

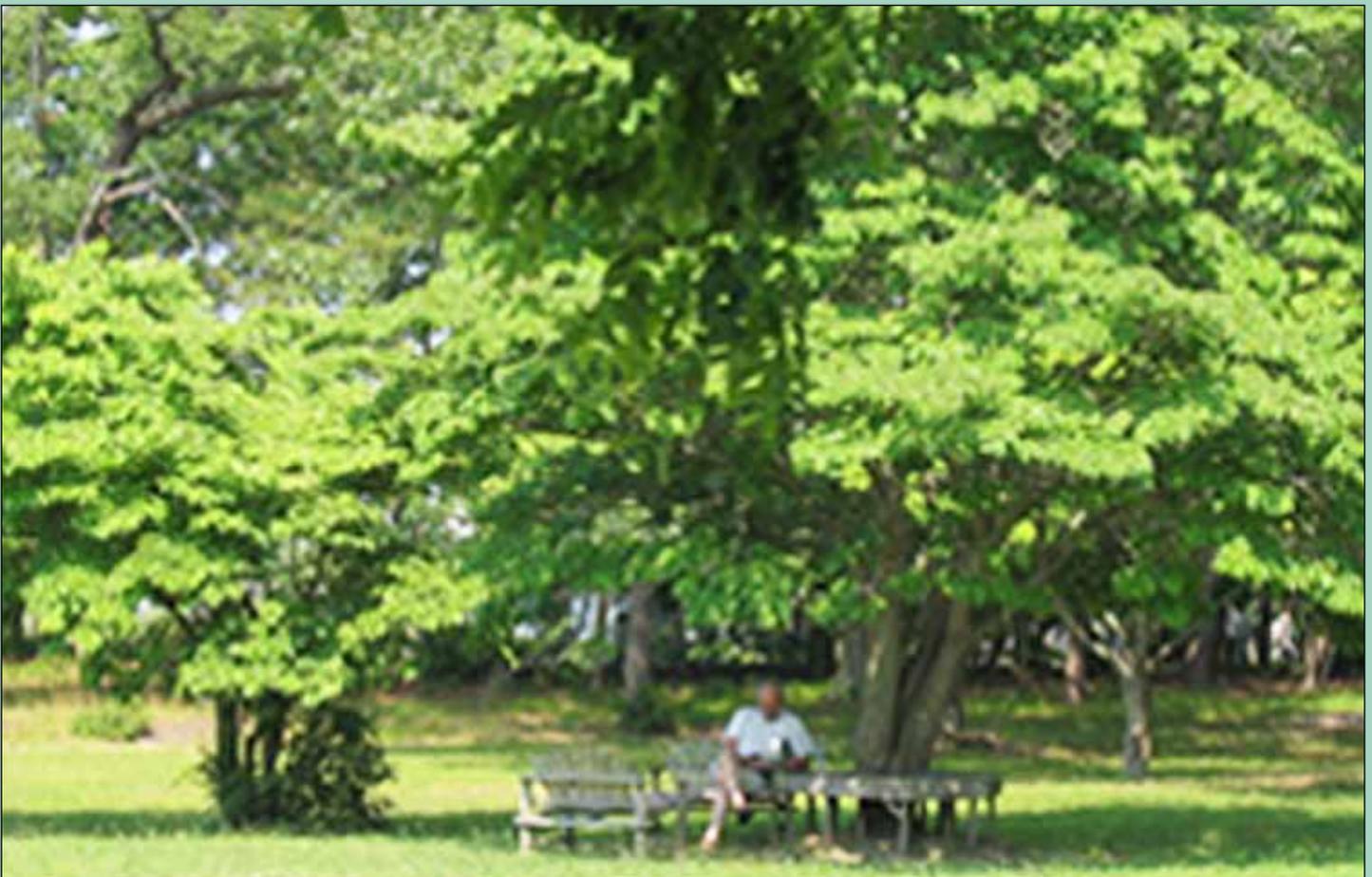
July/August 2012



The Christian Universalist

Published bi-monthly by the Christian Universalist Association

www.christianuniversalist.org



Peaceful Greenery at Murray Grove

This man reads beneath the spreading boughs and greenery in a thick wooded area at *Murray Grove Retreat and Renewal Center* in Lanoka Harbor, New Jersey. This is the spot regarded by many as the birthplace of Universalism in America. John Murray, believed to have been the first person to preach the message of Universalism in America, preached his sermon in a chapel and meeting house built by Thomas Potter, a member of a locally prominent family. Ten years after the meeting house had been built, John Murray arrived aboard the

brig "Hand in Hand", bound for New York. The ship and its crew and passengers, first diverted to Philadelphia, were on their way up the Jersey coast when they swept over a sandbar in a fog into Barnegat Bay. Murray finally gave into Thomas Potter's persistent requests to preach after a storm kept the ship stranded in the bay. The Christian Universalist Association will hold its annual conference here, September 21 to 23.

