

THE UNIVERSALIST HERITAGE

**Keynote Addresses
on
Universalist History,
Ethics and Theology
(1976 - 1992)**

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**Edited by
Harold H. Burkart**

In theological Universalism, it was the love of God for humanity that was decisive for heavenly salvation. In ethical Universalism, it is we who are required to be the agents of an earthly salvation.

Richard S. Gilbert

NEW YORK STATE CONVENTION OF UNIVERSALISTS

The New York State Convention of Universalists consists of the Unitarian-Universalist Churches in New York State that were members of the Convention at the time of merger. The primary missions of the convention are:

(1). To promote the growth of Unitarian-Universalism in New York State through support of innovative programs carried out by UU Societies and associated organizations;

(2). To promote an awareness and appreciation of Universalist history and the contemporary value of its Universalist concepts; and

(3). To carry out such functions as are necessary to administer the NYSCU Pension Program; to hold, maintain or dispose of real and personal property deeded to the Convention; and to maintain its relationship with the St. Lawrence Foundation for Religious Education.

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PREFACE

"Our Universalist Heritage" - - words with warm, abstract meanings for old-time Universalists, and also words that encompass the history, the ethics and the theology of Universalism. They tell of a heresy held by a few in the late 1700's which was spread through the countryside by circuit riding preachers, and of the formation of Universalism, which became the fifth largest religious denomination in the United States by the mid-1800's. The words speak to the ethical and theological foundations of that heritage. The emphasis on education, the founding and funding of liberal schools, colleges and theological schools and the opening of the colleges and of the ministry to women are a part of that heritage.

The decline of Universalism from a peak membership of 800,000 in the 1880's to under 100,000 in the 1950's is also a part of that heritage.

What was it and what is it - - for it has changed over time. We certainly cannot return to those ideas of yesterday which provided a rallying cry for seekers of a more benevolent religion. More importantly, what are the fundamental concepts of Universalism and are they applicable and of value to each of us in today's society? And what can we learn from our past successes and failures?

In 1975 the Executive Board of the New York State Convention of Universalists (NYSCU) concluded that there was a need among the old as well as the new members of our Unitarian-Universalist denomination to keep alive the history, theology and ethics of Universalism. The Board then stipulated that the Keynote Address at each of its annual sessions relate in some form to "The Universalist Heritage". Fourteen of the eighteen addresses since that date have been collected for this volume (manuscripts of the remaining four were not obtainable). Assembled together, they provide a wealth of information on the history and philosophy of Universalism, on its dynamics and on the significant changes in its theological outlook from the time of its founding to the present day. And they speak, with varying view point, to the relevance of the theological and ethical concepts in today's and tomorrow's world - - and of what it demands of us.

Individually and collectively the addresses raise questions which are of concern to all Unitarian-Universalists. Believing that

this material could provide the basis for an interesting and needed adult discussion series, the Rev. Ray Nasemann and Rev. Elizabeth Strong were encouraged to develop such a series together with an appropriate discussion guide and leader's manual. The series, entitled "Remember Universalism Into Life", was field tested in the fall of 1992 and is available through the UUA Bookstore. It is believed that such discussions will contribute to the growth of Unitarian Universalism and its individual societies. We recommend them to you.

Harold H. Burkart, President
New York State Convention of Universalists
15 March 1993

**WE DO NOT STAND,
WE MOVE**

The Second Annual Address
On Universalist History,
Ethics and Theology

By
The Reverend Dorothy Tilden Spoerl, Ph.D.

148th Annual Session
New York State Convention of Universalists
Little Falls, New York
October 14, 1976

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Dorothy Spoerl has had a distinguished career as a minister, religious educator, and psychologist. After receiving a B.A. in 1927 at Lombard College (now Meadville-Lombard Theological School), she received an M.A. the following year in religious education from Boston University. In 1942 she received a Ph.D in psychology from Clark University. Ordained in 1929, she served as minister in churches in Maine, Massachusetts and Vermont and as an interim minister to several churches. She also served as Director of Religious Education at churches in Detroit, Springfield (Mass.), Charlestown and Boston. For 19 years she was a professor of psychology at American International College and was, prior to leaving, chairman of that department and director of the psychological laboratory.

She is perhaps best known to most Unitarian-Universalists for her books and pamphlets in the Beacon Series in Religious Education where she was a major force. She held various positions during her ten years at denomination headquarter in Boston.

She is also known for her numerous articles in psychological journals in the fields of drawing, personality, etc. in children and of the value systems and prejudices of youth and college age young people.

WE DO NOT STAND , WE MOVE
The Reverend Dorothy Tilden Spoerl, Ph.D.

I have one distinction, shared by many but not all of you, which may come as a surprise. I am a native New York State Universalist, having been born into the All Souls Church in Brooklyn some years back. I remember little of the church school or the church services (children went to church with their families in those days), except for learning the Five Principles of Universalism which we recited each Sunday morning from a tender and uncomprehending age. I found them comforting, at least the fifth, the final harmony of All Souls with God, and felt fortunate to be a member of All Souls Church. Imagine my surprise, at the age of ten, upon moving to Illinois to find that the Galesburg Universalist Church also believed in the final harmony of All Souls with God, and that it really meant all souls, not just the members of our Brooklyn parish. It was then, perhaps, that I began to learn that interpretation is important, and that the process of interpretation often changes one's understanding of words, phrases, principles. It was an important learning, for I have since discovered that such change is a continuous process.

If one harks back to ancient controversy, one could say that the All Souls people are ultra-Universalists, for I was troubled by one of the other principles I learned; the certainty of just retribution for sin. This had been explained to us as meaning that one would be punished here and now for sin, and what child under ten, when something unpleasant happens can not dredge up some sin for which that punishment has been given? So I can attest that, contrary to the opinion of the orthodox about the early Universalists, that a belief in the final harmony of all souls with God does not give one comfortable license to sin.

So much for the genesis of my personal faith. But while thinking of these things and the changes in Universalism during my lifetime, I chanced on a small anecdote in the Reader's Digest which I would like to share with you:

A Danish writer speaks of looking from his study desk and thinking of the fields about him, of the long line of people who have lived there and cultivated those fields over the millennia, for the spot had been settled for more than four thousand years. He thinks that if folks from long ago came to visit his home, he would find their dress and customs strange, and probably would not be able to communicate with them because of the vast changes in language

patterns. But, he points out, if they came in serial order, from the latest to live there down to the earliest, each in turn would easily communicate with his nearest predecessor, and thus a message could pass down the years, or come up from out the distant past, understood at each stage along the way.

So, too, it is of time in history, even so short a time as a little over two hundred years, when one is dealing with ideological and theological concepts. Were Elhanan Winchester, John Murray, Benjamin Rush, Hosea Ballou, George de Benneville, or Adin Ballou to be present at your convention today there would be vast areas of violent disagreement, and others of deep misunderstanding. But if we trace the patterns back and watch their slow evolution to the places where we stand today much of this controversy would disappear.

The changes in the last two centuries have been great indeed. I found a fascinating summary of them in a sermon preached by Brainard Gibbons in the Rochester, New York, Universalist church in 1949, the occasion a Universalist General Assembly. (Cassara, pages 272-273)

"Every Universalist realizes that Universalism has changed considerably since the days of its New England forebears and many Christian dogmas have gradually been supplanted. Even the sketchiest summary reveals the vast differences between then and now. Divine revelation has been replaced by human investigation, ignorance by knowledge, superstition by reason, the closed mind by the open, stagnation by progress, celestial nonsense by common sense. Hence Universalists today consider all religions, including Christianity, expressions of human spiritual aspirations, not God founded institutions; the Bible a marvelous work of man, not the miraculous handiwork of God; Jesus, a Spiritual Leader, not a Divine Savior; man's fate in human hands, not superhuman clutches; faith the projection of known facts into the unknown, not blind creedal acceptance; the supernatural merely the natural beyond man's understanding."

The process by which these changes have occurred has been a slow one, and it occurred to me that a fruitful way to consider

the growth and change from the ancient relevancy to the present day relevancy of Universalism in America might be to take a look at the various statements of faith that have been devised and voted by sundry conventions and trace some of the theological ideas as they have changed and been interpreted and reinterpreted over the years. For change there has surely been.

Before doing this, let me turn to one more recollection of my childhood and adolescent years in Galesburg. I attended over the years a good many Lombard College commencements, eventually including my own. Each year from our Divinity School, separately located in Chicago, came Lewis Beals Fisher. Dr. Fisher was a distinguished appearing man, always warmly welcomed, and often with words of great wisdom to speak. (I am assuming that you are aware that the charter of this same Lombard College, now removed to Chicago, is the Lombard of Meadville/ Lombard Theological School, its roots half Unitarian and half Universalist.) In any event, one of the wise things which Dr. Fisher has said, quoted from his book Which Way published in 1921 was this: (Cassara page 253) "Universalists are often asked to tell where they stand. The only true answer to give to this question is that we do not stand at all, we move." This quotation is both the source of my title for this occasion, and the "text" for what I would like to say.

Let us therefore trace the way in which we have moved by examination of the various statements of faith, principles of universalism, bonds of fellowship, which have been "official" over the years. For they demonstrate not only how we have moved, but also how, through that movement, we have remained relevant in a rapidly changing world. I limit myself to the five major statements voted: that of the Philadelphia Convention of 1790 (the statement at least polished by Benjamin Rush); the 1803 Winchester profession of Faith written by Ferris, but approved by Hosea Ballou as a member of the committee. (The committee is reputed to have never met, but Ferris who brought a finished statement with him as chairman allowed Ballou to go over it before it was presented to the convention.) The Five Principles of Universalism adopted in Boston in 1899 (the ones I learned in Sunday School, still to be found framed in some of our churches), and the Bond of Fellowship voted in 1935. Finally the joint statement issued by Universalists and Unitarians at the time of merger in 1961, Part of Article II of the By Laws of the Unitarian

Universalist Association. I will not take time to read these in toto (though I have copies with me in case any of you would care to refresh your minds). I want to trace through them our evolving ideas of God and the nature and role of Jesus, the place of the Bible, our doctrine of man, and finally the concept of the salvation of all souls. The developments are interesting, and I believe significant for us.

A few quotations from the 1790 statement make clear its trinitarian overtones despite its opening statement that "we believe in one God". For it goes on to say also that we "believe there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; who by giving himself a ransom for all hath redeemed them to God by his blood", and further to state that "we believe in the Holy Ghost, whose office it is to make known to sinners the truth of their salvation." It sounds rather thoroughly trinitarian despite the opening assertion.

Although the Winchester Profession of 1803 is clearly modelled on the Philadelphia statement there is some evidence of the changes probably wrought by Hosea Ballou who had, in the interim, arrived at a Unitarian position which he promulgated far and wide to the distress of John Murray. "We believe that there is one God, whose nature is Love, revealed in one Lord Jesus Christ, by one Holy Spirit of Grace." The change in attitude becomes more clear in the 1899 profession, "The Universal Fatherhood of God, the spiritual authority and leadership of his Son, Jesus Christ", but not definitively stated until 1935 when the statement has no suggestion of the divinity of Jesus, and God has clearly become a unity. "To that end we avow our faith in God as Eternal and All-conquering Love, in the spiritual leadership of Jesus..." In the merger statement the controversy seems to have been left open so that our long held diversity of belief remains a possibility: "cherish and spread the universal truths taught by the great prophets and teachers of humanity in every age and tradition, immemorially summarized in the Judeo-Christian heritage as love to God and love to humankind."

To me this is a fascinating sequence, telling us much of our history. The power of Love has remained constant throughout, the nature of Jesus has changed from "one in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" to one of the prophets and

teachers of humanity. And our theological concept of God is clearly now unitarian.

On the other hand we are today, I fear, a theologically disinterested group. Our children and youth have little notion of the process by which we have arrived at our present day convictions, and perusal of countless newsletters from our varied societies shows that rarely indeed do the adults of our churches concern themselves with theological issues. One of our needs is that we should become articulate about what it is that we believe, as individuals who have thought our way through to a considered opinion in a church that permits each of us to hold those opinions which are honestly his own. This creedlessness, which does not excuse us as individuals from being articulate about our personal faith, is one of our distinguishing characteristics as compared with other religious institutions.

With less of detail let us look at the evolving attitudes toward the Bible, no less controversial in the early days. In 1790 the scriptures of the Old and New Testament were seen to "contain a revelation of the perfections and will of God and the rule of faith and practice", in other words a guide to the life one should be living. By 1803 we believed the Bible to contain "a revelation of the character of God, and of the duty, interest and final destination of mankind." Indeed the early arguments of Universalists for their faith were for the most part achieved by the careful perusal and quotation of Biblical passages attesting to the truth of their opinions. By 1899 the whole principle of interpretation and biblical criticism had entered and we came to accept "the trustworthiness of the Bible as containing a revelation from God", changed again by the 1935 statement to "the authority of truth known or to be known", the source of the truth unspecified. In other words from the Bible as a direct guide book to moral and ethical choices, a revelation to man, it has come to take its place as Gibbons made clear, as a "marvelous work of man" among other marvelous works of men. In the Merger Statement it is expressed as a desire to "support the free and disciplined search for truth as the foundation of religious fellowship". It is fortunate that Rush, de Benneville, John Murray and the Ballous were not present when these latter day statements were voted.

Indeed we do not stand, we move: AND YET, I find of late

the resurgence of the very old notion that if one truly knows his Bible he will by that very knowledge become religious. A feeling in our churches that if our children only knew the stories of the Bible (and strangely more often than not when pressed as to what stories it is the Old Testament stories which are named) they will grow up to be good Universalists. Consider some of these stories in your mind, for we do not have time to examine them, and ask which can be told to the young without interpretation, criticism, and a careful attention to understanding. Ask yourself, too, if they contain all the values and ideals that you would transmit to your children, and further what ideas they contain that you do not want to have become a part of their heritage. There are no simple solutions, and it is time we faced that fact.

It is time indeed, that we made clear to ourselves who are the prophets and teachers of all time, to whose search for truth we dedicate ourselves; to find for ourselves the values and ideas that are basic to our religion, and to decide in what ways these can best be transmitted to our children in such terms that they, in their turn, can interpret and change them as new ideas and new evidences are later presented to them. I, for one, find myself increasingly frustrated by the statement too often heard among us, "It is interesting material, but is it really religious?" A true understanding of our historic evolution, and a more conversant knowledge of the sources of our truth, might make a vast difference in what we discuss among ourselves and with our children, and the final (but temporary) conclusions which we reach. It is far past time for us to act upon the beliefs which we so glibly state.

Our doctrine of man has always been one of the things that distinguished us from others; it is more often stated by implication than directly. In 1790 the concern was that "the love of God, manifested to man in a Redeemer, is the best means of producing obedience to that law, and promoting a holy, active and useful life", with an admonition in the Winchester profession "that believers ought to be careful to maintain order and practice good works, for these things are good and profitable unto men". (I have always particularly liked the way the Winchester Assembly stated this.) The 1899 statement does not really deal with the question except by the implications following from the Fatherhood of God, but there is real clarity in the Bond of Fellowship of 1935: "We believe in the power of men of goodwill and sacrificial spirit to overcome all evil and progressively establish the Kingdom of God."

We may not have moved very far in this doctrine, but we have made much more clear the subtle meanings involved. For what we are so clearly stating, it seems to me, is the old Arminian Heresy which was so basic in the genesis of both American Universalism and American Unitarianism. For the Arminian Heresy makes the bold assertion (I quote Conrad Wright),

“that men are born with the capacity both for sin and for righteousness; that they can respond to the impulse toward holiness as well as the temptation to do evil.”

(Wright, page 3)

This would not have pleased Hosea Ballou, and may explain why it was not more clearly stated at an earlier date. Let us look at the probable cause of his displeasure.

According to Cassara, Ballou was greatly influenced in the writing of his Treatise on Atonement by the Deism of Ethan Allen, and the use of reason in religion as Allen argued it. Let me quote Cassara once more in showing the controversy as it stood in Ballou’s day, for it is highly relevant to our stand at the present time:

“Whereas Arminians like Chauncy, in order to preserve man’s free will, could see man holding out against salvation, Ballou found this idea intolerable. He was logical in believing that an all-powerful, all-loving God who was in complete control of the universe could not brook such opposition.

“Ballou,, then, was a determinist...the loving Father, had determined that all his children would be saved and was intent in carrying out this plan. If Ballou, in order to be consistent, had to accept determinism he was prepared to do it. This upset his fellow liberals, who preferred to take the inconsistent position which allowed both God his omnipotence and man his free will.”

(Cassara, page 22)

To the Universalists of the present day I feel sure that the issue of free will would arouse far more interest and excitement than the issue of the omnipotence of God. For our doctrine of man, as I understand it, states that each of us is born with potential, a potential that will be developed for good or for ill by

the environment, education, social order, culture in which we are raised, and our personal reactions to it. Our will is free; we can and do make our own choices, what education can do for us is to help us in the making of wiser choices. It is, indeed, the triumph of the Arminian Heresy, and to me one of the most exciting aspects of our faith.

If we truly believe in the capacity of each of us to develop his potential in the directions of his choice, it lays upon us, as individuals, grave responsibilities; not only are we responsible for ourselves and the choices we make, but we are also responsible to society. Responsible in the sense that we must work for the achievement of a society in which the environment and the education, the opportunities and the encouragements, are such that all men have the opportunity to develop that inner potential for good which is truly theirs and which can be, so often, blotted out by adverse conditions and circumstances.

This brings us clearly, at least so it seems to me, to the whole question of the theological issue from which we have derived our historic name: the final restoration of all men to holiness and happiness. A restoration, which as we shall see, has been changed from a future life to the here and now, and which has become even more meaningful by that very process. Our earliest distinguishing difference was this concept of the final salvation of all men. Trace its evolution, then, through the successive statements we have made:

In 1790 it read, "Jesus...who, by giving himself as a ransom for all, hath redeemed them, and... will finally restore the whole human race to happiness." The Winchester profession states it somewhat differently, "there is one God, whose nature is love, revealed in one Lord Jesus Christ, by one Holy spirit of Grace, who will finally restore the whole family of mankind to holiness and happiness." By 1899 in the Boston statement it comes to read simply: "the final harmony of all souls with God."

There are those among our historians and theologians who see this evolution of ideas as related to the acceptance of Darwinian evolution, helping to firm the conviction that man cannot be "saved" unless he has fallen from grace and been born sinful. This was something our forebears could not accept. If evolution was to be a continuum upwards this sort of salvation could not belong. No longer speaking of Jesus as having "ransomed" man

by "sacrifice", the denomination moved to a belief that men must play a role in their own salvation. A move clearly, and convincingly stated, in the 1935 Bond of Fellowship in these words: "in the power of men of good will and sacrificial spirit to overcome all evil and progressively establish the Kingdom of God." Nowhere in the 1935 statement is there any mention of the "final harmony of all souls with God."

It is my conviction that this change is an important one, for it suggests strongly, at least to me, that we have substituted the salvation of all men through the improvement of society for the salvation of all men as an act of God. (And I would make so bold as to suggest that if we have not thoroughly done so, we might consider seriously making a real commitment to this interpretation.) It is probably strongly related to the fact that the issue of the afterlife has come to have minimal meaning among us. It is a long time since I have heard any Universalists making statements about the eventual possibility of an eternity in heaven. This silence is explained by the facts revealed in the answers to two of the questions in the Goals Report made under the direction of Robert Tapp and the committee which worked with him. Two of the questions and the answers to them are relevant at this point. (Tapp, page 226)

Question: Is immortality, in the sense of a continued personal existence of the individual after death, part of your belief system?

Answer: 10.5% YES 89.5% NO

Statement: Man's potential for "love" can overcome his potential for "evil".

Answer: 89.5% AGREE 10.5% DISAGREE

Interestingly the percentages are almost identical, but the implications of the answers are poles apart. The issue is no longer whether one will be saved for all eternity or not, the important fact for us has become that man's potential for "love" can overcome his potential for "evil". This is basically a point of extreme importance.

Let me therefore return once more to the development and changes in my own personal belief system in the process of growing up. Fifty years ago next August, fresh from Lombard College, I arrived in Boston on the 22nd to study for my Master's

degree. My introduction to Boston was on a momentous evening in the history of that city; it was the night on which Sacco and Vanzetti were electrocuted by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for a crime that there is little reason to believe they had committed.

Boston was tense that day, many believed that there would be serious riots if the electrocution was carried through. People were picketing the State House, and interestingly as one looks back on the event it was not primarily "hot headed college students" (as we frequently characterize protestors today). It was adults of standing in the community who were making their protest clear and vivid. Prominent among them were two who came to have a vast effect on my life: Dean Clarence Skinner of the Tufts College Divinity School, and a Methodist teacher of social ethics, Dr. David Vaughn, who was to be my instructor in that subject in the year just starting. The impact of the event (the electrocution was carried through, you will recall, and the riots did not materialize), and of their influence, was such that to use the phrase common today "my consciousness was raised" (indeed it was raised mightily), and I came out of the experience with a social conscience and an attitude toward life and society which still raises the hackles of some of my mid-western friends who feel that New England has made a radical out of me.

It is not surprising that these men, and the other men and women who were with them, made the protest that night. For Universalism has had a long and proud history in the areas of social action, and the "social gospel" has long been basic to the Methodist faith. Our record is not pristine and clear, we have often forgotten our belief in the fatherhood of God which makes all men brothers, and we frequently act as though we only dimly recollect our belief in "eternal and all-conquering love". But the potential for good is there in our institution as it is indeed in each one of us.

There is not, of course, time to trace the history of social action and social conscience among us, much of it was touched upon by Mrs. Baker in her address to you on this same occasion a year ago. What I would like to try to do is to take a few of the issues and look at our responses to them over the years, and then consider why it is that at the present moment, at least so it seems to many of us, we have moved from our dedication to the

improvement of society, and thus the “progressive establishment of the Kingdom of God” has moved away from the center of our vision.

We made our first official public statement on peace at that apparently exciting General Assembly in Philadelphia in 1790. “Although a defensive war may be considered lawful,” they said, “yet we believe there is a time coming when the light and universal love of the gospel shall put an end to all wars.” The pacifist stand of Adin Ballou, both at Hopedale and elsewhere in his preaching, must have strengthened this attitude in many of our people. Despite these early beginnings, however, and the attempt to pass strong statements on arbitration and peace at the Gloucester Centennial Meetings, the General Assembly of 1917 went backwards and pledged complete devotion to “making the world safe for democracy”. Not until 1931, according to Williams, did we adopt the provision stating, (Williams, page 66)

“fellowship in this Convention shall confer the right to interpret the general purpose and spirit of the Universalist faith as sanctioning refusing of all forms of military service, if such refusal be based on conscientious grounds.”

During the Viet Nam War much was done, especially through the service committee, for conscientious objectors, but I wonder where our real action on behalf of amnesty and the teaching of the ideals of peace is today? When did your society last consider these problems? How much of this history and the ideas that are involved in peace and the sanctity of conscience is to be found in the curriculum of your society for children and youth? One of the shocking experiences I recall from General Assemblies was returning from one during World War II, and having a couple of our leading clergy who happened to be on the same bus, make the statement, “Of course one can’t be a pacifist in wartime”. Our treatment of pacifist ministers during times of war has not always done us credit, in large part because we do not take the time to examine our ideas and make our statements of their meanings specific and clear to ourselves as well as to the others.

Historically we have been sometimes on the side of labor and sometimes on the side of management, at certain periods leaning strongly to an approval of paternalism in industry. Of late years our record has been better, particularly dealing with the problems of Caesar Chavez and his Farm Workers. I think of an

example from the days of the great textile mills in Lowell when the local Universalists, through their ministers, developed "Improvement Circles" for the millworkers (with spectacular literary success). From the circles came examples of the writing the factory women were doing as part of their "improvement", first a few articles were printed, then a selection, briefly a magazine, and finally a book entitled Mind Among the Spindles. Real talent was found and encouraged, there was great care for the welfare of the individual's intellectual life, but one does not read as much about concern for the long hours, the poor working conditions, the low pay, that were to become the deep concern of such people as Henry Ledyard, one of the great labor leaders we have produced. We need to continue this concern for the evils of the system if we believe in the reality of the salvation of all souls through the improvement of society: there are many areas among migrant workers, mill workers (particularly in the south where so many mills have been moved), among the minorities whose opportunities are not equal to ours, where we could make the forms of our compassion felt if we really believe in the "power of men of goodwill and sacrificial spirit to overcome all evil."

In our early denominational history we did well in the area of women's suffrage, and women were particularly noticeable for involvement in the Centennial Meeting. We have a good record in the ordination of women to the ministry and their use on our various denominational committees and boards; yet it is only a decade ago that when asked in the questionnaire on which the Goals Report was based: "If you were a member of the pulpit committee seeking a minister for your church, which of these statements would best describe how you would feel about a woman candidate?" To that question 47.2% replied "her sex might hamper her effectiveness." That this answer could come in the churches whose history includes the earliest official ordination of a woman, the second college in the country (Lombard) to admit women on a coeducational basis, and which prides itself on being open and modern raises some question about the depth of conviction that exists in regard to some of the statements we have made.

Universalists were active in other causes as well: slavery, prison reform, the excitement over black empowerment, and doubtless will continue to be as new causes arise. But there are many who have a feeling that of late years we have tended to be

less concerned with the plight of the many who have problems of education, work opportunity, housing, equal opportunity, and to become more concerned with a narcissistic involvement with the betterment of our individual selves, a trend that is found among other denominations than our own today. Looking at reports in church newsletters, or the columns of the UU World will make clear how far this tendency has spread (though there seem to be slight signs of diminution at the moment). I believe firmly that one develops sensitivity by the use of compassion in his dealings with others in daily life, not through exercises in triads and dyads. I believe that one develops sympathy by examining the lives of others and reacting to those lives, by opening to the children as well as ourselves the knowledge that although there are many good things in this world that there are evil things as well, and that we need to take stands against that evil wherever we may see it. For it is through the choices one makes that one expresses his religion. This tendency to a lesser interest in social issues of the day which seems to characterize many of our societies is dangerous, and it is related to many of our problems on both a continental and a local level.

Cassara in Universalism in America gives some figures which might well give us pause,

“By the 1840’s the faith was prospering in all of the states and territories of the new nation. Universalists could count about 700 societies and over 300 preachers. By the 1850’s these figures were to double, and, all told, 800,000 members were claimed for the movement.”

(Cassara, page 29)

Or look to the figures in a book published this summer by the New Hampshire-Vermont district of the UUA. Under the title Rebellion in the Mountains, Edith MacDonald has written a history of the Universalist and Unitarian churches of Vermont and Quebec. On reading it I was appalled to have confirmed what I really knew: of 179 societies formed between 1794 (the year Joab Young was appointed to “go forth in a circuitous manner and preach”) and now; the current UUA year book lists 13 as active, 2 part-time, 2 temporarily inactive, and 4 lost to all intents and purposes in mergers with more conservative groups. These are not encouraging figures.

In the same book Mrs. MacDonald quotes some material

from a New York state study I have not seen and draws a simple conclusion from that and from her own work:

"Two studies appeared in the 1966 Annual Journal of the Universalist Historical Society. The paper of Richard M. Woodman, a study of the 1900-1955 statistics of the New York Convention, is of particular value because of its close parallel to Vermont's situation. Mr. Woodman found that the ministers, always in short supply, were always poorly paid; that the continuous efforts to breathe life into old churches in decaying villages were wasteful of funds that could have been better used... Finally, he thought that ideational change had weakened Universalism. Its distinctive thought of a loving God who promised salvation to every soul no longer elicited the fierce loyalty of early days...

"These remarks are equally true in Vermont... Local parishes have over and over insisted on going their own ways, suspicious of their Convention, and unwilling to fund it adequately...

"My own concluding thought is that Universalists simply lost the vision."

(MacDonald, page 36)

I would change her statement only slightly at this point, to say that we have not been willing to reinterpret the old convictions in terms that would be meaningful to today, to see the salvation of all men as a social problem which is dependent for its solution on how deeply meaningful our stated purposes and ideals are in our daily living.

I remind you of an ancient Biblical proverb, "Where there is no vision the people perish." We need to regain our vision of the power of all-conquering love and apply it to the social problems of today as well as to the acts of our individual living.

If we want Universalism to continue to exert its historic influence as a constituent part of the Unitarian Universalist Association, we must become articulate about our belief and choose those actions which will demonstrate that we do not just talk about compassion and love and understanding, but that they are values which we incorporate into our inner frame of reference.

It was St. Paul who wrote to the early Corinthians, "And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?"

Too often our Universalist trumpets give forth uncertain sounds, and too frequently what we pipe we do not do. To use an old missionary phrase, "the fields are ripe for the harvest", and there is important work for our churches and their individual members to do. For the salvation of all men can only be meaningful today when translated into social and economic ideals implemented by dedicated work towards the ends we cherish. The choice is ours, as it was when Jehovah lay a similar choice before the children of Israel,

"But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and thy heart, that thou mayest do it. See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil... Therefore choose life, that both thee and thy seed may live."

The choice is ours. We need to remember that we do not stand, we move. Choose this day life, and the salvation of all men through the power of men of goodwill and sacrificial spirit to overcome all evil; choose this life and we and our church shall endure.

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THE CONTINUING RELEVANCE OF UNIVERSALISM

**The Fourth Annual Address
on Universalist History
Ethics and Theology**

**by
The Reverend Ellsworth C. Reamon, D.D.**

**150th Annual Session
New York State Convention of Universalists
Little Falls, New York
October 14, 1978**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Reverend Ellsworth C. Reamon, D.D. was closely associated with the New York State Convention of Universalists for many years. A native of upstate New York and a graduate of St. Lawrence University and its Theological School in 1921, he served churches in Minneapolis, Minnesota and Lansing, Michigan before coming to the First Universalist Church of Syracuse (then known as Betts Memorial) in 1932. He served this church for 38 years, during which time he was extremely active in community and denominational affairs, both on the state and national levels. Among his many offices were those of President of the Universalist Church of America (1941-44) and Chairman of the Board of Trustees, St. Lawrence University Theological School (1951-61). He holds Doctor of Divinity degrees from both St. Lawrence and Syracuse University. In 1970 Dr. Reamon left Syracuse to become minister of the Universalist Church of Tarpon Springs, Florida, which he served until his retirement in 1976 after 55 years in the parish ministry.

He and his wife, Hope, who has worked closely with him in many capacities, now live in Brattleboro, Vermont. The couple recently celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary.

THE CONTINUING RELEVANCE OF UNIVERSALISM

The Reverend Ellsworth C. Reamon, D.D.

Text: "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom;
and with all your getting, get understanding."
(Proverbs IV: 7)

This occasion is like a home-coming for Mrs. Reamon and me and we deeply appreciate being asked to share these meetings with you. The renewal of friendship and fellowship is one of the most precious experiences of life. I cannot let this occasion pass without expressing my joy in the continuing autonomy of the New York State Convention of Universalists. One of the top officials of our denomination surprised me recently by saying: "You were right in fighting for the independent existence of the New York State Convention within the UUA."

As most of you know, I have been a life-long member of the Universalist Church with the exception of two years when I was a member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Watertown, N.Y. Those two years gave me a deep appreciation of orderliness in worship, but I grew impatient with the almost slavish dependence on the Prayer Book. Perhaps I should confess also to a flirtation with Humanism during the early 1920's. You should know that classical Humanism left me cold and hungry. Fortunately, at this same time, I was living and serving at Unity Settlement House in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This Settlement House had been built, financed and directed by our Church in Minneapolis under the wise pastorate of Dr. Marion D. Shutter. It was a magnificent expression of Universalism in action. Here I learned about humanism with a small h. This experience has borne fruit through all of my professional and personal life. The Universalist faith is in my blood. I have come to understand that there is no single exclusive pathway to the truth of God and to the love of God because both truth and love are universal.

While we were serving our Church in Tarpon Springs, Florida, I joined the Ministerial Association. You should know that Tarpon Springs is a Greek community and you should remember that Orthodoxy has a strong foothold in the southland. During our last year there, a Roman Catholic priest was elected President of the Association and I was elected Vice President. This was tantamount to the smashing of the atom. The Priest and

I got along very well, but before the end of the year the Association voted to abolish the office of Vice President.

When we were located in Syracuse, one of my best friends was Dr. Ray Freeman Jenney, Pastor of the Park Central Presbyterian Church. He was a human dynamo. We worked together on many community projects and problems. On more than one occasion, he said to me privately: "I preach Universalism from my pulpit constantly. If I did not, I wouldn't have much to say." One day I said to him: "Why don't you come over and join us?" This was his candid reply: "I cannot afford to do so because the pension is so much better in the Presbyterian Church."

