

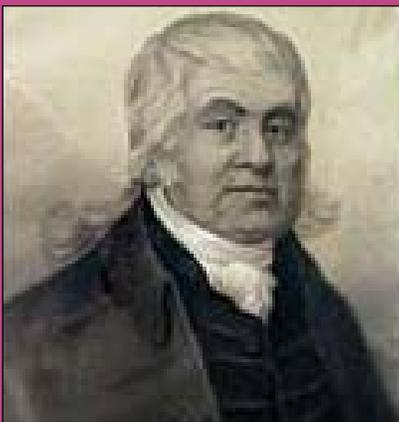


February 2012

# The Christian Universalist

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The Rev. John Murray

John Murray (1741-1815), known as the "Father of American Universalism," was a follower of the Methodist minister James Rely, who taught the salvation of all.

When Murray tried to promote this message to other Methodists in England and Ireland, he was excommunicated for heresy and decided to leave for America. In 1774 he settled in Gloucester, Massachusetts and established the first Universalist church there out of a Relyite study group.

He participated in the first general Universalist Convention in 1785 and was a central figure in the founding of the Universalist Church of America in 1793.

Murray later served as pastor of the Universalist Society of Boston. He also was a writer of hymns and compiler of hymnals.



Murray Grove in Winter White

Murray Grove Retreat and Renewal Center, near Lanoka Harbor, New Jersey, will be the site of two Universalist events this year - the 2012 Universalist Convocation, May 18-20; and the CUA (Christian Universalist Association) Celebration 2012 conference, September 21-23. Murray Grove, named for John Murray (upper left), is the site of the former farm of Thomas Potter, who built a chapel there in 1760. The site is the traditional birthplace of Universalism in America. See Kalen Fristad's column, From the Board Chair, on page 4.

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## *The Christian Universalist*

*The Christian Universalist* is a digital newsletter published monthly by *The Christian Universalist Association (CUA)*, with news, information and commentary for anyone interested in Christian Universalism. Editorial reports, letters to the editor and photos are welcome.

Deadline is the 24th of the month preceding the month of publication. Reports and photos may be emailed to the editor at [patmor123@gmail.com](mailto:patmor123@gmail.com). Please send all photos and illustrations as separate JPEGs at high resolution of at least 300 dpi.

Opinions expressed are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect those of *The Christian Universalist Association*.

### **Contact Us**

**Rich Koster, CUA Coordinator**

Email: [richkoster.cua@gmail.com](mailto:richkoster.cua@gmail.com)

Telephone: 269.352.4457

Business mailing address:

**Christian Universalist Association**

14 Fairfield Place

Fort Thomas, Kentucky 41075

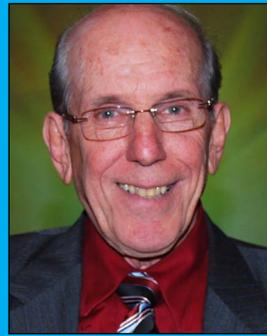
**Pat Moauro, Editor**

Email: [patmor123@gmail.com](mailto:patmor123@gmail.com)

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The **CUA** is an international movement of persons, groups, congregations, and ministries, spreading the Good News of the grace of God for the salvation of all people. The **CUA** holds conferences, publishes literature, and sends out this monthly digital newsletter to members and others.



## *Word of mouth*

*Pat Moauro, Editor*

*Pat Moauro, Editor of The Christian Universalist, can be reached at [patmor123@gmail.com](mailto:patmor123@gmail.com)*

## **An experiment in “readability”**

**H**ave you noticed anything different about this issue of *The Christian Universalist*? Aside from the different articles, have you noticed how the pages are laid out? If you said the copy on each page is now laid out over two columns instead of three, you are right.

Recently, this editor received several comments from readers expressing some concern that issues of this newsletter were somewhat difficult to read as PDF documents on a computer monitor.

Part of the problem was the way the pages were connected. When two pages were connected side by side, they “jumped” as each pair of pages was scrolled down or up, making them somewhat difficult to read.

The pages are now laid out singly and scrolled down in “continuous flow,” eliminating the “jerk-ing” from one page to another. As well, each article is contained within one or two pages, rather than separating and continuing an article on other pages farther back in the newsletter.

In an effort to improve the “readability” of this newsletter, I’m testing a slightly different layout in this issue. Instead of the usual three-column layout on each page, I’ve laid out this issue, using a two-column layout per page - a design often found in print magazines, including *The Universalist Herald Magazine*, a print publication edited by my colleague **Rich Koster**, who is also Coordinator of the **CUA**.

Personally, I prefer the three-column layout because it is more flexible and permits more variety, especially involving photos and headlines, especially in print publications. However, I’m willing to try the two-column layout. Please let me know whether this issue is easier for you to read, or not. Thank you!