- Photo courtesy of Murray Grove Retreat and Renewal Center

Inside this issue

- 2** CUA / Board Directory
- 3** From the Editor's Notebook
- 4** CUA news
- 5, 6** Universalism: both theological, ethical
- 7** "Telling it like it is" ... "IT IS FINISHED!"
- 7** David Spatz resigns from CUA Board
- 8** Religion, hate, love
- 9, 10** Questioning "the tradition of the elders"
- 11** Immanuel Kant's "categorical imperative"
- 12** Holy Humor!

The best ... the greatest ... the most!

The best day ... today;
The best play ... work;
The greatest puzzle ... life;
The greatest thought ... God;
The best work...work you like;
The greatest mistake ... giving up;
The greatest need ... common sense;
The most dangerous person ... a liar;
The most expensive indulgence ... hate;
The most disagreeable person ... the complainer;
The best teacher ... one who makes you want to learn;
The worst bankrupt ... the soul who has lost enthusiasm;
The cheapest, easiest, and most stupid things to do ... find fault;
The greatest bore ... one who keeps talking after he has made his point;
The greatest comfort ... the knowledge that you have done your work well;
The most agreeable companion ... the one who would not have you any different than you are;
The meanest feeling of which any human being is capable ... feeling envious of another person's success;
The greatest blessing ... good health;
The greatest victory ... victory over self;
The greatest thing, bar none, in the world ... Love;
Love for family, God, home, friends, neighbors ... and for the land in which we enjoy our freedom.

- From the Internet

The Christian Universalist

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

Deadline is the 24th of the month preceding the two-month period of publication. Reports and photos may be emailed to the editor at 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*.

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 digital publication to members and others.

Board of Directors

Kalen Fristad, Chair; Mary Keller, Vice-Chair; Sharon McCauley, Treasurer; Marquis Hunt, Steven Rowe, Mikal Rasheed, Judy Sheriff, Susan Smith, Eric Stetson, John Licitra, Stan Seidner, and Sheila Hansen.

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From the Editor's Notebook

... Pat Moauro

When we “can’t go home again” and when it feels “like coming home”

American novelist **Thomas Clayton Wolfe** (October 3, 1900 - September 15, 1938) wrote a novel called *You Can't Go Home Again*, published posthumously in 1940.

According to Wikipedia, the novel recounts the story of **George Webber**, a new author, who writes a book that refers frequently to his home town of Libya Hill. As in many of his other novels, Wolfe explores American society and its changes during the 1920s and 1930s, including the stock market crash, the illusion of prosperity, and the unfair passing of time which prevents Webber ever being able to return “home again”.

The title comes from the novel's final solution and understanding in which Webber realizes that: “You can't go back home to your family, back home to your childhood ... back home to a young man's dreams of glory and of fame ... back home to places in the country, back home to the old forms and systems of things which once seemed everlasting but which are changing all the time – back home to the escapes of Time and Memory.”

The familiar phrase “you can't go home again” has become a part of American speech. And it has come to mean that once you have left your country town or provincial backwater city for a sophisticated metropolis you can't return to the narrow confines of your previous way of life. More generally, attempts to relive youthful memories will always fail.

For me, Wolfe's novel, *You Can't Go Home Again*, has always been somewhat of a metaphor about any spiritual seeker who has left her/his previous religious/spiritual understanding and former place of worship. Some may think that they can always go back to their previous belief system and take up where they left off.