Well, having dispensed with these preliminaries, perhaps it is time to come to grips with the main theme of this paper: "The Continuing Relevance of Universalism."

Over a period of nearly two centuries, we have produced three statements of faith:

(1) "The Winchester Confession" of 1803; (2) "The Boston Declaration" of 1899; and (3) "The Washington Avowal of Faith" of 1935. There was also The Philadelphia Declaration containing some ten points. This was never officially adopted even though it was recognized as a statement of high quality.

Obviously, we are a people who do not believe that there is one holy faith once delivered by the saints. We are convinced that truth is a growing thing, especially in the field of religion, and that there are very few absolutes. We might say therefore that our Universalist Faith is a growing thing and in that sense it represents a continuing relevance.

Running through these three official declarations of faith there is a continuing emphasis on these universals: God's all-embracing love; human brotherhood; ultimate salvation for all; and the universality of truth. There is another note of primary concern: the conviction that "faith without work is dead". We do not use those familiar words very much but we do insist that our religion demands the practice of good works. We are not strong on personal piety; we prefer to emphasize the importance of personal morality.

In New England we have recently celebrated the 175th Anniversary of the Winchester Confession of Faith. Dr. Dorothy Tilden Spoerl gave the main address using as her theme: "And

Practice Good Works." We also made a pilgrimage to the birthplace of Hosea Ballou. All told, it was a thrilling experience.

When I use the word Universalism in this paper, I am not referring to any particular statement or confession of faith or belief. My reference here is to the basic philosophy which runs through all of our statements of belief: the Fatherhood of God; the Brotherhood of man; the authority of Truth and the ultimate salvation of all souls. It is my contention that this faith or philosophy is as relevant today as it was when first introduced. It should be said here also that, since the days of Hosea Ballou, we have been in agreement with our co-religionists, the Unitarians, in emphasizing the unity of God and the importance of living or practicing our religion.

History is on my side in arguing the continuing relevance of Universalism. As a philosophy of life, Universalism is rather old. During the fifth century B.C., the Ionians, believing that there must be one irreducible element common to all natural phenomena, searched for this single universal substance.

As Dr. Clinton Lee Scott has said: "In theology the word universalism has been used to designate a single principle operative in God's dealing with mankind." In particular, the word has been applied to the doctrine of universal salvation. This so-called doctrine was "... founded upon the belief that the ethical characteristic of God is such that it is His will to bring the entire human race into a holiness and happiness."

Some of you may be surprised to learn that during the first five centuries of the Christian era the idea of universal salvation was an accepted doctrine... not by everyone, but by the rank and file, so to speak. During the first Christian century, universal salvation was taught by Clement of Alexandria and by his pupil, Origen, who, following Paul's example, tried to formulate a systematic theology. Diodorus, Bishop of Tarsus; and Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuestia and one of the founders of the Nestorian Sect taught Universalism although they did not use the word. It is noteworthy that the teachings of these great leaders and of others did not provoke the official condemnation of the Church.

Justinian, Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, had assumed control of ecclesiastical affairs. In 544 A.D. he condemned the belief in universal salvation as heresy. Not content with that

order, he went further and declared that "...all of its abettors and believers, past, present, and future, are placed under the curse of heresy." The doctrine was pronounced anathema by succeeding synods.

I am convinced however that this doctrine or teaching was never completely wiped out. Great ideas have unusual survival qualities. Hosea Ballou in his book "Ancient History of Universalism", contends that this so-called heresy was never completely stamped out. And Dr. George De Benneville of Philadelphia, one of the most intellectual and beloved leaders of his time, was of the same conviction. As Dr. Clinton Lee Scott says in his short history of the Universalist Church of America: "The doctrine of the final salvation of all people has had many strange associations in the realm of theological ideas." From the sixth century to the time of the Protestant Reformation, leaders in many parts of the world were sowing the seeds of modern Universalism. For unnumbered persons our faith and philosophy has been consistently relevant. This was especially true of the dissenters: the Albigenses, the Lollards, the Men of Understanding and the German Mystics. What we call American Universalism had its roots in the spiritual Reformers, many of German background; and the predominant English Relly-Murray strain, brought to this country by John Murray.

Universalism enjoyed its greatest growth during the latter half of the past century. From Pennsylvania and New Jersey, the faith spread westward to Ohio, Indiana and Illinois and ultimately to California. From New England, the followers of Murray and Ballou carried the faith to New York and Canada. Missionary work was established in Japan. The records show that forty-one institutions of higher learning were established by Universalists. During those years of remarkable growth, it would have been easy to argue the continuing relevance of Universalism. The evidence was readily at hand.

But what shall we say of today? Along with many other well established denominations in this country, we have witnessed a steady decline in membership, especially during the past decade. Our merger with the Unitarians in 1960 has not produced a resurgence of growth and influence. This has been a time of great social unrest and upheaval. Church leaders in the northern half of our nation are deeply concerned. Protestants and Roman Catholics alike face serious problems. Statistics would seem to

indicate that the only churches showing real growth during this period are those of the evangelical persuasion. Along with this trend we have witnessed a remarkable development of cults and underground movements. We should not be too surprised by these trends. History shows that in every period of danger, change and great social unrest, people have sought refuge in apocalyptic types of religion and in weird cults.

Our world today is threatened by at least two major forces: (1) the threat of nuclear devastation, and (2) the rapid depletion of vital sources of energy. Hunger haunts large areas of the earth. Rich and poor alike are worried. We know that a widespread misuse of nuclear power could reduce this earth to ashes. Here in our own country, we have become a nation of gamblers. And there is evidence to indicate that we are becoming a nation of thieves. Our system of justice is proving unequal to the task of curbing crime and the traffic in drugs. Disclosures of corruption in governmental circles, from Washington, D.C., down to the smallest hamlet, are a daily occurrence. In times like these, ethical religion is never popular. People gravitate toward the type of religion which promises "pie in the sky" but which demands little in the way of moral and ethical living. This is one of the bleak facts of life.

Organized crime, more commonly known as the "Mafia", has infiltrated institutions hitherto thought to be untouchable.

My word to you today is that our type of religion was never more needed. I use the word "relevant" because universalism is timely. Whether we like it or not, the human race is a vast brotherhood. We do not need or should not need a "summit" meeting to remind us that Arabs must learn to live with Jews and Jews with Arabs... that the color of a person's skin is not of primary importance... that "the least, the lost, and the last" are all children of God. Society needs to recognize that the truth is our greatest and most benign authority. We cannot "plea-bargain" our way into heaven or into a world of decency and peace. We need to come to the realization that human beings are the most valuable commodity on earth and act accordingly. And finally, we need to understand that religion is not a matter of creeds, dogmas, ritual and noble sentiments... playthings for the Sabbath... it needs to be a power for good, finding daily expression in the lives of those who claim to be the children of God.

I challenge you therefore not to be content in the knowledge that your religion is both timely and relevant. Spread the word and put your religion to work in a society which is crying for salvation here and now.

THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE IN LIGHT OF OUR PAST

**The Fifth Annual Address
on Universalist History
Ethics and Theology**

**By
The Reverend F. Forrester Church, Ph.D.**

**151st Annual Session
New York State Convention Of Universalists
New York City
October 13, 1979**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Reverend Forrester Church, Ph.D. holds an A.B. degree (1970) from Stanford University and M. Div. (1974) and Ph.D. (1978) degrees from Harvard. Ordained in 1975, he is Senior Minister of the Unitarian Church of All Souls in New York City. Dr. Church has written or edited 15 books, including: "Father and Son: A personal Biography of Senator Frank Church of Idaho", the trilogy, "A Humane Comedy." (The Devil and Dr. Church, Entertaining Angels and The Seven Deadly Virtues). "God and other Famous Liberals: Reclaiming the Politics of America". A new edition of "Thomas Jefferson's Bible" has been published by Beacon Press: "Our Chosen Faith -- an introduction to Unitarian Universalism", which he co-authored with the Rev. John Buehrens, has also recently been published by Beacon Press.

Dr. Church spent two years as a weekly columnist for the Chicago Tribune (1987-88); 50 of his columns are collected in "Everyday Miracles: Stories from Life", published by Harper & Row in 1988. Four of his addresses have been included in the annual anthology, "Representative American Speeches". He is a member of the board of Union Theological Seminary, the Council on Economic Priorities, and Religion in American Life.

**THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE
IN LIGHT OF OUR PAST**
The Reverend F. Forrester Church, Ph.D.

I begin this morning with the final two entries in the ledger book of an Eastern caliph, brief yet evocative, written in a careful hand by a minor functionary centuries ago. The first entry reads: "For a dress of honor and decorations for Jaafer, son of Yahya, 400,000 gold dinars." And just beneath it, with but a few days intervening, "Naphtha and shavings for burning the body of Jaafer, son of Yahya, 10 kirats."

He may have been burned in his new finery. I cannot say. From the record as it stands, cryptic, intriguing, there is no way to tell. He may have been done in by his wife's lover or his younger brother, either of whom, as caliph-elect, might have found it preferable to dispense with an elaborate funeral. But this I can say. Upon the death of the caliph, the caliphate survived.

You may wonder what relevance this questionable bit of history has to do with my topic for this morning, "The Church of the Future in Light of our Past." First, you must remember that ministers have a tendency to open their sermons with irrelevant material designed to capture the attention of their listeners. Second, the Taoist in me, which, admittedly, does not constitute an overwhelming part of my makeup, would gladly dispense with whatever may follow on the perverse hunch that I have now said everything worth saying concerning the tenacity of institutions and the fragility of those individuals who people or lord over them. One more possibility. This morning I shall be dealing with history and the future; with memory and hope. In its own way, this little story speaks to both. May it serve to remind us, as we reflect upon the promise of tomorrow in light of yesterday, that tomorrow and yesterday are each, more or less, a closed book. We may infer and project all we will, yet the mystery of origins and destinations, the mystery that darkens, that enlivens our every today, must remain a mystery. If we open ourselves to it, the wonder of this mystery, beyond asking, cannot help but animate our faith.

The year is 1865. The war is over. Destruction has given way to reconstruction. Fratricide, to a call for reconciliation. America is rising from its own ashes, the ashes of its children whose future was cut short, the still smouldering ashes of its president, slain victorious, his, too, the ultimate sacrifice. On the one hand, dress of honor and decorations; on the other, naphtha and shavings for burning. Both were much in evidence as Americans begin rebuilding their faith and dreams for the future. And in our churches too, rebuilding, growth, and future were the watchwords, Universalist and Unitarian alike joining in the chorus. "Salute the Arriving Moment," is the verse from John Haynes Holmes chosen for the chapter title of this section of the Sesqui-centennial History of American Unitarianism. A Stream of Light. "Salute the Arriving Moment: Denominational Growth and the Quest for Consensus, 1865-1895," roughly a century ago.

1865. The place is New York City. Because of the work of Conrad Wright, Harvard Church Historian and editor of A Stream of Light, his work and that of other revisionist historians, we are beginning to uncover what was going on in the liberal religious trenches once the war was over. Even as he who once said that "Men descend to meet," Ralph Waldo Emerson, archangel of religious liberalism, was floating away into the transcendental moonlight, others, such as Henry Whitney Bellows of All Souls were in the ascendance, meeting, for instance, here in New York to establish a permanent National Conference of Unitarian Churches, building the Church of the Future. Bellows' story finally is being told - this great churchman who, in Conrad Wright's words, was "the one indispensable person in an enterprise that saved Unitarianism in America from atrophy and ultimate extinction." Walter Donald Kring has written a fine new biography of Bellows, to be released officially at a reception in his honor here in New York City next month. He and Wright and others argue, persuasively I think, that had Bellows not seen fit to place as his first priority the nurture of Unitarian institutions, offering at the same time "a renewed understanding of the nature of the church and the way it answers to basic human needs," few if any of the churches named after Ralph Waldo Emerson, who himself abandoned the church for the lecture hall, would be in existence today. Yes, for Bellows, the story is at last being told.

And with it, our appreciation for the importance of the corporate dimension of our liberal faith is enhanced.

But back to 1865. New York City. This morning I should like to share with you another long forgotten story, that of Elbridge Brooks, the Rev. Dr. Elbridge Gerry Brooks, then minister of the young and struggling Sixth Universalist Society in New York. Like Bellows among the Unitarians, it was Brooks more than any other who gave of himself in an attempt to galvanize the General Convention of Universalists into an effective denominational agency. What Brooks sought was a basis for concerted action to enlarge the compass and to insure the ongoing vitality of Liberal Christianity. As his son writes of him, "Persistent, almost aggressive in his efforts for a united church, he held that spirituality, to be effective, must be not only contagious but practical and reciprocal." And, according to his contemporary Moses Ballou, "Brooks, more than almost any other person, organized the denomination in its present form, and to that institution, to that power in this country, he gave all that was, with all that he had."

Here is how it happened. As was true among the Unitarians, there was considerable resistance among the Universalists at that time to the establishment of any mechanism that might possibly impinge upon the principle of individual freedom in an attempt to enhance corporate responsibility or to formulate a common, broad but more coherent, basis for their faith. As Brook's fellow Universalist, I.D. Williamson put it, "our people, schooled in our great Protestant principle, will plant themselves on the responsibility to God alone, and let the doings of association and conventions pass unheeded." But, in 1859, the very year that Brooks moved to New York from Lynn, Massachusetts, steps were taken, at his direction, that would soon lead to the strengthening of the Universalist Convention. Believe me, it did not lead to a despotical authority. As will ever be the case with us, this was not a danger. In Brooks' view, the only danger lay in a continued abdication of our joint responsibility to nurture the corporate body of the faithful. Of the loose federation that existed then among Universalists, Brooks had this to say:

The General Convention of Universalists in the United States of America is a very large and highly sounding name, but what has this body ever done corresponding to it? Except as a pleasant social and religious gathering, what has it ever been? Practically, what has it ever done

to show itself anything but a very thin bubble of very imposing pretensions - a blank book with a magnificent title page?

Others answered to the call of these fighting words. By 1861, the committee on organization of the General Convention, meeting in New York, was instructed to prepare a detailed plan for the systematic organization of the denomination. The plan was finally ratified four years later and a Board of Trustees established to provide leadership and direction to this new, vitalized body. 1865. And on September 22nd, at Brooks' residence, the first meeting of the Board of Trustees took place. Two years later the Board moved to enhance the denominational structure still further by appointing a General Secretary, whose job, in part, was to "aid in the more complete organization of the Universalists; ... visit the conventions, societies, and churches of Universalists throughout the country,... make appeals in behalf of the missionary, educational, and other interests of our Church; attempt the rehabilitation of suspended societies and suggest the help of weak ones; nominate local agents for the collection of funds; propose the formation of circuits, and in all wise ways, by counsel or otherwise, (to) aid the churches toward a greater prosperity." Elbridge Gerry Brooks was chosen for this post.

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So here in New York, Elbridge Brooks and Henry Bellows were both hard at work building the Church of the Future, building our church. If they knew one another, we have no correspondence or other reference, as far as I can tell, to indicate as much. But in 1865 these two men played pivotal roles in strikingly parallel developments taking place in their respective denominations. Bellows convened the National Conference of Unitarian Churches, and Brooks, the first meeting of the Board of Trustees of the newly constituted General Convention of Universalists. Their visions of the Church of the Future were not, of course, the same in every particular. Bellows, in his great sermon, "The Suspense of Faith," called for a new Catholicism; Brooks in his Book, Our New Departure: or, The Methods and Work of the Universalist Church of America as it enters on its second century, took, given our common history, with roots in the Protestant

Reformation, a much more sensible tack, proposing that "The Church of the Future is to be a vitalized Protestant Church, and not a rejuvenated Roman Catholic Church with the Pope left out." But both men were reacting to the tendency within their respective communions toward what appeared to each as a destructive exaggeration of the principle of individual freedom, leading to a neglect of corporate responsibility and a failure to attend to the cultivation of a larger community of faith. As George Williams writes in his bicentennial essay on the history of

American Universalism:

Brooks had to acknowledge that in large measure Universalism had undergone "some of the worst influences" of fissiparous evangelical congregationalism and individualism, but he was somehow confident that Universalism as now emerging could help the world understand "the Church as the perpetual symbol of religious ideas and as the means of communicating spiritual life."

In Brooks' own words, "The old theologies are dying; souls are adrift; minds are questioning and doubting. Hearts are hungering. Life is largely without centre or mastery, except from beneath. What they need is spiritual arrest, quickening, anchorage. Ours it is, if we actually have any business in the world, to answer these great uses."

And that, my friends, is the preacher's cue. But before I indulge, let me make a couple of general observations. First, as would become obvious if I took the time to quote Brooks and Bellows more generously, theirs is a much narrower faith than Unitarian Universalists on the whole profess today. Most of us resonate more naturally with those who fought the institutionalists tooth and nail in their own day, and who, if victorious, would have left us little of a church in which to celebrate their memories. To me, this suggests two things. First, to repudiate our visionaries and prophets, our mavericks of a century ago, would be unthinkable. On the other hand, what we have to learn from Bellows and Brooks in this, our own self-proclaimed time of growth and extension, is that the gospel of freedom alone is not enough. Freedom of religion too easily translates into the emptiness of freedom from religion. Without strong and vigorous structures, vital worshiping communities, and a faith that sustains more than a self-satisfied few through times of crisis and hardship, our much vaunted freedom and openness remain

spiritless abstractions. We must not forget that what we offer is an alternative religion, not an alternative to religion. It is religion modified and shaped by the principles of freedom and open process; it is a liberal religion, but a religion nonetheless. Our challenge for the future is thus not so very different from the challenge faced by Unitarians and Universalists 100 years ago: to avoid compromising our liberal principles, to avoid any impingement upon our freedom for religion, while at the same time building a greater community of faith, the church of our future, a community gathered according to common values and embodying the highest principles of true religion.

There is a difference, my friends, and more than merely a semantic difference, between religious liberalism and liberal religion. Are we liberals who happen to gather in churches, or are we churchmen and women who practice our religion according to liberal principles? Religious liberalism necessarily places the emphasis upon the substantive, liberalism. When this happens we run the great danger of displacing the myriad dimensions of our faith in favor of a single precept, the precept of freedom. Beyond the constrictions such would place upon the sweep of our religious concern, there is a further danger in this as well. As James Luther Adams writes,

Idolatry occurs when a social movement adopts as the center for loyalty an idol, a segment of reality torn away from the context of universality, an inflated, misplaced abstraction made into an absolute. Liberalism in its generalized form has been the chief critic of the idolatries of creedalism, of church or political authoritarianism, of nationalistic, racial, or sexual chauvinism; but in its specialized form it has generated a new idolatry, the idolatry of "possessive individualism."

Here Adams stands in the tradition of Bellows and of Brooks. While freedom is the watchword of our faith, each of these witnesses reminds us that we take that freedom seriously. For one thing, we choose to be free together, with all that this entails, rather than remaining free alone. For another, free to dismiss the answers others have given to life's essential questions, we are not free to dismiss these questions themselves. In every age, religion has addressed itself to questions of life and death, of origins and destinations, of living well that from life may be redeemed some

meaning that even death cannot dispel. To ignore such questions would be to diminish our humanity, to strip our faith of depth.

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It is up to us. We have so much to offer, so much to give, if only we might muster the courage and the will to extend ourselves, to build our institutions, to give our faith the breadth and scope that it deserves. To those who choose to follow, we have something new to offer, something new of value. And much that is old, whatever is of value there as well. That which inspires us; that which gives us strength. Whatever is of beauty, whatever brings to our world joy and to our lives the will to give of ourselves to the limit of our promise. This is what our liberal faith is all about. Not a rejection of religion, not a substitute for religion, but our own religion, that part of us, of our very being, that reckons face to face with life's eternal questions, that struggles and celebrates daily in search for purpose and meaning in life. Nothing cheap about it. Nothing shallow, unless we make it so, unless we sell it short. And we are responsible. That is one special thing about our faith. Free to believe what we will, we are responsible for believing what we can. No one else is going to do it for us. Looked at in this way, there is no more serious, no more challenging or compelling religion than this religion of ours. We are free. We are free to pitch ourselves into the very midst of life's teeming questions with all of our heart and mind and soul; we are free to redeem from death some abiding significance to be found in life itself; we are free to build and nurture a community of faith as stewards of the visible church who carry its message in our lives beyond its doors. Such freedom is our challenge and our charge.

Elbridge Brooks once wrote:

Our work as Universalists is not simply to sow seeds, but to cultivate harvests; not simply to see that ideas are diffused, but to organize them that they may be consciously held and efficiently served. Mass-meetings and conferences, with good speaking and fervent prayers, are very excellent and important things in their place; but when work - orderly, systematic, efficient work is to be accomplished in workman-like form, then these are not

all that is needed. There must be head, heart, hands; there must be organization with reference to these ends.

With these thoughts, I leave you to your good work. May you thrive together this day, that our common faith may flourish, now and forever more.

Thank you very much.

THE PERSISTENCE OF UNIVERSALISM

**The Sixth Annual Address
on Universalist History
Ethics and Theology**

**By
The Reverend Gordon B. Mckeeman, D.D.**

**New York State Convention of Universalists
Buffalo, New York
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Reverend Dr. Gordon B. ("Bucky") McKeeman is a native of Lynn, Mass., a graduate of Salem State Teachers College and of the Theological School of Tufts University. He also holds a Doctor of Divinity degree, awarded by Meadville/Lombard Theological School in 1969. He was ordained to the Universalist ministry in 1945, initially serving as minister to the Universalist Church of Palmer, MA. and then, for 22 years as a minister to the Unitarian-Universalist Church of Akron, OH. During the period from 1983 to 1988 he was president of the Starr King School for the Ministry. Extremely active in denominational affairs, he has served as Vice Moderator of the UUA Board of Trustees and as President of the Board of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee.

THE PERSISTENCE OF UNIVERSALISM

The Reverend Gordon B. McKeeman, D.D.

A year ago, I was invited to Murray Grove to preach on the occasion of the 209th anniversary of John Murray's first sermon in Thomas Potter's Meeting House. As I walked toward that historic meeting house, I saw, resting in the weeds beside the path, the bell that once hung in the Potter Memorial Church which was destroyed by a fire some years ago. It was, I must say, a sad, dispiriting sight, but somehow it seemed symbolic of what many Universalists feel. I remember the line from the poem, "The Creed of the Bells" by George Bungay: "'No Hell' rang out the Universalist bell", and I saw the bell, now neglected and silent, its message no longer echoing over the hills. Broken. Rusted. Mute. The bell posed a visible, voiceless question: What has happened to Universalism? Where is its voice? Where, the sweet sound of its gospel? Where, the warmth, the acceptance, the joy, the passion, the confidence? Where, the larger hope? And another question, no less weighty: Will it ever ring again?

Recently, I had a letter from Brainard Gibbons, a former President and former General Superintendent of the Universalist Church of America. I had printed a portion of Brainard's occasional sermon delivered at Rochester, N.Y. in 1949, which was, for me, an electrifying event. He was sent a copy of what I had reprinted in our church newsletter by one of our members and he thought to write to me about it. In his letter he said "In 1949 I had begun to feel that Universalism, in its historic meaning, was beginning to fade and to begin to be translated into its basic meaning." That is what I would like to talk to you about today, these two kinds of Universalism: historic Universalism and basic Universalism.

I want to begin with basic Universalism, that kind of Universalism which is woven into the fabric of the universe. When I was a student at Tufts, at the School of Religion, Dean Clarence Skinner said to us, "Now, if you want to say something dangerous, be sure to quote somebody." So I am going to quote somebody to you on this dangerous question of basic Universalism. In fact, I have in mind to quote from three individuals, the first of whom is J.B. S. Haldane, a British biologist. He writes "The phenomena of life tend, in the case of any particular species of organism, to persist and reproduce themselves as a whole. When

we examine the details of structure, environment and activity, we find that they are so coordinated or connected that the life of the organism or its kind tends to be maintained. The life-conserving coordination appears as the essence of life. We never succeed in seeing beyond it. The wholeness is always there."

The second somebody I want to quote is Carl Rogers, one of the leading American psychotherapists. He writes, in the Credo column in Kairos "In my experience, I have found one foundation for psychotherapy in a basic trust in the organism. In every organism there is an underlying flow of movement toward constructive fulfillment of its inherent possibility. In humankind, too, there is a natural tendency toward more complex and complete development. It is this on which we can rely. No matter what the environment, the behaviors of an organism can be counted on to be in the direction of maintaining, enhancing and reproducing itself. This directional tendency is fundamental and is what makes psychotherapy possible. Some think that this picture of the actualizing tendency in human beings is too optimistic a view. They point to all the evil in the world which cannot be denied and to the fact that all organisms in time deteriorate, as well as grow, which is, of course, true, but to my mind, this constructive direction in humankind is only part of a broader formative tendency which can be observed at every level of the universe. Every form we know emerges from a simpler, less complex form. Every star, every planet, including this one, was formed from a less organized whirling storm of particles. Every crystalline gem emerged from less ordered fluid matter. We marvel at the startlingly unique, symmetrical and often beautiful form of the snowflake. Yet it emerged from formless vapor. So, there is an ever-operating trend toward increased order and interrelated complexity evident at both the organic and inorganic level. The universe is always building and creating, as well as deteriorating. Thus, when we can provide a climate in psychotherapy which permits a person to "Be", we are not involved in a chance event. We are tapping into a tendency which permeates all organic life, a tendency to become all the complexity of which the organism is capable. And in my judgment, we are also tuning into a potent creative tendency which has formed our universe from the smallest snowflake to the largest galaxy, from the lowly amoeba to the most sensitive and gifted of persons."

I would quote, as well, Lewis Thomas, Director of Sloan-Kettering Cancer Research Center in New York. In his book The

Medusa and the Snail he writes, in an essay entitled "The Youngest and Brightest Thing Around"; "Mind you, I do not wish to downgrade us. I believe fervently in our species and I have no patience with the current fashion of running down the human being as a useful part of nature. On the contrary, we are a spectacular, splendid manifestation of life. We have language and can build metaphors as skillfully and precisely as ribosomes make proteins. We have affection... We have genes for usefulness and usefulness is about as close to a common goal for all of nature as I can guess at. And finally, and perhaps best of all, we have music. Any species capable of producing at this earliest juvenile stage of its development almost instantly after emerging on the earth by any evolutionary standard the music of Johann Sebastian Bach cannot be all bad. We ought to feel able to feel more secure for our future with Julian of Norwich at our elbow; 'But all shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.'"

You see, running through life is the urgency to wholeness, to integration, to the putting together of the scattered pieces of life. There is a universality of natural laws and there is, in parallel with it, a universality of the religious impulse, the desire for holiness or wholeness. This tendency, this unquenchable tendency is also observable when one looks at the obverse side of the coin, when one examines the dire, demonic consequences of not understanding or living by those universal laws. When we see people seeking to live out parochial, partial and insular assumptions, we discover people who create or perpetuate the tragic divisions of life, the costs of which in human misery, pain and suffering we continue to pay. For people who live out such assumptions maintain that it is possible to have political and social and economic arrangements which provide Heaven for some and Hell for others - Heaven for the top dogs, Hell for the underdogs, Heaven for the privileged, Hell for the deprived. And as we have rejected the notion of Hell as a religious doctrine, so we see, also, that the laws of life reject all attempts to live by partial and parochial assumptions.

The examples of this are too numerous for any of us to need to have them cited: Women and men; blacks and whites; capitalists and communists. The Moral Majority and the Moral Minority. When we act by such dichotomies and think it's possible to achieve Heaven for some without any untoward consequences to those who think they will get Heaven is to sow dragon seed.

And sowing dragon seed brings us the bitter harvest of conflict and oppression and despair. It is no accident that those early Universalists, seeking to write down some of the most important tenets of their faith, came to address the charge made of them by their enemies, that anyone who did not believe in Hell might do any unethical or immoral thing. In the Winchester Profession of Faith, the Universalists responded to this argument by saying "We believe that holiness and true happiness are inseparably connected and that believers ought to be careful to practice good works, for such things are good and profitable to men." (I would add "women", as well).

You see, it is no accident that we have strong moral principles which are based on our perception of the nature of life itself. It is no accident that we believe in the democratic way in government, which encourages the participation of all people, not only in the political life of our country but also in its economic and social life. We believe in equity for all people, because unless equity is achieved for all people, we do sow the seeds of our own destruction.

Carl Sandburg, in one of his poems, has a memorable phrase. "This old anvil," he says "laughs at many hammers." Basic Universalism has laughed at many hammers. It has a persistence and a constancy in season and out that we ignore at our own peril.

I think, then, that you have some sense of what Brainard Gibbons was talking about when he talked about basic Universalism, that Universalism which is woven into the very fabric of the life we know and cannot be eradicated from that fabric.

What now, of historic Universalism? Well, while there have been a great persistence and a great constancy in basic Universalism which has been the case since the beginning of time, historic Universalism, the expressions of basic Universalism in the religions of humankind, have often been in eclipse. There were, of course, the prophets in ancient Israel calling for righteousness, trying to say to the people that you cannot ignore the moral law without untoward consequences. But people managed to ignore the prophets, indeed, to slay them and to go on about their lives as though they had not spoken. But the consequences did, in fact, occur. Jesus, in his day, spoke basic Universalism in a theological framework when he said "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me." We are one human

family and cannot escape that understanding of life and maintain any sense that the future is going to be better than the past has been.

In the early church, the early Christian church, Clement of Alexandria, and his pupil Origen, who believed in the salvation of the Devil, spoke of the eventual triumph of God's love. Eventually, of course, the early church declared such views to be heretical. But they did not disappear simply because they had been declared to be heresy. Some continued to see basic Universalism and to try to express it in historical forms. Universalism persisted in small groups and in the lives of individuals who could not bring together the image of God as love and the notion of eternal punishment, eternal separation. But Universalism, as an historical movement within Christianity, was surely in eclipse for a long time, its light overshadowed, but it emerged again. It emerged in pietist sects and as minority opinion in majority religions. Those people who took seriously the idea of God's love and could not harmonize hell with it. So Universalism came to be called "The Gospel of God's Success", the gospel of the larger hope. Picturesquely spoken, the image was that the last, unrepentant sinner would be dragged screaming and kicking into heaven, unable, at last, to resist the power and love of the Almighty.

Now, this idea of historical Universalism once introduced on this continent, spread like wildfire. I think it is hard for us to imagine now how quickly Universalism became popular. In 1843, the United States Convention of Universalists was held in Akron, Ohio. If you can transport yourself in imagination back to that time, back to 1843, try to imagine how difficult transportation was in those days, how difficult it was to get from the East across the Allegheny Mountains to Akron, Ohio. This was the first convention of the Universalists which was held west of the Alleghenies. People were asked to bring their own food and their own bedding because the local hosts were aware of how difficult it would be to properly entertain any such group as was expected. 5,000 people came to that convention! 5,000 people! the Unitarian Universalist Association, in all of its history, has never had 5,000 people at a single General Assembly, even though they now can come by airplane and automobile and by train, as well. The Akron Universalists took the windows out of their church and they erected a large tent beside the church. Of the people who

came, some sat in the church, some stood in the church. Some sat outside under the tent. Some stood outside. The speakers stood in the windows to address this enormous throng of people who had come to hear the liberating news of the Gospel of God's Success.

By the time of the Civil War, the Universalists were the fifth largest denomination in the United States. Then, alas, there came a time when historic Universalism began to go into eclipse again. There were those who felt that its liberalizing work was done. After all, they said, almost nobody at all believes in a literal Hell. Why don't we find some group that is sufficiently liberal and sufficiently open to us and merge with them? So, there was a movement which reached its peak in the '20's to try to merge the Universalists with the Congregationalists. But there were those who feared for the submersion, if not the eclipse, of Universalism, who thought we ought to maintain our separate existence.

Then, partly to indicate our sense of solidarity with other religious groups, we Universalists applied for membership in the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America. In 1944, the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America declared that the Universalists could not be admitted to membership because they were not in truth a Christian sect. This idea fell across many Universalists with a sense of surprise and, for some, with a sense of outrage. How could they, we said, think that we were not a Christian denomination. But there were others who said, Hurrah! At last there is someone, even if it is only the Federal Council of Churches, who understands the Universalism is more comprehensive and broader than can be contained within the narrow concepts of Orthodox Christianity. And there were those who said, At last! We now have the opportunity to make historic Universalism be an adequate expression of basic universalism. We are, in fact, more than a Christian sect. We are the religious expression of the basic universal nature of life itself, with its urgency to wholeness and to integration.

So, as Brainard Gibbons said, he was optimistic that basic Universalism would find an adequate voice in historic Universalism. Then, there came to be a strong effort to merge, or, as it later came to be called "consolidate" the Unitarians and the Universalists.

