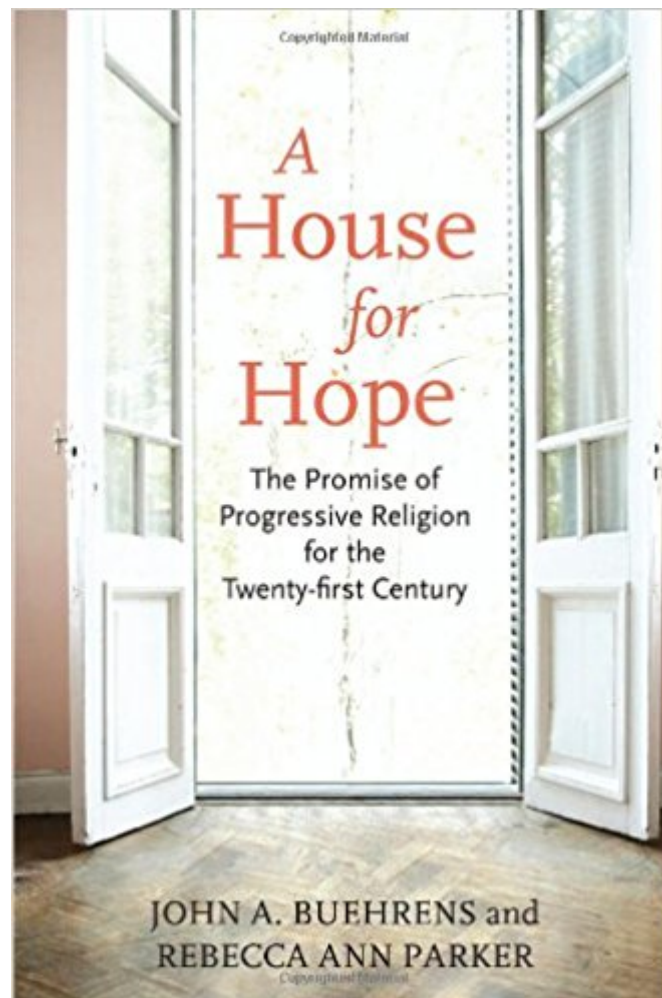




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A House For Hope: The Promise Of Progressive Religion For The Twenty-first Century



Synopsis

For over a generation, conservative religion has seemed dominant in America. But there are signs of a strengthening liberal religious movement. For it to flourish, laypeople need a sense of their theological heritage. A House for Hope lays out, in lively and engaging language, the theological house that religious liberalism has inherited—and suggests how this heritage will need to be spiritually and theologically transformed. With chapters that suggest liberal religious commitment is based on common hopes and an expansive love for life, A House for Hope shows how religious liberals have countered fundamentalists for generations, and provides progressives with a theological and spiritual foundation for the years ahead.

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Customer Reviews

Coauthors Buehrens (A Chosen Faith) and Parker (Saving Paradise), both progressive clergy, engage in conversation with each other and with theologians ancient and modern (Origen, Barth, Buber, J.L. Adams). Using the metaphors of garden, walls, roof, foundation, threshold, they construct a theological framework that faith communities can apply to stimulate reflection and reform, which will develop communal hope, discipline, and activism. To educate contemporary faithful about progressive theology's deep roots, the authors offer complementary chapters within thematic sections, reviewing historical ecumenical and universalist movements and illustrating their arguments with personal anecdotes. Exploring such religious themes as eschatology, salvation, and

sin, the authors provide credible alternatives to traditional biblical interpretations, arguing, for example, that apocalyptic scriptures don't predict Earth's ultimate destruction but a future when God's will is done on Earth, and that humanity needs salvation not from God's wrath, but from the consequences of sin. Closing chapters introduce process theology, which argues that God both abides and changes. This accessible, engaging book may inspire religious progressives to claim their proud history and vital role in contemporary theological conversation. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“A thoughtful meditation on religion, duty, and the common good.”
•Booklist
“To some observers, religion and conservatism have become inextricably fused. But to [Buehrens and Parker], something new is emerging—a liberal religious renaissance.”
•Steven Levingston, *The Washington Post*
“For nearly three decades, journalists and pundits have focused on the views and beliefs of the Religious Right and basically ignored members of America’s mainline and liberal Protestant establishment. . . . [Buehrens and Parker] have set out to reintroduce people to the riches and bounties of progressive religion.”
•Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, *Spirituality & Practice*
“Buehrens and Parker begin with the life of service and work for justice and deepen it to show the implicit beliefs that it assumes and that are implicit in it. They show that progressive Protestants can be proud and articulate about their beliefs.”
•John B. Cobb Jr., coauthor of *For the Common Good*