But after experiencing new, more soul-satisfying beliefs and practices you simply “can't go home again” to your former set of beliefs. For the honest-hearted seeker who values Truth over friendships with former close fellow believers this is simply not possible. There have been a number of examples of ministers, some very prominent ones, who formerly were part of an ultra conservative belief system that preached eternal punishment in a supposedly fiery hell. These ministers learned that the idea of a loving God torturing and punishing his beloved creation forever in a fiery furnace is simply unthinkable, unacceptable, unloving,



Pat Moauro

Pat Moauro, Editor of The Christian Universalist, can be reached at patmor123@gmail.com

and untrue. New Universalist believers started preaching their new message of the wider hope. As a result, they were stripped of their right to preach and usually dismissed from mega and other churches and ministries by religious officials who still cling to such a fearful, unloving teaching.

Such former believers in hell fire simply “can't go home again”. Once the mind has been stretched by a new idea and we have risen in consciousness, once we have truly grasped a satisfying new truth, we simply can not return to former beliefs, ideas and practices. “You can't go home again.”

After realizing God's grace and everlasting love and desire for everyone to enjoy and express God's joy and love forever, how could any Universalist ever go back to such a degrading, God-dishonoring belief of eternal torment in a fiery hell? Truly, “You Can't Go Home Again” to that type of belief system.

However, in another sense, you *can* go home, as in the familiar phrase, “It felt like coming home.” Heard mainly in New Thought circles, this phrase reflects the joy and happiness when someone realizes they have found ideas and teachings that resonate with them because those truths are deep within them - at the core of their being.

The challenge for all of us is to realize and accept when we “can't go home again” and when we know within our heart of hearts that we have truly come home.

Please read **Bryan Sherwood's** article on page 7 and **Ed Burley's** article on page 8. They both “get it”!

God loves you with an everlasting love.

Pat



Entrance to the Murray Grove Meeting House, Lanoka Harbor, New Jersey

CU at the shore

Conference and Annual Meeting
of the Christian Universalist Association
Lanoka Harbor, New Jersey
September 21-23, 2012

\$140 Total Registration Fee for the weekend
\$40 Saturday only
\$25 Half Day

For Schedule and Registration Form
contact the CUA Coordinator at:

richkoster2@aol.com
269-352-4457

Would you like to be a Member or a Friend of the CUA?

Last year the *CUA* Board approved a new membership policy and it is finally being implemented. For you to be considered a Member you need to show some special interest or support beyond just giving us your contact information.

A minimum \$10 donation each year will make you a Member. Other ways to become a member:

- Come to annual conference;
- Help with a project;
- Enter our ordination program;
- Join a team or committee;
- Promote the *CUA* to friends and neighbors;
- Connect to other CU folks near you;
- Start a fellowship group;
- Make suggestions, provide input, show that you care.

We now have about 180 Members, another 700 Friends, and 500 more who just want to get the newsletter. We'd like to see more Friends become Members, and more newsletter readers become Friends.

Starting soon, Members will get special benefits: discounts on books, reduced conference fees, and, when our new Bylaws are approved, the right to vote for Board members. - Coordinator **Rich Koster**

CUA Ordination Program continues to produce new CU ministers

At a special ordination ceremony at the *CUA* Conference at Murray Grove in September, at least three and perhaps as many as six persons will be ready and approved for ordination. Those ordained will join 12 men and women previously ordained and now constituting a core group of CU clergy:

Eric Stetson
Judy Sheriff
Blake Murray
Deb Peterson
Jose Castillo-Bayonet
Fred Howard
Susan Smith
Mikal Rasheed
Donne Hayden
David Spatz
Mary Keller
Tim King

Some features of the *CUA* Ordination Course have been changed or expanded; however, the web site does not yet show these changes. If you are interested in applying for the course, please contact *CUA* Coordinator **Rich Koster** at richkoster.cua@gmail.com, or call him at 269.352.4457.

Universalism: “both a theological and an ethical religion”

EDITOR’S NOTE: This is an abbreviated summary of a talk given by keynote speaker the Rev. Richard “Dick” Gilbert to the 2012 Universalist Convocation at Murray Grove Retreat and Renewal Center, May 18-20. Rev. Gilbert, who spoke on Love that will not let us go - or off, is a parish minister, author, and Social Justice Coordinator for the St. Lawrence Unitarian Universalist District. This talk appeared in its entirety in the Spring 2012 Universalist Herald.