Now, let us be honest in saying that this movement toward

merger or consolidation was viewed by many Unitarians with great misgivings. A. Powell Davies, for example who was perhaps the outstanding leader among the Unitarian ministers, was strongly opposed to merger because he felt that it would stultify, stifle, perhaps even smother, the growth which Unitarians were enjoying, a phenomenal growth, indeed, particularly in the area in which A. Powell Davies lived, in the Washington, D.C. area.

Let it also be said that the movement toward merger was viewed with misgivings by Universalists. Many of them were not certain but that "merge" might, in fact, mean "submerge" and that the Universalists would be deserting their tradition and that historic Universalism would go into eclipse once more. The verdict on that question has yet to be rendered.

But I am not here to tell you about the past. I am here because I believe in the persistence of Universalism, that Universalism reflects the unchanging nature of reality, and the intuitions which gave rise to Universalism in its earlier forms, its earlier historic forms, have now been buttressed by more and more evidence from the sciences and our intuitions still ring true to us. There are, therefore, new possibilities before us.

In recent years, the Unitarians and Universalists have strongly emphasized individualism. We have, in fact, as far as that is possible, institutionalized individualism. But, as people come to us, and grow through the stage of individualism in religion, they increasingly want to know what lies beyond that. They have heard Lesson No. 1 time after time after time.

They know that they do not need to believe in the old religious doctrines literally. They know that they do not need to understand the Creeds literally. They know they are free to form their own religious opinions, but what is Lesson No. 2? What lies beyond individualism in religion?

Perhaps it is here that historic Universalism may again make important contributions. Universalism contends that we, all of us, all human beings, all life, are bound by the laws of the universe and that our happiness and our health lie in understanding and practicing those universal laws. We understand that the world needs larger and more vocal, more powerful groups who speak for the INclusive, who speak and act for the world community, who speak and act and contend for the necessity of Universal Consciousness. That is the message that

comes to us from the ecologists who say that it is not possible for us to ignore the consequences of what we discard, that it is not possible to throw anything away, that it all remains and affects the quality of our life.

In international relations, we are again and again and again brought face to face with the Universalist proposition that we cannot maintain a world which is divided into the "haves" and the "have-nots", that seeks to resolve conflict by resorting to violence. The insanity of nuclear war more and more becomes evident to us because we live in one world and that radioactive cloud that is generated by our nuclear weapons will kill us, as well as those whom we so unwisely call enemies.

When we look at the economy, we discover that we are being ushered into a time when we have to take account of the world in our economic life. The auto workers and the automobile manufacturers are now faced with serious competition from the Japanese. You and I remember when the words on any article "Made in Japan" were words which suggested that it was cheap and tawdry merchandise. But now, Japanese craftsmanship is the envy of the world.

Wherever one looks, therefore, one sees the auguries that Universalism, basic Universalism, cannot be averted. It cannot be dodged. It cannot be submerged. It cannot be ignored, because it rises again and again and again. Should we not, therefore, have an historic expression of Universalism which matches our present understanding of basic Universalism?

Now, I am aware that, when people are scared, they tend to retreat. We live in a time when there are a great many scared people who do not want to hear that they have to enlarge their selves. They do not want to hear that they need to widen their sense of concern and consciousness to embrace the whole of the world. They would like very much to retreat into fortress America, or to fortress Christianity or to some other narrowed loyalties to which they can give themselves. Nonetheless, it is unwise, indeed, for us to think that we should cater to the fears of some that moving forward toward Universalism is the way to death. It is, in fact, the only way to life and we ought to be articulating basic Universalism with vigor and with enthusiasm. We ought to be pointing in people's lives to the urgency within those lives to wholeness and that no person can ignore that inner urgency to his

or her own wholeness save at his or her own peril.

The response to the problems that we face, whether in politics or economics or social relations or in religion must evoke from us an inclusive response: "No Hell, rang out the Universalist bell!"

Now I am going to tell you something that rankles me. It is hearing our religious movement spoken of as Unitarian. I am angered by that. I would like to commend to you an article which appeared virtually unheralded in March of 1979 in the Unitarian Universalist World. It was written by Dr. Sidney Mead, former President of Meadville/Lombard Theological School and an eminent church historian. It was entitled "Are You A Trinitarian Without Knowing It?" and what he points to in that article is the fact that we are not philosophically or theologically Unitarian, that we believe that the expressions of the Divine are to be found in the human, and that therefore, Trinitarianism is really a better, more picturesque and more apt expression of Universalism than Unitarianism. Women and blacks and gays have all had their days of raising consciousness by talking about the way in which language shapes reality. We are now to speak of women, no longer of ladies or girls or gals. Blacks are to be called blacks. They don't want to be "colored" or "nigra" or "nigger". Gays want to be called Gays. Maybe the Universalists are next for liberation. For Heaven's Sake! Speak up! Hell is, in fact, a burning issue for it is the issue of separation, whether we can, with safety and impunity set up little islands in the human experience and therefore protect ourselves against any relationship with the mainland. And Universalism says unequivocally, it cannot be done. You cannot have Hell for some and Heaven for others.

I want to close, now with a story from the pen of A.J. Cronin. It really is an autobiographical piece, in which he tells about his own experience as a doctor in England who contracted tuberculosis. He had to give up his medical career and go to the Scottish Highlands to recover from his illness. In the little village in which he was staying in the Highlands, he struck up an acquaintance with an old resident of the village by the name of Angus. He used to talk with Angus about all manner of things. In addition to going for long walks across the Highlands, Dr. Cronin was also engaged in writing a book and one day he did something which all authors ought to be cautioned about. He picked up the manuscript of what he had written and began to read it and he

was so appalled at what he had written that he threw it all in the ash can and went out for a walk. On his walk, he encountered Angus. Angus was engaged in backbreaking labor, not uncommon in the Scottish Highlands, of "ditching a bog". Ditching a bog means digging channels to drain off the water. Eventually, if you dig channels enough, you may, perhaps, drain off enough of the water so that the land may be claimed for pasture.

Dr. Cronin paused to talk to Angus. Angus leaned on his shovel and listened to Cronin's story about his despair over his writing and what he had done with it. Finally, after he had heard the story out, Angus said "Well, Doctor, I'm sure you know what you are doing." He said "My father ditched this bog all the days of his life and he never made a pasture here. I've ditched this bog all the days of my life and I've never made a pasture here. But pasture or no pasture, I canna help but dig, for my father knew and I know that if you dig long enough, a pasture can be made here."

That's a lesson that Universalists ought to learn from their own history, for while historic Universalism has often been in eclipse, we ought to know that if you only dig long enough, if you only persist long enough, Universalism will prevail here.

On September 1, 1939, W. H. Auden, wrote a poem whose title was that date, September 1, 1939. It was his reflection on the event that occurred on that day, the beginning of the Second World War. The last lines of his poem are these

Defenceless under the night
Our world in stupor lies;
Yet, dotted everywhere,
Ironical points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their messages:
May I, composed like them
Of Eros and of dust,
Beleaguered by the same
Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.

Our religious doctrine has an enormous persistence in its basic form. It is our job to see that it has a persistence in its historic form. It is for us to dig long enough. It is for us to show an affirming flame.

**I DON'T KNOW THE NAME,
BUT THE PHASE IS FAMILIAR**

The Seventh Annual Address
On Universalist History,
Ethics and Theology

By
Reverend Max A. Coots, D.D.

153rd Annual Session
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The Reverend Max A. Coots received a B.A. degree from Bucknell University, a M.A. from Columbia University in 1951, and a M.DIV. from Union Theological School in 1953. Ordained in 1953, he served as minister to the Cortland, N.Y. Universalist Church from 1953 to 1958. During the next 34 years he served as minister to the Universalist Church (now the U-U Church) of Canton, NY. During this period he was also an Adjunct Professor of Sociology at Clarkson College Technology. He is the author of numerous articles in national and denominational periodicals and is well-known for his book of meditative prose, "Seasons of the Self". In 1978 he was recognized for his work by the Starr King School for the Ministry and awarded an honorary doctorate. The Reverend Coots is a former President of the New York State Convention of Universalists.

**I DON'T KNOW THE NAME,
BUT THE PHASE IS FAMILIAR**

The Reverend Max A. Coots, D.D.

Last May I was asked to speak on the theme: "Universalism - Past and Future." So I chose the title, "I don't know the name, but the phase is familiar." Last week someone changed the topic to "Universalist Theology" so I thought to call it, "I don't know who's to blame, but the haze is familiar." This week I'm not sure of the theme, so to be safe in all events, my title is "Universalist Universalism-past theology and future changes in the theme or I don't know my place, but the maze is familiar." Universalists are a peculiar people and always have been from the beginning.

Unitarians were too, but being of the urban and intellectual elite of the nineteenth century, they could not quite rock the ark of the Calvinist covenant in the same way their Universalist country cousins could. Unitarians boggled the minds of New England's pious Puritans as few Universalist preachers of the time could, but in a century when most Americans lived on hard-scrabble farms or along the streets of small town America, the learned essays of Unitarian divines was pretty heady stuff for around the kitchen tables of common men and women. No, it was popular Universalism versus "Partialism" that invaded the villages and gave our neighbors their first taste of honest to God heresy.

Historians don't say so, because written history, the product of scholars reading the writings of the literati, naturally gave the credit to Unitarianism for liberalizing the eighteenth century, but the credit should go, not to the Unitarian intellectuals who shook the sons of Harvard, but the less prestigious preachers, who touched the emotions of ordinary people in ordinary places in extraordinary ways. They were men like Erasmus Manford, who, in 1832, travelled twelve hundred miles on horseback, delivering a hundred and sixty talks along the way, receiving a hundred fifty dollars for his pains. That was hardly enough for salve for his saddle sores, but quite enough to leave a hundred little clusters of converts in his wake - peculiar people, calling themselves "Universalists."

The real agents of early liberal religion were these peripatetic preachers, vaguely educated and highly motivated to do what Father Murray asked of them in 1770: "Go out into the highways and by-ways of America, your new country. Give the people,

blanketed with a decaying and crumbling Calvinism, something of your vision. You may possess", he said, "only a little light, but uncover it, let it shine, use it in order to bring more light and understanding to the hearts and minds of men and women. Give them, not hell, but hope and courage. Do not push them deeper into their theological despair, but preach the kindness and everlasting love of God."

For more than a century that was the message of Universalism, a message so intolerable that in 1860 the Presbyterian minister in Canton delivered a day-long diatribe against the establishment of the Universalist university on the slope overlooking that village, a university he called "that dungheap on the hill."

It was the message that was recalled by Gertrude Sneller, remembering the sound of the bells over Cicero. She wrote, "All these bells had individual tones easily identified. The loungers on the hotel steps, who never went to church, not only recognized the notes of each, but were able to identify what they said. According to their insights, the Methodist bell shouted, 'Repent! Repent!' The Presbyterian bell urged, 'Church time! Church time'. Only the Universalist bell held out a cheerful promise. 'No Hell! No Hell!' it said. The loungers felt safe in staying where they were." (A Vanished World by Gertrude Sneller, Syracuse University Press.)

Now the loungers cannot hear ringing justification for their lethargy, for the post office sits in Cicero where the church once sat, and the Presbyterian minister in Canton would be hard pressed to find much heresy heaped on the hill where St. Lawrence University now lounges in innocuous non-denominationalism.

But in its season, ours was a church with a contradiction to conjure with. As Miss Sneller put it, "It may be thought that in our church we sometimes spoke lightly of what other churches held dear. We were not irreverent in our hearts, and we never meant to sin against the holy spirit. The mission of the Universalist Church was to free the minds of men from the cruel prisons of dread and fear, and help them to understand that God and life are kinder than they supposed..."

But, as the century turned, the fire they fought had all but died in the other churches around the village greens. Hell was no longer a burning issue, and, so, no-hell lost its lure. Moved by changing times, the sons and daughters went away to the cities and the suburbs. Moved by time, the fathers and the mothers of the church

went to sleep on the slopes above the villages. The churches in Hornellsville and Heuvelton; Malone, Madrid and McLean, Ellenburg and Cicero, and almost everywhere the circuit riders had spoken them into existence, vanished as the villages themselves dwindled into hamlets or were swallowed into suburbs.

In our time, Universalism, as such, like a spinster lady, late in life, took a husband, and though they agreed to hyphenate their married name, by now, the offspring of that union often simply called themselves by the husband's name, and in time, may not recognize her name at all.

But the time has come for a new phase for Universalism and the phase is familiar by any name. A movement of new "Partialists" has been born-again to that unholy wedlock of scientific ignorance and the frightened faith of fundamentalism. The consummation of that marriage is devoutly to be unwished, its conception is unimmaculate, and its births are traumatic for everyone, except those who have seen the light - a light that has too often been cast by the burning of books.

The ground was laid a while ago, by Graham, a southern cracker turned the toast of Presidential piety, who played nearly every stadium in the world, gamely preaching a Brooks' Brothers styled evangelism in public and conservative policies in private at White House prayer breakfasts. We hardly noticed.

Then there was Anita, who swung down out of Florida's sunshine tree and made juicy headlines with a successful campaign against homosexuals, gayly saying the love of God was exclusively heterosexual.

By then the season of sacred silliness brought us a bumper crop of television evangelists, claiming God was deaf to Jews; that Jesus' injunction, "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not" was a Biblical basis for banning contraception and abortion and a heavenly host of other illiterate allegations.

Then there was the Washington rally when a right-wing Christ rode triumphantly into the city on the backs of twenty-thousand asses. They came to throw the social changers out of the legislative temple, claiming that God loves a good right armament, that the E.R.A., sex education, and pant suits are the spawn of Sodom and Gomorah, that public schools are parochial schools for the satanic religion of "secular humanism" and that Christian academies are

the only way to save the children from perversion, purple passion and permissiveness; that text books must be cleansed of irreverent references to evolution, human religious development, and any mention of progress in Russia. Thus saith the Lord as heard from the militant mouths of the new prophets, who are absolutely right on every issue and extreme right on most. And the silence is deafening in opposition.

This march of the Moral Majority and other backward Christian soldiers is obviously a power-struggle between scientific thought and Biblical religion, between empiricism and emotionalism, between data and dogma, the questing mind and the unquestioning ego. It is a contest to determine which shall have power of authority, not over the private minds of individuals, who are always free to believe "six impossible things before breakfast", but over the public institutions of society. It is a political problem and needs the social action of a coalition of social, political and religious groups. But there is another dimension to this encounter, which is best illustrated by that part of the contest that involves creationism versus evolution. This specific debate is an excellent example of the need for a new phase in Universalism - one which is as theological as the old debate that brought us into being. But it is a contest that has its dangers. Because the creationist created the debate, the argument tends to be set up according to his definitions. We are apt to be put on the defensive or trapped in the narrow confines of his mind. For example, because he claims the book of Genesis is literally true, we are tempted to react negatively and dismiss the book, throwing the poetic baby out with the unscientific bath. Or, if he says, "God did it!", I am prompted to say, "Didn't", instead of saying that the question is not God, but how. The argumentative temptation is to fall into the thoughtless practice of saying, as the song said, "If you say 'potato' then I say 'potahto', you say 'tomato' and I say 'tomahto'" when we should just "call the whole thing off". We should not get caught in the simple-minded reactionism of the simple-minded, who think that the only true faith is one that can be compressed between the pages of "The Book" like a corsage from some prehistoric prom.

Instead, we should realize that the debate is theological, and so, is between theologies, religions and faiths and is not, as he imagines, between atheism and theism, between irreligion and religion, and between faithlessness, and faith. "We are not irreverent in our hearts."

This controversy is not only which is better science, creationism or evolution, but which is better theology, or, more correctly, which provides the more valid basis for religious response and belief, or in the two hundred year-old words of John Murray, "which gives hope and courage... (and) kindness" and in Miss Sneller's words, which helps us "understand that God and life are kinder than they suppose."

The question, whether creationism or evolution is better science will be resolved by the interpretation of viable data. The question, which is better theology is insoluble on any empirical or provable basis. It is resolved for individuals on the basis of their knowledge and what seems reasonable and acceptable to them. The proof of the pudding of religion is in its highly personal eating, not in a chemical analysis of its ingredients. So, my theology, like any other, is characterized by my perception of that which I conclude is greater than myself alone, by my experiences of wonder and reverence, and what I imagine is the object of that wonder and that reverence. The shape of my theology is determined by what I conceive to be the source and sustainer of life, and how I perceive my relationship to it in both its transcendent and immanent ways - that which has been called the first cause, the prime mover, the ultimate reality, the ground of being, the creator, and divine - in short, God.

Every religion's theology, every person's theology, the theology of old Calvinism and historic Universalism, and the theology of the born again and modern liberal religions all have this same characteristic.

What differentiates theologies, yours from mine, and ours from others, is not whether we perceive God, by whatever name, but how we perceive it, what we imagine its character and function and relationship to us to be. That is why the question, "Do you believe in God?" is really a meaningless question. That is why the fundamentalists and religious liberalism, the theology of Billy Graham and the theology of Albert Einstein are vastly different, not because one is theological and one is not, but because of the perceived realities to which each responds and the different definitions of the nature, function and purpose of those realities, as well as the believer's sense of relationship to those realities.

I contend that the creation stories of the Bible, which are the source of the creationist's response, while valuable literature, are inadequate grounds upon which to build a concept of the nature of life or upon which to formulate a personal religious response that can hold up its head in the company of modern minds, which is in essence, if not in detail, exactly the contention of our Universalist ancestors.

The reason I say this today and in specific response to my creationist-evolutionist example, is that the theory of evolution, however incomplete it is, implies a saga of fabulous dimensions that stretch out in time and space farther and more wonderfully than did the once-wonderous firmament on which the Biblical God hung the sun and moon and stars. Evolution's details far overshadow the dusty potterings of the God of Genesis with an implication of divinity whose "miracles" are as microscopically amazing as the double helix and so distant as to out-distance the imagination. It implies a theology that leaves the creative voice of Yahweh mute and makes his six-day labors but a blink in the long gaze of creation. It speaks, not of a once-and-only-once miracle by a god who had to rest when it was done, but of a continuation and a continuity of which, even we, are an intrinsic part and product. In intricacy, complexity and magnitude, the unfinished story of evolution sings through the marvelling mind like an endless oratorio rising from the smallest grace-notes of the proteins of life's beginnings to a crescendo as overwhelming as the cosmos. It says to me that the "music of the spheres" is a far greater work than that simple song once sung around the desert nomads' campfires. Anything else is heresy! Anything else is blasphemy!

It implies a theology and it implies a philosophy of humanity, as creationists cannot, that says we are not the fallen refugees from a punitive paradise, but that we are the progeny of a species held in the family of life and bound in biological fealty to life in all its manifestations from here to eternity.

As such, it says to me that we should eat our breakfast eggs as though they were the sacred elements in a Eucharist, welcome flocks of grosbeaks as flights of angels, and walk our minds barefoot on the common soil, speechless with the knowledge that it is holy ground. As such we should adore the carrot and the beef as those who died for us that we might have life. As such we should kneel in the garden in awe, scoop up and hold the soil, as if it were

the flesh of God, and drop the seeds as if we were annunciating angels participating in the conceptions of holy births.

All this is, of course, not science. These are implications drawn from the theory of evolution as I see and respond to it. This is not science, but poetic and theological response to scientific thought. It is one man's version of that faith that old Erasmus Manford rode twelve hundred miles to say. It is one facet of that church whose bell once rung in positive contention over the roof-tops of Cicero. It is one aspect of the continuing theology of Universalism, by whatever name it may be known or not. It is part of what we need to be whether as Universalists, Unitarians or Unitarian Universalists-- a peculiar people who will say to our time what Hamlet said to Horatio, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy."

**LOVE'S LABOURS NOT LOST
or
GIVE US THAT OLDTIME
UNIVERSALIST RELIGION WE'RE
GOOD ENOUGH FOR IT**

The Eighth Annual Address
On Universalist History
Ethics and Theology

By
The Reverend Christopher Gist Raible

154th Annual Session
New York State Convention of Universalists
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Christopher Gist Raible is a Toronto writer and historian, and a retired Unitarian Universalist minister.

Now living in Canada, he was born in New England and spent his later childhood in Texas. He was educated at the University of Chicago, at the University of Manchester in England and at the Starr King School for the Ministry in Berkeley, California.

For 29 years an active Unitarian Universalist minister, he served churches in New York, Wisconsin, and Massachusetts. As an executive of the Unitarian Universalist Association, he was the first publisher of *The Unitarian Universalist World* and was the initiator of the "Minister-on-loan" and the "Sharing in Growth" extension programs. As the last president of the Universalist Historical Society, he helped make possible the publication of *The Larger Hope*, a history of American Universalism, and the formation of the Unitarian Universalist Historical Society. He authored the chapters on the Unitarian Universalist religion in Leo Rosten's *Religions of America* and of *The Spirit of Toronto*, and edited anthologies of worship materials. He also chaired the U.U.A. Commission on Common Worship.

As a writer and historian he has published in the *Toronto Star*, the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, the *Canadian Forum*, the *Beaver*, and *Ontario History*. He works as a researcher and historical interpreter for the Toronto Historical Board and is the author of *Muddy York Mud*, a history of early Upper Canada. He has also served as resident historian for CBC radio in Toronto. He is a member of the Ontario Historical Society, The York Pioneer and Historical Society, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, Dying With Dignity, Toronto Planned Parenthood, and is an honorary board member of the Canadian Abortion Rights Action League.

**LOVE'S LABOURS NOT LOST
OR
GIVE US THAT OLDTIME UNIVERSALIST RELIGION
WE'RE GOOD ENOUGH FOR IT**

The Reverend Christopher Gist Raible

I want to tell you a story that you already know. It is the story of a miracle - as far as I know, it is the only miracle in our history. And because it is the story of a miracle, it is a story out of our Universalist (rather than our Unitarian) history.

The year was 1770. John Murray was a depressed, almost a broken man. In England he had tried to be a preacher, but he was a failure. Through his reading, he had arrived at a Universalist interpretation of Scripture, but few people seemed interested. His wife had died; he felt completely unsuccessful, a total failure. So he resolved to start life again in a new way in the New World. He set sail from England to begin a new life in America - and he resolved never to try to be a preacher again.

The ship on which he was sailing crossed the Atlantic, and ran aground off the coast of (would you believe?) New Jersey. (His is the only ship I ever heard of that landed in New Jersey!) Since he was the only passenger aboard, Murray was sent ashore - the captain did not want to lose a crewman if the ship broke loose again. Murray waded ashore and tried to find help. According to the tradition, the very first person that John Murray met was a man by the name of Thomas Potter, a well-to-do but illiterate farmer. Many years earlier, Potter had himself arrived at a Universalist theological position and he had built a chapel. For twenty years or more he had been waiting for a preacher to arrive to preach Universalism in his chapel. Potter at once saw Murray as the man he had long sought and prevailed upon Murray to preach the following Sunday - it then being Friday. Reluctantly, Murray agreed, provided the ship did not break loose before Sunday. It did not, and Murray preached. He was guided, he believed, by Divine Providence.

The experience changed John Murray's life completely. From that point on, he began to preach Universalism in America and a few years later founded the first Universalist church in North America in Gloucester, Massachusetts. From that first sermon, Universalism in America grew as a major religious movement.

What was this doctrine that Murray preached? It was “universal salvation,” that is, the idea that all souls will ultimately receive the rewards of Heaven. It was preached in contrast to the more prevailing idea that only some people are saved, that is, only some people will go to Heaven, the rest are damned to hell.

Why did the Universalists believe that all will go to Heaven? Because they believed that the basic nature of God is love. To quote the early great leader, Hosea Ballou, writing thirty or so years later:

“There is nothing in heaven above, nor in the earth beneath, that can do away sin, but love; and we have reason to be eternally thankful, that love is stronger than death, that many waters cannot quench it, nor the floods drown it; that it has the power to remove the moral maladies of mankind, and make us free from the law of sin and death, to reconcile us to God, and, to wash us pure in the blood, or life, of the everlasting covenant. O love, thou great Physician of souls, what a work hast thou undertaken! All souls are thy patients; prosperous be thy labors, thou bruiser of the head of carnal mind.” (Ballou, Hosea, Treatise On The Atonement, 3rd edition, Hollowell Maine, C. Spaulding, 1822, pg. 132, orig. pub. 1805)

“God is Love!” That was the great Universalist motto. The phrase was carved on their pulpits, painted on their churches, quoted on the mastheads of their publications. “God is Love!” Nothing that a human being can do or not do can ever separate that human being from the love of God. Love’s labours are not lost. All are sustained and protected by divine love.

It was (and is) a powerful idea. All people are saved, no matter what they may have done, no matter what sins they may have committed.

Think about that a moment. If all persons are saved, you are saved. No matter what, God still loves you. You know yourself. You know your weaknesses, you know your failures, you know your errors. You know the evil - dare I call it sin? - you have done, the hurt you have caused, the wrongs you have committed. Nevertheless, our Universalist forbears declared, God still cares for you. There is no way that you can separate yourself from the love of God.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the idea spread like

the proverbial wildfire. Unlike their Unitarian cousins, the Universalists did not take over existing churches, they established their own. Soon itinerant preachers were travelling about, spreading the good news. On the frontier, revivals were held, proclaiming the truth of Universal Salvation. Much like the Methodists, churches were organized and served by circuit riding ministers.

A few years ago, I read the autobiography of a frontier Methodist circuit rider, Peter Cartwright. For almost a half a century, he served in Ohio, in Kentucky, in Indiana, finally pushing west to Illinois. Until I read his story, I had always thought that the worst hazards to a frontier circuit rider were storms and floods, wild animals and Indians. But no - at least not to Peter Cartwright.

To him, the worst evil that he could encounter were those sinful people, the Universalists! Of their ideas, Cartwright wrote:

“... if I were to set out to form a plan to contravene the laws of God, to encourage wickedness of all kinds, to corrupt the morals and encourage vice, and crowd hell with the lost and wailings of the damned, the Universalist plan should be the plan, the very plan, that I would adopt.”
Cartwright, Peter, Autobiography Of Peter Cartwright, The Backwoods Preacher, ed by W. P. Strickland, New York, Abington Press, 1956, orig. pub. 1856.

And why, pray tell, did Cartwright and others consider Universalism to be such a devilish doctrine? They believed that the Universalist preached “no hell.” If, they thought, there is no hell, then there is no punishment. If there is no punishment, then there is no fear, there is no reason not to sin.

If the Universalists had no reason to fear, and thus no reason not to sin, they must indeed be very wicked people. If, their neighbors thought, the Universalists had no fear of hell, then, their neighbors thought, the Universalists must be engaging in all those wonderfully wicked things that their neighbors wished they themselves could engage in, if they feared no hell.

No doubt, some of the Universalists did engage in wickedness, just as, no doubt, some of their Methodist and other neighbors did too! But what the neighbors did not understand about Universalists was they were not so much preaching about “no hell” as they were arguing about its location! They were telling of

hell here on earth that we make for ourselves if we cannot live lives of love.

Further, the Universalists were arguing against the idea that fear and guilt are necessary for there to be morality.

What was the Universalist reaction to all this misplaced opposition? Let me state it again. They did not believe that fear and guilt are necessary for morality. Human beings do not have to be scared or threatened into being good.

You may remember a phrase used by early Universalists. It is found in the Winchester Profession, "holiness and happiness." Indeed, let me quote the whole Profession as adopted in 1803:

Article I. We believe that the Holy scriptures of the Old and New Testament contain a revelation of the character of God, and of the duty, interest and final destination of mankind.

Article II. We believe that there is one God, whose nature is Love, revealed in one Lord Jesus Christ, by one Holy Spirit of Grace, who will finally restore the whole family of mankind to holiness and happiness.

Article III. We believe that holiness and true happiness are inseparably connected, and that believers ought to be careful to maintain order and practice good works; for these things are good and profitable unto men. (q. in Miller, Russell E., *The Larger Hope*, Boston, Unitarian Universalist Association, 1979, pp. 45-46)

I won't repeat the story of the writing of the Profession. It was only adopted after much argument, and only after all the critics had left the meeting and gone home (a warning to anyone who is a delegate to a business meeting!)

"Holiness and happiness," the phrase was echoed in the subtitle of Ballou's *Treatise*. The two are inseparably connected, the Universalists taught. If there is knowledge of happiness, i.e., assurance of salvation, of the ultimate reward in Heaven, then there will inevitably be holiness, i.e., moral behavior. Believers "ought to be careful to maintain order and practice good works." (The phrase reminds me of the British North America Act which established Canada as a Dominion in 1867 for the purpose of "peace, order and good government.") There is certainly no hint

here that faith in universal salvation leads to sinfulness, quite the opposite.

Human morality comes, not from fear, but in response to love. If one knows that one is loved, the response is to become loving. Love's labours are not lost.

You all know the story of the next 100 years. Universalism flourished in North America. It became for a time the fifth largest religious denomination in the United States, the third largest here in New York State. Universalists were responsible for founding educational institutions like Tufts and St. Lawrence. Universalists were in the leadership of almost every movement for social reform, be it abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, or temperance. In short, Universalism as a religion and Universalists as a people were very well known for their "holiness." (See Russell Miller's history, quoted above)

There followed a century of steady decline. We still argue today about why. Perhaps it was because Universalist ideas were co-opted, in practice at least, by mainstream Protestant bodies, so that today there is a functional Universalism in much Christian teaching and preaching. Almost everybody is going to heaven (except perhaps a few Unitarian Universalists).

I believe that Universalism declined because it never quite found the 20th century language to express its central message.

By the time I entered the ministry just 25 years ago, Universalism was apparently dying - dare I say even decaying? It seemed dead, but it had not been embalmed or buried.

I became a Unitarian minister in Jamestown here in New York. I dutifully sought acceptance in associate fellowship as a Universalist minister. After three unanswered letters, I eventually received a badly mimeographed document which I still cherish and which certified me as having status as a Universalist.

The nearest Universalist church was in the neighboring village of Bemus Point, New York, except the church had no congregation and its building was used rent free by a fundamentalist Pentecostal group. I did occasionally meet some of those neighboring Universalists when I was asked to conduct a funeral, but I never saw them otherwise. There were Universalist ministerial colleagues in the state some distance away - men (I knew no women) like Dick Woodman and Max Coots. Actually, the first

Universalist contemporary I met was 8 years earlier at an American Unitarian Youth convention when we were visited by a "fraternal delegate," Bill DeWolfe.

My first real encounter with Universalists was here in Syracuse in 1959 at a joint convention called for the purpose of hammering out the details of the merger of the two religious bodies. I discovered that there were many at that gathering, both Unitarians and Universalists, who were fearful that the new association would abandon its heritage, especially its Christian heritage. I recall at one point in all the debate, we were all called to vote on a proposed wording of one clause of the statement of purposes for the new body which made explicit reference to Jesus. All votes which were close required delegates to stand to be counted. As those who were in favour of this particular proposal got up, someone began a chorus of "Stand up, stand up for Jesus" and almost immediately someone else shouted out, "Sit down, for Christ's sake!"

It was only later that I learned that this Syracuse church in which we are today meeting was one which led the fight of Universalists against the merger. I have only recently served the Worcester church which lead the fight of Unitarians against the merger. Each of these churches had a neighboring church in its city of the other denomination, so each thought it knew very well what those others were like. Yet even in Syracuse in 1959, I realized that the Unitarians who were against merger and the Universalists who were against merger were in turn very much alike.

(And while I was Minister in Worcester, I served as president of the Universalist Historical Society and helped to raise the 20 thousand dollars needed to publish the Russell Miller history, so I hope that my Universalist credentials are now legitimate, even if they are by adoption.)

The old Universalist theological doctrine had ethical consequences. For Universalists, moral behavior could not be based on fear and guilt. We are all part of a divine plan, they taught. The nature of that plan is love. Our response to that knowledge that we are part of the plan is to be responsible, to express love in our own lives. Love's labours yield love's fruit. If we know that we are saved, we know that we are worth saving, we know that we are worth something, so we inevitably demonstrate that in the

way we live our lives.

In our time, can we be so sure? Dare we believe that we are part of a divine plan? Can we, like our Universalist forbears preach a religion of surety and security?

Our time is a time marked by disease and unease. There is much to be scared of, even scared to death of. I will not attempt a complete catalogue of our fears, but let me simply list a few of the most obvious:

- * We are afraid of the danger of the destruction of civilization (or at least what we know as civilization) through a nuclear holocaust.

- * We are afraid of the danger of the collapse of the ecology, the destruction of the environment through the rape of the land and water and the resulting pollution.

- * We are afraid of the danger of the collapse of our economy through continued recession and inflation and unemployment.

- * We are afraid of the dangers of cancer and other diseases caused by the food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe.

- * We are afraid of the danger of too great a dependence on technology and our thus creating a dehumanized world of numbers and computers.