A House for Hope doesn't bill itself as a book of theology for Unitarian Universalists much less a book of Unitarian Universalist theology. It is subtitled "The Promise of Progressive Religion for the Twenty-First Century." Both of the authors are identified with Progressive (Liberal) Christianity -- Parker is (also) a United Methodist minister, Buehrens is a frequent speaker at events of the Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship. Both authors have identified themselves as students of Process Theology which appears to be the theology of choice of Progressive Christians (witness the Process and Faith website). In spite of the above -- and in spite of the occasional reference to Jesus -- I don't think this book could fairly be considered a work of Christian theology. It is, however, theistic in tone -- albeit not theistic in a supernatural sense -- but not at the expense of being anti-Humanistic. Still, it would take a very openminded Humanist to find this book congenial. Then again, it would take a very openminded Christian as well. By not pointing A House for Hope

specifically at UUs, Parker & Buehrens are sidestepping the question of whether such a theology (and in spite of differences they do present mostly a united theological position) could address a real constituency within the UUA or if their intention is to shape one. I think the answer is both. With a Humanistic wing that itself has a classic (rationalistic) as well as an innovative (nature-centered) side; a Christian wing that has both a neo-Protestant and a post-modern component; self-identified Jews, Buddhists, and Pagans; the theology of A House for Hope seeks to address a theistic center which may or may not be the future of the denomination. I have no reservations recommending this book with the above caveats for those who reject a theistic premise altogether, or one which is clearly rooted in Unitarian (and to a lesser extent Universalist) theologies of the past.

The new vision on liberal religion is a great contribution for the theological transformation we need for the Remonstrant tradition in the Netherlands, with its foundation in the early 17th century. Important for my PhD research - comparing the christian Unitarians of Transylvania and the Remonstrants in the 20th century along the time table of the main IARF conferences. Rev. Tina Geels. You can find me on LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter..

We are using this book as our study for a Constructive Theology class at my church. I find the metaphor very helpful. We think of the different spaces of our homes and their functions. Our faith and church membership function in analogous ways.

In A House for Hope, the reasoning behind a call for a more progressive religious stance, one that is evolving and open as opposed to static and unchanging, is offered. Some history and background are supplied along the way, as well as some of the ethical principles that are crucial to such a religious stance, and a strong advocacy is put forth. It is acknowledged that it might be difficult to turn some people who have been raised to believe that only their religion and only their god is the correct path, and thus all others must be converted. An appeal, however, is also made to the millions who feel "spiritual" but have been hesitant to become involved in "organized" religion. The failures of advocates of this more progressive religious stance are noted, and suggestions for moving forward offered. My only criticism of the book is a common one to this genre, the often seemingly inherent equating of religious liberalism with political liberalism. At one point in the book, the recent devastating horror of a gunman opening fire in a UU church and targeting a children's theatrical production is described. The authors, however, take time to point out that conservative books were found in the gunman's home, and that he specifically noted that he was targeting

liberals. Those facts are not in dispute. I'm sure, however, that the authors don't mean to say that conservatives generally attempt to murder liberals or that the millions who have read such books will now take up weapons and attempt to murder children in churches. So why note it? Otherwise, one would have to examine the reading lists of mass murderers in the name of leftist political thought. Liberalism in politics is not equivalent with liberalism in religion (e.g., Owen-Towle, in *Free-Thinking Mystics with Hands* (p. 16): "we must be vigilant against equating our free spirit with doctrinaire social, economic, or political liberalism." He goes on to quote Roger Greeley, "we are not a liberal movement for liberal causes, let us leave those choices and courses of action to political parties and organizations specifically designed around those principles be they liberal or conservative." As a UU and libertarian myself, I believe it is this often inherent political bias that keeps many political conservatives and libertarians (and they are very different things) from attending progressive churches, even though they may share the progressive religious vision. That criticism aside, the book is an excellent read and time well-spent. The sections on how we must put our beliefs into concrete action, even when extremely socially unpopular, particularly stand out.

Unitarian Universalists have allowed ourselves to think that we have no theology, and bring nothing to the table in terms of a religious heritage. This is a great reflection on our history, and our involvement as a progressive religious movement.

I found this book useful for writing a sermon about covenant. I enjoyed the metaphor of different parts of the house to discuss theology. Parker and Buerhens each contributed chapters for each section and I found it interesting how their theologies compared and contrasted with one another.

If you have read anything by John Buehrens you won't be disappointed, he is a knowledgeable writer and easy to read.

Peace and hope to all

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