By Richard Gilbert

I begin with a poem:

*Come return to your place in the pews,
And hear our heretical views;
You were not born in sin,
So lift up your chin -
You have only your dogmas to lose.*

These satirical words by the late Unitarian Universalist minister **Leonard Mason** may not be the stuff of which public relations campaigns are made, but they are a comic summary of my theme: *Love that will not let us go - or off.*

We invite people to religious community as heretics = heresy, as in the Greek *harein*, meaning to choose. We affirm the inherent dignity of all people. We wish to permeate the world with hope, without stifling religious dogma. We are more likely to use the following words:

*Love is the doctrine of this church,
The quest of truth is its sacrament,
And service is its prayer.
To dwell together in peace,
To seek knowledge in freedom,
To serve human need,
To the end that all souls shall grow
Into harmony with the Divine -
Thus do we covenant with each other and with God.*

These words were by the early 20th century Universalist minister **L. Griswold Williams** (1893-1942). They are often spoken in our churches, not as creeds, but as celebratory statements of community. Sometimes they are modified theologically, as in **James Vila Blake’s** (1842-1925) more humanistic version:

*Love is the spirit of this church,
And service is its law.
This is our great covenant:*



Richard Gilbert

*To dwell together in peace,
To seek the truth in love,
And to help one another.*

You will note at least two differences: the Williams variation describes love as a doctrine and the covenant is with each other and with God. In the Blake version the wording is much simpler; love is a spirit, not a doctrine, and the theology is humanist. However, more important is that both of these popular congregational readings begin with love and end with covenant. And that is my theme: Universalism as the love that will not let us go - or off.

That wording is crucial. Universalist history emphasizes both the embracing love of God - universal salvation, the final harmony of all souls with God - where the initiative is God’s - **and** the imperative to help one another - where the initiative is ours - the covenant to love thy neighbor.

Let me invite you to a brisk jog through the history of universalism (small “u” and capital “U”) to demonstrate it is both a theological and an ethical religion. Universalism as an idea goes back at least to early Jewish history. The Bible teaches universalism: Noah’s God covenants with the whole human race after the flood. The Hebrew prophets proclaimed a God of all the nations....

Jesus’ Parable of the Good Samaritan is universalism in narrative form - even the hated Samaritans were God’s children. 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.” (Galations 3:28)

In the third century, **Origen** (185-254 CE) declared universal salvation from a merciful God. Punishment was a self-inflicted consequence of sin. That was radical talk for which Origen was subsequently condemned as a heretic by the Council of Constantinople in 553 CE.

Continued on page 6

Universalism: “both a theological and an ethical religion”... *continued from page 5*

From the Christian 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. That is what I call the ethical mandate to be good - for nothing.

All this laid the foundation for **James Reilly's** 18th century enunciation of universal salvation in England. It was a disillusioned Methodist preacher, **John Murray**, who in 1770 brought this heresy literally to these very shores in his legendary meeting with **Thomas Potter**.

Universalism grew slowly as a rag-tag scattering of souls who had outgrown Calvinist pre-destination - teaching that some at birth were destined for heaven, some for hell. Universalism replaced a vengeful God of judgment with a merciful God of love. As one wit put it, “Here is how one gets Universalist holy water - boil the hell out of it.”

The struggle between Calvinism and Universalism was a dramatic one. There were two **John Murrays** in Boston at the turn of the 19th Century, “Damnation Murray” and “Salvation Murray,” to distinguish Calvinist from Universalist.

There was a schism in the mid-19th century among the Universalists themselves. We can illustrate it in the story told about **Hosea Ballou**, a Universalist preacher and theologian. One of his critics inquired of him whether he had the habit of asking his parishioners, “O, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?”

Ballou's reply was typical for its laconic wit. “No Madam,” he said. “That class do not attend my church.”

While Ballou was an ultra Universalist - all were saved no matter what - there were many who felt that let people off too easily. Called Restorationists, they argued for a period of punishment between death and ultimate restoration to heaven. It was a heated debate, but the Restorationists returned to the “ultra” fold within a decade.

However, through the 19th and into the 20th century this theological heresy became increasingly popular among many Christians, and Universalism became less distinctive. Nonetheless, this universal salvation in a new interpretation is central to what Universalism contributes to the religious world today.

So much for the love that will not let us go - the ever-

embracing love of God. If you prefer more humanist language, you might like the surprising words of Protestant theologian **Paul Tillich**: “You are accepted, you are accepted, you are accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you do not know ... Simply accept the fact that you are accepted.”