- * We are afraid of the danger of the breakdown of our democratic institutions and the loss of personal freedom in an authoritarian state.

- * We are afraid of the dangers of crime and the loss of our possessions, so we adopt a barricade mentality which makes prisons of our homes.

What is our response to all this fear? Some of us lapse into a sense of hopelessness and futility. Some of us try to grab what we can, for the time is short. Others of us try to escape into religious cults or quasi-psychological cures.

The prophets of doom and gloom were never more vocal. But the problem is that their predictions of peril may paralyze us. All the trends I just listed must be opposed, but preachings of fear and guilt won't work. They are no deterrence, any more than the death penalty is a deterrence to crime.

We need, to echo John Murray's great phrase, to preach "not hell, but hope and courage." Our Universalist forbears were not preaching "no hell," as I have said, they were arguing about its location. If human beings abandon their responsibilities for each other, they make the world more hellish. But if we can feel hope, we will work in the world. Give me that old time Universalist religion - I say we're still good enough for it.

I began with the story of Murray's miracle. Murray did not believe that the series of events was some amazing coincidence; he believed it was all the result of Divine Providence. I called it a miracle, but remember that there is nothing supernatural in the story. Nothing happened contrary to the laws of nature. They were natural events in a natural world, yet they shaped human history.

Murray's response when he became convinced that he had been moved by God was to get organized, to work in the world and not withdraw from it. The Universalist religious body he founded did not isolate or insulate itself. It was never a sect, separating itself. It never tried to create an island of purity and innocence. It always identified itself with the whole (just as Unitarianism always did). The old time Universalists were not cultists nor were they narcissists. They believed that the fate of each was tied up with the fate of all - of all human beings.

Love's labours are not lost. We live in a world which is our home, which we can make our home. We all belong simply because we are here. We are part of our world. We are human agents in a great evolutionary process which we can believe is good. This world is worthy, this life is worthwhile. We human beings have the energy and the insight to avert the threatened destructions. Love's labours are not lost. We are good enough - all of us. To be human is to want to be whole and wholesome and holy, and we can be.

We meet on the eve of Halloween, on the eve of All Hallows' Eve. The next day is All Saints' Day; the day after, All Souls' Day. Who are the saints? According to the traditional doctrine, the saints are those who are with God, who are, in a sense, connected to God. Old time Universalist religion taught that all souls are connected to the divine, that all human beings are never separated from the divine as long as we are not separated from the world or from each other.

**SOFT SEATS AND NO HELL
THE UNIVERSALIST IMPULSE
NOW AND THEN**

The Ninth Annual Address
On Universalist History
Ethics and Theology

By
The Reverend Richard S. Gilbert

155th Annual Session
New York State Convention of Universalists
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The Reverend Richard S. Gilbert received a B.S. degree in 1958 and a B.D. degree in 1961 from St. Lawrence University. Ordained in 1961, he served as Assistant Minister, First Unitarian Church of Cleveland, OH. (1961-'64), then as Minister, First Unitarian Church of Ithaca, NY. (1965-'70). From 1970 to the present he has been Minister to the First Unitarian Church of Rochester, NY. In 1977 he received the degree of D. Min. from Colgate Rochester Divinity School. In 1985, the Starr King School of the Ministry awarded him the honorary degree of Doctor of Sacred Theology. He was a Merrill Fellow at the Harvard Divinity School in 1986.

Dr. Gilbert has been a Board Member and Chairman of the UU Service Committee, the International Assn. For Religious Freedom, the UUA Task Force on Economic Justice and the UUA Social Concerns Grants Panel. He has been actively involved in social action and civil liberties groups during his ministry.

His writings have been published in book or pamphlet form including: "The Prophetic for a New Social Gospel", "A Call to Justice: A workbook for Study and Action", "Religious Education and Social Action" (co-authored with Roberta Nelson), "Building Your Own Theology 1", and "Building Your Own Theology 2", and "How Much Do We Deserve? An Inquiry in Distributive Justice".

**"SOFT SEATS AND NO HELL" — THE UNIVERSALIST
IMPULSE THEN AND NOW**
The Reverend Richard S. Gilbert

In his book on the first century of American Universalism, The Larger Hope, Russell Miller writes of the Universalist General Convention which was established in 1833: "The Amount of activity and the number of delegates and visitors at convention meetings had become sufficiently great by the mid-1830's to raise the possibility of extending meetings beyond the customary two-day period. Some felt that there were too many sermons (an average of six each session) and too few opportunities to transact business; a plea was made to repress this desire for preaching which seemed to prevail among the clergy." (134)

I don't believe it possible to "repress this desire for preaching" among contemporary Unitarian Universalist clergy. I certainly don't want to do it, and I hope this body will not succumb to that 19th century mini-heresy which Miller recounts.

On the other hand I do not agree with Thomas Whittemore, a 19th century Universalist minister, when he wrote of one parish experience: "I had not half enough to do. To prepare two sermons a week...and take care of the parish, did not occupy one-third of my time." (297)

At any rate I am delighted to be here delivering the annual address to the New York State Convention of Universalists. I feel quite at home here despite the fact that in my ministry I have served three congregations Unitarian by history. I am a birth-right child of this convention, having been born into the Universalist Church in Bristol. My wife Joyce is likewise a once-born Universalist from Fort Plain. It's like coming home.

"Soft Seats and No Hell". The phrase tickled my theological funny bone and this spring I began to research its source. Attending the Vancouver, British Columbia, General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association in June, I sought out the great historians of the movement. Not a one had heard of it. I was understandably worried for it was the title of a sermon begging to be preached.

Then, upon my return, a moment of grace: Two responses to my urgent SOS were on my desk. I learned the phrase came from

the Rev. Lewis H. Robinson, Minister of the Pullman Memorial Universalist Church in Albion, which he served from 1921-1941. He evidently used the phrase to encourage people to come to church.

In this irreverent way Robinson put his finger on the distinctive doctrine of 19th century Universalism - Universal Salvation, the final harmony of all souls with God. For many, this theological concept is anachronistic eschatology - the ultimate end of things - a charmingly irrelevant bit of 19th century nostalgia, a theology for the good old days.

However, lest we pass over the issue so easily, we should note that it is a burning issue with some today, witness a paid ad in the Boston Globe on May 21, 1983. The message, laced with Biblical proofs, threatens eternal damnation unless the reader "repents of sin and accepts Jesus as Savior and Lord." (UU World 6/15/83, p1).

I suggest universal salvation, reinterpreted, is yet a distinctive doctrine for Unitarian Universalists in this time. I further submit that it is a most radical doctrine and this perhaps suggests one reason why our liberal religious movement has not grown as did its predecessor Universalist denomination a century and a half ago. The Universalist impulse - to save humanity - to include all people in the human family - is alive and well, but it has changed its beat.

The agnostic Robert Ingersoll once wrote: "The Unitarian Church has done more than any other church - and maybe more than all other churches - to substitute character for creed... I want to thank the Unitarian Church for what it has done. I want to thank the Universalist Church too. They at least believe in a God who is a gentleman... they believe, at least, in a heavenly father who will leave the latch string out until the last child gets home."

Let me pursue that idea first by inviting you for a brisk jog through the history of the concept of universal salvation. Universalism as an idea goes back at least to the 13th century B.C.E. in the religion of Akhneton, "The First Heretic", whose belief in one universal God was a thunderbolt in a polytheistic time.

The Biblical tradition is rich with universalistic imagery - in the Noah story God makes a covenant with the whole human race after the flood. The Hebrew prophets proclaimed a God, not

of a particular people, even their own, but a universal God of all the people of the earth. In Amos 9:7 we read: "To Me, O Israelites, you are just like Ethiopians" declares the Lord. "True, I brought Israel up from the Land of Egypt, but also the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir".

And in Jeremiah we find these words:

"O Lord, There is none like You:
You are great and Your name is great in power.
Who would not revere You, O King of the Nations?
For that is Your due,
Since among all the wise of the nations
And among all their royalty
There is none like You." 10:6-7

The Talmudic tradition expresses ethical universalism when it condemns the rejoicing of the Hebrew people in the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea at the time of the Exodus: "He rebuked them saying 'My Handiwork' (The Egyptians) is drowning in the sea; would you utter song before me?" Even today Jews recite only half the prayers of praise at Passover as a reminder of the humanity of all people.

Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan is universalism in narrative form to remind the Jewish People even the hated Samaritans were of God. And the Apostle Paul wrote "In Christ there is neither black nor white, male nor female, neither Greek, nor gentile nor Jew, but all are one..."

In the third century of our era, Origen wrote of God as "Spirit", "Light", and the Source of all Mind", declaring universal salvation from a merciful God. Punishment was a self-inflicted consequence of sin.

"From the tradition of Bernard of Clairvaux in the Middle Ages there survives the story of a woman seen in a vision. She was carrying a pitcher and a torch. Why these? With the pitcher she would quench the fires of hell, and with the torch she would burn the pleasures of heaven. After these were gone, people would be able to love God for God's sake." (A Cry of Absence, p. 59). There is a similar story from Readings from the Mystics of Islam about Rabi'a. (The Practical Meditator, by Meserve, p. 86).

All this laid the foundation for James Relly's 18th Century enunciation of Universal Salvation in England. It was a disillu-

sioned Methodist preacher, John Murray, who brought this heresy to these shores in 1770.

Now let me pause in our jog to formulate the beginnings of a thesis. Universalism grew slowly as a rag-tag scattering of souls who had outgrown Calvinist pre-destination with its foreordination of some to heaven and some to hell. The Early Universalists had a hard time gaining recognition and adherents.

There were two John Murrays in Boston at the turn of the 19th Century, "Damnation Murray," and "Salvation Murray," to distinguish Calvinist from Universalist. The unpopularity of the latter, our John Murray, is evident in these words from his autobiography describing a Sunday morning sermon in Boston: "At length, a large rugged stone, weighty, about a pound and a half, was forcibly thrown in at the window behind my back; it missed me. Had it sped, as it was aimed, it must have killed me.

"Lifting it up, and waving it in the view of the people, I observed, 'This argument is solid, and weighty, but it is neither rational, nor convincing... Not all the stones in Boston, except they stop my breath, shall shut my mouth, or arrest my testimony.'"

With this spirit, the Universalists persisted and prospered. One can understand the appeal of being told one is a child of God destined for salvation after being harangued as "sinner in the hands of an angry God." So popular did it become that by 1832 its 500,000 adherents made it the 6th largest denomination in the nation. (Miller 162) By 1836 it was 7th largest although it had grown to some 600,000 adherents. At its peak in 1850 it composed no less than 3% of the total population (164).

Its popularity was perhaps as much due to the negativism of its competitors as to its own positive appeal. The rapid growth of Universalism in western New York in the 1830s has been attributed in part to the very fact that "people became satiated with protracted meetings and revivals." (M 273). "One result of the general spirit of revivalism in Ohio, according to Universalist interpretation, was making many converts from the faith of endless woe.'" (273)

The popularity of an optimistic faith in which all would be saved had an understandable appeal. But by the time of consolidation in 1961 it had become one of the smallest denominations. Why?

There are many reasons that could be forwarded - lack of church central organization, lack of funds, suspicion of the institution by very individualistic people, among others. But among them I suggest that once popular theological universalism had lost its appeal, a much more demanding ethical universalism came into being.

That is, by the last quarter of the 19th century, the scientific revolution, Biblical criticism and a nascent secularism simply made hell less fearful and heaven more remote. People who had before found universal salvation appealing for their souls, now did not worry about their ultimate destiny any more. Universalism became just one more protestant denomination.

I cite some of the sermons of the day to document my thesis. Dr. F.W. Betts told the New York State Convention in 1895: "Our fathers found theology encamped in human life, waving the flag of eternal misery. They charged that flag until there is not a citadel of conservatism where it floats triumphantly today. The Universalist church has won its great theological battle... However conservative many denominations may still be, however much remains toward liberalizing theology, the lines of difference are not plain and well defined... The mountains that stand in the way of Christian progress are not theological, but moral, ethical and social... I have but one dream. It is to redeem that mass from sin." (UHS V. 6, p. 42)

Dr. John Murray Atwood told the Convention in Troy in 1927: "When the denomination changed gradually from a controversial attitude to a constructive ministry it lost a certain element of the spectacular and exciting that went with a polemical movement.

"There was an inevitable shrinking in numbers and a lessening of interest, although the new work was in a way far more practical and important. But it was so much more difficult. It was so easy to talk enthusiastically about the salvation of all souls in the future. But to persuade men, even ourselves, to be brothers and friends to this and that man of alien race or class or character, was a very different proposition. Yet this was our new gospel." Ibid. 42

John Coleman Adams said: "...All the reviving of race prejudice, or class distinction, of international hatreds is a challenge to

Universalism... If we are to be true to our own faith, we must be counted invariably upon the side of him whose humanity is slighted... whose divinity is treated with impiety." (Johnson Paper p. 8)

And so, while theological universalism had become a popular belief, ethical universalism had not. The rigors and discipline of an ethic that takes a Universalist, or what I call, "A God's eye view of the world", were such as to elude popularity. The concept of a one world community, however appealing in the abstract, is far less so when it means equal treatment of one's immediate neighbors of every race, religion class and nationality. In short, it is simply hard to love one's neighbor, near and far.

In the words of Eli Powers near the turn of the century: "Universalism as an eschatology is a comforting faith for all who think of a future life. Universalism as a regulator of human life is the most exacting and difficult faith which calls (people) to its support. Universalism teaches us the race is so bound together that an injury to one member is an injury to all." (Lalone, p. 73).

What's more, there were critics of universal salvation in any form.

Hosea Ballou received this letter to the editor at The Universalist Magazine, April 8, 1820: "My good Friend: Continue as you have done widely to disseminate your princely magazine, and be assured that you will shortly have one of the most exalted thrones among us. Yours with all the love of a fiend, Nick Lucifer." (Our Liberal Heritage, p. 23)

Peter Cartwright, a stern critic of Universalism, put it this way: "What has a Universalist, who really and sincerely believes that doctrine, to fear? Just nothing at all; for this flesh-pleasing, conscience-soothing doctrine will not only justify him in his neglect of God and man, but gives fallen nature an unlimited license to serve the devil with greediness in any and every possible way that his degenerate fallen soul requires or desires." (Miller, p. xv).

In those days the function of hell was as deterrent to immoral behavior; Heaven's function was to encourage virtuous conduct. it was thought only these external restraints and incentives could produce goodness. The early Universalists had the temerity to suggest the model of a compassionate Jesus and the vision of a

Loving God were sufficient for the creation of character.

At any rate, Universalism abolished Dante's eternal hell for a temporal one of human creation. This, however, did not stop Universalist men and women from reforming the world of their time.

This demanding, ethical Universalism grew out of theological Universalism. Hosea Ballou had written: "There is one inevitable criterion of judgment touching religious faith in doctrinal matters: Can you reduce it to practice? If not, have none of it."

The Universalist General Reform Association, organized in 1846 recognized the word of God" and especially the New Testament Scriptures, as the basis of all genuine reforms." (Miller 132)

William S. Balch had seen the connection of theological and ethical Universalism: " To whom does this work of correction more properly belong than to Universalists? We have the best theory that can be devised - Universal benevolence - justice, mercy, equality, peace, holiness, happiness, for all men. What can be better? But of how much worth is the doctrine without its application?... How can it be accomplished? Ah, that HOW is the difficult word..." (M212)

John Murray had taken in a slave as a member of the first Universalist Church in America in Gloucester, and championed the separation of church and state. Benjamin Rush, signer of the Declaration of Independence, was father of American Psychiatry, founder of the first anti-slavery society in America and promoted a Department of Peace. Adin Ballou was a Christian pacifist who influenced Leo Tolstoy. There was Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, whose biography was called a "sketch of compulsion". Olympia Brown was the first woman ordained by a denomination, in the northeastern part of our state; she was an ardent suffragette.

However, ethical universalism was not destined to be as popular a movement as theological universalism. In theological universalism God acted to save humankind; we were encouraged, but not really required to act in kind. As Ambrose Beirce puts it in his Devil's Dictionary: "The Universalist is one who foregoes the advantage of hell for persons of another faith." (p. 138)

It is so easy to tick off these reformers as if all Universalists had made an easy translation of theological into ethical Universalism. But such was not the case and the pages of our history are filled with internecine strife. Sylvanus Cobb, reformer and denominational editor, was active in the anti-slavery cause which had little or no popular appeal among Universalists at the time. "One friend expressed his sorrow that Cobb could not publish 'a good Universalist paper without meddling with Rum and Niggers.'" (M303) The General Convention of the Universalist Church did not go on record against slavery until 1855.

After the war Universalist preachers and editors focused on the "culmination of industrial and commercial abuses... with accompanying increase in poverty, suffering and crime," as G.H. Harmon of Tufts College put it. Dr. Frank Oliver Hall preached successive sermons at Universalist General Convention gatherings on "The Gospel in an Age of Indifference" (1909) and "A Social Program for the Universalist Church" (1911). As a result, the Convention appointed Dr. Hall Chair of a Social Service Commission. The Secretary of that Commission was Clarence R. Skinner.

Skinner, late Dean of Crane School of Religion at Tufts University, essentially translated theological Universalism with its concern for the Fatherhood of god into ethical Universalism with its concern for the Brotherhood of Man. His book *The Social Implications of Universalism* was a ringing declaration of faith in the Social Gospel, the application of religion to the social order.

Skinner's appointment as Professor of Applied Christianity was not universally approved, as some believed him too radical in his politics and potentially a dangerous influence on students. He was a pacifist, and virtually ostracized on campus when it was taken over by the Navy in World War I.

Failing to find a church that embodied his demanding ethical Universalism, he founded and for 17 years led the Community church in Boston. He returned to become Vice-Dean and Dean at Crane, teaching until the end of World War II, which he also opposed. Skinner reminds us the translation of theological into ethical Universalism is never an easy one.

He began his book, *A Religion for Greatness*, by taking issue with Father Divine who said: "Metaphysics don't tangibilatate."

His theology of the divine indwelling surfaced in his social commitments. He tangibilized his beliefs. His was a kind of social mysticism, a linking of a universal spiritual vision of the unity of the race with the universally inclusive ethical imperative. His criterion of religion was not the heavenly salvation of the individual soul but the earthly salvation of the human race, A Beloved Community of Earth.

"If people are taught to be dissatisfied with the status quo in theology," he wrote, "their logic will inexorably drive them to the same dissatisfaction with the status quo of politics, or of industry. Light the fuse and the fire will reach the bomb. Emancipate a man's spirit and he will carry his freedom into all he says and does. From defying authority in ecclesiasticism he will progress to denying authority in politics. From fighting tyrannies in theology he will lead on the fight against the tyrannies of the commercial oligarchies." (SIU p. 19).

"Faith" he used to say, was "belief plus", and the plus was that "force which carries belief into action." Faith is a form of human energy. God in the creative power at the center of things working toward law and order and justice. "The modern interest in Christ is pragmatic rather than dogmatic," he wrote. (UHS 1967-8). There was no other way than ethical Universalism: "It is greatness - Universalism - or perish." (Ibid. 120)

As a born Universalist I have inherited that tradition. I can recall collecting dimes for the Clara Barton and Eliot P. Joslin camps for diabetic children. I can remember sending money to the Jordan Neighborhood House in Suffolk, Virginia, an historic attempt at black empowerment. In the summer of 1965 Joyce and I worked at Jordan and came to know Annie B. Willis, daughter of its founder. In the summers of 1957 and 1958 I worked in a refugee camp in West Germany for the Universalist Service Committee, later serving as a board member of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee.

The Universalist impulse is alive and well in these institutional expressions of concern for the earthly salvation of the human family.

In theological Universalism it was the love of God for humanity which was decisive for heavenly salvation. In ethical Universalism, it is we who are required to be the agents of any

earthly salvation. God may for some become the symbol and motivation for action.

Universal salvation in its ethical expression is more important now than ever. Despite the fact we live in a global village on spaceship earth, we seem more and more divided as people. The Universalist impulse stands in prophetic judgement over divisions of class and speaks the religious word to those powers and principalities, public and private, which increase the gap between the haves and have-nots in our land and abroad.

It stands in judgement over those policies and policy makers who increase divisions of race in our land. A universalist perspective, in my opinion, would oppose not only the manifest racism of the Ku Klux Klan, but the more subtle racism in the evisceration of the Federal Civil Rights commission, equal opportunity and affirmative action programs.

Ethical universalism enables us to take a God's eye view of the world, in which all nations and peoples are worthy of respect as children of God or Humanity, depending on your theology. To label an adversary "the focus of evil in the modern world," to carve the world up into the good and the evil, is to divide the nations and make a shambles of a universalist perspective which agrees with Arnold Toynbee that the most idolatrous religion of the 20th century is nationalism.

Universal salvation now has come to mean global solidarity. The unit for salvation is no longer the individual; it is the world community. Universalism implies we become planetary citizens with a world conscience, citizens of the world before we are citizens of a nation state.

I full well realize a truly "God's eye view of the world" is impossible for finite human beings, but with moral imagination we can begin to liberate ourselves from personal self-interest and national chauvinism. Astronaut Rusty Schweikert spoke of this experience of viewing the earth as "no frames, no boundaries." We need that leap of moral imagination.

By now you are probably saying, he is getting into politics and what's a nice middle-aged born Universalist (Unitarian, doing there? The point is that as we move from a theological universalism to an ethical universalism, we move from the general to the particular.

It is like the story of the preacher who was candidating for a pulpit in a small country town. After the first sermon, "Thou Shalt Not Steal", he received rave reviews and many wished to extend the call on the basis on only one sermon. However, after the second sermon the preacher was run out of town, tarred and feathered. He had preached on the theme: "Thou Shalt Not Steal - Chickens." Between the two is a world of difference.

The universalist impulse is part of what I call "convictional theology." If we think of the theological - our relation to the ultimate - as the vertical dimension of religion, and the ethical our relation to our neighbors on earth - as the horizontal dimension of religion, then the vertical puts pressure on the horizontal. Our basic beliefs cry out for action. "There is no vacuum in the spiritual life, as there is no vacuum in nature. An ultimate concern must express itself ethically, socially. We walk with a Bible in one hand and a daily newspaper in the other. The holy thing in life is infusing the one with the other."

"Soft seats and no Hell," is a homely but apt summary of theological universalism. Its appeal swelled the ranks of Universalist churches. The theological impulse was strong. When theological universalism lost that appeal, the movement was left with a rigorous ethical universalism which is controversial to interpret, difficult to practice. The hard seats of social responsibility greet us in our churches now, and it can be hellish to practice that ethic.

The growth of the Universalist impulse today may well not be numerical. We have a hard act to follow. Ethical universalism is not for the fainthearted. The only growth we may achieve is growth in will and wisdom, in commitment and action. If that is the price we must pay to follow the Universalist impulse, I suggest we must pay it. The church of Benjamin Rush, Clara Barton, Olympia Brown and Clarence Skinner will not and should not be denied.

Universalism is an idea whose time has come. Walter Henry McPherson said that you Universalists are sitting on the biggest word in the language. It is time to improve the premises or get off. I would rather try to improve the premises and act on the promises than get off.

**I'M OK, YOU'RE OK, HE'S OK, SHE'S OK,
IT'S OK, THEY'RE OK**

**The Tenth Annual Address
on Universalist History
Ethics and Theology**

**By
The Reverend Donna Morrison-Reed, Ph.D.
The Reverend Mark Morrison-Reed, Ph.D.**

**156th Annual Session
New York State Convention of Universalists
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The Reverend Donna Morrison-Reed received her B.A. degree at McGill University, Canada, in 1975. She and the Reverend Mark Morrison-Reed both received M.A. degrees from the University of Chicago in 1977 and their D. Min. Degree from Meadville-Lombard in 1979. Ordained in 1979, they served as co-ministers of the First Universalist Church of Rochester, NY from 1979 to '88 and are now serving as co-ministers to the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto, Ontario.

Dr. Mark Morrison-Reed is the author of "Black Pioneers In A White Denomination" (1980), 1984) and "How to Open the Door" (1990) and was joint editor with Jalqui James of "Been In the Storm So Long" (1991). The three volumes were published by Skinner House of Beacon Press.

**I'M OK, YOU'RE OK, HE'S OK, SHE'S OK, IT'S OK,
THEY'RE OK**

The Reverend Donna Morrison-Reed, D. Min.

The Reverend Mark Morrison-Reed, D. Min.

Over the last 100 years Universalism has been slowly but surely dying. This cobblestone church was organized 150 years ago in 1834. Then it was a living institution ministering to man, woman and child. Today, it lives again in a different way but in 1895 it perished as an ongoing religious institution. It was soon followed by many others. A century ago we laid claim to being the sixth largest denomination in the United States. Today, even when combined with the Unitarians we are among the smallest. In 1835, the year after this society was founded, there were 663 other Universalist societies in America, and we had over 300 Universalist societies in New York State alone. The Universalist Companion and Almanac published in 1856 records that by 1846 there were 1096 societies across the country. Today, the entire UUA is made of a little over a thousand societies, and this convention is made up of 30 churches, only 16 of whom are represented here at our annual meeting today. Once our churches outnumbered our clergy two to one. Today, the UUA has more clergy than churches. Yes, once upon a time we were a growing and vital movement in this country. Today, we are but a remnant.

Paradoxically, it is over that same 100 years that Universalist ideas - universal salvation, the idea of a loving God - have become more acceptable and have spread well beyond the confines of this denomination. In the early 1800's as Universalism was growing rapidly in western New York so was The Church of the Latter Day Saints and universal salvation was part of their faith. And into this century, as the liberalizing effect of Darwinism and Higher Criticism penetrated into the mainline denominations, Universalist beliefs have become more acceptable.

It has also been in the last 100 years that the field of psychology has been born, and has grown to paramount significance. It's proponents have sought to explain individual idiosyncrasies and deviation not with the judgement filled words of the times - sin and damnation - but more in a mode of understanding and care. Their "God"? If they have one it may not be loving, but neither is that God angry. More often it is simply benign.

It is in the last 100 years that our own western culture and religion has been broadened and informed by other religions and cultures. We no longer live in a world that sees everyone else solely as "heathens" in need of salvation. We are more likely to take parts of eastern religions, meditation perhaps, parts of western religions, parts of the modern social sciences, parts of popular culture and psychology, and weave from them a tapestry which sees religious and cultural difference not as threatening, but as enlarging and nurturing the human spirit. In this way, much of our world has grown to accept a universalist sense of inclusiveness, one articulated as a belief in a loving god and salvation for all.

So it has been that the more pluralistic and more open to modern ideas society has become, the more respectable has our Universalist faith become, as well. But, paradoxically, the less we Universalists have found ourselves under attack by orthodoxy, the more our own fervor has waned. The less has been said of a righteous and angry God meeting out damnation to sinners, the easier it has become for those who have believed in universal salvation to remain in the mainline denominations. The more has been heard of the loving Father and his Son who intercedes for his children, the less distinctive has the universalist message become.

And further, it has been said by some, that it is exactly because the idea of a loving God has become more prevalent and more accepted, that Universalism has floundered. It is what one UU colleague once referred to as the Reston, Virginia syndrome. For those of you who do not know, Reston, VA, is a planned community outside of Washington, DC. It is the kind of community, with its well laid out streets, its well positioned parks and schools, its government civil servants, that should be literally crawling with potential Unitarian Universalists. Instead, the community has a little church that for a long time could only support a half time ministry. Why? Because there is nothing for the good UU to butt his or her head up against. Why go to church on Sunday when you could be washing your car or reading the Washington Post, when the tennis court is across the street and the golf course runs through your backyard. There is no need to go to church if everyone is sympathetic to your cause, if everyone is like-minded, if your community is homogeneous. It is not like

being a Unitarian Universalist in the Bible Belt, where you have to band together simply in order to provide an alternative to the Fundamentalist Nursery School for your preschooler. Reston VA, is also not like Upper New York State was 100 years ago, when Universalists were not allowed to use the YMCA, when Christian ministers would cross the street to avoid meeting the local Universalist minister, when the Universalists were a favorite target of orthodox Evangelists, one of whom in Rochester almost made the headlines in the newspaper when he called the devil the first Universalist.

There is something about a hostile environment that makes individuals band together, to reaffirm their values and themselves. And there is something about a tolerant community - and believe me, despite the moral majority, ours is a comparatively tolerant community - that leads individuals to relax, take it easy, not feel quite so anxious about getting to church each Sunday morning.

But bemoaning our decline is not helpful. It is also not what we had in mind for this talk. Instead, Mark and I would like to look at how our message has grown. Where has the ascent of our message led? What does the idea of a loving God and Universal Salvation mean today? If we have not been spreading the message, then who has? And what have they been saying?

First, there has been the liberalization of the Christian message, with its emphasis less on sin and damnation, and more on God's love - among the theologians, but more importantly in the popular press, on television and in popular books. Where does one hear that we are worthless damnable sinners who need fear an angry God if we do not right our ways and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? Believe it or not, you don't hear it much anymore. Listen to your TV evangelists. Graham, Schuler, Roberts, even Falwell don't preach fire and brimstone; it won't sell. Of course, we are all sinners but misguided rather than wicked sinner. So you'll hear how Mrs. Jones prayed and God answered her prayers. You'll hear the witnesses of the misguided entrepreneurs DeLorean, President Nixon's aid Charles Colson and revolutionary Eldridge Cleaver and how their lives changed when they were born again through Jesus. The fear of eternal damnation is still there, but it is not out in the open like it was 100 years ago. Rather, the message has become directed to people

who are threatened by pluralism, who long to have good and bad clearly delineated. They are given a heavenly authority figure to instruct them. The message is directed at those who feel forlorn, misguided and rejected. They are embraced by a loving God. For these and others the question has shifted. It is no longer how do I overcome human depravity but rather how do I live with my emptiness, and how do I know right from wrong. The answer? A loving, if paternalistic, God.

Liberal Judaism has shifted ground, as well. In Rabbi Harold Kushner's book When Bad Things Happen To Good People he writes: "I no longer hold God responsible for illnesses, accidents, and natural disasters, because I realize that I gain little and I lose so much when I blame God for those things. I can worship a God who hates suffering but cannot eliminate it, more easily than I can worship a God who chooses to make children suffer and die, for whatever exalted reason. Some years ago, when the "death of God" theology was a fad, I remember seeing a bumper sticker that read "My God is not dead; sorry about yours." I guess my bumper sticker reads "My God is not cruel; sorry about yours." Elsewhere Kushner asks us: "Isn't my feeling of compassion for the afflicted just a reflection of the compassion [God] feels when He sees the suffering of His creatures?" The question is rhetorical, the answer is yes.

Beyond the religious realm there has been the rise in psychology's recognition of the human need to be loved and accepted. In many respects, love is the center piece of psychology's contribution to modernity. From Leo Buscaglia to Erick Fromm love is more often than not the answer. In The Road Less Travelled Scott Peck writes: "But what is this force that pushes us as individuals and as a whole species to grow against the natural resistance of our own lethargy?" We have already labeled it. It is love. Love was defined as "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth." When we grow, it is because we are working at it, and we are working at it because we love ourselves. It is through love that we elevate ourselves. And it is through our love for others that we assist others to elevate themselves. Love, the extension of the self, is the very act of evolution. It is evolution in progress. The evolutionary force, present in all of life, manifests itself in [hu]mankind as human love. Among humanity love is the miraculous force that defies the natural law of entropy." That is what Scott Peck, the psychiatrist,

bases his vision of mental health upon - love.

I'm OK You're OK, Thomas Harris' book on Transactional Analysis is simply one more example of this approach. He writes: "I am a person. You are a person. Without you I am not a person, for only through you is language made possible and only through language is thought made possible, and only through thought is humanness made possible. You have made me important. Therefore, I am important and you are important. If I devalue you, I devalue myself. This is the rationale of the position I'm OK - You're OK. Through this position only are we persons instead of things." Later he goes on: "It may be that our civilization is rapidly arriving at an unprecedented confrontation: we either respect each other's existence or we all perish...Perhaps we are approaching another significant point, where because of the necessity of self-preservation we shall undergo another mutation, we shall be able to leap again, to reflect - with new hope based on the enlightenment of how we are put together - I am important, you are important. I'm OK - You're OK." What else is this but universal salvation - if we are not all God's children, if we are not all of us saved, then we will all perish. There can no longer be **them** vs. **us**.

I'm OK, You're OK, He's OK, She's OK, It's OK, They're OK. We are all of us good people, struggling in a trying and difficult world. What is this but a reaffirmation of Universalism? What is this but a modern expression of that ancient idea of a loving God? Universalists are no longer carrying this message alone. In fact, very far from it.

But does this mean that we are no longer necessary? Have we done our job in helping to bring the idea of God's love to all people? Is this decline of ours simply the natural by-product of having done our job so well? Or were we simply ahead of the times 100 years ago, and now we are being discarded after the rest of the world has finally caught up?

