bolster, 357). From the standpoint of two world wars, the harrowing Cold War, the holocaust, numerous other instances of genocidal madness, and the rise of terrorism on a grand scale, one may quite naturally be drawn to Bolster’s assessment.

However, it is important to consider Clarke’s experience. In a sermon given in 1886, later published in the Gazette, he summarized the social progress of his age: “I have seen great and

beneficent change taking place in the world. In Europe since I was young, France has become free; Italy united and freed from Austria and petty tyrants; Germany has become one and independent; Hungary has obtained self-government; England has gone forward with mighty strides in the paths of education, popular progress, and improvement. In this country we have seen a whole race set free from slavery which is one of the miracles of history. We have seen vast progress in general education, the rise of various philanthropies which have brought comfort and help to the blind, the insane, the prisoners; which have begun and are carrying forward movements for temperance, for reform in political action and in social life... James Freeman Clarke, "Nicodemus and Christ" (a sermon) The Boston Saturday Evening Gazette, LXXIV, #16 (April 17, 1886)

In 1919, thirty-one years after Clarke's death, Constitutional Amendments were ratified regarding two issues on which Clarke had worked so diligently: Prohibition (18<sup>th</sup> amendment()) and Women's Suffrage (19<sup>th</sup> amendment). The creation of a professional civil service continued over the years, greatly reducing the political spoils system with the attendant corruption which he had fought for many years. The United Nations and the International Court of justice, which he envisioned, have become realities.

Admittedly, the last 125 years have been hard on the optimism which Clarke shared with so many people, especially religious liberals. The glorious progress towards the kingdom of God he envisioned is not heralded in the same way among Unitarian Universalists today. The capital sin which Clarke inveighed against throughout his career was selfishness. He thought it was a hard sin to overcome, but it was not impossible to so because people were not inherently evil. Their better nature could be appealed to in such a way that moral progress could be made. Sometimes contemporary Unitarian Universalists lose sight of the fact that humankind is not always condemned to make selfish choices. We might not share Clarke's robust optimism, but his legacy encourages us to celebrate the moral progress that has been made and to work for incremental progress.

If he were to return today he would be impressed by the fact that we have the capability to provide good water, food, and life saving medicine throughout the world if we have the will to do so. He would encourage us to do so. He would be impressed with the way congregations from many different traditions are banding together to fight for social progress. This had been his fervent wish for the congregations of Boston .

I think he would be pleased that Unitarian Universalists have included world religions in our sources section of our Purposes and Principles from which we draw our seven principles, though we certainly don't have the hope that those of other faiths will find fullness in Christianity. This would represent a religious imperialism which would not be generally felt appropriate.

In 1877, Clarke wrote "I have been told that I am too much of an Optimist, that I am too hopeful, see things too much on the bright side, do not recognize enough the evils, failures, moral disasters, spiritual tragedies of human life. It may be that my temperament is too sanguine, and that in reading the gospel I love to dwell more on its hopes and promises than on its threats and warnings. But let us

consider this a little and ask, “which is the truest and wisest view of life, that which hopes or that which desponds.” (Go Up Higher, p. 199 quoted in Bolster thesis, p. 643)

8. Clarke’s personal commitment to self culture is a source of inspiration to us. As I have pointed out along the way, he lived the principles of which he spoke to a remarkable degree. When he was in his early twenties self culture seemed to be a bit of a white-knuckle issue with him. He was doubtful and anxious about the degree of progress he was making. He wondered if he would ever make his mark in the world. As he matured he gained self confidence and his efforts at self development became a less intense and more enjoyable process. Sometimes I am overwhelmed when I consider the catholicity of his tastes, interests, and endeavors. As Derek Colville points out and as I discovered myself “his notebooks and journals contain notes on classical myths, on prominent Elizabethans, on contemporary wars, on geology, government, law, and science: on it seems, almost everything from the authority of the Bible to the habits of American snakes.” (118) He is considered by many to be the Transcendentalists’ Franklin.

Among these interests was writing poetry. He had notebooks full, very little of it published, because he realized poetry was not his forte. He wrote poetry because it clarified and enriched his experience. I want to share one poem with you that I have found particularly moving. He wrote it after his son Herman died at age 9.

Where is my boy?  
It seems but an hour ago,  
He was digging in the snow,  
Joy and love in his face, In his hands a nameless grace  
As he lifted the heavy spade.  
--[The little path he made,  
Has not yet melted away.  
You may see it in the snow,  
Lingering as loth to go.  
But he has melted and gone, Gone into earth or air  
Leaving us so alone!  
Where is my boy, O Where?

From his notebooks and journals came ideas for sermons, articles, books, social service projects, political action, and ways in which he could become a better husband and father. Each of us has such a notebook if not on paper, then in our mind. Clarke's legacy encourages us to take one of those ideas which represents, perhaps, as he phrased it, our nearest duty, and begin to flesh it out. As it put it: "+ Begin, and do, what you can, not thinking of the past or of the future, but of that now, which is always the day of salvation." ("Now is the Accepted Time," 203, in *Everyday Religion*.)