

"The Inherent Worth and Dignity of All Souls: Universalism in Trying Times"

Sunday, January 28, 2024 at 10:30 a.m. UUCF

Rev Scott Sammler-Michael - UUCM

Prelude "Morning Has Broken" - Yusuf Stevens Sarah Diaz, vocals;
Danielle Grace, piano

Welcome The Rev. Dr. Carl Gregg, minister
Introit "Let's Get Together" - Chet Powers -

Chalice Lighting former Intern Minister Kathryn Adams,

***Hymn no. 347** "Gather the Spirit"

Story for All Ages Melissa Rosenberger, (DRE)

Go Now in Peace no. 413: *Go now in peace (x2), May the Power of Love surround you. Everywhere, everywhere, you may go.*

Joys and Sorrows
Rev. Carl

Spirit of Life no. 123

Meditations
Spoken Intern Minister Derail

Today's reading is adapted from "A Religion for One World," written in 1964 by Rev. Kenneth Leo Patton.

Patton served the Unitarian Society of Ridgewood, NJ from 1964 to 1988. Patton was a prolific writer who printed many of his books in the basement of UU Ridgewood.

"Several thousands of years of human culture have passed and humanity has yet to create ... a religion for a united human family. Instead the human scene is decorated with a multitude of faiths; the major divisions break up

into hundreds of small sects. Some of these religions believe that they have created a universal religion.

Buddhism moved out of its native India into most of Asia and the East Indies. Islam probed deep into Africa, into Asia, (and beyond). ... Christianity, in its many forms, has attempted to convert the world to the gospel of its "Saviour." None of these religions is likely to become the religion for one world. ..."

The practical approach is to tackle the problem of creating a religion for one world on an experimental and 'model' basis - to [create a universal religion in miniature].

Its success, at first, will not be measurable by its popularity."¹

Silent

Musical "Open" - Regina Spektor

Sermon: "The Inherent Worth and Dignity of All Souls: Universalism in Trying Times," - RS [watch the face! still!]

Thanks for today's anthem - *Open up your eyes, and then* This service was inspired by today's reading -

A Religion for One World, by Kenneth Leo Patton -

I learned a little about Ken Patton when I served my internship at the the Unitarian Society of Ridgewood, in New Jersey; Patton longed to compose a *religion for a united human family*. Sounds like Universalism, yes?

Universalism refers to Universal Salvation -

The theological concept claiming all souls will be saved - reunited with divinity after death.

This concept is ancient, but had its first Western expression in Christianity; it became part of our faith's heritage, an innovation of spiritual imagination quickly transcending its Christian roots.

¹ from, "A Religion for One World: Art and Symbols for a Universal Religion," by Kenneth L. Patton; Beacon Press, Boston; 1964; pages 5-6

The most thorough Universalist treatise was composed by Hosea Ballou, who famously claimed in 1805, that, “since sin is finite, the punishment for sin is also finite.” Ballou claims God would be a cruel monster to punish people forever for transgressions made in a moment’s lapse on this earthly plane, where we have incomplete knowledge, unaware of all the consequences of our actions. He taught that Earthly misery is one reason we sometimes get angry with God.

Now, Ballou lived in a world where death lurked around every corner.²

In 1805 medical knowledge was in its infancy.

Nearly 1 in 2 children did not make it to their 5th birthday in 1805 - 1 out of 2; what happened after death needed explanation; an eternal torment for innocent children, to those who embraced a loving God, wasn’t good enough.³

Amidst the pervasiveness of such misery, Ballou responded by claiming that God’s love knows no limits, rejecting the prevailing preoccupation of his time - and ours - on hellfire and damnation. Life was hard; the holy understands, and welcomes us home, gladly.

Universalists claims all people shall be saved, reunited with the divine, no matter their misdeeds.

Some Universalists believed there was a period of punishment and purification after death, where we pay reparations for our sins before being invited into Heaven; other Universalists claimed we were united immediately beyond death’s veil.

Rev. Minot Savage, who served Community Church, New York, wrote this in 1905’s about Universalism’s logic:

We do not believe it is possible for a human soul to ultimately be lost. Why?

Because we believe in God.

God either can save all souls, or he cannot.

If he can and will not, then he is not God.

If he would and cannot, then he is not God.

² Ballou, Hosea; A Treatise on Atonement

³ From <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1041693/united-states-all-time-child-mortality-rate/>

*[God] is under an infinite obligation to God's own self ... to see to it that all souls are reconciled."*⁴

Divine love knows no limits.