But what of the second part of our theological equation - the love that will not let us go - or off - meaning that while we have been accepted, that is not the end of the deal. Something is expected of us. That love will not let us off either - it requires us to do something. It is a covenant among ourselves, with others and with our highest values which some call God - others may call it Humanity or the Beloved Community.

Universalism was and is not only a theological position, but also an ethical imperative. Biblically speaking, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.” (Luke 10:27) Increasingly Universalism has captured the imagination of 21st century UU's (Unitarian Universalists) with its theological inclusiveness and its ethical clarity.

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 - as the horizontal dimension of religion, then the vertical puts pressure on the horizontal. We might take Paul Tillich's words - “accept the fact you are accepted” - as our theological premise.

If this is true, then that realization prompts us to accept everyone - to work for universal justice. Our basic beliefs cry out for action. Universalism, originating in the theological vertical dimension of faith, faces the daunting prospect of transforming that faith into the horizontal - or ethical dimension. It is love that will not let us go - or off.

We Unitarian Universalists, a tiny slice of progressive religion, wonder about our role in the great scheme of things. The social landscape is daunting. How do we get a handle on what must be done to build a Beloved Community of peace, justice and sustainability? I suggest one of our primary missions, and perhaps our unique mission, is to be a gadfly on the body politic and religious.

Around the turn of the 20th century **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 that get off. Universalism is more than a theology; it is an ethic as well. **It is love that will not let us go - off.**

Telling it “like it is” - “IT IS FINISHED”

By Bryan Sherwood

I've often heard people say about their favorite preacher, things such as, “I like Pastor so-and-so. He doesn't sugar coat it. He “Tells it like it is!” When they say that he “tells it like it is,” they're usually referring to the preacher's harsh, confrontational style, and his brazenness in calling people out in regard to “sin.”

He calls black, black and white, white. He preaches hell hot, and heaven not. He preaches sin intrusive, and grace elusive. He preaches Adam persistent, and Christ far and distant.

He talks about judgment on America and the nations. He preaches a God who abhors those who struggle with sin. His God is angry, tightly wound, and always on the verge of doling out a healthy portion of wrath and retribution. He makes you feel low and lacking, dirty and distant. You know, he “tells it like it is.”

While I respect a preacher's right say whatever he pleases, and to tell it like he thinks “it is,” allow me to go on record as saying from a New Testament, Gospel standpoint, that is absolutely, categorically, one hundred and fifty seven and a half per cent NOT telling it like it is!

If we're going to “tell it like it is,” let's use Jesus as our example. How “is it,” exactly? Here it comes ... are you ready?

IT IS FINISHED.

That's right! You read it! That's exactly how it is! It's finished!

The problem of sin and death is finished!

The problem of alienation and self-imposed separation is finished!

Your lack of the Spirit is finished!

Your uncleanness is finished!

Your days of bondage and oppression are finished!

Your days of lack and estrangement are finished!

Your days of hiding in the bushes with Adam, scrambling to cover your nakedness are finished!

Your days of rocking back and forth on your knees, pleading for mercy, and begging for scraps from the table are finished!

Your days of cowering before an imagined angry God are finished!

You're clean and you're close. You're near and you're dear. You're adopted and included. You're filled and forgiven – part of the family! You're regal, righteous, redeemed and restored. Shall I continue?

Sorry if this offends, folks, but I just thought I'd “tell it like it is”! IT IS FINISHED!

David Spatz resigns from *CUA* Board and as Facebook page moderator



David Spatz

David Spatz, has resigned as a member of the *CUA* Board and from his position as moderator of the *CUA* group page on Facebook.

“For personal reasons, I will be resigning from the Board, effective immediately,” David wrote to fellow Board members on July 7. “Someone on the board should be in charge of the Facebook page and so I'm relinquishing that as well as of today,” he said. “I will remain in the group, but just as a group member.”

Board Chair **Kalen Fristad** told David in an email: “I am saddened by your resignation from the board. You have contributed, perhaps more than you realize. You have served with great integrity and honesty. You have stood up for what you believe in, and you have sometimes challenged the rest of us to rethink our positions. Thank you for that.”

Kalen added: “Thank you for taking the initiative with the Facebook group, and for all of your thoughtful input, and for all of the time you gave to that cause. We will miss you on the board, but hope we will still be able to work together in some ways in the future.”

David, of Pasadena, Maryland, thanked Kalen and other board members, adding: “It has been my honor and privilege to serve on the board since early last year, and I wish you all the best as you continue to move forward building the *CUA*.”