*Pat*

## From the Coordinator

... with Rich Koster

# CUA Board approves new membership levels

The **Christian Universalist Association** Board has approved five donation levels for members. Starting this year there will be the following new membership levels:

<b>Copper</b>	\$10 per year
<b>Bronze</b>	\$25 per year
<b>Silver</b>	\$50 per year
<b>Gold</b>	\$100 per year
<b>Platinum</b>	monthly donations of any amount
<b>Friend</b>	No donation

Right now we have quite a few members who fall into one of the five donating levels, but we have far more who do not. They will continue to be part of our community as "friends" and will receive our monthly online newsletters.

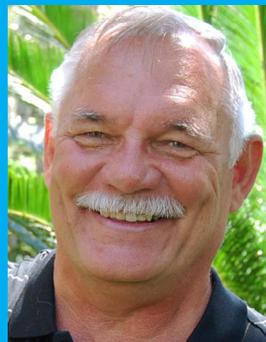
Still, we invite everyone to help support our ministry with at least a \$10 per year donation, and we hope that you will seriously consider that much or more, with a donation each year.

On our part, we will try to inform everyone and be as transparent as possible so you will know how we are spending the money we receive.

## BOARD APPROVES 2012 BUDGET

The **CUA** Board has also approved the following budget for 2012:

Coordinator Salary	3,600
Regional Events	200
Internet Services	1,000
Postage	400
Web Hosting and Development	100
Bulk Email Services	130
Corporation Costs	500
Book Purchases	300
Conference	3,200
Seminars	300
Insurance	1,000
501c3	500
Miscellaneous:	300
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>\$11,230</b>



*Rich Koster*

**Rich Koster**, a Disciples of Christ minister and Coordinator of **The Christian Universalist Association**, can be reached at [richkoster.cua@gmail.com](mailto:richkoster.cua@gmail.com) or [richkoster2@aol.com](mailto:richkoster2@aol.com), phone 269.352.4457.

## OTHER NEWS

Four new ordinands have been approved:

**Lisa Morgan**, Petersburg, Virginia

**Stan Seidner**, Austin, Texas

**Jamez Terry**, Cambridge, Massachusetts

**Wendy Kubow**, San Jose, California

We have 12 ordained ministers and 32 men and women who are now taking the course or applying to do so.

If you wish to consider our Ordination Program, please read the web site information but do also get in touch with me because some of that information has been changed.

Our 2012 Conference will be held September 21-23 at Murray Grove Retreat and Renewal Center, near Lanoka, New Jersey and close to the Atlantic shoreline. Hope you can join us!

Watch future issues of *The Christian Universalist* for further information, or again, get in touch with me.

*If you have any questions please call me at 269.352.4457, or email: [richkoster.cua@gmail.com](mailto:richkoster.cua@gmail.com)*

## From the Board Chair

... with Kalen Fristad

### Universalists to meet in historic Murray Grove, Sept. 21-23

Hello Friends. We universalists are going to Murray Grove! We have scheduled our next **CUA (Christian Universalist Association)** conference for September 21-23, 2012. Celebration 2012 will be held at the Murray Grove Retreat and Conference Center, Lanoka Harbor, NJ.

If you are unfamiliar with the significance of Murray Grove for those of us who believe in universalism, I'd like to share some historical information.

**John Murray**, a citizen of England, came to believe in universal salvation, resulting in him and his family being expelled from his damnation-teaching church. Undaunted, he proceeded to preach and teach the wonderful message of universalism, but that resulted in all of their friends turning against him and his wife.

To make matters worse, his wife and baby became sick and died, and their medical expenses left him in financial ruin. He felt that he had failed God, his family and himself. He decided that he was never going to be part of a church again, and never preach again. Completely disillusioned and devastated, he sailed for America in 1770 to start a new life in a new land.

#### Strong wind persuades Murray to preach again

Murray's intended destination was New York City, but the wind blew his ship off course and it became stranded on a sandbar along the coast of New Jersey. The sailors couldn't move the ship because the wind kept blowing them into shore. There wasn't much food on the ship, so Murray climbed out and waded ashore. Near Barnegat Bay, he met a farmer named **Thomas Potter** who invited him into his house and gave him supper.

He discovered that Potter also believed in universal salvation. Ten years before Murray arrived in America, Potter had built a chapel all by himself and was waiting for the right preacher to come - a preacher who would proclaim the liberating message of universalism. Potter was convinced that Murray was the one for whom he had been waiting. But the problem was that Murray had resolved that he would never preach again.

Potter told Murray that he believed the wind that had brought him to Potter's house was the breath of God, that God had sent him there to preach in the chapel that Potter had built, and he believed that the wind would not change until Murray preached the good news of universalism in his chapel.

Murray still refused. But Potter asked him, "If the wind



*Kalen Fristad*

**Kalen Fristad**, a minister and Chairperson of **The Christian Universalist Association Board of Directors**, can be reached at [kkfristad@hotmail.com](mailto:kkfristad@hotmail.com)

does not change by Sunday morning will you take that as a sign from God that you should preach again?" After giving it some thought, Murray said, "I will".