In one word: NO! It is not the end of the road for us, nor for this convention. We still bear good news, news we need to proclaim within our liberal faith and far beyond. Our Universalist message is still needed in this world, and our way of saying it is still needed. Certainly the message of God's love of all humanity is more widely accepted today than ever before, and that is good. But there are some very important differences between our way of saying it, and others. And those differences are crucial.

First of all, it is easy to see that although the message of God's love and the message of universal salvation is more prevalent now than it was 100 years ago, it has by no means completely taken over our thinking and our world. There remain Christians who are more concerned with saving souls for heaven than with saving bodies here on earth. And although television evangelists emphasize a loving and caring personal relationship with Jesus, hell is still portrayed as a very real place, with severe consequences for the non-believer. The vision may be less glaring, but this portrayal rests upon the basic assumption that humanity is unambiguously separated into the saved and the unsaved. Every church has criteria that separate the wheat from the chaff be it baptism, election, conversion or good works. And this reality can not help but make for a "them vs. us" mentality which runs counter to the universalist belief in one human fellowship.

There is the underlying basis of much of Christianity which requires that you have to do something in order to deserve God's love. Christianity's God still uses the carrot and stick routine - the basis of good behavior is a threat. It is not the unconditional, most basic, underlying all kind of love that the Universalists have been preaching for years.

Psychology, on the other hand, has seen the need for unconditional love. They have seen that every human individual needs to feel loved in order to function effectively in society. But their love has been too limited. It is the rare psychologist who sees love as a great underlying divine presence which undergirds us all, allowing us both to give and to receive the deepest kind of love - the kind of love that can truly sustain this world. Instead, psychology's love becomes: How can I get my needs met? Love is something you have to get. Pop psychology's best sellers abound. These "Self-Help Books" tell us: How to find happiness, how to get the man or the woman you really want, how to identify your needs and get them met, how to find true happiness in life. These are questions that need answers, but the truth of the matter is that until we can truly love ourselves we will be unable to love others.

The problem is, as with modern Christianity, this is not enough. Christianity's love is deep and undergirding, but limited. It is only for those who have earned it, by accepting Jesus as their lord and savior. Psychology's love is a personal quest which is universal in the sense that it is there for everyone. But it can become very self-

centered and limiting. Both are necessary. Both respond to human need. Both perceive aspects of a truth. But Universalism brings us even closer to that truth.

The key that we hold is our belief in Universal salvation. Behind that notion is the recognition that we need to be loved in order to give love, and that those who are loved will in turn love others. Universal salvation: no matter what we do, God so loves us that she will not and can not consign even a single human individual to eternal damnation. Universal salvation is really Universal love: the recognition that love is the grounding, the basis of all. And the argument Universalism has had with the rest of Christianity is over the Universalist conviction that love is not something that can be coerced out of anyone. Unlike much of Christianity we do not hold that those who fail to give love or to follow the commandments will lose God's love. No one draws love out of another with threats. God's love is given to all.

But what does God's love mean? What does it feel like to know that God loves us? Let's face it. Some of us don't even believe in God. And for those who do, we are very often not quite sure what that conviction means, what it actually is that we believe in. We know that God is not a great bearded white man sitting on a throne up in the clouds. We use words sometimes to describe this God: Ultimate Good, Universal Love, the First Cause. But what does it feel like to be loved by the First Cause?

Perhaps the psychologist's have part of the answer when they say you must love yourself. Sometimes I think God's Universal Love really feels like a deep inner conviction that you love yourself, that you are lovable and loved.

I think you can look around and see those people who feel the presence of God's love, or that deep inner conviction that they are loved. They are the individuals who are not afraid to be alone with themselves. They are the great moral leaders throughout history who are not afraid, in the face of the mighty, to stand up and make their beliefs known. They are the individuals who can give love to others as if they had a bottomless well within themselves from which to draw. The great recognition of Universalism is that you do not have to force people to love others. The commandments are not threats - if they are not fulfilled that God will withdraw his love. The reality of the situation is that those who feel God's infinite love within themselves will in turn feel so good about themselves that

they will not be able to help themselves in returning it.

Where does this love come from? Psychologists would say it comes from your relationship with your parents or your earliest caretakers. The Judeo-Christian tradition would claim that love comes from God. I would say that the deep and abiding sense of love comes from God, through your parents and those around you. It is the spirit of God, or the spirit of Universal love if you prefer, that empowers us and those around us. It is to the extent that your parents felt loved themselves that they in turn were able to give love back to you. It is to the extent that you feel an undergirding of love that you will be able to give it to others.

For me, there is a love which pervades the individual, and finds its home deep within the human soul. It is the love that we Universalists have been spreading the word about in this country for over 200 years. Psychologists call it self-love. Religion calls it God's love. Whatever we call it, it is the love from within that radiates outward to envelop our neighbors, whoever they are and wherever they be. It is a love that is for everyone. It is a love that never dies, no matter how trying our circumstances. It is the love that inspired these words, that were found scratched on the wall of a basement that was occupied by Jews who were hiding during the Second World War.

I believe in the sun even when it is not shining.

I believe in love even when I cannot feel it.

I believe in God even when I cannot see Him.

God is Love and Love is God. Feel it. Feel it in the ground beneath us, in the air we breathe, in the sun that warms and lights our way. Feel and know that it is Love that makes life possible. And like the good Universalists you are, spread that love, and make of it more love, until like the ground and the air and the sun, it envelops all.

THE FUTURE OF UNIVERSALISM

The Eleventh Annual Address
on Universalist History
Ethics and Theology

By
The Reverend Kenneth L. Patton, L.L.D.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Reverend Kenneth L. Patton received his A.B. degree (1937) from Eureka College and M.A. degree (1939) and B.D. degree (1940) from the University of Chicago. His three liberal pastorates have been in the Unitarian Society of Madison, WI. (1942-'49), the Charles St. meeting House in Boston (1949-'64) and the Unitarian Society of Ridgewood, NJ. (1964-'86). In Madison he participated in the planning of the Frank Lloyd Wright church. He was a member of the Hymnbook Commission that produced "Hymns for the Celebration of Life" and has served on many denominational commissions and committees.

Dr. Patton is the publisher of Meeting House Press and the author or editor of an extensive list of books, pamphlets and essays including: "A Religion for One World: Art and Symbolism for a Universal Religion", "Man's Hidden Search: An Inquiry into Naturalistic Mysticism", "A Religion of Realities: A Philosophy of Religion", "The Sense of Life: The Meaning and Mysticism of Natural Religion", "Chinese Poets of Nature and Humanity", "The Way for this Journey: A New Translation of Oriental Humanism" and "Kaggen, the Mantia: Folklore of the Cape Bushmen". His poetry, hymns and readings are widely used in UU services. Dr. Patton retired in 1987.

THE FUTURE OF UNIVERSALISM

The Reverend Kenneth L. Patton, L.L.D.

My liberal religion was developed within the Protestant tradition, culminating at the Divinity School at the University of Chicago, under teachers who were also Protestants, but who had developed into religious humanism, naturalism, and a "science of religion." It was a movement quite independent of Unitarianism and Universalism. I became a Unitarian because it allowed me to expound and develop my religious humanism. I had already left their original heresies, the unity of God and universal salvation, far behind. Since I no longer believed in God, it was small concern whether he was three or one or one thousand. Since I no longer believed in salvation, or any existence after death, whether there was both a heaven and a hell, or just a heaven, was an idle quandary. Thus my present opinion is the same as when I came into liberal religion 43 years ago: that in its original formulation, Universalism has no future at all; it is an outworn fantasy.

When I shifted from Unitarian to Universalist ranks seven years later, and moved to Boston, I discovered that Universalism was a progressive, evolving idea. The word universal was a great word, with a multitude of creative applications. Under Clarence Skinner, head of the Tufts School of Religion and the Community Church in Boston, universalism was now related to universal peace, justice, equality, to one world, one humanity. I launched a creative program at the Charles Street Meeting House, to explore the possibilities of a religion for one world. We created a laboratory model of such a religion, through a dozen integrated projects. But it was not simply that, for it was also the living religion of the people of the Meeting House. I believe we succeeded in our experiment. But we failed in the sense that other liberal societies did not make it a model for their reconstruction. Oh it had various influences and partial imitations. But our now merged association has not become universal in the sense we demonstrated. The Meeting House is gone, its collections of art, symbols, world bibles, music, vandalized and dispersed, the building sold to an architectural organization. The temple of universalism we created has been demolished, and now exists only in the book that described the process and philosophy of its creation.

When we ask about the future of universalism, we are in fact asking two questions: 1st, what is the future of universalism within the Unitarian Universalist Association. 2nd, what is the future of universalism in the world at large. And between these two questions there is a very important issue. In supernatural and theistic religions, their ultimate success is guaranteed in a life and world beyond this, a process magnificently and hugely projected in Michelangelo's great mural on the last judgment. In Islam the faithful will graduate at death into paradise. The future of Hinduism is reincarnation, and ultimately release from the wheel of rebirth, and in Buddhism it is nirvana.

But the future of a natural and human religion of universalism is an entirely different matter. It is a religion of human achievements and relationships in this world, here and now. It is entirely dependent on human character and achievements, on human behavior, and dependent on the environment of planet earth. We are subject to earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, tornadoes, to desertification, drought, and our own pollution and depredations, to war, hatred, and greed. Given the unreliability of the earth itself, and our own waywardness, the success of this idealistic Universal religion is far from assured. That is, we have no assurance that our own denomination will become truly universal, and we have no assurance that humanity as a whole will become universal. We have no assurance that we will survive the nuclear crisis. Wendell Thomas has stated the issue perfectly: What we need most of all is a future.

If we created an adequate universalist religion of our own, what would we have? I have spent my professional life proving out a conviction: That this universal religion is "out there," in human history, in art, literature, philosophy, in science, archaeology, anthropology, paleontology, in history. And it is there. One of the projects in Boston, our "open hymnal," has been continued, and is now culminated in the publishing of four Hymns of Humanity volumes. A life of research has produced 1100 song verses of high literary quality, and thousands of pieces of poetry and prose for readings. 25 years ago it provided some 80 hymns and 90 readings for HYMNS FOR THE CELEBRATION OF LIFE. Some 40 of those hymns found their way into the new English Unitarian hymn book.

Our problem lies in the discrepancy between what is available to us, and what we make use of. Take a specific instance: Frank

Lloyd Wright was born a Unitarian, his father and uncle leaders in liberal religion. Perhaps the greatest architect ever born was one of us. But in a long lifetime he built one Universalist and one Unitarian Church building. We could have had a hundred Wright buildings across the land. There is a wealth of art and symbolism available to us, but most of our temples are barren of both. We have a treasury of great literature expressing our free, natural and human faith. Our next hymn book could be a literary treasury. We will probably use but a fraction of it, because of our reluctance to give up our denominational doggerel. The great poets have written for us. The great painters and sculptors have wrought for us. The great architects would serve us. Music, dance, and drama, wait for our adoption.

In order to make use of the treasures that are ours for the taking, we have to escape the narrowness and provincialism of our own past. Granted that our roots were in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, but do we have to be stuck in the rut in which we originated? The first axiom of a universal religion is that it is world-wide, and humanity-wide. It so happens that our history is mainly in China and not in the West. Our religion is 3,000 years old in China, where the greatest philosophers, poets, and painters created Chinese naturalism, humanism, and universalism. But do we have the wits, taste, acumen, scholarship, and appreciation to avail to ourselves this magnificent cultural treasure? I call it our "Chinese connection," and I have published four books on it. Our roots also go into the old stone age, where humanity had no gods, but related to the earth, the wind, and the sun and stars and was in profound collaboration with the earth and its other creatures. I have just published its major storehouse, KAGGEN, THE MANTIS. I do not say this by way of self-glorification. I have simply explored and practiced my own religion, my universalism, during this one brief life given us. I could not have used this life to better purpose, with greater personal rewards of fundamental satisfactions.

What is the future of Universalism, as the religion of some 200,000 of UUs? The answer is paradoxical: We have a magnificent universalist religion, which we largely ignore and make no use of. Its fact is not in the future. It is here now. What is in the future is whether we will become aware of the great religion that is available to us, that is "out there," and bring it "in here," and make it our own. Are we big enough, intelligent enough, appreciative enough,

wise enough, to acclaim that universal religion that already exists, awaiting our espousal?

But the paradox is of even more vast dimensions. Say that we did accomplish all this, what would it amount to? The experiments in Boston not only involved the collection, the designs, the interpretations. They involved our personal reactions to them, as members of a parish, as members of a Universalist Society. We were our own guinea pigs. Did this work for us, on a week-day level, from Sunday to Sunday? After one of our festival services, a visitor was heard to remark. "These people really believe this." And we did. We had our universal religion, even as we labored to create it. What if all 200,000 of us had this universal religion? What would it amount to? What effect would it have on the world, on the hope and fate of humanity? Probably not much. 200,000 in 240 million is not a considerable percentage. In some 5 billions of human beings planet-wide, even less. 3,000 years of Chinese humanism has not transfigured the human family. Such a religion would greatly enrich our societies and our personal lives. This is our major consideration, the enrichment of our family and personal lives, of the religious fellowship. We cannot wait until the world endorses our universal religion. We must celebrate and live it now, and make it meaningful to our children. In an amusing sense, universalism becomes a parochial matter, a fellowship concern. It is also a personal matter, for it permeates the reveries, the meditations, the sensibility of each of us. It is the aura, the atmosphere of the day. It is a profoundly intimate and private matter, even as it ramifies out into the entire human family, the planet, even the universe. We are creatures, not just of planet earth, but of the whole, blooming universe, in which our planet and its stars are tiny, but native, denizens.

In a sense, even denominationally, the future of universalism is a personal matter. Ultimately, each of us is responsible for the fullness of universal religious experience that is our own, our personal religion. I must confess to a profound pessimism as to the likelihood that our own Unitarian Universalist Association will realize the future of the universalist religion that is available to it. My disrespect for denominational bureaucracy, organization, politics, "leadership," professionalism, is profound. I have virtually no respect for denominational, organizational religion. I do not believe it should be called religion at all. Religion in any real sense, is what happens in the individual, in the personal idealism, dreams,

hunger, sorrow, and aspiration of the person. Denominations are the dry, dead branches, the debris of living religion.

What is the future of universal religion? You will answer that in the privacy of your own person. Each of us has a personal love affair with reality, with the universe. I have expressed it thus:

One blossom on my tulip tree,
fresh opened, first day in the sun,
first day in air, a white delight,
its scent a frail delirium:

It is all blossoms of the world,
all flowers since world of flowers began,
that triumph of the universe
that made it flower, that made me man.

To me that is all that religion, in its reality, amounts to, the zest, the creativity, the belongingness that permeates the private life of the individual. That is the only reality religion has.

This matter of the future of universalism has for me, a personal irony. It is in religion that universalism should have its fullest, its most profound expression. And yet religion is congenitally averse to affirming and espousing universalism. It is perennially parochial, local, tribal. Religion protests universal love, forgiveness, charity, and practices the meanest hatred, rancor, niggardliness, and vengeance. Judaism is torn between the love of God and the wrath of God. The irony is that universalism fails as the ideal of religion, but succeeds as the ideal of dozens of secular, academic, artistic, cultural agencies. A news item from last week: "Academics and political leaders gathered to pay tribute to Edwin O. Reischauer, America's foremost expert on Japan, and to celebrate the opening of the new Reischauer Center of East Asian Studies at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies... Mr. Reischauer told the audience that his life aim in 1931 was to draw attention to Asia. 'Today, the field has grown far beyond anything I dreamed of,' he said. 'This ambition has been more than fulfilled.'"

The future of universalism, in the broader perspective, is assured, because universalism is factual, realistic. The root of the word is "universe." There is but one "universe." If this is true, universalism is the only future the human race has. If it is not true,

then a hornet's nest of rancorous and bestial animosities has been loosed. If the fundamentalists are right, there is only one piece of advice: find a place to hide.

The theme of the future of Universalism is being played out not in religious societies, but in universities, in museums, in cultural agencies. My observations inevitably have a personal referent.

In the Meeting House in Boston we created centers of world religions and cultures. Each had its essential art objects and symbols. All that is gone. But in the Brooklyn Museum of Art all of those centers are intact, and their art magnificently displayed. At the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the process goes on unrelentingly, to show that art and culture are universal. Primitive and Tribal art, Chinese Art, Japanese Art, Hindu Art, Near Eastern Art, Grecian and Roman Art, all areas have been widened and deepened. Culture and art are universal. A true museum of art is a museum of world art, a museum of universal human culture.

Religion has no monopoly on religion. Universities and museums can be far more realistic and idealistic than religious denominations. In Kansas City I was speaking on universal religion. Two blocks away was one of the world's great assemblages of Chinese naturalistic and humanistic arts. Several times I walked over to share it. The unitarians and universalists of the area knew nothing of the riches they harbored. Museums and Universities go on about their business, regardless of the quandaries of religious bureaucracies. Reality is reality. It has nothing to do with denominations, boards, public relations strategies.

The collection of the art of the world's religions we assembled in Boston had been dispersed. But the museums have become truly universal. The Centers of World culture exist in the Brooklyn Museum in almost the same form we gave them in the Meeting House. The Metropolitan is possibly the most dramatic example, with superlative collections of primitive and tribal art, Near Eastern and Islamic Art, the art of Egypt, Greece and Rome, Christian art, a new Chinese gallery, and new galleries of Japanese and Hindu and South Asian art in preparation. It is now a museum of the art of one world. The same trend is advancing in the Universities, with special area studies on Africa, Asia, archaeology, anthropology. The Universities are now living up to their name, and becoming universal.

Universalism is a fact. We live in a universe. Nature is one, and all its processes universal. We are a single species, and microbiology has proven to us that all creatures are members of a single family of life. Human culture is united in one cultural evolution. Only 10,000 years ago we were all in the old stone age together, all hunters and gatherers, living in small bands. The making of stone tools was a world-wide art. There is but one scientific enterprise shared by all the world's peoples. The scientists shame our governments. Scientists from Russia and America collaborated in developing and proving the theory of the nuclear winter. An alliance of doctors against nuclear war has received the Nobel Peace Prize, and the organization is headed by a Soviet and an American physician. Universalism is the only way of thought and life that has any future, for all studies and research but further demonstrate its fundamental reality and wisdom.

The future of universal religion does not depend on a small denomination that professes it. Even if we did not practice it as poorly as we do, even if we realized it completely, it would not depend on us. It has permeated human thought and idealism. This we do know, if universalism does not have a future, then the human race has no future.

The future of the human venture depends on enough people becoming universal in their imagination, their learning, and their compassion. How many would be enough? Certainly they will have to be in positions of power and control. The Ayatollah Khomeini demonstrates how far we are from this, and how precarious our situation is. Lebanon is a disastrous object lesson of humanity divided by provincial, sectarian, and warring factions. With atomic weapons, we cannot survive another world war. The two world wars demonstrate the terrible price paid when universalism fails. A third would be fatal. If universalism has no future, we have no future.

MORE THAN A PASSING FANCY...

The Twelfth Annual Address
on Universalist History,
Ethics and Theology

By
The Reverend Brian S. Kopke

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Reverend Kopke received his B.A. degree from Colby in 1964 and his J.T.B. degree from Harvard Divinity in 1970.

He served the First Universalist Church of Southhold, New York, from 1972-77, and from 1977-84 he served in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Currently, he is minister of First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa.

When not ministering, he is actively engaged as a carpenter, watercolorist, and enjoys sailing and cross-country skiing.

"MORE THAN A PASSING FANCY"

Reverend Brian S. Kopke

"The World is too much with us," writes Wordsworth. "...late and soon, getting and spending, we lay waste our powers...." Our *real* powers, sidetracked by the glitter and hopes of this age, curtailed by our fears and doubts, where do they lie? Perhaps it is in a commitment deeper than this age encourages.

When Methodist John Murray moved from his home in Ireland to London his curiosity was aroused by the zeal of local preachers in their denouncement of the thought and preaching of James Relly. Relly preached universal salvation. He was a Trinitarian who parted from strict Calvinism over the details of how many people were saved when Jesus died on the cross. The Methodist preachers were frightened that with no retribution for evil doings, Relly's followers would become debauchers and evil doers.

"So insistent were the Methodists that Murray and his wife could not resist the temptation to attend a Relly meeting to see for themselves. Instead of loose living they found a starkly simple meeting house and a sober congregation. Under the influence of Relly...the Murrays accepted Universalism and became devoted adherents." (Cassera, Universalism in America. 1971, p.10)

Murray and his wife were obviously two curious people. They wanted to know the enemy and were open to testing all that came their way as truth or falsehood. They were unusual people whose way of living brought to them new experiences all the time.

After Murray's time in debtor's prison and the death of his wife, he did not wallow in his grief but sought a new life for himself in America. He was a man capable of understanding new things and appreciating them so as to make them a part of himself.

The America which Murray came to was not without knowledge of this theology of Universal salvation which Relly had preached. Jonathan Mayhew and Charles Chauncy in Boston had taken on Johnathan Edwards over his strict Calvinism. Chauncy preached several steps of convincing before entrance to heaven - but everyone eventually went to heaven. Before him, George DeBenneville had carried the message of God's love to Pennsylvania.

The magnitude of what these people were preaching was unknown at that time. In our adherence to the content of the theological arguments of the past, I believe we have lost some sense of the real power of their message - the message was really a way of thinking about the world. They brought an encouragement to attempt the new, with permission from God to live a wider life than fear-riddled Calvinism ever could allow.

It was a message which filled new Universalists with zeal and hope. Out of that hope, Universalist idealism soared, societies were built, clergy were hired, new ideas were discussed. There was a price to be paid by this new way of being - a price all groups can pay. A price paid all too often by those with high hopes and fresh zeal. The price was parochialism and narrowness. They resulted from lack of insight into the process which allowed the sense of new being to develop and unleash spiritual energies. In the case of Universalism in the 1700's and 1800's I submit that the process was more important than the message -but could not have happened without the message at that particular time in history. I hope to make a case today for explaining the demise of Universalism in these terms, and apply some of the lessons learned to our lives together as Unitarian Universalists today. Our Good News brought hope. It brought hope to people whose souls were smothering under the selective damnation of Calvinism. That doctrine was preached by John Murray at Thomas Potter's little chapel in Good Luck, New Jersey. Murray believed that Jesus had died for the sins of all people and was raised up as a sign that all people would be raised up in the end. He said:

"The death of Christ was the death of all men, and he, now living...affectingly says, 'BECAUSE I NOW LIVE YE SHALL LIVE ALSO.' and it is therefore he is called the life of the world and the world lives through him...It is in this divinely glorious... plan, that all the scriptures harmonize...Blessed are the people who Know..." they walk in the light of God's countenance, they shall never come into condemnation, nor shall they ever be ashamed..." (Cassara, Universalism in America, 1971, p.77)

Murray, Winchester and others laid a groundwork that was taken up as a life challenge by Hosea Ballou. Like Murray, Ballou started as a trinitarian, but after reading Ethan Allen's "Reason The Only Oracle of Man," he became convinced of the need for reason in interpreting the Bible, and of the (small "u") unitarian view of

God. Those thoughts and earlier questions about how God could be good and be responsible for the endless suffering of people in hell became the content of his "Treatise on Atonement" published in 1805.

"The God of Hosea Ballou, like the God of the Deists (Ethan Allen), emerges as human-centered. God loves people and seeks, in the eighteenth century expression to "happify" us. Indeed, unlike much orthodox Christianity, which insisted that the fallen must suffer in order to glorify God, Ballou insisted that God glorifies in making us happy." (*Ibid.*, p. 21, ed.)

Ballou's writings and the preachers and laypersons who followed them led to the establishment of a wave of hope. The energies of that hope were harnessed to build churches and establish societies. That hope caused growing numbers of Universalist churches to see the need to band together in associations and State Conventions to promote Universalism.

Over 240 churches were organized in Massachusetts (MacPherson, Universalist Historical Society, vol. VI, 1966, p. 5), over 130 organized in New York State (Woodman, Universalist Historical Society, vol. VI, 1966, p. 26) in Vermont there were over 175 socialites formed with many more fellowship-type groupings in the more rural areas (MacDonald, Rebellion in the Mountains, p. 58-121). Out of the darkness of Calvinism people were led into a life which allowed so much more freedom of expression, thought and belief, and a real freedom from the deadly shackles of fear.

As time passed something happened to Universalism. Our history is troubling. The hopes withered and failed us. One example is cited by Richard Woodman in his story of the decline of Universalist churches in New York State:

"The history...(of) local churches has been studied with glittering generalities and exaggerated hopefulness. The following is a typical example:

"After a period of long inactivity, Rome awoke and said to Rev. O.F. Alvord: 'Come over and help us.'"

"He responded August 1st. Not 'childless and crownless in her voiceless woe,' but with a living people, and a vision clear, she takes her place among the active churches of the imperial state.

"The church closed its doors several years later." (Woodman, op. cit., p. 45)

Universalism gave us hope. Yes, it gave hope - and it also led us to dashed hopes. But the hope was the important thing and on that hope we built. In her history of Universalists in Ontario, Louise Foulds writes of those who founded new churches:

"The missionaries were...unrealistic in their expectations. Utterly dedicated to the cause, and imbued with incorrigible optimism characteristic of their calling, they launched churches without regard for the financial facts of life. The laymen and women who rallied round the exciting one-time project of erecting a building had no conception of the substantial ongoing financial commitment that would be necessary in order to support a minister. As a result, the congregations were crippled from the beginning by chronic problems from which they had no hope of extricating themselves given their modest means and casual approach to financing. The resulting succession of brief pastorates and long periods with no minister at all gradually discouraged all but the most dedicated, who were steadfastly loyal but far too few in number to support their churches." (Foulds, op. cit., p. 149)

Universalism offered a personal hope which fired the zeal of its missionaries and laymen and women. But the hope led them onto shoals and rocks. The ships foundered and then disappeared. The hopes left their heads in the clouds, blinded, narrow in their concerns, parochial in their outlook, Even Clinton Lee Scott writes of the same tale:

"Many Universalist mission churches were planted in small villages in all parts of the country with scant consideration given to the prospect for survival. They were often little more than fellowship groups, gathered under the winning influence of missionary preachers or started by some resident person or family of Universalist persuasion. Few were able to maintain themselves beyond the life span of the founders or for a generation thereafter." (Scott, The Universalist Church of America: A Short History. 1957, p. 25)

And so the commitment of these good people was milked by the hopeful of Universalism. Perhaps these are isolated examples and obscure commentary? Hardly. The story of Universalism in many states is echoed by these words of David MacPherson in his study of the decline of Universalism in Massachusetts:

“Of 244 churches organized in Massachusetts, only 199 remained in 1906. By 1940 there were 79 churches and in 1950 the Universalist Directory listed 78. Of those 78, 49 were full time, 16 federated, four were holding summer services only, two were occasional, and seven were dormant. Only 63% were listed as active. They represented only a 32.4% survival rate. From 1900 to 1950 only one new church was built, in 1944, and only one other organized, that in 1949. Thus while roughly 52 churches expired, only two were organized.” (MacPherson, loc. cit.)

What are we to make of these situations, these figures? Is it true that the Universalist message offered hope? What was the real “good news” of Universalism?

In one last rally at Universalism, lest we believe that it was only missionaries and zealous lay men and women who caused this disaster for Universalist adherents, we look at comments by Edith Fox MacDonald in her story of Universalism in Vermont:

“There was a desperate shortage of ministers to serve the growing number of churches. This was a sore point, for all denominations attracted some strange characters. In 1834 the Convention recommended that the Associations go into a more thorough examination of the literary and theological qualifications of candidates, In 1838 a committee of discipline was set up to deal with cases of unministerial conduct. Another trouble with the ministers was that they soon began wandering off into the various philosophies that so enlivened the nineteenth century. It was not until 1860 that the Vermont Convention brought its members back to some solid standing by readopting the Winchester Profession of 1803.” (MacDonald, op. cit., p.18)

Now, you can bet your bottom dollar that one does not set up a disciplinary committee without there having been reason! You can also bet that one does not comment on the strange characters who get into the ministry or their wayward theologies without there having been enough of them to cause trouble. Right or wrong

the Vermont convention turned in 1860 backward to restate the message of Universalism. At that moment it put its faith in the message and forgot the process which had enlivened that message a century earlier. Murray and Ballou had been curious sorts, enlivened by the new and fresh. It was part of their personalities. Many early Universalists were excited by new ideas - and the new ideas opened them up to know more about life. Harking backward over fifty years for a statement of belief ended that process.

With its identity taken care of by readopting the Winchester Profession the Vermont Convention turned to the hard work of record keeping and raising funds for the missionary churches. History it is said repeats itself. After so many years of trying to state who we are as Unitarian Universalists, trying to clearly state our identity, and now with the new Principles and Purposes in hand, we are engaged in proud exaltation of our growing numbers and raising funds for starting new churches.

There was a common thread in the decline of Universalism in so many places. The thread I want to emphasize is not in the words of their theology. But in what turning backward for those words and constantly referring to them did to Universalists.

We lost the greatness of Murray along the way. Here was a man who, after all his troubles, the loss of a wife, prison, leaving his homeland, finally chose to remarry in 1788 in America. The woman he married was of like mind - she was adventurous and committed to those life processes which opened up opportunities for people. Judith Sargent Murray was an early feminist writer outspoken on the need for women to be educated and of their abilities to do anything men can do. She like her husband brought hope to people. (See Johnson "Sixteen Unitarian and Universalist Issues," 1975, p. 112-3).

Hope was not at fault in the decline of Universalism. Though too much hope can lead us to insanity, and too little to despair, hope was not at fault for the disasters to people's lives which followed the zealous wave of Universalism. Ideals and dreams were dashed because the ways which led to hope were blinded by parochialism. Who knows what it is that fueled the parochialism - excessive pride, fear, unresolved anger over old theological ways, who can really say what narrowed the vision down.

Let us stop for a minute to consider parochialism. I grew up south of Boston in a largely Protestant area. I grew up in a town

which had a hard time finding houses for Jewish people in the fifties. I attended public school with children whose parents had a hard time accepting Catholicism in their midst. In short, there was prejudice. When we referred to the Catholic schools, we called them "parochial schools". It was a put down in colloquial language to call the Catholic schools parochial. The Catholics themselves called the schools parochial. But their use of the word was based in the Latin "parochia" - the word for parish - for indeed they were parish schools. Parochial came to mean something narrow and negative to me. It took a wider exposure to the world before I changed my views of parochial schools. In Ontario the Catholic Schools are called separate schools (the name applied to English schools in Quebec) and the word parochial does not have the same negative connotation. Today I use the word parochial in a negative sense. That negativism is no longer drawn from my early views of parochial schools, but issues from the theological work of Henry Nelson Wieman. I believe that there are few instances where parochialism advances the cause of humanity.

Though there were many examples of Universalism which I could cite that succeeded, I have chosen to dwell on the failures this morning - not to shock - for we are too aware of that history - not to pretend I have done original work, for the stories I share are already well documented. I dwell on the failures because I see a thread of parochialism, or narrowness, of blindness, that runs right through all of them. I can not help asking what blindness, what narrowness, what parochialism runs through our lives, in our thoughts, in our hearts, in our very blood, these days.

Before tackling some specifics, let me ground us in theology, for I believe that we must ever give our touchstones, especially when we are about to call something evil.

Henry Nelson Wieman, familiar to some Unitarian Universalists for the term "creative interchange" and others as that guy who can't read, is my base. He was a professor at the University of Chicago, a prolific writer, and has affected the thinking of many current-day Unitarian Universalist ministers. He is a process theologian.

A recent letter writer to the UU world complained that she was sick of process—she had left too many process workshops with the feeling that she had learned nothing. I have to give the theological grounding from Wieman. Please grant me your patience and

attention if you hate process. Rest assured I am not asking you to put a paper bag on your head or make a laundry list to complete the talk. I share this section with you because I believe that the process of Murray and Ballou was as important to early Universalism and its spread as it is to us today.

When Wieman's name is mentioned in UU circles it is often followed by words like, "oh yeah, creative interchange." Creative interchange is the moment when something from outside impacts on our beliefs, ways of perceiving, our thoughts, our feelings, and alters them in a significant manner. You know what a deviled egg is...the half of a hard boiled egg with the yolk mixed with tasty goodies and replaced in the white as a container and garnished with paprika. Well, sometimes we want to taste from so many platters that we have only time to taste the paprika never getting to the deviled egg let alone the egg white.

Creative Interchange is too shallow an understanding of Wieman. It is only a moment in time. It is just the moment that we get the reward for hard work. How many of us have ever heard the words "ever greater appreciative understanding"?