David's resignation leaves the *CUA* Board with a total of 12 members.

“A damned good story” - FB posting discusses religion, hate, love

Ed Burley posted this article on the *CUA* Facebook group page recently.

By Ed Burley

Why do we hate?

Because religion is the “knowledge of good and evil” which opens our eyes to our “nakedness” and makes us ashamed. We then, as our original spiritual parents did, hide behind “fig leaves” and “shrubs,” the “works of the law,” i.e., religion.

The shame that we experience due to “religion” (the knowledge of good and evil) causes us to either judge others, to make ourselves feel better about our shame OR it brings so much shame we can never feel accepted by the Divine.

Jesus came to show us that the Divine loved us, always had. The Divine created humanity “naked and without shame.” We have always been called to walk in that relationship with our Creator - accepted, beloved, without shame.

Our Creator speaks to us saying, “I am Love. Love never fails. Love holds no record of wrongs. Nothing can separate you from Me, for I am Love. Even when you are faithless, I am faithful, for I cannot deny myself. You are one with Me, your Creator. Love Wins. I am Love. I win. You belong to Me.”

But most of us spend our lives thinking we are serving Christ by practicing a religion. But religion can only bring shame - and it makes us HATE. We claim that “we hate what God hates,” but God is love. God told the early church to “love your enemies” and in so doing, they would be LIKE GOD...a lover of enemies...a forgiver.

When we finally understand that God was NEVER mad at us; God was NEVER separated from its creation. WE, as our original spiritual parents did, separated ourselves, hid ourselves behind religion - fig leaves and shrubs. There was no fall...the only death experienced was what humans perceived - a spiritual death.

But Jesus has brought LIFE, and LIFE more abundantly. When we realize that, we can stop hating. We can Love, as God is Love. We can be Love too...for we are one with God.

To further back up what I said here...at Mt. Sinai, God wanted Israel to come to the mountain to meet her, but Israel said, “don’t let God speak to us



Ed Burley

again, just tell us what we are supposed to do (the Law, good and evil, religion) and we will do it.” God wanted relationship, like in the Garden. Humanity, through its representative Israel, wanted religion. Jesus didn’t come to give us a new religion, but to bring God to us. “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.”

Religion is humanity’s attempt at reaching God... God came here.

End of story.

And it’s a damned good story.

***CUA* revising Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation**

The *CUA* Board has drafted a new set of Bylaws and, when that is approved, will follow up with amended Articles of Incorporation. In making these changes the Board is confirming that for the near future at least, the *CUA* will operate as a Membership Structure organization.

We will continue to seek affiliation and connection with other groups, and to plant new Christian Universalist congregations, but for now the *CUA* will be somewhat like a church with a Board to guide and govern and with members to support and actively take part.

The heartfelt goal for everyone is to start seeing new Christian Universalist fellowship groups and churches that would be part of the *CUA* as an association. Perhaps, eventually, one day we will be a new denomination!

That would be so special since there has not been a truly Christian Universalist denomination in the U.S. for a long time. - Coordinator **Rich Koster**

Respect people who honestly question the “tradition of the elders”

By George W. Sarris

Are Evangelical Christians allowed to think for themselves and question the “tradition of the elders” in their pursuit of truth?

According to *Christian Post* Reporter **Napp Nazworth’s** article about theologian **Peter Enns’** observation that *Young Evangelicals Want to Rethink What it Means to Be Evangelical*, the answer may actually be an emphatic “No!” – at least, not without being called a heretic . . . or a wolf . . . or a false teacher.

Many within the Evangelical movement today – and not just those who are young – have honest questions about what the Bible actually teaches on various issues. Many within the movement, however, are extremely reticent to engage in any significant form of dialogue on those issues. They feel they have received a tradition from the elders that should not be questioned.

But, honest questions need honest answers. And, honest questions that are not answered satisfactorily never go away.

Humble Responses

Historically, sincere Christian believers have been persecuted, defamed, tortured, and sometimes put to death by other sincere Christian believers who didn’t agree with their positions on baptism, election, church government and authority, and a host of other issues. If history has taught us nothing else, it has taught us that we should be humble enough to realize that there are many theological issues within the faith that are legitimate subjects for debate.