The wind blew and blew for days, keeping the ship from leaving the shore. So on Sunday morning, September 30, 1770, **John Murray** preached in the chapel that **Thomas Potter** had built. He preached of a loving and caring God and about universal salvation, proclaiming that everyone would eventually experience salvation.

#### Murray spreads message of universal salvation

After that service, when the people came up to him and thanked him for his uplifting, inspirational and liberating sermon, Murray became a changed man. He decided that he did want to continue preaching and to share the wonderful message of universalism with as many people as he could. In the following decades, Murray preached throughout the American colonies/states, and under his leadership the *Universalist Church in America* was organized.

That brings us back to our next **CUA** conference. It will be held at the Murray Grove Retreat and Conference Center, which is located on the site of **Thomas Potter's** farm and the chapel where **John Murray** first preached in America.

I'm going to be there, and I'm excited about it. I invite each of you to come and share in an inspirational conference where we will celebrate God's unconditional love and unlimited salvation. Mark September 21-23, 2012 on your calendar, watch for more information in upcoming **CUA** newsletters, and plan to attend.

*Kalen*

## Universalist themes shine through in Ubuntu theology

By Mikal Rasheed

Many great religious leaders and activists may not specifically espouse a Universalist theology, but they are non-the-less Universalist in their overall theological world view. I believe that one such person is **Archbishop Desmond Tutu**, whose Universalist world view is reflected in his Ubuntu theology.

His Universalist vision shines through in many of his works, including two of his latest works, "No Future without Forgiveness", and "God is not a Christian". In fact, reference to his works has been made in many a Unitarian Universalist sermon.

I have found his work a source of inspiration in many ways. After the first of three visits to South Africa I became quite interested in the South African person-communal worldview as reflected in the concept of Ubuntu. I was further intrigued by the great similarities between the thoughts and activism of **Dr. Martin Luther King** (another closet Universalist) and **Desmond Tutu**.

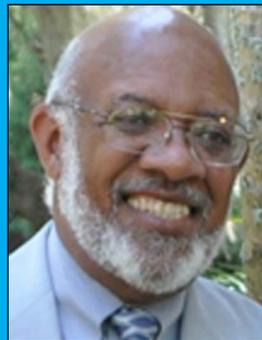
Finally, I was motivated to write about **Desmond Tutu** for *The Christian Universalist* newsletter in response to a letter written to the editor by **Dr. Heinrich Cyril Volmick** of Johannesburg, South Africa. In his letter he referred to the concept of Ubuntu and its possible connection to Christian Universalist thought. The intent of this article is to explore some of the possible connections especially in terms of the socio-ethic possibilities for Universalist thought.

### Apartheid and Ubuntu

Following the end of the repressive political regime of apartheid in 1994 and the release of Nelson Mandela who had been incarcerated on Robben Island for 26 years, South Africans were faced with the task of building a post-apartheid society. Remarkably, what was seen in South Africa, under the guidance of President Nelson Mandela and men such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu was the emergence of a new non-racist "rainbow nation".

Faced with the awesome task of creating an inclusive society composed of eleven ethnic and linguistic groups, (including Afrikaans and English), the nation of South Africa put forth one of the most progressive national constitutions in the world.

This constitution honored the rights of all people, by promoting "non-racialism, and non-sexism" as essential elements of their new civic society. What marked this transition and transformation, without the violent reprisal that many feared coming from the hands of the formally repressed black South Africans, was that the architects of the new South Africa returned to an ethical, social,



*Mikal Rasheed*

*Mikal Rasheed is a Christian Universalist minister and a member of the CUA Board. He can be reached at [mrasheed@sbcglobal.net](mailto:mrasheed@sbcglobal.net)*

spiritual, and philosophical concept that was a part of the indigenous cultural worldview of South Africa. This concept is Ubuntu.

To understand the meaning of the word Ubuntu, one can look at its linguistic origins. The term comes from a linguistics group of Sub-Saharan languages known as Bantu. Both words Ubuntu and Bantu can be recognized by the common root ntu (human). The prefix ba denotes the plural form for humanity. In short the term Ubuntu means personhood or human being or what it means to be human. The Zulu phrase "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" means that a person is a person through other persons.

Another phrase which speaks to the meaning of Ubuntu is "I am because we are and because we are I am". It is a concept that is not unique to South African cultures. Rather, the belief that personal identity is formed and understood within the matrix of community life is found in other African cultures. Yet it is a concept that became a part of the South African consciousness as the nation recovered from the social devastation thrust upon it through apartheid.

Ubuntu as a cultural world view highlights the essential unity of humanity and emphasizes the principles of empathy, sharing and cooperation in efforts to resolve social problems and social conflicts. **Barbara Nussbaum**, a proponent of Ubuntu who has applied the concept to a corporate environment, describes Ubuntu as the capacity in African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, and humanity. These human characteristics as valorized in the Ubuntu worldview are understood as essential for building and maintaining community.

*Continued on page 6*

## Universalist themes in Ubuntu theology ... continued from page 5

Those who subscribe to Ubuntu as a guiding principle state that it calls on us to believe and feel that: “your pain is my pain”, “my wealth is your wealth”, and “your salvation is my salvation”.