Appreciative understanding is the work that leads to creative interchange. Without appreciative understanding, creative interchange does not happen. Creative interchange is exciting - it is what fueled the hopes of early Universalists. Murray and Ballou were early masters of the process Wieman described.

"Creative interchange comes from an attitude of openness which allows us to make connections, appreciable connections, which are mutually sustaining, mutually enhancing, mutually diversifying, and mutually meaningful...and which makes life more abundant in two ways: 1) the richness of the emotional quality, and 2) in the meaningful connections which enter into our awareness as we go through life." (Wieman, Journal of Religion, vol. 16, no. 4, p. 394-5)

Appreciable understandings are hard work and they depend upon the right connections being made in the mind (heart and soul) and the mind's being able to understand those connections. When Ballou read Ethan Allen's treatise on reason, the arguments fell on a receptive field - Ballou understood the connections and they were meaningful to him in a positive way. Others who read Allen's work did not understand it, some understood it and found it anathema.

Wieman uses the word “appreciable” rather than “appreciated” regarding experiences. One is ongoing, the other is past and done. Ballou’s reading of Ethan Allen’s work led to more thought and the writing and rewriting of his own work. It was ongoing throughout his life. When the Vermont Convention harkened back over fifty years to the Winchester Profession they made it clear that they appreciated that statement. It was past, done, over. It was a dead end.

Look at Murray again...downtrodden, feeling rejected, lonely after the loss of his wife, he wanted a narrow life of obscurity when he fled to America. He would never in his wildest dreams have believed that the faith and love of Thomas Potter would be able to change his outward stance making him preach at Good Luck in 1770. But deeper than his personal despair was the knowledge that Potter was a special man with a deep faith. It deserved attention - so Murray bargained with his God; the calm remained over Barnegatt Bay. He preached. He was able to put aside his grief and make the connections, and make them with meaning - his interchange with Potter changed him. Wieman deals with the ongoing. The appreciable event is a complex system of activities all connected in a valuing whole. Murray was an unusual person. He practiced appreciative understanding.

Again and again as we encounter what is different—we do not simply seek to know the ideas, but we seek to appreciate. This can come in unusual ways.

I was minister in Philadelphia in the days when Rizzo was Mayor. (Sounds like the opening of a Biblical reading.) It was not uncommon to hear our social responsibilities zealots spend an evening villifying the Mayor. Their words sounded not unlike Rizzo’s diatribes against liberals. I disliked the policies and behavior of Frank Rizzo. But together we shared a common humanity. It was not until I read a book entitled, The Cop Who Would Be King, that I found that common humanity. Rizzo, as a policeman, was called down to the tracks near North Philadelphia where he found a young boy with his legs severed by a passing train. He picked the boy up and held him in his arms on the way to the hospital. The boy looked up at him and said, “Don’t tell my mommy.” Rizzo could not hold back the tears. The simple plea of a child brought forth his humanity in ways we can all relate to.

In a second event he was called to the SEPTA (Bus Barns) barns where a supervisor had suffered a heart attack. Rizzo arrived. The drivers were milling around. The supervisor was dead. Rizzo looked up at the men and asked if anyone had tried resuscitation. No one had. They were all trained in CPR. Rizzo asked why no one had helped. One of the men said, "Look, it is a chance for advancement!" Rizzo was disgusted. I was too. I stood beside Rizzo on that one.

In this example I widened my view of Rizzo, he became human. I gained an appreciable understanding of the man beyond his policies.

Let me take the commentary a step further before returning to Wieman and Universalism. This commentary is about our social action and how forgetting the process for the sake of content disables us.

In our social action we had to understand the city. To understand the city of Philadelphia, we had to understand how Rizzo endured as a folk hero to so many people in the city. As Unitarian Universalists we needed to remember that this was a city living in fear. Rizzo gave many people hope. Our liberal stands were impossible for most people to adopt. If we wanted change we had to keep in mind the ends we desired, but first enter a process whereby we could appreciate and understand the people of the city. We had to assess how far in our direction they could move with each step and then teach them to walk in our direction. First steps are so small and our zeal makes us impatient. Nathaniel Hawthorne was right - in our zeal we do not see. It is this blindness which Wieman would label as evil because evil is anything that thwarts the growth of ever greater appreciable understanding. Wieman wrote of evil as that which goes counter to expanding appreciative understanding. Thus, the blindness of early Universalists was evil. The head in the clouds spurred by excessive zeal and hope was evil.

Wieman's definitions are sound and the process he talks about is a saving process for humankind—it is a process that will save us from ourselves and each other at our worst.

The end goal - reasonably achievable in a lifetime - is that we will find more and more of what we encounter in life to be confirming of who we are. Life becomes richer and richer.

There is little difference between what Wieman is calling for and what Fowler says is the highest stage of faith development, Piaget says is the highest stage of cognitive development, Kohlberg says is the highest stage of moral development, and which Erickson describes as the highest stage of personality development, Maslow places at the top of the hierarchy of needs.

But these hierarchial models are distinctly drawn from a male world of achievement. They do not take into account what Carol Gilligan points out as distinctively a female approach - that of fostering and nurturing relationships. Wieman does not present us with stages. He presents a model for relationships, for fostering and nurturing them. I submit that Murray and Ballou, too, in the process they lived by were drawing from that female side of their being and that process is what enlivened minds and quickened the souls of early Universalists. They had been crying for a way out of the traditional male punishment oriented world and early Universalists offered them that life stance - but later forgot it as they succumbed to the weight of tradition stepping back into the deadening male model which always will superimpose order at the expense of relationship.

In seeking to lay out the ground work, I have given you some example of what I believe happened in our past when we became parochial, too narrow in our approach to religion. The missionary idealism was so strong it blinded Universalist adherents. We were not able to understand Universalism as time progressed, we harked back to the past. With things not working as we had hoped, we went flaky on our flocks, following fad after fad until the inherent enabling and nurturing process behind the message of Universalism was lost. When we sought to point to the message, we turned back to the Winchester Profession and fashioned the Washington Declaration.

Some today will point to the Principles and Purposes of the UUA. I do not. I believe these represent distinct statements of where we were once upon a time. The great message which sustained Thomas Potter and brought John Murray to Gloucester was not just that of universal salvation. Murray brought with him a process Wieman later put into words. Murray gave to people a way to open up to the world - they could experience more and know more without fear of God's retribution. It was the process he brought which fueled human hopes and caused people in the

eighteenth and nineteenth century to flock to Universalist parishes. It was the opening up that excited people.

When Ballou began writing, he gave people an open door. He gave people a pathway which they understood. They followed. He offered a life open to greater appreciative understandings than had hitherto been the case. Of course they flocked to it. Look at the damned Calvinism they came from. Who wants to live a life consigned from birth to the consuming flames of Hell. I would opt for anything that could let me appreciate life more, even allow me to feel good about myself. Universalism had the answer.

But as time went on and other churches mellowed in their Calvinism and emphasized other aspects of their faith, as society offered hope through technology and science, Universalism in many areas failed to grow spiritually, failed to offer a sustaining vision of human life, failed to continue to find avenues of hope for its people.

I speak of Universalism here because I address you, with a specific history. I however, speak of Unitarians too - for given the time the same sort of case can be made against the Unitarians for their reasoned arrogance and love of their biographical history.

How do we fare today?

Today we find that all we do is to be measured against the new Principles and Purposes. We have given in to those who need the boxes to define us, who require order over the seeming chaos of relationship. Each new course we develop for use in our church schools must be justified as to how it relates to the Principles and Purposes. Our social action must be justified against the Principles and Purposes. I would rather know their theological and philosophical, and psychological justification. Are we laboring at creating a generation of adults who will be able to move beyond us, their elders, and succeed where we have failed in making this a more peaceful and just world?

Most of our courses stress a process. It really began back with Dorothy Spoerl and the discovery method in the fifties. Up to that time we were creating liberals in content - but not process of thought. Today we teach our children to cherish their curiosity, to foster greater understanding of the world around them, appreciatively. But the trend in the last few years has been for the UUA to ask again and again whether what we are doing relates to the

Principles and Purposes. I suggest this has happened because we are a church made up increasingly of people who have not enough experience with the process that Wieman laid out, the process brought to this country by the life of Murray and developed by Ballou. We are a church of come outers, or, as has recently been suggested, come inners. We stress the welcome to all who would worship with us; we also have to stand firmly for who we are - and too often there is little given the new person entering our churches - little more than the standard Introduction to UUism course, a dry history, a sharing of our diversity, and a clear path to the bookstore. It is not enough. People come to us hungry and we must offer a full plate - not just the paprika.

I believe we must include on our plate these concerns and address them directly.

First, we must talk of change, firing it with the trails of our own lives, of human growth, our own growth, and lay out the theories for them, we must talk of the blocks, to growth in terms of theology, philosophy, and psychology - not insisting on one school or approach but with appreciative understanding for all ways of describing human living.

Second, we must actively pursue contacts with other religious and cultural blocks, people of different economic backgrounds, sexual preferences, ethics and racial backgrounds - and do that in ways which change us - not just inviting them to become like us.

It is only with these contacts that we have the hope of expanding our beliefs and understandings appreciatively. There can be no peace in this world without people understanding each other, and how can this happen if we do not know each other?

The way in which we have worked with other religious groups has come under fire in Harry Hoehier's book, Syncretistic Universalism (small "u"); he writes:

"Syncretistic universalism is the attempt to create a common world faith by abstracting and synthesizing the universal elements believed to underlie the outward forms of all religions.

"Probably the most prominent American religious body to travel such a path is the Unitarian Universalist Association. The UUA is the only major denomination in America to include in its founding purposes a commitment to religious

syncretism. Where this emphasis became a dominant theme was in the thinking of certain radical Unitarians and Universalists who were members of an organization which appeared in 1867: the Free Religious Association. Grounded theologically in Emersonian Transcendentalism, the Free Religionists hoped that by forming their organization they would be able to move beyond the narrowness of Christianity and create a religion free from religious dogmatism. But beyond the conviction that democracy and unfettered belief should be the climate of a genuinely 'free' church, there was the assumption among Free Religionists that religion was a universal phenomenon, concealed by the diversity of the historical religions. If one could but peel away the restrictive encrustations of historical religion, they stated, one could liberate the undefiled dimensions of pure faith which united all religions at their depths. "The passion of the syncretistic universalists to locate and address only those similarities in other faiths which correspond to their own faith-perspectives has resulted in their ignoring or discounting the actual complexity and variety of the inter-religious situation." (Hoehler, News Bulletin for Religious Liberals (CLF), vol. XLIII, no. 2, p. 4)

This is a description of narrowness. It does not speak to diversity. It is shallow religious life and can lead only to our demise. Wieman calls it evil. Can you imagine anything more deadly than living only with our sameness? And yet look at our churches? Look at how hard it is for our gay and lesbian ministers to find settlements? Look at the color of our skin? Look at our education? Look at our standard of living?

I do not praise Murray and his first wife for having stayed in the Methodist church listening to diatribes about Relly. I praise him for wanting to seek out differences and find out about them!

Look at how we bring people into our churches. Teach them about us. Our introductions to UUism would be better begun with all new people going through the old course, *Owning Your Religious Past*. Teach them to affirm - for affirmation is the life stance of our way at its best. This says we value you and your individual contribution in our midst more than asking them to learn our history does. One way nurtures, the other narrows when taught alone. The history is necessary but can only become part of a saving work when it adds to appreciative understanding. I believe we

must extend that understanding to others before we expect it of them.

Third, in our zeal we must always have some humility remembering that it is always going to be true that we are unable at all times to keep up with the task Wieman has set before us, the task Murray and Ballou began. Life just moves too fast and we do not understand even ourselves enough to always remain open to appreciative understanding.

There are some things we have done well - and which fit right in with expanding our abilities to appreciate more of the world around us. The About Your Sexuality programs are a good example. My own father took the course when he was fifty and said, with enthusiasm, that nothing had ever changed him so much.

The Death and Dying seminars, of the type run by Bobby Nelson of Fairfax, Virginia, have served us well. Not only do we learn about Kubler Ross's work but some of the alternate approaches such as the Pulitzer Prize winning, Denial of Death, by Berger. The approach mixes theology and psychology AND lays out a clear understanding about human life - that it is part and parcel with change. And though what now is shall likely change, how we handle what is going on right now will have an effect on tomorrow and how we feel about all life.

The new course, Cakes for the Queen of Heaven, helps to lay such a path. It asks questions which come from another angle. For instance, How did Job's wife feel living with such a man? It leads us right to the heart of the matter - not the scabby faith of a dogmatic curmudgeon - but what is life really like? The bible gave us the situation but to be really on top of appreciative understandings we have to ask about what is not said.

Remember the letter of the woman sick of process? Let me agree that she has verbalized a cardinal evil amongst Unitarian Universalists today. We are so tied to process that we forget the content. Come and be put through the cuisinart. We flock to experience. Experiential education is the cry and we hue to its demand. Experiential education as used in many Unitarian Universalist workshops is shallow. It is devoid of content which is meaningful to us. Too often the content is provided as a laundry listing of the experiences of the participants. If the leaders do not know more than the participants - get new leaders who do! Good experiential education, I offer the model of the old NLT Labs of the

fifties or the current day LTCN Labs of the Eagles Training Labs. They are based in experiential education but ... the difference is that no experience is offered without the accompanying piece of theory the experience is intended to demonstrate. So - we might offer an ice breaker activity as people gather. Why? To get people on board comes the answer. That is not enough. I expect to be given some of the theory which I can apply in hundreds of ways, not just a single game. If we are put into triads to share the idea is often to build trust. Then I expect some theory such as the Johari Window to offer me a framework useful in my life which explains why we are doing the exercise. If we are drawing on early experiences with churches in an introductory course, I would like a little piece telling me why we are doing this - either on group building, the stages of faith development, or the like. It takes so little time to offer theory and make us all literate. It takes so much time to bring a person back into a process patient stance in life once they have been damaged by those who are willing to milk process gimmicks to fill time at a workshop.

The process which Murray and Ballou started for us is more important than the content - but without content it is hollow. The content of the process is how we are living our lives. We can never afford to forget what happened to the early Universalists who remained stuck on the past and were unable to move their faith in the ways which had excited them so.

There is much that we are doing that is good today. There is much offered to help expand our sense of appreciable understanding in the world - but I see - and I am sure many of you can see that there are places in our hearts where we have stopped to rest - and perhaps rested too long - and we may fear to move on for fear of losing something comfortable or something we love. We need not fear. Moving on in our personal theology, growing in our abilities to embrace more and more of the world is our task. It is a wholesome task. You do it in little ways each day.

But we can not rest on laurels, we can not hold fast to Principles and Purposes forever, we can not remain parochial, narrow and blind - in any area. It is up to us to constantly live our ideals to the fullest and in the wisest ways we know. Murray and Ballou gave us more than hope - they gave us life. It is up to each of us to hold that gift in trust and make the best of it so that we may pass on to the next generation a life task furthered by our own existence. That

is the greatest gift we can give to them ... And though we are doing it from time to time it is often tackled as though it is a passing fancy. It is more than that. No greatness ever succeeded with partial enthusiasm and incomplete commitment. Our faith together can make a difference in the lives of people in this world - more than it does - but for that to happen we have to treat it as though it is not just a passing fancy.

TO MEET THE SHADOWY FUTURE WITHOUT FEAR

**The Fifteenth Annual Address
On Universalist History
Ethics and Theology**

**By
The Reverend Peter Lee Scott, D. Min.**

**161st Annual Session
New York State Convention of Universalists
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Dr. Peter Lee Scott received his B.A. degree (1955) and B.D. degree (1957) from St. Lawrence University, his M.A. degree (1962) from Hartford, and his D. Min. (1972) from the Lexington Theological Seminary. Ordained in 1957, he has served churches throughout the east and midwest. He was minister to the UU Fellowship of Marshfield, WI. (1978-80), the Fox Valley UU Society of Appleton, WI. (1980-83) and the Unitarian Church of Norfolk, VA. (1984-87). Since 1987 he has been minister to the First Universalist Church of Southold, NY.

TO MEET THE SHADOWY FUTURE WITHOUT FEAR

The Reverend Peter Lee Scott, D. Min.

Twice in my ministry I have moved from a southern church to a northern one, both times without significant trauma. The story is told, however, of one preacher in the deep South, who became known to a northern congregation and was invited to be considered as their minister. He prepared carefully for his candidating trip. He wore his good suit and he polished his shoes. He took along his best sermon and was ready to tell his funniest stories. And off he went. ...But he came home a few days later thoroughly dejected. And his wife asked him, "What happened?" Didn't you wear your best suit and have your shoes shined? You told your best stories and preached your best sermon?.....And the preacher said, "Yes, I did all those things, and it went very well until I had Sunday dinner with the President of the Church..." "Everything was going fine, until he asked me if I'd like some corn, and I said 'Yes,' but then I made my mistake; I passed my glass instead of my plate!"We Unitarian Universalists do not appear to have this as a problem, especially at conventions!

Faith and I encountered no such difficulty when in the summer of 1987 we moved from Norfolk, VA to Southold, LI. And one of the things that we counted as a real gain was moving to an area strong in organized Unitarian Universalism. We were coming into the most active Area Council in the denomination, into a District more compact geographically and far more active than the one we were leaving, and into the strongest of the remaining Universalist State Conventions. At the ministerial level alone the change was dramatic. In three years in Norfolk, as a part of the Thomas Jefferson District, we never once attended a UU ministers' meeting; they were held at The Mountain, roughly a 15 hour drive from us. We could more easily have been members of the Greater Boston Ministers Group, to say nothing of Washington, DC, Philadelphia, Metro NY and Connecticut Valley in between. But on Long Island, even out at the end of it, a one to two hour drive reaches all of our UU societies.

It is a pleasure in several ways to be at this Convention. I'm glad to be visiting Rochester, where I have a lovely 2 1/2 year-old grandchild and another on the way. The New York Convention is a happy return home for me in that I'm a graduate of The St.

Lawrence University and of its Theological School. My initial license to preach was from this Convention. And I'm glad to be a part of any institution carrying on the Universalist name and tradition.

Half of my ancestry is through Vermont, where my father was born. All Vermonters seem to claim descent from Ethan Allen (who, interestingly enough, never married!), and Universalists have also found in Allen a spiritual relative in his religious radicalism (which, among other things, had a strong influence upon the thinking of Hosea Ballou). Allen was certainly a Universalist, but on one occasion he denied this, saying that he had to believe in Hell, otherwise there'd be no place to send the Yorkers! This seems an appropriate thing to recall at a New York convention.... We've moved a long way from that time of virtual war between Vermont and New York.

I stand here this morning as an adopted "Yorker," as a convinced Universalist, and as one born to it as well, my Universalist ancestry going back on my Mother's side in Liberty Universalist Church of Camp Hill, Alabama. My mother, raised as a good daughter of the Confederacy, used to avow that there were three men she'd never marry - a minister, a widower, or a damnyankee! She got all three with my father! I'm birthright to the 5th generation from Camp Hill, and I'm happy that a part of generations number 6 and 7 are active right here in the Rochester Universalist Church with my son Michael, his wife Kelly and their daughter Erin.

At the same time I would emphasize that I am not at all distant from nor even cool to the Unitarian tradition. I'm proud of both our lineages and glory in them. I married a 6th generation Unitarian, Faith Grover Scott, who is currently preparing for our ministry. (We sometimes refer to ourselves as having a mixed marriage!) But in truth I speak and minister as a 2nd generation Unitarian Universalist; my uncle and my father were two of our earliest ministers to have dual fellowship in both denominations. I was brought up in both and raised to see them as essentially one. In my early years in the ministry I worked hard for Merger and I remain glad that it occurred. It has been, in fact, one of the most successful denominational consolidations to take place in this country. It has worked and worked well in the 28 years of its existence.

Many ministers have the experience at times of announcing a sermon title which simply does not turn itself into the finished product. In preparing for this morning I worked on two rather different addresses, being quite unsure which would be completed for this occasion. Reaching the deadline I announced the title you see printed, which further work did not complete to my satisfaction. The second endeavor worked better for me, and I give you, then, the second address - and if you want the unfinished first one we can skip lunch and I'll share it with you also!

In both explorations I have looked to the future and what it may bring. My remarks are titled.

TO MEET THE SHADOWY FUTURE WITHOUT FEAR

C.S. Lewis, in his Screwtape Letters, says that, "The future is something which everyone reaches at the rate of 60 minutes an hour, whatever he does, whoever he is." This is the kind of statement that, although we recognize its truth, does not help us very much. It is akin to Thoreau's comment, when someone complained that he never had enough time: he replied, "Well, you have all there is!" This is not much help in planning out your day.

And though we may agree, obviously, with Lewis that we all go into the future together and at the same pace, we do not all approach the future with the same degree of courage, or confidence, anticipation or hope. Indeed, with the future that appears to us today, many of us have none of these sterling qualities in hand as we enter it.

In far too many ways the future we face today is grim and threatening. You probably have your own list of what's wrong with it. My list has four main entries:

1. The danger of war. We have lived with the nuclear madness for well over four decades - a balance of terror threatening all earth's peoples. We tend to forget this, though it's constantly hanging over our heads. It is underscored today by our national administration that continues to be sold out to the military/industrial alliance. Despite clear signs, with the Gorbechev regime, that the cold war with the Soviets is over and that both they and we may now put our limited resources to peaceful endeav-

ors, our government continues the arms buildup, with the Stealth bomber, nuclear submarines and the nonsense of "Star Wars."

2. Ecological Insanity. We continue to treat the Earth as an expendable resource, to act as if it has an unlimited capacity to sustain our use and abuse. We know better; we know that "Small is beautiful," and that the "Diet for a Small Planet" must become our menu. But how we act! Are we really going to continue selling off wilderness areas to private business, to head the EPA with folks who are opposed to its mission, to deal with Acid Rain only as a way to keep peace with Canada, to treat Chernoble as a Russian accident that could never happen here, and to pretend that the oil will never run out while we let solar power go down the drain? All this and more continues to come out of Washington today; we hear the message that there's really nothing that American ingenuity and "free enterprise" can't handle. Lip service is given to the environmental crisis, but it's still business as usual in creating that crisis, with a shrinking ozone layer, a growing greenhouse effect, acid rain, mountains of garbage, brown tide, and polluted air and water.

3. A New Ugliness in our Society. As our squandering of the Earth's resources has begun to catch up with us, a necessary decline in our "standard of consumption" in America has begun. As the realization of this has grown, Americans have abandoned their traditional openness to those in need. We have seen in the past decade a new ugliness which ignores the needs of the Third World wherever possible and abandons our own poor as well. The Reagan years saw taxes cut for the rich and increased for the poor, and the Bush administration is following the same course. We're "leaving charity to the private sector," and reserving our help for only the "deserving poor." This period has seen an orgy of spending by the rich - bigger cars, second homes, faster boats, etc., while more and more middle-class families can no longer afford even one home. And at the bottom of the ladder the ranks of the homeless continue to swell, with three million persons on the streets today, an estimated nineteen million by the year 2,000, and the Federal Housing Budget cut by 77% over the last eight years! Education is publicly recognized as going down the drain, and little is said about the main problem being the neglect of inner-city children. Health care is an abomination, with our nation the only major industrialized one without a national medical system. More and more Americans are being frozen out

of any medical insurance, and the AIDS epidemic is still being treated as if the government just wished it would go away. Indeed in all areas of social service government is pulling back from helping those who need help the most.

4. The Right Wing. The last area I note is the emergence of a stronger and more articulate right wing in our nation - in politics and in religion, and too often these are allied. It's easy to make fun of these folks - we recall the bumper sticker which says, "The Moral Majority is Neither!" - but they get better P.R. than we do. They have had some setbacks: the Moral Majority is disbanded; Jimmy Swaggert is discredited; Jim Bakker is in jail; Oral Roberts is a bit poorer; and Pat Robertson failed politically. But Jerry Falwell is still going strong; Swaggert still brings in millions of dollars each week; Robertson's TV take is as high as before the election; and the Assembly of God starts one new congregation a day in the U.S. and seven a day abroad. Far worse, we are seeing growth today in racism, in anti-Semitism, in anti-intellectualism; the KKK is still thriving, along with newer hate groups such as the Posse Comitatus.

These four areas scare me; and in listing them I've just scratched the surface. I recall the story told by Harry Scholfield, of the little boy who went to sleep but woke up during the night. He heard a clock in a nearby tower begin to strike, and he listened to see what time it was. The clock struck eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve - but then it continued - on through thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen. Finally the little boy could stand it no longer; he jumped out of bed, ran down the hall to his parents' room, burst into their room and shouted, "Mommy, Daddy, wake up! Wake up! It's later than it ever was!" This describes well the kind of world we live in today: it's later than it ever was!

Why, then, do I propose to you an optimistic title, "To Meet the Shadowy Future Without Fear"?

The phrase is obscure. It comes from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's romantic poem, "Hyperion", written for the wooing of Frances Appleton, who eventually became his second wife.

"Look not mournfully into the Past
It comes not back again.
Wisely improve the Present; it is thine.
Go forth to meet the shadowy Future without fear,
and with a manly heart."

Easy to say, though hard to do. I understand that the poem actually hurt Longfellow's chances with the lady, though eventually he did win her (manly) heart.

So how do we go about meeting the future without fear? One way is to regard it strictly as beyond our control, to say, with Charles Swain, "Leave things of the future to fate." This is probably not very satisfactory to most of us.

Another way, equally unsettling for us, could be to see the whole mess as being somehow in God's hands, and a sign of the coming end of the world. Our friends in the Assembly of God preach this message. The "end times" are coming. Soon will be "the Rapture of the Church" (whatever that is; I haven't dared ask!). Then the end of the world will arrive, and all the rest of us will catch it!

Most Unitarian Universalists believe in free will, in a world bound neither by fate, socio/economic necessity, nor the whims of the gods. We would say, with the Belgian poet, Maurice Maeterlinck, that "The future is a world limited by ourselves." This may not help our confidence much, but from this basically humanistic point of view I can look with a realistic hope to our present and our past.

Patrick Henry, speaking to the Virginia Convention, said. "I know no way of judging the future but by the past," and it is to the past of our Universalist and Unitarian movements that I would look today to help in our consideration of our future.

One of the hallmarks of the Universalism of our ancestors was its confidence - that God loved all persons, desired the salvation of all, and (being God and thus all-powerful) would succeed in this quest. It was aptly described as "the Gospel of God's success." This was a confidence not just in God, but in humanity as well, a confidence that we were all worthy of salvation, recipients of God's love and concern simply because we were human beings and therefore children of God. It was also a confidence not just that all persons were to be saved, but that all could merit that salvation; all were capable of reaching holiness as a prelude to happiness, of becoming good persons as a necessary part of salvation.

This was indeed a "grand design," a view of the human venture as but one scene in a larger cosmic drama. And that

drama was to be played out not only for heaven and eternity, but here on earth in this life as well. The final scene might well be booked to play before the throne of the Almighty, but the opening lines were to be spoken in the here and now. When the Winchester Profession of 1803 stated that "Holiness and true happiness" were to be seen as "inseparably connected", that held for this world as much as for the next. Thus the 1790 Convention in Philadelphia went on record: against war, slavery and compulsory oath-taking; for arbitration in place of litigation, and for conformity to the civil laws; and an article of faith adopted then declared, "We believe in the obligation of the Moral Law as the rule of life... in obedience to that law, and promoting a holy, active and useful life."

The story is told of Hosea Ballou, riding over the hills of New Hampshire as a circuit rider. One day he was accompanied by another itinerant preacher, a Baptist, and they argued theology as they traveled. At one point the Baptist minister said, "Brother Ballou, if I were a Universalist, and feared not the fires of Hell, I'd hit you over the head and steal your horse and saddle." Ballou looked over at him and replied, "My brother, if you were a Universalist the idea would never occur to you!"

Universalists thus refused to offer a "short-cut" in religion - no easy route to Heaven, no guaranteed formulas or saviours, no magical rites or ceremonies. It affirmed the future with confidence, both for each individual and for the race as a whole, while holding that all individuals would have to reach that state of holiness for themselves, by their own efforts.

I'm identifying this as a doctrine primarily Universalist, but most Unitarians eventually accepted this belief as well, albeit with some reluctance to do so too publicly. The story is told of the young Congregational minister who was chided by one of this older colleagues for becoming too friendly with William Ellery Channing. "Don't you know that Channing is a heretic, and is headed straight for Hell?" "Perhaps Channing will go to Hell," the young man replied, "but if he does he'll change the climate there, and turn the tide of emigration in that direction!" The good life, here on earth, was seen as paramount.

Over the decades since our beginnings in America, our Universalist and Unitarian churches have grown more and more "worldly", mundane, secular. We always felt, both Universalists

and Unitarians, that true religion had to result in right living and good people. Both Unitarians and Universalists, from their beginnings, were to be found in the forefront of practically every social reform movement in America; the list of our involvement is the catalog of change in the 19th and 20th centuries. Our "organizing doctrines" were theological - Universal Salvation and the Unity of God - but over the years more and more of the time and energy of our people and our denominations went into "Mundane" concerns. And it was a natural thing that the concerns of this world gradually replaced and pushed aside our confidence in a world to come.

Perhaps we should say that only the focus of our faith was changed, for the confidence of Universalism remained, though centered on this world, this life. The Unitarian avowal of belief (used earlier by the Universalists) "in the progress of mankind onward and upward forever", expressed a faith common to both our denominations, a faith in the inevitable triumph of Good. The Social Gospel Movement that cut across all main-stream Protestant denominations was based on this optimism, a determination to "bring the world to Christ in one generation," a confidence that the Kingdom of Heaven should and could be established here on earth.

It took the multiple tragedies and shocks of the 20th Century to temper this optimism, this confidence in the final outcome of the human quest - wars, depressions, science turned to the uses of evil - but the tempering occurred. The optimism crumbled. The vision of a divine plan faded. The faith in God's final success (here and hereafter) largely disappeared.

Occasionally today we still hear the message of universal salvation within the Christian scheme (some form of Calvinist salvation for everyone), preached by some radical evangelist who has bothered to read Scripture closely. But that message is aimed afar off, in the hereafter. By and large we do not hear the message of optimism for this world, this life - at least not from organized religion. We don't even hear it much from Unitarian Universalists; we used to write hopeful hymns about the future, but today we're not too sure there's going to be one!

And there is, of course, ample reason for this climate of gloom and despair. I've come full circle here, to our fears for the future - your list or mine! The story is told of the British general

who, on the eve of the invasion of Normandy, noticed that his hands were shaking. Addressing them he said, "You'd shake even worse if you knew where I'm going to take you in the next few hours!!" We may have good reason to have the shakes today.

But I submit to you the proposition that despite our apprehension about the future, we are all incurably optimistic with regard to the human venture on planet earth. We speak our prophecies of doom, and we believe them. But we all act as if life is to go on! We get up in the morning. We go to work, sometimes on long-term projects. We raise children. We plant trees. And all of these things are acts of faith - that life will continue.

You may well say that we carry on these daily affirmations of life out of ignorance, that we repress our awareness of the horrors hanging over us. And perhaps this is so. But I sense as well a gut-level faith or optimism, built into the human race and basic to Universalism in all generations.

Now of course we act too much this way. By our daily actions we assume that life will go on. We take it for granted, both without evidence and without action to insure its happening. Recall that our Universalist ancestors, though they had faith that God would succeed, never left the task wholly up to Him. They saw women and men as partners with God - co-workers in the vineyard, co-creators of the Kingdom.

Even so today we must realize that nothing will replace the needed efforts of men and women "of goodwill and sacrificial spirit" (to quote the Washington Avowal of 1935).

An example: I floss my teeth each night, as an act of faith that there will be a future in which I will need them. Not in Heaven - I presume that if "all God's chillun" will have shoes they'll also be provided with dentures! But needed here on earth. And yet seldom do I spend as much time each day working at the tasks that can insure that future - to preserve the earth from despoilage, to prevent the missiles from being launched, to establish righteousness in the gates and justice in the marketplace!

Quite simply, we can meet the shadowy future without fear if we bring to it our best efforts. Our confidence in the future may well be a subconscious faith that keeps us going each day, but our actions to actually build for that future cannot at all wait on our

subconscious. Faith must always be translated into action to be meaningful.

The fact that you are here today (and not home hiding under the bed) tells me that you believe in the future, of Universalism and of the world. Our religion tells us that we must match that belief, that faith, with good works. It's been suggested that "horse sense" is what keeps horses from betting on people. Frankly, I'm willing to bet on people - any amount and any odds.