Universalism remains shunned and feared by many Christian denominations, and frankly by many people who pretend they know theology but don't; still, more Christians proclaim they have discovered Universalism all the time. Evangelist Rob Bell proclaimed he believed the Bible supports Universal Salvation; he was promptly rejected from his church.

Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart wrote a best seller titled, *"That All Shall Be Saved"*: his faith tries to silence him.

Bishop Carlton Pearson was the heir apparent of Oral Roberts' christian empire in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Pearson was cast out when he shared his vision of Universal Salvation after losing his son to a tragic illness; so he moved his flock to the Unitarian Church in Tulsa - *All Souls*

More people of faith - lay and professional - have begun to deny the existence of some ghastly eternal torture chamber for the majority of humankind.

Indeed, people reading the bible with open hearts and minds throughout the ages have understood its stories as parables and cautionary tales - not some blueprint for the cosmic order.

We have been freed of the need to cling to meaningless proclamations of ages past simply because some preacher tells us to. ~ Thank God! Over time, Universalism spawned a cry for a Universal Religion - a religion for One World.

This is where Ken Patton enters the scene.

Besides being a religious innovator, Patton was a justice warrior, an embodied white ally dedicated to force America, in his words, to live into the beauty and promise of its diversity.

He witnessed first hand the racism black Americans faced.

In 1947 Look magazine asked him to explore the extent of racial prejudice in Chicago by attempting to integrate restaurants, hotels, country clubs and real estate.

Patton was repeatedly turned away when he claimed to be black or when accompanied by people of color.

⁴ Savage, Minto; *The Unitarian Gospels*; loc. 310 on kindle.

In response to this embodied experience of America's original sin, Patton declared he wanted to "resign from the White race" - a comment for which he would receive hate mail for the next 40 years.⁵

Patton intuited that we must see we are all in this together - that there is one race - the human race.

To assist in that project Patton knew religion must change; faith must uphold as sacred truth the oneness of humankind and evolve past racism and tribalism.

So he endeavored to craft A Religion for One World.

Patton saw that no revealed, historical religion - Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism -

none can serve as the religion for all the world.

Once we base our faith on one people, one revelation, one location, its appeal can never be universal;

we need something new - truly global .

This was a new idea in the Mid twentieth century.

The search for a Universal religion is noble, he taught, so long as it is done with a radical openness to critique and input from all the corners of the Globe.

So Patton traveled the world at his own expense to collect religious artifacts and to experience as many forms of worship as he could.

A truly Universal religion, he said, "has the widest possible circle - the membership is nothing short of all people, all souls" - even those who transgress.

A religion for One World proclaims:

All have dignity, that covenant and care extend to all.

Patton shares parameters for A Religion for One World. "Universalism must expand," Patton writes, "to include these new 'universals' - universal brotherhood; universal peace; universal health, freedom, security and understanding.

⁵ From: <https://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/biographies/kenneth-leo-patton/#:~:text=In%20a%20radio%20talk%20Patton,this%20catapulted%20him%20into%20notoriety.>

We are committed to the truth known and to be known, and therefore we feel no hesitancy in demanding that our ideals and concepts must grow to meet the necessities of later times.

Nothing we believe should stand as a barrier for what we must believe. ... (x2)”

For new revelation, our focus must be worldwide.”⁶

Patton boldly challenged that we must do something never before done in human history - expand our loyalty and belonging to a group as various and scattered as the whole human race; *Open up your eyes! All souls means all.*

Cannot such sage advice help us build a more beloved community?

Ken Patton ran an experimental congregation in Boston, known as the Charles Street Meeting House.

My late colleague Mark Ward wrote this about that church: “From outward appearances it was fairly run-of-the-mill, ... just off Boston Common. But once you walked up the stairs into the sanctuary of the it was plain that this was no ordinary church.

The pews, which once marched row on row facing a raised pulpit, were now situated in concentric circles, gathered around a polar projection of the globe inlaid in the center of the floor ...

A speaker’s lectern just inside the circle of pews was all that remained of a pulpit, while on the pulpit platform was a large bookcase full of texts, sculptures, an impressive stereo system. From the pulpit Patton could control the sound and lights.”

~ Wow - wouldn't that be a grand! Pulpit as control booth!!

Ward continues, “what first captured one’s attention, even before the unusual room arrangement, was a massive mural, some 25 feet high, painted by Patton himself, of the Andromeda galaxy.”