In essence, Ubuntu addresses our interconnectedness and our common humanity. Ethically, Ubuntu speaks to the responsibility we have to each other and that this responsibility flows from our connection and interdependence.

### Desmond Tutu's Ubuntu Theology

**Archbishop Desmond Tutu** appropriated and embraced Ubuntu thought and identified the natural synergy between Christianity and Ubuntu.

As a result, Tutu created a synthesis of the African spirituality of Ubuntu and Christianity, forming a uniquely Africanized relational spirituality. For Tutu, Ubuntu is a “theological concept in which human beings are called to be persons because they are made in the image of God (imago dei) and created by God to be interdependent.”

The evidence of Ubuntu's relationship to the Christian narrative is found in the creation story of Adam and Eve. Here there is a clear indication that man has the need for and is created for interdependency. According to Tutu, relationships are central to acquiring our humanity and we are created by God to be more cooperative than competitive. We are meant to be with each other and for each other. That is what it means to be human.

As Tutu stated on many occasions, a meaningful solitary existence is a contradiction and a self-sufficient existence is counter to man's need for interdependency.

### God's intention: unity of entire creation

For Tutu, God's redemption story reflects Ubuntu. Unity, love and reconciliation are the goal of the universe. As Tutu believes, the unity of the entire creation was God's intention from the very beginning of creation. The primal state of the universe was harmony, unity and fellowship. It was sin that destroyed this unity and created a state of alienation especially within the human community.

In fact, the ideology of racial separation as promoted by apartheid is based on the premise that people are created for separation, alienation, division, disharmony, and disunity. Thus apartheid represents a state of sin and brokenness or, in other words, a sin-based ideology. From this point of original sin there has been cosmic movement toward the restoration of this original unity (elements of the concept apokatastasis). Because of sin and brokenness, creation cries out for reconciliation and restoration. Thus Jesus was sent by God to bring unity, harmony and to restore human community and brotherhood.

Tutu's understanding of imago dei is that each person is not just to be respected but to be revered as one is created in God's image. The imago dei reflects the infinite value of each of us as a child of God. The imago dei also means a fundamental solidarity among human beings as children of the same God. Since the same image of God resides in all human beings, all are interrelated.

Here the imago dei constitutes a universal human identity, deeper than any racial, ethnic, and/or cultural identity. There is clearly a distinction between a Western and African (and African American) understanding of imago dei.

In a Western context imago dei highlights the individual, the inner spiritual nature, and the ontological and axiological relationship with God. In an African and African American context, imago dei emphasizes both the individual and communal dimensions of human existence, as well as the sense of social responsibility that emerges from this interconnection.

### Desmond and King: A comparison

As stated earlier, I found that both **Dr. Martin Luther King** and **Archbishop Tutu** shared the same communal based spirituality, though in this article I have given attention to **Desmond Tutu**. Now I would like to share what I see as some of the comparisons between these two warriors who fought to establish God's love-based kingdom in the midst of a sin-based social order.

Neither King nor Tutu separated their theological principles from social issues. Each believed that God sides with the poor and oppressed. The world cannot be ethically neutral because God is a moral God. What happens in all domains of human life has equal significance for God. God is not a neutral Deity who abstains from mundane realities of human conflict. Rather, God is compassionate, involved and active in human affairs.

Both King and Tutu were firmly convinced that the universe is governed by a moral order and it is within this moral universe that God is concerned, not only about individual salvation, but also the redemption of the social and political order.

One of the statements attributed to Dr. King is that the moral arch of the universe is long but it bends toward justice. While he was speaking to the eventual triumph of good over evil, and the inability of man to thwart God's purpose for the redemption of the social order, the implications for a Universalist understanding of salvation is evident. But this is the subject for another article.

*The conclusion of this article will appear in the March issue.*

# Maronites reject purgatory, accept universal salvation

By Stan Seidner

Although a part of the Roman Catholic Church, the Maronites' historical literature regarding purgatory offers a somewhat contradictory perspective. Purgatory, a Roman Catholic term, is not found in the Syriac Aramaic liturgy of the Maronite church.

In itself, the Catechism of the Catholic Church had declared one needed cleansing before entering heaven. This theology underlying the catechism vacillated through the ages, seeing purgatory either as a place, replete with cleansing flames, or as a condition of darkness for the soul. This theology appeared at odds with pronouncements about the afterlife by Syriac fathers.

After the Maronites had affirmed their definitive consolidation of union with the Catholic Church in the 16th century, they faced the dilemma of reconciling their theology with that of Rome. Up through the present time, the Maronites have treaded softly over the issue of purgatory. Although the majority of current literature skips over the notion of purgatory, occasional references to it appear in a few Maronite publications, perhaps as a sign of obedience to Rome. We will see that this was not always the case.