But what should we say of our Church? What future is there for the organized Universalist Unitarian movement? I wish I had a good answer to this question. I know that if the world is to be "saved" (from its own folly) it will be through the religion of universalism - through applying the principles of our religious faith. But it is quite unlikely that this salvation is going to come through our particular organization. One of Christopher Raible's Hymns for the Cerebration of Strife says it all too well:

An open mouth, an empty head, A pledge card left
unsigned,
These are the lib'ral attributes Which spring first to the
mind
These are the bonds of fellowship Which tie our tiny
band.
Why we do not convert the world We cannot understand.

We Unitarian Universalists have the grandest religious faith in existence; and we "match" this with a most miserable level of commitment. So in some ways I'm afraid I expect little of our organization.

And yet despite its many faults, our Unitarian Universalist Association is probably still necessary to the existence of our faith - secondary to our ideas, yes - but still quite needed. Needed to conserve those ideas, to transmit and share them, to protect them. Our denomination has come through some rough times, with problems of organization, of finances, of philosophy. But it has come through them, and survived, and we with it. The immediate past UUA Administration was lean and tough, of necessity. It was efficient, with programs often cut to the bone - too much so at times. But it did good work. The new Administration of Bill Schulz has made some spectacular mistakes, but is working hard at its job. It deserves our support; it must have our support to succeed, as well as occasionally our criticism.

But is it really necessary, this denominational structure, all these buildings in Boston filled with people working at this and that? Sometimes we say it is not, and often we act as if it is unneeded. It is my observation, however, as a historian of our movement, that a strong denominational organization is crucial to our survival. I believe that without the organization, the institution, our Universalist Unitarian faith would be the treasure of only an occasional, isolated individual - lonely and probably silent and afraid.

Recall well the early history of Universalism in America, before the arrival of John Murray in 1770. There were Universalists to be found in the American Colonies from the earliest days, but they were scattered, isolated - folks such as Henry Vane, Joseph Gatchell, Samuel Gorton, George de Benneville, Charles Chauncey, Jonathan Mayhew. There were Universalists to be found in most denominations, but they had no denomination of their own, no way to be aware of one another, no way to give one another support. Even at a later time we find Thomas Jefferson writing that, "The population of my neighborhood is too slender and too much divided into other sects to maintain any one preacher well. I must therefore be contented to be a Unitarian by myself."

Again on the Unitarian side of our heritage, remember that the liberal elements within the Congregational (or Established) churches in Massachusetts existed for many years without forming their own organization. We should be eternally grateful to Congregational minister Jedediah Morse and his fellow conservatives for deciding to "clean house" and force our Unitarian ancestors to form their own association. (We really should erect a statue of Morse at our Headquarters in Boston!) The Unitarian faith, brought into the open however reluctantly, could then spread and be shared with others. 1825 marks the date that Unitarianism in America became organized.

The arrival in America of John Murray, a half century earlier (in 1770) marks in similar fashion not the beginning of Universalism in America, but rather the organization of Universalism. The genius of John Murray, remember, was not in his theology - he was a Universalist Calvinist in effect, and was soon left behind theologically by the denomination - rather it was in his seeing the need for the organization of the scattered forces of Universalism. Murray established Universalist churches, organized them into

a denomination, spread the faith and defended it from attack.

Our history would suggest, then, that organization is of vital importance to the survival of liberal religion, and that we neglect it at our peril.

History also teaches us that we will thrive and grow in an atmosphere of controversy and even of hostility. Remember that our greatest period of Universalist growth came in the time prior to the Civil War, when it was estimated that there were 800,000 persons connected with our faith. This was a time of great controversy, when "Universalism" was often used as a cuss word, when it was actively debated with the orthodox and actively persecuted by them in many places. Since then we became respectable, and have waxed and waned along with the other respectable churches.

We may well become an embattled group once again, like it or not. The right-wing resurgence in our country has us as one of their targets. Theirs is a general attack on "Humanism," and the Unitarian Universalists are the main religious proponents of it. This can be for us both good and bad. It can be hard to take at times, since we don't really like to be attacked, especially when we know what nice people we are (and if you don't believe this, just ask us). And yet the attacks may serve to rouse us from slumber, to bind us together, and to attract others to our ranks.

Unitarians and Universalists have found it hard enough in the last century to share their faith with others; this may become even more difficult in a time of aggressiveness from the evangelical churches, or it could become easier. If they are beating people over the head with their message, maybe we'll be more ready to at least gently share ours.

Do we doubt the need for this sharing? Less than 10% of our adult members were born into our faith. How many of us here today are birthright UUs?If no one in our Church did any evangelism at all, any spreading of the good news of our religion, we few who have our hands raised would be the only persons here today! And a large part of our being able to face the future without fear lies in our being able to face it together, to share problems, to share solutions, to hang together so as to avoid hanging separately.

The task of liberal religion remains:

- to search out meaning for existence;
- to bind humanity together;
- to establish justice in the market-place;
- to affirm faith in the human quest.

I share with you a basic faith - that there will be a future and that we can affect it for the good.

May I close as I began - with Longfellow, from his Psalm of Life:

“Let us then be up and doing
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labour, and to wait.”

END

**OUR PROPHETIC SISTERHOOD
AND
THE UNIVERSALIST EXPERIENCE**

The Sixteenth Annual Address
On Universalist History
Ethics and Theology

By
Cynthia Grant Tucker, Ph.D.

162nd Annual Session
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"Prophetic Sisterhood: Liberal Women Ministers of the Frontier, 1880-1930". Beacon Press, 1990.

"A Woman's Ministry: Mary Collson's Search for Reform as a Unitarian Minister, A Hull House Social Worker, and A Christian Science Practitioner."
Temple University Press, 1984.

"Kate Freeman Clark: A Painter Rediscovered."
University Press of Mississippi, 1981.

OUR PROPHETIC SISTERHOOD AND THE UNIVERSALIST EXPERIENCE

Cynthia Grant Tucker, Ph.D.

In a sense, what we're doing today is performing a ritual much like the one that our Jewish brothers and sisters performed just a few weeks ago when they celebrated the season of repentance and renewal, a season that began with Rosh Hashana and ended with Yom Kippur. Those holidays were a time when the Jewish congregations prepared for renewal and growth by taking stock of their shortcomings and accepting responsibility for reconciling relationships and making them all they should be. During that season, memory's power was recognized as the dominant force that moves a community forward to a better future; and that's why on both Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, the people prayed with one voice, Zachrenu Lehayyim, which means "Remember us into life." Remember us into life. This heavily theological phrase, which has meaning for all of us here, was helpful to me as I thought about sharing in this yearly Universalist rite of renewal, a history-laden ritual of taking stock and looking ahead.

If my calculations are accurate, the Universalists of New York State, untiring in their annual meetings, have now had the chance to sit through at least 161 keynote addresses since first creating this conference back in the early 1800's. Those of us who couldn't be present for all of these can still hear what we missed by going through old Christian Leaders, which faithfully carried reports of proceedings and papers year after year. What we find when we go back to look is pretty much what, until recent times, we'd come to expect from any religious convention, even the ones that considered themselves to have been the most progressive: namely, that featured speakers routinely surveyed the year that had passed, spoke reassuringly of the prospects for greater virility in the movement, and as the culture demanded, did all of this in a thoroughly manly way.

The comments delivered in Buffalo exactly 100 years ago, in October of 1890, were fairly typical. Rev. I. M. Atwood, the President of this Convention at the time, was one of the first to address the group with words that were hopeful and upbeat despite a number of nagging, chronic problems. There was cause and concern in the number of moribund parishes and in the

shortage of pastors to lead those societies that were still growing or showing signs of new life. But Atwood was heartened, he said, by evidence that the Universalists were, nonetheless, making headway in spreading their message of love and righteousness.

One of the most encouraging signs for Rev. Atwood was that New York's Universalists had "so fine a force of young men in important places" throughout the state. The pulpits in Hudson, Albany, Troy, Little Falls, Utica, Auburn, Syracuse, Clifton Springs, Victor, Macedon, and Rochester Second," he said, going right down the roster, were "young men of talent and consecration" from whose zeal and hard labor the Church was "destined to reap great advantages." Moreover, in fields outside of the ministry, "but no less important," Atwood added, there was also a goodly number of "very promising young men," whose calibre of "young manhood" was surely the envy of other state conferences that shared New York's purpose of strengthening the Universalist cause.

Surveying a wide expanse of denominational territory, the speaker had no trouble finding the space to acknowledge the service of veteran pastors, of seminary and college professors, and all the other "good men," black and white, who were tending the liberal vineyards. With its generous tone and obvious effort to draw its circumference expansively, Atwood's survey was clearly intended to be quintessentially Universalist, leaving its listeners feeling that no worthy effort had been passed unnoticed and no faithful laborer had been left out or forgotten. ⁽¹⁾

We can only conjecture how well this keynote went over in 1890, but hearing it in 1990, its celebration of "promising men" seems to some in the audience anything but inclusive. Church people generally have become more aware of the male tilt and exclusivity that have characterized denominational structures historically. With this heightened consciousness, many religious liberals are coming to see, with a keen sense of the incongruity, how the very religions that prided themselves on rejecting the "partialist" view as demeaning habitually pictured their progress, year after year, as if their women had never existed or made any difference worth mentioning.

Not long ago, while doing some research concerning church buildings and grounds, I ran across a description of an Episcopal vicar's study as the vicar's daughter remembered it from her

childhood. Her memory's eye could still see a huge roll-topped desk, a leather-bound swivel chair, and an anthracite-burning stove which devoted ladies who worked for the church had provided. Unable to bear the sight of their beloved vicar with his fingers white, these women, through great determination and effort, had collected the money to buy the stove as a gift. But most telling of all were the walls, not the two which were solid with books, but the others:

The walls of the study which had no bookshelves were covered in photographs. No man or boy who had ever worked closely with the vicar... could let an occasion pass without being photographed and sending a copy to the vicar. Bell-ringers ringing bells; choir boys in surplices; men's societies on outings. There was no end to them, and not one was thrown away. The women church workers were only photographed when they were in their graves. There were dozens of photographs of graves, usually at the stage when they were piled with wreaths.⁽²⁾

For the most part, until fairly recently, the accounts of Universalist and Unitarian history have been like the story presented on the wall of the vicar's study. Without the slightest show of concern that its bias distorted the truth, it considered only the men while excluding the women who still were alive and active, indeed, the silenced majority whose efforts and thoughtfulness had kept all the men of the church - and their trust chroniclers - warm and comfortable. In short, our historical narratives presented a terribly undemocratic and skewed account that nonetheless seems to have satisfied all but a few.

To appreciate the enormity of what was left out of the published reports we only need look at the women's ledgers, the records that church women, knowing their own worth and presence, kept for themselves to preserve an orderly memory of what they achieved through their separate associations. These well kept, informative journals, considered of little historical interest and rarely read by the men, have long been stored out of sight in private homes or in musty church basements. But when they're retrieved they leave no doubt that Universalist women, like women in all mainline Protestant groups, not only accounted for most of the people who sat in the pews, but also did practically all of the parish work - from sewing and cooking for mission

work and congregational suppers and fairs to raising the money for buildings and visiting sick and elderly members. These journals also remind us of the prophetic nature of work carried out by the Universalist women, "prophetic" in that it was activated by discontent with the status quo and by a religious commitment to making the social system work better.

A report delivered in 1906 with obvious pride to the members of the New York Universalist Women's Missionary Society dramatizes the breadth and diversity of women's contributions to the Universalist cause and indeed leaves some readers wondering what there was left for the menfolk to do. "We now have 19 active chapters," the handwritten entry began, noting that seven of these were new affiliates that had been formed in Brooklyn, Canton, Cooperstown Junction, Buffalo, Morris, Ogdensburg, and Victor. "During the past year, we were represented at 11 different associations by some members of our faithful band who gave papers in our behalf." Throughout the state, the report went on, "the Circles responded nobly" to calls for aid in benevolent work all across the continent and abroad, including the missions in Southern states and Japan, and the Red Cross disaster relief that followed the San Francisco earthquake and fires.⁽³⁾

Moving in still closer to look at the parish reports of what women did locally, we find that they spent a tremendous amount of their time far away from the public view doing all sorts of unglamorous tasks like cooking church suppers and cleaning up afterwards, sewing and filling large barrels with clothes for the poor, preparing and carrying food to the needy and providing Christmas gifts for underprivileged children. Most of the groups also had their pet projects. The Mission Circle in Middletown, for example, used part of its earnings to cover an invalid sister's rent every month, and another part to lodge a disabled parishioner in the Parish House.⁽⁴⁾ The Fourth Universalist Society's women in New York City ran a free kindergarten and opened a home for the aged out in the country. Clearly, it was this dutiful sisterhood, noted only in passing if mentioned at all by the chroniclers, who took the lead in establishing outreach programs and missions, who tended the local parish needs and supported the work of the ministry, in short, whose daily labors gave meaning and life to the Universalist message.

Not that the women left preaching and authorized ministry

to the men alone. While most did accept the supportive roles as their portion and asked for no more, some sisters felt called to move out from the kitchens and pews to stand up on the platforms, to occupy pulpits and lead congregations as well. Olympia Brown became the first woman to make this request and succeed when New York's St. Lawrence Association of Universalists agreed to ordain her in 1863, eight years before a Unitarian, Celia Burleigh, set a similar precedent. In 1875, ten of 674 Universalist preachers were female. By the time women were given the vote in 1920, 88 Universalist sisters had been ordained by their denomination, and half that number had been ordained in the Unitarian fold. Though a tiny contingent usually on the outskirts and distant from the centers of denominational control, the name of these women crop up consistently.

Rev. Caroline Soule, first president of the Women's Centenary Association, went on to establish the Scottish Mission - an idea proposed first in New York City in 1874 - and served as minister of St. Paul's Universalist Church in Glasgow for almost fifteen years before she retired in 1892. In the Brooklyn area, during the mid-1880's, Rev. Annette Waltz Crossman, served briefly, and later was followed by Rev. Alice K. Wright who, with her minister husband during the 1890's was settled with both Brooklyn's Third and Fifth Universalist societies. Rev. Augusta Chapin, the second woman credentialed by the Universalist body and a native of this state, had one of the longest careers, one that spanned nearly forty years. After serving churches from coast to coast, Chapin returned to her native state and held her last pastorate in Mount Vernon before she retired to New York City in 1901.⁽⁵⁾

Given the energy and contributions of this Universalist sisterhood, it is sad and unsettling that they are almost invisible in our inscribed memory. As your keynote presenter this year, I'd like to propose that we give our support to the work - already begun through significant efforts by Charlotte Cote, Catherine Hitchings, Charles Howe, David Johnson, Russell Miller, Arthur Saxon, Gwendolyn Brown Willis, Joella Vreeland, and others - of enlarging and reconstructing the record, creating the fair and accurate history that ennoble us all by giving our women their rightful place in our past.

Accomplishing this will entail a lot more than some quick cosmetic refurbishing. It will take more than just adding pictures

and names of women to freshen things up here and there. More than changing the textbook's cover or making our language stylishly gender inclusive. More than this, we need to engage in a deeper process of renovation, a process of reconstructing our state of mind, proceeding boldly in shucking off old ways of seeing things, and venturing off the beaten paths to explore the abandoned precincts and to read the markers that name the unnamed and forgotten.

But as we take off on this expedition, retracing our sisters' steps back to the past, we need to beware of the pitfalls that frequently trip us up. For one thing, we'd best not go out with the expectation of finding a great stash of buried "success stories" of the conventional type; for it's doubtful that many exist. Conventional stories of so-called "success" present us with heroes of unblemished character, shoo-ins for sainthood, who overcome any and every adversity. They negotiate wonderfully smooth and productive careers while remaining unscarred and untroubled. But few human beings who enter professions fit into this script, females least of all.

This is certainly clear when we look at what happened to women who wanted to preach and do grassroots ministry. This small, scattered group had their triumphs but also were worn down by constant resistance and often dropped out of sight after just a few months or years. We find that the struggles of these pioneers were not by any means over if and when they gained ordination, but that, to the contrary, having the same credentials as men as well as the nerve to preach compounded the charges of heresy that were leveled against them by their critics. With society's widespread ambivalence about such departures from fixed gender roles, women rarely got called to any but the smallest and unstablest churches that could not always promise a pastor a living wage.

We might well consider the testimony of Rev. Olympia Brown, a name staunch defenders of canonized history like to invoke presumably to suggest that her tradition was fully supportive of women who wanted to enter its ministerial ranks. To be sure, Brown appreciated the broader view of the Universalist fold, whose Canton Theological School at St. Lawrence University opened its doors to her sex at a time when even the Unitarian institutions refused to do so. Brown also believed she was treated

fairly while she was a student there. But when she had graduated and made it clear she meant business, applying to be ordained by the St. Lawrence Association of Universalists, in Malone, New York, she encountered what she described later as bruising opposition, with some of the harshest coming from other women. ⁽⁷⁾ Similarly, Hazel Kirk, ordained in the Ogdensburg Universalist Church in 1915 and one of the most resilient pioneers despite the persistent opposition, encountered enough of the bias to bear witness privately to "a prejudice regarding women" that made her cohort's survival in ministry difficult at best. ⁽⁸⁾

The accounts that we have of Maria Cook's rise and decline as a preacher in upstate New York in the early 19th century remind us not only that women have long demonstrated great oratorical gifts, but also that public resistance to their using these talents has many times been too intense and destructive for them to surmount or endure. In Maria Cook's case, things started off well enough, due to the good natured curiosity and respect people had for her unexpectedly powerful presence and message. But after a few months, as critics began to speak out and Cook was put on the defensive, her sermons took on a darker tone, which alienated yet others. As her popularity plummeted, and the public became less tolerant, her unwomanly disregard of conventional bounds and her anger were discredited further by being ascribed to mental derangement. ⁽⁹⁾

That there were additional stresses for pastors who also chose to get married, often to colleagues, is equally evident when we inspect the ministerial files kept for women like Alice Wright Graves, whose career in the pulpit and marriage both came to an end at the turn of the century after she spent several years in co-pastorates with her husband. Graves's story suggests that even where such joint appointments might have helped both partners vocationally, the woman's position was usually propped up by her spouse's, creating a state of dependency that cancelled out the benefits. ⁽¹⁰⁾ If children came into the picture, as they usually did, things became even harder for married women in pulpits. As Elsie A. Magoon, who preached in Bombay, New York, learned early on, when one had become "the mother of a family of little ones," there was "not the time and opportunity... for self improvement and preparation for higher usefulness." ⁽¹¹⁾

If a married woman did manage to stay in the ministerial field, she almost always accomplished this by compromising, by

trading the role of a minister for the role of a minister's wife, which is to say, of the parish assistant and Sunday School superintendent.⁽¹²⁾ In short, when we start to recover the history of what Universalist women were doing, we can't expect to come up with the kinds of fabulous lives of steady, prodigious accomplishment that we'd like to imagine for them to make reparation. For those who aspire to break with tradition, real life scenarios never are placid and simple, no matter how many advantages their protagonists enjoy. Nor do we need to perpetuate these standards for "success." We need to reassess what we mean by empowering human achievement and use these criteria to appreciate women's history. Simply not to achieve what we set out to do doesn't mean that we haven't lived valuable lives that are worthy of recollection and emulation. Those who for all of their personal limitations held fast to their principles, who sometimes tripped up but pressed on with courage and dignity, these are the real successes we want to remember and use as our models.

As well as resisting the urge to give history's women their turn with the old success model - a model that really does none of us any good - we need to restrain the combative impulse that has us depicting their struggles as if they took place on a battlefield with men in black hats on the one side and women in white on the other. It's the simplest way of deploying the forces, but history's facts don't support it. Indeed, the record shows that Universalist men were often the leading advocates of reforming the social structures that narrowed their sisters' political rights and vocational opportunities, while women themselves were often the most resistant to any such changes.

To be sure, some men argued vigorously that it was a violation of nature for women to step out of spheres that biology and their domestic responsibilities prescribed.⁽¹³⁾ Yet the prejudice that pastors like Olympia Brown, Maria Cook, and Hazel Kirk claimed they ran up against, as Kirk wrote confidentially nearly sixty years ago, was "usually found among the women and not the men." It was only when the sisters as well as the brothers were willing to give them a chance that the clergywoman could "make good" and establish a good relationship.⁽¹⁴⁾ The conventional formula, men against women, just doesn't equate when we're talking about the complex dynamics of challenging old conventions and changing the forms of denominational leadership.

There's also the pitfall of thinking that noteworthy history is a series of one-person plots, of scripts about single protagonists whose fates are unique, theirs alone. This perception implies that to be worth remembering we have to have somehow performed by ourselves, to have been somehow different, eccentric, essentially unlike other people instead of part of the larger, timeless community who share a common experience. The late Joseph Campbell's message in unwrapping the meanings of myths for us was precisely that we do participate as a family in one human narrative. The stories of long obscured women who are finally coming to light serve well to reinforce this vital message. When I wrote A Women's Ministry (Temple UP, 1984) - which recounted the story of how a Unitarian pastor, Mary Collson, became involved with Christian Science around the turn of the century - I knew I was writing also about my mother's ordeal with Christian Science and about the countless others who also have gotten caught up in that movement. More recently, too, when I reconstructed the group biography of early liberal clergywomen (Prophetic Sisterhood, 1990), I wanted to show how these people's lives were tied to each other and tied to our own by a common humanity and our shared hopes and struggles.

One final word of caution: let's not think that we can bring everything hidden in history out of the darkness. It's true that historians do play the roles of detectives and spies, collecting and putting together the clues of what happened before they arrived on the scene. And it's true that many historians thrive on competing for information and relish in flaunting facts and figures their colleagues appear not to know. But historical reconstruction is neither a contest nor upgraded dime-store mysteries. Detective stories would have us believe that all the disruptive problems that threaten our well being are finally soluble. They show us a world where all the unknowns can be clarified, leaving no further questions or mysteries; after all, they're created for the purpose of being worked out and letting us sit back and know at the end of the story that the challenge, having been met, is over and done with.

Historians, too, would like to solve all of the puzzles. After all, it's the manifold mysteries that first draw us back to the past. What was Maria Cook thinking and feeling during the difficult months when the press was reporting that she had become irrational and was plainly out of control? Or what caused the

marriage of Alice and Ellsworth Wright to end in divorce, and how did the failure affect their lives from then on? And why was it women like Hazel Kirk were able to prosper in parish ministry were other women could not and had to withdraw? We all want to know what made people of vision attempt what they did and become what they were, and historians try to come up with some probable answers. But reflective chroniclers understand that the answers are always but partial and tentative. Unlike those popular writers who compose our detective fiction, they don't pretend that all the important questions have answers. Historians ought to be able to offer us fuller views into the past while encouraging our respect for the realm of mystery where the divine, however we understand it, surely resides.

When we congregated in Buffalo 100 Octobers ago, Rev. Atwood's "fraternal welcome" was followed by an Occasional Sermon. It was preached by another good brother, the Rev. E. E. Perry, and it posed the questions, "What are the signs of the times and what is required of us in response?"⁽¹⁵⁾ These questions have a special timeliness for us today as we face the challenge of making not only our written remembrances of the past, but our present and future, truly universalist texts by giving fair recognition, giving all of our family their place in the sun.

And how can we make sure this happens? How can we make sure a few or one group are deterred from trying to block out some others? The Japanese have come up with one possibility, one way to deal with inequities in the sharing of space. They came up with this while trying to work through the problems in Tokyo, where 12 million people have squeezed themselves into only 800 square miles, a relatively small area. As more and more people have moved to the city, with no more room to spread out, they've just piled themselves up, one on top of the other in high rise apartment buildings. New skyscrapers have had to be built, each one higher than the last, trying to accommodate this massive and still swelling population. And, as the apartments rise, they block the sun from adjacent buildings, so that people living in the lower structures find their environment darker and colder. There's not much central heating in Japan, and winter sunlight is what keeps many offices or homes warm.

This problem and the protests about it have led to a new concept called nisshoken, "the right to sunshine." This concept,

in turn, has made its way into a law that requires all builders to compensate those who are robbed of their sunshine by any new building that goes up. The law is replete with a complicated formula that requires high rise builders to give the people whom they overshadow financial compensation - a one-time payment that can range from about \$400 to over \$1000 for each hour of sunlight they lose on a winter day. Nisshoken - the right to sunshine - is a concept that makes us take pause. For it has implications not only for urban development and real estate but also for the interior space of our memory as religious liberals, and the impact historical overshadowing has had, and will have, on our relations as a community of faith.

To have a place in the sun - in a social system, in public and private memory, in human relationships - to have this place in the sun is a basic human need to right and certainly a salient part of the liberal religious legacy. Our religious tradition was formed through the bold affirmation of this universalist imperative, though somehow its leaders and scribes too often forgot that women were as much a part of the family as men. We may hope for a change, as we hope for goodwill, but we cannot legislate it or speed up compliance through ordinances and punitive measures. And we surely don't need to.

History, unlike our urban centers or the walls of the vicar's study, will never be short on space, never cramped. It will always spread out endlessly over time and place and have room for us all to meet as equals, on one plane, on common ground, and join hands in one celebration. As the speaker of this convention said 100 years ago, where there is a restless desire to make our relationships better, where there is commitment to progress as well as goodwill, there is surely cause to be hopeful.⁽¹⁶⁾ So now, as our memory bids us to settle accounts with those we've left out in the past and to pledge ourselves to making our faith more universalist, we can pray that the spirit that moves all things and unites us through hope and love, that this source of all goodness connecting all time will remember us into life. So be it.

NOTES

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9. Nathaniel Stacy, Memoirs (Columbia, PA., 1850), 223-229.
10. Hitchings, 75.
11. Trumpet 41 (2 July, 1859), 18; (2 August, 1859), 37; (10 September 1859), 56.
12. See account of Lydia Jenkins' experience in Howe, "Under Orders from No Man," 97-116.
13. Universalist 41 (23 July 1870), 1.
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15. Christian Leader 72 (16 October 1890), 2.
16. Ibid.

ROOTS AND WINGS:
Five Suggestions for the Future of Universalism

The Seventeenth Annual Address
on Universalist History
Ethics and Theology

By
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He was Chairman of the 1985-86 UUA Task Force on Social Responsibility and is now or has been on the Boards of anti-poverty agencies, civil advocacy groups for the mentally-ill. His present congregation sponsors some 22 social ministry projects.

ROOTS AND WINGS

Five Suggestions of the Future of Universalism

The Reverend John A. Buehrens

*Roots, hold me close;
Wings, set me free;
Spirit of Life, come to me,
come to me.*

-Carolyn McDade

Standing on the subway one day, amid the usual diversity of the city's jostling humanity, I looked up and saw among the advertisement placards a "Streetscape" poem, placed there by the Humanities Council.

*These days
whatever you have to say, leave
the roots on, let them
dangle*

And the dirt

*Just to make clear
where they come from.*

This advice from the poet Charles Olson seems to me worth heeding. So let me start by saying a little about "where I'm coming from," as we used to say in the '60s. Spiritually, I'm very much a product of that decade.

The first time I entered a Unitarian Universalist meeting house was in April, 1968. I was a senior in college. One of my closest friends was a young black man from Cincinnati who'd been both president of our class at Harvard and of continental LRY, the Unitarian Universalist youth movement of the time. He'd convinced our class that we shouldn't let our graduation be planned by the college. The speaker was too likely to be an apologist for the *status quo*, for the misbegotten war in Vietnam. We should have our own Class Day speaker, to express our point of view. So we asked Robert Kennedy. He accepted. Then in

March, when President Johnson announced that he wouldn't run for re-election after all, the Senator's staff called. Kennedy couldn't come to Cambridge in June; he'd be in California, for primary.

So my friend Bill managed to contact Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He'd met him at a UUA General Assembly (the first time it was held in Hollywood, FL) when King spoke. And he agreed to come. Two weeks later he was shot and killed in Memphis.

I wanted to go to the funeral in Atlanta with Bill. He, understandably, wasn't talking to white folks just then, much less driving with one all day and all night. So instead I went alone, feeling about as lonely and depressed as I've ever felt about the world, to the church in Harvard Square. Frankly, I don't remember much about what was said there. What I do recall is staring at a plaque on the wall alongside the chancel. It bore a good motto for a non-creedal congregation - the words of the prophet Micah, "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

Earlier that year I'd heard Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who was one of the founders of Clergy and Laity Concerned about Vietnam. When it comes to religion, he said, our society has almost forgotten how to ask important questions - questions like that one. Instead, good individualists and consumers that we are, we turn them upside down, asking "What do I require...in a God I'd be willing to believe in, a community I'd be willing to support, a cause I'd help serve." Not bad questions mind you. The prophets knew that we must choose whom to serve. Some idol of our own making? Or the Source of All Being? Bad questions only if we forget the larger one, of what might be required of us, in the way of doing justice, loving mercy, and walking more humbly.

Heschel knew that those who prophetically challenge our idolatries of nation, race, and class are often ignored or silenced. Sitting there, knowing that in Dr. King's death another prophet had been killed, I remembered what the rabbi said about keeping such questions alive: that it can only be kept alive by communities, willing to live in the spirit of the prophets and in their questions. A year later, after a year spent teaching public high school (which I sometimes say is what **really** drove me to religion), I applied to Harvard Divinity School, "not so much to find answers," as I put it, "as to explore the eternal questions, and communities willing to live in them."

My own family roots were not UU, and certainly not very Harvard. They were working class, and Midwestern. My father's mother, exploring the origins of her Wisconsin farm family later traced them back here to upstate New York, and then to an early settler in Vermont, Capt. Steele Smith, whose son Azahel was a Universalist minister. But I was raised a very nominal Roman Catholic, by a mother whose parents came as orphaned immigrants from Czechoslovakia, and by a father who'd never been able to go to college, the son of a Lutheran plumber and shipyard worker.

Without knowing about my Universalist forebear, I spent the first year at Div School doing research in Universalist history. I assisted Prof. George Hunston Williams. (You'll find me in footnote #1 of American Universalism.) I'd worked for him before. As senior, I'd helped him on *The Radical Reformation*. That was my major: history and literature of the Renaissance and Reformation. What had first given me the "wings" to get to Harvard in the first place was a year spent in Italy — thanks to an AFS scholarship. At a Jesuit liceo in Milan, I traded in my mother's fairly moderate Catholicism for a fascination with the Renaissance and humanism. But when I studied American forms of liberal religion it was Universalism that first drew my attention.

When I think about exploring those roots, it strikes me as almost, well, *botanical* how often the number "five" came up. Nearly all the historic Universalist statements of faith had five clauses. So did the Unitarian statements. Dr. Williams told me both were reacting to the so-called "Five Points" of classical Calvinism. Looking back a hundred years, Williams himself found five historic interpretations of Universalism at its 1870 Centennial - two forms of Christian Universalism; Universalism as the inclusive democratic faith of the American Republic, aimed at universal redemption; and two forms of Universalism as a natural or world religion. About the same time I read his colleague James Luther Adams' pamphlet on "The Five Smooth Stones of Religious Liberalism" around which our roots still seem to twine. More recently, the new Principles and Purposes of the UUA listed five sources from which our living tradition draws. My colleague, Forrester Church, and I used those sources to structure five chapters each for Our Chosen Faith, our new introduction to Unitarian Universalism (Beacon, 1989).

About fifteen months ago, I spoke to about 1,500 UUs at the Southeast UU Summer Institute. The theme was "Roots and Wings" and the logo, as I recall, had a five panel depiction of a great five-rooted tree turning into a bird with two wings, two legs, and a tail. So what you're going to get from me today is somewhat analogous.

There are five suggestions for the future of Universalism that I want to make. Each, I believe, has something to say about what's needed to draw from our roots and allow this great faith tradition to really soar once again. What can give us wings? Well, I'm tempted to repeat the story of a Southern evangelist who said to his flock, "Brothers and sisters, there's work to be done. Great good to be got. But first we got to take that first little step. And then the second. Then we got to walk together, and not grow weary." "Amen," said the congregation. "We got to run together, and not grow faint." "Amen, they chorused. "We got to spread our wings like eagles and fly!" said the preacher. "Amen!" they shouted. "But," said the preacher, "we all know today it takes *money* to fly!" Sudden silence, until a voice piped up from the back, "Then let's walk, preacher!"

Well, money sure would help. God knows we UUs aren't very generous with it. We have one of the lowest average rates of giving of any denomination in the country. But that's not where I want to begin. The first source of uplift I want to suggest isn't material. It's spiritual. Religious **language**, rooted in experience and nature, is perennial. But too often we have neglected it. Historically, our approach has been to trim back the burgeoning bush of religious expression. Sometimes our pruning has been over-drastic, leaving us with little but a sterile stump in the ground.