“At the opposite side of the sanctuary, hanging from the ceiling, was his depiction of the atom. ...

Scattered along the front of the church balcony were some 65 images of the world’s religions;

in alcoves underneath the balconies were glass cases containing religious art from around the world.

⁶ Patton, Kenneth Leo; *A Religion for One World: Art and Symbols for a Universal Religion*; Beacon; Boston, 1964; page 22, adapted.

It was like nothing else, and at a time when Boston religion, even among the liberals, had a reputation for being ... stodgy, it definitely radical." 1949 ... Patton was so committed to inviting new ideas into worship that his Charles Street hymnals were looseleaf binders; They routinely changed what was in those hymnals as new innovations and sources inspired them.

Ken Patton shared that *A Religion for One World* was different from a single faith for all;

he accepted that no single religious path would ever be embraced by all the world's people and cultures.

A Religion for One World meant to invite and accept all the best teaching, art and ritual enshrining the diversity of humanity, and to emphasize the relatively new notion in 1949 that we are all part of one race - the Human race - "The planet has become a geographical unity," he writes, "people living everywhere are my people.

Nothing human is alien to me."

Patton begins *A Religion for One World* while America still has legal segregation, state sponsored apartheid.

By 1950, advances in communication and travel had literally brought the world closer together - And ~

The world had just witnessed the cruelty of the Holocaust; the murderous purges of Soviet Russia;

the threat of global extinction by nuclear war ~

Hiroshima remains one of the great catalysts for conceiving of humankind as one. Wisdom wrought from desrtuction

~ How many of you participated in Nuclear War safety drills as children? I'm 61.

My first day of first grade we were taught to duck and cover. Open up the locker, place your face inside, and kiss your ... ahem ... self - goodbye."

My entire generation was indoctrinated with nuclear terror. So people of conscience and compassion worldwide began concluding that we better begin to reframe humanity's mission, proclaiming that we have but one world - this earth, this Big Blue Marble, and if we do not want to blow ourselves up in macabre dances of nationalism and militancy we better learn to see everyone - *everyone* - around the globe as our sibling, deserving of

care and protection. This was an elevation in consciousness, now sadly often forgotten;

We have one world, we are one race; this new way of seeing, is too often demeaned by our so-called leaders.

Because people cannot overcome from their greed and tribalism, Universalism remains feared as "The Most Dangerous Heresy of Our Time" - We know why - a lust for power; they want impunity for their cruelty as they subjugate those they think are inferior to them, often for profit; let us always remember that

Beliefs have consequences

If you believe others will be punished by a God who favors you, it becomes easier to justify cruelty towards them while they live on Earth

Sheriff Joe Arpaio, the fascist Arizonan who built prisons in the 120 degree desert in Maricopa County, said as much; "these men are all going to hell. I am just giving them a taste - preparing them for their fate."

The cruelty one justifies if one believes destructive lies about damnation from God is nearly immeasurable.

As much as the theology of damnation has scant evidence in scripture, as much as it confuses the divine will with lurid tales of torture, that thinking is most dangerous when applied to this world. Indeed it is the ultimate control device. If I can stand here as minister:

Do what I say or else you will burn forever -

What more unholy power can I wield?

This is abuse of the highest order; spiritual violence.

But what if one believes that everyone could one day find themselves in union with everyone else, with the holy - where all are seen as worthy of human and divine love - where none are rejected or lost?

This is the radical claim of our religion - one we must repeat until we hear our civic leaders proclaim it.

Yet despite *our* rejection of the hideous doctrine of hellfire, it can be difficult - can it not? - to apply Universal love to all of the human beings around us.

Thieves, murderers and rapists;

Corporate villains ransacking entire nations for profit; Politicians hellbent on justifying any infamy - even the denigration of whole classes of people, denying violent truths of America's history - all to seize and hold power.

We are beset in our day with the unhinged delusions of insurrectionists, traitors, climate change deniers, seeking to wield control over their fellow citizens even if it means butchery, genocide, pollution, or mass incarceration.

We know this is wrong. We have known it wrong our whole lives. Like any other great truth allied against greed and hate we must preach it every day everywhere.

Universalists of course demand that criminals be punished, the guilty and violent kept away from the innocent;

we just do not believe their punishment lasts forever.

So how do we walk through a troubled world with some sense of Universal love for all humankind - no matter how horrible some of our fellow human beings may be?