## Maronite traditions about salvation

The Maronites themselves had derived their name from a priest and hermit whom many theologians of the time considered both ascetic and saintly. Maron had retreated to an area outside of the city of Antioch where he lived his life in poverty fasting and prayer. His example and miraculous healings resulted in a following. Over the years Maron's adherents congealed into a sect and developed its own distinct Syriac Aramaic liturgy. Maronite traditions on salvation originated from Judaic and early Christian populations who had fled to Antioch.

Maronite traditions on salvation descended from a distinct apostolic lineage from the church of Antioch. Established by Peter the Apostle, this early church became associated with the followers of Jesus Christ termed "Christians. The new center had incorporated Judaic traditions of offering atonement for the sins of the dead and God's mercy upon the departed. This spirituality stressed humanity as the children of God and heirs of Eternal Life.

The emerging literature from Antioch declared the mystery and mercy of God. It rejected any boundaries placed upon Him by humankind and their restrictive use of language. God's revelation of himself in this world occurred through his self-emptying, which allowed the indescribable to become understandable. Humanity's inability to understand grace never restricted God's capability to allot it. By His divine breath humanity became destined to safely arrive at the terminal harbor of salvation. So we find within

the Syrian liturgy:

*You have united, O Lord, your divinity with our humanity and our humanity with your divinity; your life with our mortality and our mortality with your life.*

*You have assumed what is ours, and you have given us what is yours, for the life and salvation of our souls.*

This mystical imagery of the co-mixture part of the Communion ceremony projects a flow between God and humanity that remains unbroken. If this is so, then our journey home back to God becomes part of this unbreakable flow that suggests a guarantee of restoration for all. Since Christ has paid the ultimate price for our salvation, we need not be hindered by any painful transition as envisaged with the Catholic concept of purgatory. A Syriac hymn (qolo) declared that "God is with us; He is the God of salvation; he redeems all his children."

## Judaic traditions incorporated in Antioch

Undoubtedly, those Jews who came to Antioch brought with them similar imagery of salvation, such as the passage found in Isaiah 7:14. They also foreshadowed current Roman Catholic pronouncements on purgatory as one of internal struggle between the "good instinct" (yetzer ha'tov), and the "evil instinct" (yetzer ha'ra). Those who adopted the new religion of Christianity attempted to infuse it with their theological reference points of the time.

Antioch's Christian theologians had incorporated the Judaic traditions of offering atonement for the sins of the dead and God's mercy upon the departed. Syriac hymns, such as the *howfro dnooro* (for the faithful departed), echoed such traditions. For some sects of Judaism, resurrection had a definite appeal and possibility. Both Jews and Christians of Antioch drew upon Hebrew and Aramaic Scripture in support of resurrection and reconciliation with God.

Syriac perspectives of the dead included notions taken from Judaism from a time that preceded the fall of the Second Temple. The Jews referred to the "house of the dead" as the residing area of the deceased awaiting resurrection. The emerging Christian Scriptures made repeated references to the Hebraic *sheol* and *gehennom*. Both terms have been widely utilized in Maronite literature. Syriac Aramaic writings similarly used the term "house of the dead" (beyt meyta). The Peshitta uses this phrase in such passages as, "Alaha abohi haw d'aqyameh min beyt meyta".

During this transition of Judaic influence upon Syriac theological thought, no interim level between death and salvation blocked the path to God's mercy.

*Continued on page 8*

## Maronites reject purgatory, accept universal salvation ... continued from page 7

Scripture considered the process toward reconciliation, at times, to include darkness along the path of salvation. Along this path human kind contemplated the true nature of its sins. In this version of separation humanity assigned to this level became aware of God but was entirely detached from Him. The "separation anxiety" that resulted from this awareness of distance from God essentially made the voyage of salvation easier for its travelers. This separation from God became more of a journey rather than a place of cleansing fire.

We find in the Qurbono ("Offering"), that the Promion of the Hoosoyo (Prayer of Forgiveness) infers a promise of illumination for those who are lost on their journey: "He enlightened those who sit in darkness, and with the brightness of his splendor, he gives joy to all creatures."

No final theosis or deification of humanity could be said of this journey since, even for the dead, the only perfection exists in and with God. Any thoughts of universal reconciliation with God seemed anathema to Rome. **Origen**, and **Clement of Alexandria** had envisaged that the soul of the departed would be made to learn all the things it had rejected while residing in human form. This happened through the efforts of Angels, who acted as mentors and provided unlearned lessons.

The process continued until the soul acquired sufficient knowledge and had been purified enough to ascend closer to God. Origen clearly believed that all rational souls were able to be saved, including Satan and his minions.

He also argued:

"For the destruction of the last enemy must be understood in this way, not that its substance which was made by God shall perish, but that the hostile purpose and will which proceeded, not from God but from itself, will come to an end. It will be destroyed, therefore, not in the sense of ceasing to exist, but of being no longer an enemy and no longer death. For to the Almighty nothing is impossible, nor is anything beyond the reach of cure by its maker."

Another and earlier **Clement of Alexandria** spoke of heaven in terms of a journey in which the soul ascended by means of an internal ladder and progressively transformed itself. The sanctified moved from plane to plane and from one joy to another. This precursor of **Origen** and heir to **Philo** supported the doctrine of the infinite development of man toward God.