When engaging in that debate, we would do well to keep two very important Scriptural principles in mind:

First, Christians are to be known primarily by their love for one another. Jesus was very clear about what would be the characteristic mark of His disciples –

By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Jesus did not say that we would be known by our agreement with one another on all issues of theology. He said we would be known by our love for one another – and love is patient . . . it is kind . . . it is not rude.

Calling other members of the body of Christ names



George W. Sarris

George Sarris, actor, narrator and master storyteller, can be reached by email at: GeorgeSarris@gmail.com; at his blog: www.GeorgeSarris.blogspot.com; his website: www.GeorgeWSarris.com, or his Facebook page. This article is taken from a post in *The Christian Post* at <http://blogs.ChristianPost.com/engagingtheculture>.

and refusing to dialogue with them is not a form of love for one another. Being gracious with those who disagree with you on a theological issue is not compromising your faith. Answering with kindness the questions of an honest skeptic is not giving the devil a foothold.

Second, God wants us to pursue truth. Scripture tells us that God’s Word is truth . . . Jesus is the truth . . . the Gospel is the word of truth. Truth always wins out in the end, for only truth will bear up under the closest scrutiny.

The Pharisees of Jesus’ day were not pursuing truth. They were seeking to defend the “teaching of the elders” that had been passed down to them . . . and they were not open to the possibility that they might be wrong. They were defending teachings that had been formulated by men. Their minds were made up and they did not want to be confused with facts.

An Issue for Today

A little over a year ago, **Rob Bell’s** controversial book, *Love Wins*, challenged his readers to “rethink” Hell. Bell voiced the concerns of a great many people within the Evangelical community by asking provocative questions about the nature and duration of after-death punishment. He even suggested that God’s punishments may be kinder and more purposeful than is traditionally thought.

Continued on page 10

Respect people who honestly question the “tradition of the elders” ... from page 9

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Jesus did not say that we would be known by our agreement with one another on all issues of theology. He said we would be known by our love for one another – and love is patient . . . it is kind . . . it is not rude.

Calling other members of the body of Christ names and refusing to dialogue with them is not a form of love for one another. Being gracious with those who disagree with you on a theological issue is not compromising your faith. Answering with kindness the questions of an honest skeptic is not giving the devil a foothold.

Second, God wants us to pursue truth. Scripture

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Before the book was even published, however, Bell was attacked. A leader within the movement labeled him a “universalist” – as if that was all that was needed to clue the faithful into the fact that Bell must be a heretic.

Another tweeted, “Farewell Rob Bell!” – alerting any who might think it okay to question the traditional belief that this was not to be allowed. And, prominent Evangelicals began to go on record affirming that there is clearly no legitimate basis for questioning the established view.

What was sad was that the questions Bell raised were honest questions that sincere believers are honestly asking. Unfortunately, not only did many of the responders simply repeat what the “tradition of the elders” had passed down to them without putting forth any significant effort to look more deeply into the issue, they also disputed the right of Bell and others to question that teaching – even though there is much about that tradition that has been and should be questioned.

When people ask honest questions without trying to be malicious, we should respect them enough to consider their questions carefully and give a thoughtful response. If we are unable to do that, perhaps it's because we need to think through our own beliefs more carefully.

The “categorical imperative”, Kant’s ethical principle, still applies today

By John C. Morgan

*“The attempt to find a common point of view is better than manipulative contempt for it.” - **Simon Blackburn**, Professor of Philosophy, Cambridge University, England.*

One major ethical dilemma today is that many, many believe everything is relative. According to this modern view, there are no universal truths; hence everything is determined by culture, history or individual quirks.

When no truth is more important than any other, nothing finally matters because there is no way to judge anything as being more important than anything else. A cartoon expresses this idea: **Charlie Brown** is seen at a school play. Dressed in a witch doctor’s outfit, he says to the audience: “It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere.”

Typically the more cynical in our midst use ethical relativism as justification for their actions. They may cheat, steal or lie because in the scheme of things no actions are more ethically correct than any others because nothing really is right or wrong, good or bad.

I find the modern view that we cannot judge behaviors by any universal standard to be intellectually lazy and morally bankrupt. If you don’t believe this I would challenge you to compare those who murdered some fourteen million people in the Nazi campaign to eliminate Jews, dissidents, and others, to those who at great peril to themselves rescued countless thousands from ending up in concentration camps.