(gesture them to come closer) "It ain't easy" - this is why we talk about it in worship, on Sunday morning

We gather to affirm one another in our quests to be the best we can - to improve our moral reasoning, to inspire ethical imagination, to love without condition, to inspire emotional maturity and social relevance, to be present to one another's elation, sorrow and confusion.

Congregations exist because spiritual disciplines are difficult exertions of courage and sustained effort over lifetimes and centuries.

Together we build communities intended to stretch beyond individual notions of what god is or what god is not - reaching beyond our individual understandings of truth - widening the circle - not so others will be changed and made more like us, no! - but so that we will all be changed by their particularity, their specialness.

The vision of Ken Patton - that we should craft a Religion for One World - remains a call to action.

True Religion aims to share and defend the human search for the values, rituals and perspectives that "make life glad and beautiful and good and just."⁷

⁷ A Eustace Haydon, as quoted in Patton, p 12, adapted

A Religion for One World does not seek to make everyone pray the same; it honors healthy paths to peace, truth and love - conditioning us to recognize diversity as destiny -

as a good, as beautiful, as necessary.

All souls means Alls souls; no exceptions ...

Discussion Question:

As I make my way to the drumset, ponder in your heart:

How can we create a faith that honors all souls?

***Hymn 346** “Come Sing a Song with Me” Danielle Grace,
piano; Rev. Scott, drums

*Come, sing a song with me, come, sing a song with me, come,
sing a song with me, that I might know your mind. (Chorus) And I'll
bring you hope when hope is hard to find, and I'll bring a song of
love and a rose in the wintertime.*

*Come, dream a dream with me, come, dream a dream
with me, come, dream a dream with me, that I might know your
mind. (Chorus)*

*Come, walk in rain with me, come, walk in rain with me, come,
walk in rain with me, that I might know your mind. (Chorus)*

*Come, share a rose with me, come, share a rose with me,
come, share a rose with me, that I might know your mind. (Chorus)*

Testimony Split-plate in for UU Legislative Ministry-MD
Steve Buckingham

Anthem “If We Only Have Love” - Jacques Brel Sarah Diaz, vocals;
Danielle Grace, piano

Chalice Extinguishing **Rev Scott**

*[God] is under an infinite obligation to God's own self ...
to see to it that all souls are reconciled.*

Nothing we believe should stand as a barrier for what we must believe.

All Souls means All Souls

*We are all crew on spaceship earth, this big blue marble, For some reason
it becomes too easy to forget that.*

Let us compose, together - liturgy, theology, stories, politics and a faith

reminding us daily that I am my siblings keeper, that what affects one affects all,
that all the allures of division serve only greed, lust, envy and destruction.
Therefore, *Unto the Religion for One World, and unto all its members, known and unknown throughout the ages,*
We pledge the allegiance of our hands and hearts.

Benediction

Postlude “You'll Never Walk Alone” - Richard Rodgers Sarah Diaz
and Danielle Grace

Xtras?:

PRAYER

Today's prayer is adapted from *Seeds of the Harvest*, by Ken Patton. Please pray with me ...

Spirit of life, known in so many ways, by so many names, Great benevolence, known completely by no single name or image - be with us, aid our

Help us see our plight, our joy, our struggle and our challenges as part of the larger human project -

help us see the world as one, its people as one ...

(US) on "its people as one"

4

"Give praise that we live, men, women and children, on this earth, under this sun, breathing this air, drinking this water. Give praise that we are born such creatures, to think, to dream, to grow, to remember, to create. ...

Give praise that we can love, that we can weep, that we can laugh. Give praise that we know we will die, for by this we know that we live.

Give praise that we, of all creatures, are so enabled, enriched in being.

Give praise that it is the way of nature that we come to be, to rejoice in these days that we have to live."

In the name of all that each of us deems holy within, we pray Amen

Antiphonal Reading #474 from 19th century Hindu reformer--Keshab Chandra Sen -

Unto the church universal, which is the depository of all ancient wisdom and the school of all modern thought;

Which recognizes in all prophets a harmony, in all scriptures a unity, and through all dispensations a continuity;

Which abjures all that separates and divides,

and always magnifies all that unifies and brings peace;

Which seeks truth in freedom, justice in love, and individual discipline in social duty;

And which shall make of all sects, classes, nations, and races, one global community;

Unto this church and unto all its members, known and unknown throughout the world,

We pledge the allegiance of our hands and hearts.