No intermediate state such as purgatory existed between heaven and hell. Early Syriac Aramaic fathers wrote of the restoration of all human kind, from the first Adam onwards. Death becomes a passage from life on earth to life in glory.

**St. Ephrem the Syrian** had written in his fifth hymn, "Likewise, death, too, is for the world a symbol of birth, and

yet people weep because they are born out of this world... into the garden of splendors." In a later hymn, Ephrem inferred an ultimate reconciliation with God: "Weary not, my brethren, nor suppose that your struggle will last long, or that your resurrection is far off, for our death is already behind us, and our resurrection before us."

The journey to paradise took shape as the nonstop voyage from death to resurrection. Syriac writers such as **Ephrem** and **St. Isaac the Syrian** believed in the surety of ultimate reconciliation from the promise of God who had sacrificed his Son. The visions of the Syriac fathers coincided more with that of **Origen** and **Clement**. **St. Isaac the Syrian** declared:

"Sin, Gehenna, and Death do not exist at all with God, for they are effects, not substances. Sin is the fruit of free will. There was a time when sin did not exist, and there will be a time when it will not exist. Gehenna is the fruit of sin. At some point in time it had a beginning, but its end is not known. Death, however, is a dispensation of the wisdom of the Creator. It will rule only a short time over nature; then it will be totally abolished. Satan's name derives from voluntarily turning aside [the Syriac etymological meaning of Satan] from the truth; it is not an indication that he exists as such naturally."

"... a rejection of purgatory, as well as an acceptance of universal reconciliation, could be found in the antecedent literature of the Maronite church. There is no argument from either Eastern or Western theologians that a solitary human could know the mind or will of God."

In conclusion, a rejection of purgatory, as well as an acceptance of universal reconciliation, could be found in the antecedent literature of the Maronite church. There is no argument from either Eastern or Western theologians that a solitary human could know the mind or will of God.

The Church Fathers knew this in their humility to discern the destiny of His creation. Perhaps for this reason, the Maronite church has maintained its relative silence pertaining to the relegation of souls to human-made categories such as purgatory. Indeed, if death is a transition and part of an eternal continuity, as stated eloquently by Syriac mystics, it also lends credence to an afterlife for all humanity.

*Stanley Samuel Seidner of Austin, Texas, who has a PhD in Religious Studies, is a Judaic Maronite - a member of the Maronite Catholic Church. He is currently studying to become an ordained minister of the Christian Universalist Association.*

## Negative near-death experiences can often change to positive

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This is the conclusion of **Ken R. Vincent's** article that appeared in the January 2012 issue of this newsletter. **Ken R. Vincent, Ed.D.** is the author of *The Golden Thread, God's Promise of Universal Restoration*. Visit Ken at: <http://www.universalist-herald.net/Mystical.html>.

By **Ken R. Vincent**

**Paul Robb**, author of *The Kindness of God*, a book that is a collection of religious experiences, notes, "If there is a single message in the accounts of this book, I believe it is this: God loves us all without exception. No matter how black the soul, the soul is still loved. I believe God's love is like sunlight. The sun gives off light; it is incapable of giving off darkness. God gives off love; he is incapable of giving off anger or hatred or vengeance or jealousy or punishment. The themes of God's love and His kindness occur again and again in the accounts in this book and at the *Religious Experience Research Centre*."

### Hell Is for Instruction and Is Not Permanent

The first near-death experience I ever read was that of the psychiatrist **George Ritchie. Dr. Ritchie** happens to be the professor who trained near-death pioneer **Raymond Moody**. In his elaborate vision described in his book *Ordered to Return*, in which his guide was no less than Jesus himself, he was shown a variety of hellish experiences, some which were on the earth-plane and others in other realms.

In all of these places, there were beings of light standing by the lost souls, and these angels were trying to get them to change their thoughts. Ritchie also relates that Jesus told him that he would draw ALL people to himself, echoing that great Universalist passage, John 12:32.

The prolific liberal Christian writer, Methodist theologian, psychical researcher, and committed Universalist **Leslie Weatherhead**, states in *The Christian Agnostic*, "Hell may last as long as a sinful humanity lasts, but that does not mean that any individual will remain in it all that time. The time of purging can only continue until purification is reached. And a God driven to employ endless hell would be a God turned fiend himself, defeated in his original purpose.... but God will never desert the soul."

It should be noted that the **Rev. Weatherhead** was converted to Universalism in theology school as a re-



*Ken R. Vincent*

sult of a powerful mystical experience. **Kevin Williams**, webmaster of the "#1" NDE website on Google and Yahoo ([www.near-death.com](http://www.near-death.com)), is a committed Universalist. In his book, *Nothing Better Than Death*, he states that, "Universal salvation is the concept that everyone will eventually attain salvation and go to heaven."