If you have never visited a holocaust memorial, you should, to remind yourself of what happens when people are treated as less than human beings. Or, read the story of slaves in our country to see that it can happen here.

Closer to home, think what happens to our values when only profits rule without any concern for people. It does matter what you believe. The difference between people who believe there is no price to be put on a human life and those who believe some lives aren’t worth much is greater than the difference between our galaxy and one light years away.

One of the greatest of all philosophers, **Immanuel Kant**, coined the term, “categorical imperative” to mean that there was a universal ethical law. Without waxing academic, one might describe this law in words your moth-



John C. Morgan

er might have used before you did something to someone or to yourself that might trouble you later. Mother would ask: “What if everyone did that?”

Ask Kant’s question the next time you think about cheating on someone or stealing or lying or worse, abusing another person: “What if every one did that?”

Once upon a time most of us knew the Golden Rule, even if we didn’t practice it as often as we might hope: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

I believe the Golden Rule is universal, though it has been stated differently in many ways.

Here are a few:

What you don’t want done to yourself, don’t do to others. (Confucius, 6th Century, B.C.)

Do not do unto others all that which is not well for oneself. (Zoroastrianism, 5th Century, B.C.)

Hurt not others with that which pains thyself. (Buddhist, 4th Century B.C.)

May I do unto others as I would that they should do unto me (Plato, 4th Century, B.C.)

Do naught to others which if done to thee would give thee pain. (Hindu, 3rd Century, B.C.)

What is hateful to yourself, don’t do to others. (Judaism, 1st Century, B.C.)

Whatever ye would that others should do to you, do ye also even to them. (Jesus, 1st Century, A.D.)

What if everybody did that? (Kant’s ethical principle called the “categorical imperative,” 19th Century)

Don’t mess with others as you wouldn’t want to be messed with yourself (street philosopher, Philadelphia, 21st Century)

This article by John C. Morgan is re-printed from the Universalist Herald. The Rev. Morgan is a Contributing Editor to the Herald, and also teaches philosophy and ethics at a community college.

Holy Humor!



Nun takes message to steelworkers

Brown bag lunch for Jesus?

An old nun who was living in a convent next to a construction site noticed the coarse language of the workers and decided to spend some time with them to correct their ways.

She decided she would take her lunch, sit with the workers; and talk with them.

She put her sandwich in a brown bag and walked over to the spot where the men were eating.

Sporting a big smile, she walked up to the group and asked: "And do you men know Jesus Christ?"

They shook their heads and looked at each other, very confused.

One of the workers looked up into the steelworks and yelled out, "Anybody up there know Jesus Christ?"

One of the steelworkers yelled down, "Why?"

The worker yelled back, "Cause his wife's here with his lunch."

Ol' Fred's last message!

Ol' Fred had been a faithful Christian and was in the hospital, near death. The family called their preacher to stand with them.

As the preacher stood next to the bed, Ol' Fred's condition appeared to deteriorate and he motioned frantically for something to write on.

The pastor lovingly handed him a pen and a piece of paper, and Ol' Fred used his last bit of energy to scribble a note, then suddenly died.

The preacher thought it best not to look at the note at that time, so he placed it in his jacket pocket.

At the funeral, as he was finishing the message, he realized that he was wearing the same jacket that he was wearing when Ol' Fred died. He said, "You know, Ol' Fred handed me a note just before he died. I haven't looked at it, but knowing Fred, I'm sure there's a word of inspiration there for us all."

He opened the note, and read, "Please step to your left - you're standing on my oxygen tube!"

Who counts gambling chips from Las Vegas churches?

This may come as a surprise to those readers who are not living in Las Vegas, Nevada, but did you know that the gambling and entertainment city has more Catholic churches than casinos?

Not surprisingly, some worshippers at Sunday services will give casino chips instead of cash when the collection plate is passed. Since they get chips from many different casinos, the churches have devised a method to collect the offerings.

The churches send all their collected chips to a nearby Franciscan monastery for sorting and later taken to the casinos of origin and cashed in.

This is done by the Chip Monks. Bingo!

Early Christians drove a Honda - really? yes, it's in the Bible!

What make of automobile did the early Christians drive? It was a Honda, for the Bible states:

"These all continued with one **Accord** in prayer and supplication . . ." (Acts 1:14 KJV)

- Thank you to **Clark Allison** of South Charleston, West Virginia for this car(e)fully researched item