"Now the kingdom of heaven," says the Gospel (Mt. 13:31-32), "is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." Emerson knew that truth. In his essay *Nature*, he wrote of language that "Words are signs of natural facts;...natural facts...[the] symbols of...spiritual facts; and Nature [itself]...the symbol of spirit." When he warned young ministers at the Divinity School that when worship decays, society lives to trifles, he insisted that "It is the office of a true teacher to show us that God is, not was;...speaketh, not spake," and he opposed both traditionalism (though not tradition) and "the paste-board and filigree" of trying to invent new forms. "Rather let the

breath of new life be breathed by you," he advised, "through the forms already existing."

What have we religious liberals done, however? Too often, it seems to me, we have laid the axe to the root of our own trees. The result is that we cannot bear good fruit. And what is cut down ends up being thrown into the consuming fire. (Cf. Mt. 3:10)

We need religious language. As one contemporary writer, Charles Morgan, has said: "Let us use the great words still - God, Satan, heaven, hell - lest for want of them we babble arrogantly about our toys." The bland abstractions of modern psycho-babble and social-political punditry are no substitute for prophetic religion. Yet too often, as the joke has it, the only time the name "God" or "Jesus" is mentioned in some UU churches is when the janitor stubs his toe!

We religious liberals haven't merely shot ourselves in the foot by abandoning all the most powerful language and imagery of our culture. We have shot ourselves in the mouth, where it's fatal. Talk about wings! We have turned over such language to the right-wing. And they have flown with it. We have given them a controlling interest in the most powerful symbols of our common heritage. We have let the partialists, the literalists, the manipulators and idolators capture the Flag, the Family, and the Bible.

As though prophetic liberals weren't, like Dr. King, profoundly patriotic. As though the prophets didn't "seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless and care for the widow." (Isaiah I:17) As though God, who created all this generous overabundance, who indulges and forgives us, weren't in some sense the greatest liberal of all. As though Jesus, weren't perhaps the second greatest. Anything but a Biblical literalist, he complained even in life about those who called him "Lord, without doing what he said about loving one's neighbor. As though the Holy Spirit - the spirit that makes for wholeness - weren't available to all people, and not just to the "theologically correct."

Some of you will recognize these as points my friend Forrest likes to make. So do I. He argues them in a forthcoming book, God and Other Famous Liberals: Reclaiming the Politics of America (Simon and Schuster, 1992). Elsewhere he speaks about "remythologizing [our] humanism." For most of our history, in trying to trim faith back to some pure ethical and spiritual core, it's as though we religious liberals have been "trying to find the seed

of an onion by peeling away its layers. "Eventually," Forrest says, "nothing is left but our tears." (Entertaining Angels, Harper & Row, 1987, p.12) I agree with him. We don't need to abandon the myth, story, imagery and religious language in which our culture is rooted. We simply need to recapture an interpretation that is ours - generous, liberal, humanistic and liberating. If we don't, we and our message won't fly.

Take the character of God. No doubt in some sense we should worry *first* about our own. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways," said God to Isaiah (55:8). As Forrester puts it, "God is not God's name; God is our name, for that which is present in each yet greater than all." American Universalists historically spent a good deal of their preaching standing up for God's character as mutuality and love, over against a Calvinist idea of God as powerful and controlling. This isn't a bad heritage.

Nor is the argument over. Consider these lines from an essay on government by humorist P.J. O'Rourke. Although conservative, he has "no very elaborate political theory."

I have only one firm belief about the American political system, and that is this: God is a Republican and Santa Claus is a Democrat.

God is an elderly or, at any rate, middle-aged male, a stern fellow, patriarchal rather than paternal and a great believer in rules and regulations. He holds men strictly accountable for their actions. He has little apparent concern for the material well-being of the disadvantaged. He is politically connected, socially powerful and holds the mortgage on literally everything in the world. God is difficult. God is unsentimental. It is very hard to get into God's heavenly country club.

Santa Claus is another matter. He's cute. He's non-threatening. He's always cheerful. And he loves animals. He may know who's been naughty and who's been nice, but he never does anything about it. He gives everyone everything they want without a thought of a *quid pro quo*. He works hard for charities, and he's famously generous to the poor. Santa Claus is preferable to God in every way but one: There is no such thing as Santa Claus.

Now I am *not* suggesting that we preach Santa Claus. Or the

Tooth Fairy. Dr. King didn't exactly espouse either. But he and Jesus and Isaiah and other "prophetic women and men [who]...confront[ed] powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love," all perceived a God rather different from O'Rourke's. More universalistic. More caring about the disadvantaged. Whose realm of commonwealth may not yet be entirely "of this world," but who works most creatively where we care within it, not only for our neighbors, but for those different from ourselves.

That brings me to the second wing without which we will never get off the ground: recovering a sense of **mission**. Today's world needs us. In it, there are still two great competing streams of ideology (or, if you like, theology.) I've already alluded to them. One still emphasizes power and control. It takes both secular and religious forms. Not just Calvinism. It appears among coupists in the Kremlin. It appears among Catholic and fundamentalist zealots, blocking women from access to safe, legal abortion. They may portray those who escort them as "pro-death," as opposed to "pro-life." I say they are simply devoted to a theology of choice, democracy, mutuality, and interdependence. And in the long-run, there's good news: that theology is bound to prevail.

Here the Universalist side of our heritage is wiser, I believe, than the Unitarian side. At its root, it's evangelical. It knows the need for good news. It preached with a sense of mission even in the "Burnt Over" district of upstate New York, where hellfire and brimstone had been pronouncing many damned, but few saved, for years and years. And it offered the cool and living waters of a more enduring gospel. The good news of God's inclusive commonwealth.

Unitarians, by contrast, too often have been aloof and elitist, making a virtual fetish out of "not proselytizing." Like the Brahmin lady on Beacon Hill who, when asked where she bought her hats, replied, "My dear, we don't *buy* our hats; we *have* them," Unitarians have too often received a prophetic heritage, but then tried to pass along something more like a worship of the ancestors. Universalists have always known better, though at times they too have succumbed to ancestor worship.

"The church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning," said one modern theologian [Emil Brunner]. The paradox of Universalist history, it seems to me, is that to the extent that our forebears

kept pouring cold water on fire in the next life, they failed in this one. To the extent that they provided deep streams of cool and living water for admitted sinners, thirsting for spiritual acceptance, hospitality and succor as pilgrims in this world, they succeeded, and won immortality. It isn't hellfire we have to encounter today. Consider the TV evangelists. Little hellfire there. Just a cool medium, spreading a watery message. Instead, it's we who need more "fire in the belly" - more of a sense of mission!

Early Universalists knew that the mission of the church is two-fold: to preach a prophetic gospel, and to provide "a community of acceptance - especially to those who feel unacceptable, even to themselves." (Paul Tillich) They also knew that, if hospitality is the most basic religious virtue, there is an obligation to share it.

My former colleague in Dallas, TX, the Rev. Norma Veridan, used to do newcomer orientation with me. And whenever asked about the difference between Universalists and Unitarians, she wouldn't repeat the old witticism that the first group believed that God was too good to damn them, while the second believed that, being do-gooders, they were too good to be damned; she'd talk about her mother, a third generation Universalist. In the early 1960s, when Grandma Vera was representing the Universalist congregation in Fitchburg, MA, in their negotiations over merger with the First Parish, Unitarians, she came back from one such meeting with a succinct definition: "Those Unitarians," said Vera, "can talk your ear off! But they can't do a church supper the way we Universalists can!" And there you have it!

Norma and I instituted two relevant programs when we worked together. One involved young adults. I'll speak about it more in the workshop after lunch. We gathered a group of six young adults in their 20s, and we gave them a mission, a ministry: to welcome every other young adult who came through the doors of that church, and then to build a young adult ministry with opportunities for mutual support, spiritual growth, religious learning, and social service. Within three years that group grew to 150. In New York City, I repeated the experience. It took only four years to transform a congregation that had only half-a-dozen members in their 20s into one with more than 250.

The second program that Norma and I worked on together involved re-activating inactive members. We took a training program in how to do that, led by a Methodist minister from here in

upstate New York. He'd written the book on the subject. Then we trained lay people to make the actual contacts. Whether you call it "guarding the back door," as I did, or something more positive, it also worked. Fewer people drifted off from the church. More came back to new and deeper forms of involvement. Most of these renegotiations of relationship with the religious community involved what today I'm going to call the two legs without which our Universalist future will also never walk, much less get off the ground and fly: social ministry and lay involvement in spiritual leadership.

Let me start with **social ministry**. While I was still in Dallas, I was asked by the UUA Board of Trustees to chair a continental Task Force on Social Responsibility. Our charge was daunting: to examine everything we Unitarian Universalists were then doing (and not doing) to make this a better world, then to recommend to the UUA Board things that they might be able to do to make us more effective.

We consulted widely. We sent out questionnaires. We studied studies of other religious movements. But very quickly we focused, not on this issue or that, but on local congregations. We began to explore the relationship between four forms of social responsibility work: (1) the kind that requires some form of **corporate congregational action**; (2) the kind that provides opportunities for group or individual **social witness**; (3) programs of **social education** about societal problems and possible remedies; and (4) programs of direct **social service**, often involving opportunities for individual UUs to serve as volunteers and grow spiritually in the process.

I concluded that too often we get the proper relationship between these things reversed. In a sense, the General Assembly provides a poor model. We start by voting on a resolution. The next steps are supposed to be witness, education, and local programs. But I have yet to see a substantive local program result from a GA resolution.

The better order is quite the opposite. Here the concept of vocation comes into play. No one of us can do everything about justice and mercy. Recognizing that is humility. But we are each called to do *something*. No one congregation can do everything either. But each can look around its community, consider its own limitations and strengths, and find some way to respond to life and death issues - often first in direct, compassionate service, by volunteers; then, as we learn directly about the human problems

and inadequate policies, in social education; then in opportunities for social witness; and finally, though on relatively rare occasions, and only where sufficient consensus allows, through some corporate action.

Let me give two examples. My first congregation was in Knoxville, TN. It started in 1949 as the only inter-racial church in that city. Early on it sponsored an inter-racial day camp, and inter-racial discussions. Many members made their individual witness by getting arrested to desegregate public facilities. But only rarely have they voted on social issues. To support Brown vs. Board of Education and local school integration. To defend a local social change agency against red-baiting. Etc.

It's been the same at All Souls. In the five years I've been there, the congregation has grown by over 50% - from 900 to almost 1400 members. The social ministry programs have grown from four to twenty-two. From traditional programs of feeding and hospitality for the homeless, through an innovative AIDS Task Force, to programs inspiring not only congregational, but national, corporate action. The All Souls Children's Task Force, starting with programs aimed at serving children in the welfare hotels, became a model for the UUSC's national emphasis on "Children at Risk." It inspired our congregation's trustees to set aside a portion of our endowment and social ministry funds for social investment in housing for low-income families. Far from being the program of a politically correct elite, social ministry at All Souls has now involved well over 800 volunteers, in service, education, witness and group action.

And that brings me to my fourth point: **lay involvement in spiritual leadership**. Not just the congregation's financial, social, and organizational life. Its spiritual life. Spiritually, as I use the word, doesn't imply something ethereal, however much less characteristic only of a high-minded elite. On the contrary. Its hallmarks, once again, are humility and a practical concern for mercy and justice.

Our Universalist forebears knew about lay involvement. What they didn't adequately master, it seems to me, is the mechanisms for training leaders, both lay and ordained. Here I'm hopeful, however. And reminded of an insightful new member who once asked about merger. When such things take place, she said, each side usually has to give something up. What did the Universalists give up? And what did the Unitarians?

I paused for a moment. I knew very well what the Universalists had given up. Their theological schools. All too much of their identity. And, in too many cases, the endowments of their state conventions. But the Unitarians? What I said may be in part wishful thinking, but I hope not. It came out of a genuine observation of what has happened since merger. I said that the Unitarians may have given up some of their elitism—and gained a bit of the liberal evangelical spirit. And I pointed to recent developments, like the rise of “leadership schools.” Like the use of lay people as “new congregation organizers”—though not with the old anti-clerical fellowship mentality; with the goal of having a trained minister and full-scale congregation. Like the broadening and deepening of programs of adult religious education and social ministry.

Lay involvement in spiritual leadership is, I’m convinced, a key to church growth. Not at the expense of strong ministerial leadership, but empowered by it. It is also the key to building on the Universalist heritage of social inclusiveness and broadening our socio-economic diversity. Certainly that’s been our experience at All Souls. It has strong leaders, but also a strong sense of shared ministry and collaborative leadership. It operates out of faith in people and not out of fear of leadership or innovation. When the latter prevails, I’m afraid, we condemn ourselves to the *status quo* or decline. And too often we have been afraid of real leadership, afraid of real growth.

Last spring I gave a paper to the senior ministers of the twenty-five largest congregations in the UUA called, “Why There Are No Large UU Congregations.” And there aren’t, really. My wife, the Episcopal priest, points out that even All Souls would likely be the third or fourth largest parish in a typical Episcopal diocese (of which there are over 100). Twenty-five years ago we had half a dozen large congregations in the range of 1,500 to 2,000 members, but no longer. Many of our small congregations are spiritually vital. But our average size is roughly half the average for non-Roman Catholic congregations in North America: 144 versus 275.

We need more programs encouraging ministers and lay leaders alike to break out of small group thinking and dynamics. To become more than marginal. To grow through providing opportunities for spiritual leadership.

Here I can’t help but recall the first time I entered a specifically Universalist congregation. I won’t name the place. Gwen was with me. We were worshipping there *in cognito*, knowing that at the time

I graduated, they'd need a new minister. Behind us, we heard one parishioner say to another, "Who are those young people? This isn't their church." Needless to say, I ended up serving elsewhere.

Mind you, there are limits to what I've come to expect from people, just as there are limits to growth. And this is my fifth and last point: the tail-feathers, as it were, if we're to get off the ground. We do need a sense of **limits**. Here our heritage and roots can provide us with good admonitory wisdom. After all, Universalism was originally a sense that even God has limits, at least when it came to being punitive or angry. Punishment couldn't be endless. But all too often, like Universalists in the 1840's, or UUs in the 1960's, we tend to get over-extended. We forget that serving justice and mercy does require a certain humility. We get grandiose. And then we burn-out. And there's nothing more pathetic than an exhausted bird or a tired liberal. Those that learn to soar do so by knowing their limits. By catching the updraughts. Not fighting every head wind.

Rochester's Christopher Lasch says that too many American progressives, rather than working progressively, step-by-step, have an intellectual addiction to progress in the abstract, where it becomes a drug. I suspect he's right, that we need the sense of limits which ordinary, working-class people have as wisdom as much as anything.

An older friend grew up Unitarian in a parish that displayed James Freeman Clarke's five Points of Faith; "the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man, the leadership of Jesus, Salvation by Character, and the Progress of Mankind, onward and upward forever." "I never believed that last one," she once told me. "Good for you," I replied, "not much humility in it." On the other hand, the Universalist Washington Declaration spoke of "the power of [women] and men of good will and sacrificial spirit to overcome...evil, and progressively to establish the "Kingdom of God" - or what Martin Luther King, Jr., would have called 'the Beloved Community.'

I'm not saying that it will come easily. Just that it can only come through a strong commitment keep the prophetic questions spiritually alive, in community. To live in those questions. To keep asking the right ones. Not what do we believe in common. That's the fearful, creedal question. It belongs to others. But the faithful covenantal question: what are we willing to promise one another,

in what hope, and drawing on what deep sources? The language of covenant - of voluntary commitment, under a sense of gratitude and spiritual obligation, between individuals, groups, religions, and nations - is deeply needed in our pluralistic world. And that is our mission. To make our convenantal vision "tangibilite". To show what it means in both our social ministries and our local leadership. Not that we can bring about universal salvation by our own efforts. But that we can be uplifted by grace. Show some others the way.

Five years ago, when I was installed at All Souls, my wife preached the sermon. She compared a committed religious community to a flock of high-flying geese. When they travel together, she said, in that V formation, they fly 70% more efficiently than any one goose can on its own. They rotate leadership, she pointed out, looking over to Forrest and referring to him as the "head goose." When one gets tired or hurt, several stay behind, to keep company with the fallen. The honking comes not so much from the leaders up front as from those behind, with encouragement and suggestions: let's stop here for lunch, turn right at the next pond, invite that other flock to fly along. Of course, as Ivan Panin puts it, "geese stay together largely by instinct; the ties that bind humans together require cultivation." Which is why, said Gwen, she'd learned a new appreciation for that bumper sticker we'd seen so often in Texas. You know, the one that says "Honk...if you love Jesus!"

Drawing on the deep roots of prophetic religion, let us mount up with wings, if not like eagles, then at least like the geese that we are. Relying on the Spirit that renews all things, may we run the race that is set before us and not be weary. Let us walk together, even if we be not fully agreed, and not faint. For these are the days that we are given to live; let us rejoice and be glad in them. Amen.

**UNIVERSALISM:
PATH WITH A HEART**

The Eighteenth Annual Address
on Universalist History
Ethics and Theology

By
The Reverend Carolyn S. Owen-Towle

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The Reverend Carolyn Owen-Towle received her BA degree from Scripps College in 1957 and completed the UUA Independent Study Program for Parish Ministry at the University of Iowa Graduate School of Religion in 1978. Ordained in 1978, she became co-minister of the First Unitarian Church of San Diego at that time.

Rev. Towle has served as President of the UU Ministers Assn., Vice-Chair of the Meadville/Lombard Theological School Board, Vice-President of Univision, President of the UU Service Committee and Settlement Consultant for the UUA Dept. of Ministry. In addition, she has served in a wide variety of community, district and regional organizations.

UNIVERSALISM: PATH WITH A HEART

The Reverend Carolyn S. Owen-Towle

I came to our Unitarian Universalist faith in 1967, six years after the merger, and it took a long while for me to sort out the distinctions between the two strands of our great religion. As I have matured in my faith I lean most confidently toward the Universalist aspect of our blended faith.

This is my first opportunity to speak to a group which cherishes Universalism, specifically, as your first, or prior faith. I am truly honored to be a part of this annual convention of stocktaking.

The 200th anniversary of this indigenous American faith is about to begin. I see the next year and a half of celebrating Universalism as a unique opportunity to teach our religious tribe through such vehicles as "Remember Universalism into Life" by Liz Strong and Ray Nasemann, about the truly distinguished contribution Universalism has made and continues to make to our way of being religious.

I anticipate this as a significant time for restoration. By that I mean I want us to reclaim for all UUs an appreciation of the power of Universalism in and of itself. I want to see Universalism stand as an equal rather than what many have felt is a subsumed partner in our Unitarian Universalist faith. I truly believe this will happen if we use this time of observance wisely.

It will take education, perhaps of our ministers first of all. Each of you can take an active role, by using this year as an invitation to talk about your religious roots and the ways in which they have strengthened and informed your lives. Books have been written, including one by my husband Tom, on Universalist history which includes writings from some of you as well as other Universalists around the land. It will come out next spring.

So thank you once again for inviting me to provide a bookend, if you will, to our upcoming 200th anniversary celebration of Universalism.

Anticipating this trip I remembered a story from my past. When I was growing up, my parents were friends of Jascha and Florence Heifetz. Their son Peter, went to school with my brother,

Owen. Once Mr. Heifetz told Mom and Dad about a concert he was to give somewhere here in Upstate New York. A fierce snow storm blanketed the area, virtually forcing traffic to a stand still. But Jascha, ever the professional, determinedly made it to the concert hall and at the appointed hour walked out on stage.

When he parted the curtain, there to his surprise sat half a dozen people. He walked to the edge of the proscenium and said: "It is so good of you to have come out in this terrible weather. Why don't we just go somewhere and get a cup a coffee and talk?"

But the man in the third row sprang to his feet and pleaded, "No, no Mr. Heifetz, I've driven over a hundred miles to hear you, come on Jascha, sing something.

Well, I have come 3,000 miles to be with you, and in just a moment now, I will tune my violin.

It's easy to be uninformed. Some things take a while to understand fully. As I said at the outset, it required years for me to grow to appreciate Universalism and Unitarianism as distinct faiths. What I highly prize about Universalism is the direct line it takes to the heart. It elicits my natural spontaneity, my exuberant zest for life.

Universalism's confidence in a benign universe, a universe which accepts us as we are—with all our failures as well as our accomplishments—liberates people. It helps us to live without fortification. A benevolent God is the source of a heartening faith. Adrienne Rich, feminist poet, ends a poem with the line, "I am tired of faintheartedness." The God of Universalism is not false-hearted, hard-hearted or faint-hearted, but rather whole-hearted and warm-hearted.

Universalism is mulch for soil in which to allow one's courage to expand and express the whole range of human emotions from sorrow, to bewilderment, to joy. The absence of fear and guilt as inducements to goodness and belief in ultimate redemption serve as powerful incentives to develop one's full humanity. At the same time I find weakness in our Universalist faith (which I will explore later), that lies close to its great strength.

The free, unfettered mind is truly an essential of our faith. Neither you nor I, would be part of a religion that did not affirm our

ability to discriminate. We were not created with analytical powers only to put them on the shelf.

On the other hand, along with Nikos Kazantzakis, I find I whisper, "Be quiet mind—let (me) hear the heart—and (my) heart begins to warble." As a person of passion and hope and confidence, I find that what ultimately confirms my choices and sustains me is my heart, my spirit, the joy, my Universalism.

My title, this morning, is taken from Carlos Castaneda's "The Teaching of Don Juan." In it he wrote,

"I warn you. Look at every path closely and deliberately ...Then ask your self, and yourself alone, one question. This question is one that only a very old person asks. My benefactor told me about it once when I was young, and my blood was too vigorous for me to understand it. Now I understand it. I will tell you what it is: Does this path have a heart?

All paths are the same: they lead nowhere. They are paths going through the bush, or into the bush. In my life I could say I have traversed long, long paths, but I am not anywhere. My benefactor's question has meaning now.

Does this path have a heart? If it does, the path is good; if it doesn't it is of no use. Both paths lead nowhere; but one has a heart, the other doesn't. One makes for a joyful journey; as long as you follow it, you are one with it. The other will make you curse your life. One makes you strong; the other weakens you."

Life presents us with both paths. Universalism urges us to take the path with a heart. Universalism tells us where the heart dwells, so does compassion. Through practicing compassion we learn empathy, which is the capacity to participate in another person's feelings or ideas.

Heart also means something else. Its literal translation from the French "Coeur", is courage...courage to face life as it really is... courage to meet the most difficult and most inexplicable realities that we may encounter. Courage is perhaps the most important human virtue, the one we summon when to go on with work or relationship, challenge or sorrow would be difficult, if not impossible, without it.

Howard Thurman, African American theologian, reminded us to "Keep fresh before us the moment of our high resolve." Courage. Heart and courage were the genesis and continue to be attributes which sustain Universalism's personal and social witness.

Historically, one of Universalism's fundamental commitments has been to confront social evils with courage and heart. I recall my days on the UU Service Committee board, when prison reform was a significant current as well as historical issue for a number of Unitarian Universalists. It is possibly an aspect of our recent history few remember. So, my objective here today is to revive some of our Universalist story regarding prison reform. Then I will reflect upon the matter of human wrongdoing, and conclude by talking about the necessary work of repentance. My remarks will be set in the context of Universalism's notion of human redemption within an affirming universe.

Last spring, while mulling over the topic I would examine with you today, a disturbing event took place in my home state of California. Robert Alton Harris, as you may remember, a man severely abused as a child, who tortured and killed others as an adult, was electrocuted for his crimes, at San Quentin. This, you may be sure, occurred over the loud protests of a significant number of people. Members of our church were among an assembly of objecting marchers, some of whom spoke in a vigil protesting this "legal" murder.

Personally shaken by California's reinstatement of capital punishment, I am of firm resolve that killing is never right. To add an appalling footnote to the Harris execution, several weeks ago California's governor signed a bill which will now give inmates a choice in how they will be killed. They may choose now whether it will be by gas or injection, the latter of which is thought to be a less painful way to die.

Russell Miller, a Tufts University historian, wrote a splendid, definitive history of Universalism, in 1979, called "The Larger Hope." I quote, "In an address delivered in the Hollis Street Unitarian Church in Boston in 1856, Thomas Starr King described a man he considered to be one of the 'walking publications to the community of (the) prominent deficiencies in our civilization...a

traveling placard,' he said,' of needed reforms.'" The person to whom he was referring was Charles Spear, who lived from 1801 to 1863. This man gave up his Universalist parish ministry to devote his life to social reform.

Spear was imbued with a strong social conscience and his concerns ranged from ridding the world of war to the abolition of slavery. In the course of his life he became involved in almost every reform movement that blossomed and faded in pre-Civil War America. But his particular interest centered around penal reform in all of its aspects. He fought against the death penalty, the harsh treatment of prisoners, the conditions of jails, and struggled for a change from the prevailing philosophy of punishment to rehabilitation.

His goal was to encourage and apply "the spirit of charity to all outcasts" and to eliminate "the barbarities of the penal code," no matter what form it might take. In short, Spear had, according to King, "grown gray in the service of a great principle that belongs to Christianity," the reformation and uplifting of society.

Ibid. p.493

Charles Spear was dedicated, as a child, by none other than Universalism's founder in America, John Murray. (In fact, Spear's brother was named John Murray Spear). Charles was concerned not just with capital punishment, but also with prisoner's treatment in jail and their transition to society upon their release. He saw the prison system, based upon England's model, not as a place of rehabilitation and reform, but as one of dehumanization and debasement.

He organized the Prisoners' Friend Association and produced a publication by that name. There were those, of course, who objected that prisoners did not need or deserve friends. Spear's compassion, however, related him to these wayward human beings. He knew that nothing human is alien to any of us and that he had more in common than not, even with felons. Charles Spear claimed his was the only journal known in the world that was wholly devoted to the abolition of capital punishment and the reformation of the criminal.

I can only imagine what courage and fortitude it took for this tireless man, his wife and brother, who worked for a time with him, to persist in a cause which was never popular. It did not help that they belonged as well to an unpopular religious faith. In spite of his

high visibility as a penal reformer for most of his life, he and his efforts were seldom mentioned outside of Universalist circles.

However, Spear's work can be largely credited with the abolition of imprisonment for debtors. During his years of service he felt great satisfaction in watching the establishment of reform schools for boys, and an industrial school for girls, removing young people from adult penal institutions. Debates dragged on over what should be the proper treatment and disposition of prisoners.

In the nineteenth century, the problem of capital punishment was considered by its very nature inseparable from prison reform in general. And every Universalist associated with prison reform, including Charles Spear, opposed the death penalty—in most instances wanting its complete abolition.

It was said that individual Universalists...unquestionably provided more "anti-gallows" reformers than any other denomination. Their devotion to the principle of the sanctity of human life and human kinship filled them with the courage to succeed. Disappointingly, the same denominational leadership was not consistent nor was it ever more than tepid in its formal support of this cause. It was individuals who crusaded courageously for this unpopular reform.

Punishment by death, or "legal murder", as it was called, was characterized as inhumane and entirely subversive of the legitimate ends of justice. Spear wrote, "It smacked too much of vengeance" and "was not a sufficient deterrent to crime to be justified." "If God's punishments were remedial and reformatory in their nature, so likewise should be the punishments inflicted by humans upon one another." If God loves us eternally, so should we love one another.

Ibid p.500

This history, by Miller, has been vividly brought home to me as I recall my six years on the UU Service Committee Board, two of them as its President. The strength of our Universalist history and commitment to the redemptive possibilities for all people, has enabled us to carry threads of our history forward into the present with the Prison Moratorium program. This was an effort which endured for more than a decade, often amidst protest and lukewarm denominational support. The UUSC persevered, despite the unpopularity of this program, because the organization saw the need for reform, and was bent on serving our Universalist values

of individual worth, relatedness, and potential for rehabilitation.

The UUSC Prison Moratorium was born in protest against the vast expansion of jail construction that was beginning. The Service Committee's rationale for urging a moratorium on prison building was the conviction that to build cells was to automatically fill them. Alternatives to incarceration for crimes against property, would not be sought, it was reasoned, as long as the public's fear demanded that felons be locked up and there were cells to receive them.

The Service Committee believed that alternative ways had to be found for "non violent" criminals to pay back their debt to society—ways that allowed them to continue to produce, rather than become a drain on the economy and be further criminalized in jail.

One of my proudest endeavors on the Service Committee was furthering the work on prison moratorium. I think it is to UUSC's credit that following that project, which was carried as far as it could go, our organization turned to working with children at risk, in a program called "Promise the Children." Our commitment is to help young people avoid such traps and temptations as criminal activity that would likely lead ultimately to prison. I credit our UU Service Committee with abundant Universalist heart and courage. UUSC believes, with poet Langston Hughes, we must "Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly." Such bold-heartedness embodies the spirit Universalism.

As I pointed out earlier, however strongly our heritage has asserted we will all be saved, one question regarding our Universalist past continues to haunt us. Our forebears have been accused of being so sure of redemption that they tended to slide past concern for evil-doing. Was that why our numbers dwindled? Had we worked ourselves out of a viable message by assuring everyone that they would be saved?

For years I resisted that point of view. I felt we were realistic about our human capacity for both good and evil. That was until an event forced me to look at a vivid example of wrongdoing in light of this charge. In my role as President (a couple of years ago), of the UU Ministers Association, I was sharply contacted by around twenty members of our UU clergy who were literally irate over the removal from fellowship of a colleague who had commit-

ted sexual malfeasance in his ministry. I realized then, we lacked an adequate theology of evil.

There were victims of this minister's acts, scarred and wounded, and at least two churches in significant pain and disarray, yet a number of our ministers wanted to quickly rush past judgment to forgiveness. The pain of denominational censure of a colleague for this kind of wrongdoing was to them, unbearable. They wanted him vindicated, right away. They tended to react with what we have since learned was a classic response. They inadvertently blamed the victims, excoriated the messengers, and exonerated the perpetrator.

Many of us learned a great deal about justice out of this experience. We were inescapably confronted by an objective thing called evil. You and I realize that none of us is exempt from evil. Each of us is capable of it. When we commit an evil act, be it moral, spiritual or physical, we must confess, we must admit our error. Accompanying admission must be genuine contrition. To dodge responsibility or blame the victim is simply to compound the wrongdoing. There is no peace or healing without justice.

In some real way we must atone through recompense to those whom we have betrayed. Perhaps one way is to pay for the survivor's therapy. Reconciliation with those we have harmed takes time; sometimes it is not possible. The victim to become a survivor must receive some measure of justice in order to heal.

But the work of redemption does not end there. We have to change our thinking, and actually turn our actions in a new direction. We must repent; that means literally "turn around" and change our earthly ways. Making oneself right with one's fellow human beings, and with God, takes effort and time. As a Universalist it is important for me to acknowledge the tangible reality of evil, the perversity in my own life. I must be willing to go through whatever painstaking steps are necessary to become right again with others and with God. This is the arduous process of redemption.

Who is to say when transformation has been achieved? That, of course, can not be fully answered. People forgive us. And eventually, if we have done all we can to turn our lives around, we forgive ourselves. And our relationship with the divine represents yet another potential dynamic to be personally worked out.

Each of us confronts obstacles which turn out to be important teachers. Perhaps our most powerful instructors are such agonizing personal struggles. We cannot turn away from them. They slam into the center of our being and will not let us go. I like to quote Robert Ingersoll where he wrote, "I want to thank the Universalist Church. They at least believe in a God who is a gentle person...they believe at least, in a heavenly parent who will leave the latch string out until the last child gets home."

That conviction not only comforted but guided my husband and me in relation to one of our children who for years seemed bent on drug related self-destruction which was devastating not only to herself but to us who loved her as well. We felt as if we had no alternative but to set restrictive limits on our relationship with her, limits which precluded normal flow of affection and approval between parent and child.

What I will be grateful for as long as I live is that, as horrendous as circumstances sometimes were, we never withdrew the latch string of parental love and kinship. Even though there were times when closing the door seemed to be desperately close to our only alternative. For today, our daughter has healed. She is building a productive, healthy life. Our bedrock love for her and hers for us, contorted for years through fear, anger and mistrust, did not die. The kernel remained, and when hope was rekindled, it burst forth, strengthening us all through her recovering process. Today, there has been forgiveness, and we move onward. But this was no easy, quick road to salvation.

I am indebted to our Universalist tradition which affirms the everlasting, unfathomable, undeserved love of God. No one, however criminal, addicted, incorrigible or ruthless is beyond redemption. At the same time no one, but no one, completes a life without wrongdoing or hurting another. Part of our job as Universalists is to make way for justice and redemption to take place, not only in our lives but among the marginalized and disenfranchised who need advocates; the convicted prisoner, the ostracized colleague, the wayward child.

I have talked about social, professional and familial ethics, in the light of our chosen faith of Universalism. In each it remains our eternal challenge to steer a course consistent with our highest values. It takes courage and love to begin and stay the course, to travel the path with the heart, to be Universalists.