This is a foreign concept to most Christians today, although it was not to many early Christians. Many Christians today cannot accept the NDE because it generally affirms Universal Salvation. While it is true Universal Salvation is generally affirmed in NDEs, it is not true that everyone enters heaven immediately upon death. It is well-documented in NDEs people going to hell upon death. However, NDEs show hell to be a temporary spiritual condition, much like Catholic purgatory, not eternal damnation."

Near-death researcher and experimenter **Nancy Evans Bush**, a retired Congregational Church pastoral counselor, has recently completed the analysis of 31 research studies on negative near-death experiences. In addition to the fact that "good" people sometimes have negative experiences, her research shows there is evidence that these experiences are for instruction and that eventually, "a positive experience is likely to emerge."

This same view is shared by internist and near-death researcher **Barbara Rommer** who wrote *Blessing in Disguise* about negative near-death experiences. Rommer reports that negative experiences often change to positive, and it is her belief that if they are allowed to continue, the white light of God and peaceful experiences will and do unfold.

*Continued on page 10*

## Negative near-death experiences can often change to positive ... from page 9

Psychical researcher **F. W. H. Myers**, in his book, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, notes that in veridical cases indicative of afterlife, there seems to be a, "disintegration of selfishness, malevolence, pride. And is this not a natural result of any cosmic moral evolution?... the student of these narratives will, I think, discover throughout them uncontradicted indications of the presence of Love, the growth of Joy, and the submission to Law." A death-bed vision occurs when a person is dying and tells people in the room what he or she is seeing at the point of death.

In their book, *At the Hour of Death*, psychical researchers **Karlis Osis** and **Erlendur Haraldsson** note that in a cross-cultural study of 1,700 people in the United States and India, only one of these cases was hellish. In all cases, the take-away person was an apparition of a dead person, either a dead loved one or a religious figure.

This was true, regardless of whether the person was Christian, Hindu, Jew, Moslem, or unbeliever.

### CONCLUSION

A good many researchers like the Unitarian **Sir Alister Hardy**, author of *The Spiritual Nature of Man* and founder of the *Religious Experience Research Centre* (formerly at Oxford) at the University of Wales Lampeter, have had religious experiences themselves. A few, like the Unitarian **William James**, author of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, have not.

## Todd Huston latest to resign from CUA Board



Todd Huston

**Todd Huston** is the latest **CUA** Board member to resign. Todd announced his resignation last month - the third to resign since last summer.

Board Chair **Kalen Fristad** thanked Todd for his service, adding he was sorry to see him leave the Board, and wished him the best in his endeavors.

**Todd**, of Tulsa, Oklahoma, is a psychotherapist, motivational speaker and author of *More Than Mountains*. He lost a leg early in life but still set a record by climbing to the top peak of all 50 states in 66 plus days.

**Doug Torkelson**, a software engineer, also of Tulsa, Oklahoma, announced his resignation from the Board in December, shortly after **Logan Geen** resigned. Logan is a first year law student at the University at

My own commitment to Universalism is based in part on my own two mystical experiences of God but also on the testimony of hundreds of people I have interviewed and the thousands more I've read about in the works of the authors I have cited. Although this ongoing research has expanded the known "data" available, in a very real way, I don't know any more than I knew 15 years ago when I wrote this conclusion in my book, *Visions of God from the Near-Death Experience*: "God is love. We are all connected. We are all part of God. God's plan for the Universe may be beyond humanity's understanding, but we are a part of it. Hell is the absence of God. Hell is the land of the self-preoccupied who have shut out the Love of God and others. It is never too late to call out to God, even from Hell. It is never too late to turn to the ones who love you and go toward The Light".

**Nancy Evans Bush**, the world's foremost authority on "hellish" near-death experiences, has a blog on the subject. Nancy had a negative near-death experience at age 25 during the birth of her second child, even though she had been "saved" twice by **Billy Graham** himself!

The most recent post on her blog has to do with the deathbed visions of hard-core felons. A deathbed vision occurs when, as a person lay dying, he/she reports to the people in the room what he/she "sees." The short answer is, their deathbed visions are overwhelmingly positive. (Universalism rocks!)

Check it out at: <http://dancingpastthedark.com/>

God is with you,

*Ken*

Buffalo Law School.

Two new Board members were appointed in recent months - **Judy C. Sheriff** of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; and **Mikal N. Rasheed** of Chicago, Illinois, bringing to 10 the number of Board members currently serving.

Other Board members are: **Chair Kalen Fristad; Vice Chair Mary Keller; Treasurer Sharon McCauley; Eric Stetson, Steven Row, Susan Smith, Marquis Hunt, and David Spatz.**

**CUA** Coordinator is **Rich Koster**, a retired pastor and Editor of *The Universalist Herald*, the oldest continuously published liberal religious magazine in North America.

The Board is actively considering other candidates to fill the vacant positions, and plans to increase the number of directors to at least 12.



Mary E. Hunt



Amy Oden



Margaret Starbird

### *Revival 2012: 10th UUCF RevivalRetreat*

## **Many Voices, Many Verses: Welcoming the Feminine in Christianity**

UUCF (Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship) will hold its Revival 2012, March 22 - 25, at Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax, Oakton, Virginia.

Revival is an experience of what the church is becoming. It is Revival. It is Retreat. It is Renewal. It is Community.

Plan to attend the next rejuvenating Revival. Revival is a dynamic, highly transformative, and spiritually uplifting event. It helps to shape the future and direction of our path in freely following Jesus.

Christian or not, Unitarian Universalist or not, seekers, believers, doubters, questioners, members of other faiths, other Christian traditions, other UUs, all are welcome for part or all of this dynamic event held in the radical inclusive, progressive, loving, liberating, healing Spirit of Jesus.

Women were integral in the life and ministry of Jesus. Women were depicted as the first witnesses to the Resurrection, they were leaders in the early church and have been theologians and church leaders throughout the centuries in the varying traditions and communities within the church.

It is no surprise that women have provided us with many voices of faithfulness. It is also no surprise that the influence of these women has often been dismissed, downplayed, or disputed through the centuries as well.

This year's Revival focus will not only explore these many voices through history, but will also celebrate the way that revelational presence of the feminine in Christianity is growing the spirit of the church today. How it is also growing the souls of many, men and women alike, in diverse ways, and while doing so, is changing not only the face of Christianity but the world itself in hospitality, learning, liturgy, and service.

While three major presentations will present takes on the theme, as will some workshops and conversations, other topics will be presented for study. In addition, var-

ied and dynamic worship services will be offered, including: communion, baptism, prayer and healing, daily office prayer time, and more.

To go deeper with others in the revival/retreat experience, and to make connections, a

small group track during the event itself, hospitality and social time will be available. The UUCF's own service project is another highlight of the program.

Featured Presenters and Preachers are:

**Dr. Mary E. Hunt**, speaking on: *Feminist Theologies in Action - Women around the world doing faith-based justice work*. Dr. Hunt is a feminist theologian who is co-founder and co-director of the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER) in Silver Spring, MD.

**Amy Oden**, *Wide Open Spaces: Women's voices in Christianity*. Dr. Oden is Dean and Professor of History of Christianity, Wesley Theological Seminary.

**Margaret Starbird**, speaking on: *Mary Magdalene: Woman and Archetype*. Starbird is the widely acclaimed author of works that seek to restore Mary Magdalene to a position of honor denied her for 2,000 years by the entrenched hierarchy of the patriarchal system.

Themes: Prayer, Bible, Theology, Universalism, Celtic Christianity, Sacred Feminine, New Metaphors, Missional Church, Growing Small Groups of Jesus Followers, UU Christianity 101.

For more information, check the UUCF website at: <http://uuchristian.org/revival>. Email: [info@uuchristian.org](mailto:info@uuchristian.org), or **Rev Ron Robinson** at: [executivedirector@uucf.org](mailto:executivedirector@uucf.org), or phone (918) 794-4637. Mailing address: UUCF, P.O. Box 6702, Turley, OK 74156.



**CUA**

*Christian Universalist Association*  
 117 Barkentine Court St Simons Island, GA 31522

*Treasurer's Report for the 12 months of 2011*

Beginning Balance January 1, 2011: \$2,694.58

	Ordination Income	Other Income	Expenses
January	\$ 300.00	\$ 223.00	\$ 216.18
February	\$ 611.93	\$ 155.00	\$1,313.03
March	\$ 365.00	\$ 920.00	\$ 452.31
April	\$ 315.00	\$ 555.00	\$ 378.70
May	\$ 465.00	\$ 547.10	\$ 652.88
June	\$ 465.00	\$ 685.00	\$ 359.57
July	\$ 340.00	\$ 515.00	\$ 435.70
August	\$ 15.00	\$ 390.00	\$ 432.25
September	\$ 765.00	\$2,938.00	\$4,241.16
October	\$ 315.00	\$ 631.00	\$ 580.27
November	\$ 15.00	\$ 575.00	\$ 798.56
December	\$ 265.00	\$ 706.00	\$ 530.49
<b>YTD Totals</b>	<b>\$4,236.93</b>	<b>\$8,840.10</b>	<b>\$10,391.10</b>

Bank of America Balance as of December 31, 2011: \$5,605.21

Sharon McCauley  
 Treasurer

*Holy Humor!*

**Pastor asks for directions**

As a little boy waited for his mother to come out of the grocery store, a man named Terry approached and asked, "Son, can you tell me where the Post Office is?"

The little boy replied, "Sure! Just go straight down this street a couple of blocks and turn to your right."

Terry thanked the boy kindly and said, "I'm the new pastor in town. I'd like for you to come to church on Sunday. I'll show you how to get to Heaven."

The little boy replied with a chuckle: "Awww, come on ... You don't even know the way to the Post Office."



**Promises**

God didn't promise a calm passage. He promised a safe landing.

**Forbidden Fruit**

A forbidden fruit will create many jams.

**Praying**

When you pray, don't give God instructions. Just report for duty!