

Kenneth L. Patton: A Citizen of the Universe

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Introduction

In 1949, the Universalist Church of America would attempt to reestablish itself in the “sacred city” of Boston through the formation of the Charles Street Meeting House. As George Huntston Williams indicates, it was a “...programmatic effort to recover...a fresh base for Universalism in Boston, just 140 years after the voice of John Murray was silenced by sickness.”¹ Along with this first goal would be a second, to develop a message that would move the denomination beyond its conservative Christian orientation, as it sought to reach towards a “New Universalism.”

Clarence R. Skinner had been one of the first to touch upon the concept of a “New Universalism.” Skinner laid out a program for social, political, economic, and spiritual changes. It was his hope that this would become a global effort. Skinner sought to express what he meant by the term “Universal.” He gave clarity to this concept when he wrote, “The universal will mean the all-inclusive as far as we can imagine it—the entire cosmos with all its contains.”² He adds, “Finally, we shall mean by the term that which is the antithesis of the limited, or fragmentary. It is the opposite of the partial.”³

Many scholarly books and articles had been written to express this line of thinking. However, the first direct reference to this idea in a larger forum came in 1943 at the General Assembly. Robert Cummins, then General Superintendent, delivered powerful words of challenge:

Universalism cannot be limited either to Protestantism or to Christianity, not without denying its very name. Ours is a world fellowship, not just a Christian sect. For so long as Universalism is universalism and not partialism, the fellowship bearing its name must succeed in making it unmistakably clear that all are welcome: theist and humanist, Unitarian and Trinitarian, colored and color-less. A circumscribed Universalism is unthinkable. [4](#)

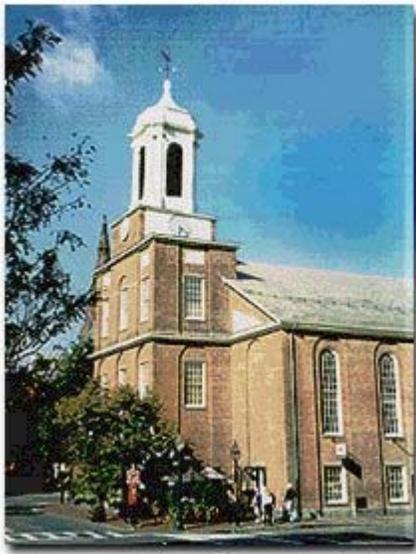
In 1946, a group of Crane Theological students formed the Humiliati. They sought to become the vanguard of change within the denomination. The group consisted of seven members, Earle MacKinney, Gordon McKeeman, David Cole, Albert Zeigler, Raymond Hopkins, Keith Munson, and Fredrick Harrison. They embraced the notion of an “emergent Universalism” as Skinner had proclaimed. It was under this banner they banded together.

Brainard F. Gibbons was asked to address the Universalist General Assembly meeting at Rochester, New York in 1949. He too would add his voice to the growing chorus. What he said was unexpected. Gibbons stated, “While fully aware of its Christian heritage, many equally sincere Universalists maintain that an inherent spirit of inquiry has carried Universalism beyond Christianity. A new type of Universalism is proclaimed which shifts the emphasis on universal from salvation to religion and describes Universalism as boundless in scope, as broad as humanity, and as infinite as the universe. Is this Universalism’s answer: a religion, not exclusively Christian or any other brand, but a synthesis of all religious knowledge, which passes the test of human intelligence, a truly universal religion?” [5](#)

It was in the light of this desire to create a “New Universalism”; the project at the Charles Street Meeting House was begun. There would be the need for an exceptional leader. The Universalist Convention of Massachusetts was urged by, then superintendent, Clinton Lee Scott to call Kenneth L. Patton from the First Unitarian Society of Madison, Wisconsin to fill the pulpit. In Patton would be found an innovator and spokesperson to move the project forward, as well as this message of “New Universalism.” He was well known for his preaching and writing skills. Scott was convinced that Patton was the

person for the job. Scott's recommendation was accepted. Patton was installed as minister of the Meeting House on February 6, 1949.

Patton sought to make this Universalism come to life that had been prophesied and preached by those who had gone before. Patton was more than willing to push out into the new frontiers that lay ahead of him, and his fledgling congregation. In their efforts a new flame would be kindled. Gone was the past, behold the emergence of something new, very new.



The project at Charles Street was experimental in nature. In light of this fact, it was labeled a “pilot project,” with the hopes that in some future time other such congregations like it might be formed. The Massachusetts Universalist Convention was putting not only finances, but also reputation on the line. It was truly a bold undertaking. The venture into “universalized Universalism”, that “would soon [become] institutionalized ...” at the “... Charles Street Universalist Meeting House,”⁶ was a bold project.

The Charles Street “experiment” would be seen as controversial right from the start. The congregation set about “...the task of creating worship materials, [and] hymns...” within the redesigned “...architectural setting...” in hopes of creating, “...a new, syncretistic Universalism.”⁷ The overwhelming disposition of the Universalist clergy and laity was a Christian-orientation. Patton, however, would “[espouse] a unitive, naturalistic-mystical-humanistic World Religion...”⁸, and this did not set well with the majority of Universalists in, and around the Boston area.

It was very apparent that Patton was ready to move out into the “universalized” post-WWII world. As the United Nations was forming the Universalists in particular felt that this was in some small way a fulfillment of “prophecies” spoke not many years before. In less than a generation the potential for its realization was at hand. Patton was ready to be the “forerunner.”

Patton saw the Charles Street undertaking as a natural progression in the evolution of the Universalist movement, as well as religion in general. For him, it was necessary for these steps to be taken in order to further human understanding and growth. He also was able to see himself in line with a distinguished group who had forged ahead in the past. He willingly carried the torch in to the new day that lay before humanity.

The Corner of Charles and Mt. Vernon

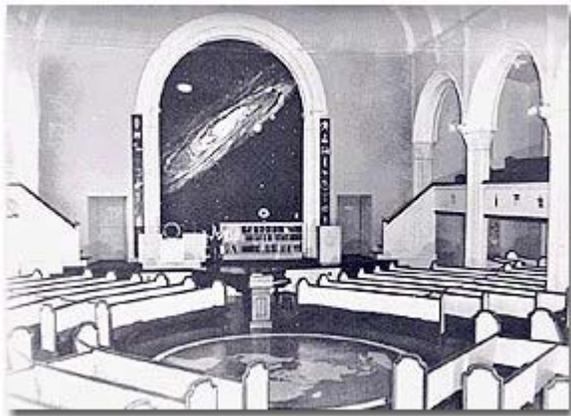


On June 28, 1948 the Massachusetts Convention purchased the Charles Street Meeting House. The location was found for the experiment. This building had a unique history, and now it would be the landmark of this inspired venture. As Peter Lee Scott, son of Clinton Lee Scott, reports, “...we found, the Charles Street Meeting House, on the corner

of Charles and Mt. Vernon Streets...”⁹ He goes on to inform us that it “...was originally built in 1805 as the Third Baptist Church at the edge of the Charles River so as to be able conveniently to perform baptisms”¹⁰, a unique edifice indeed for this project.

In that summer of 1948 the renovations would begin. The interior of the building would undergo dramatic change. Patton philosophy would be evident in the redesign that occurred within the four walls. As he states, “The pews...[were] rearranged to face in four banks toward the center, coming in from the four corners of the room. Thus the people, being seated in a circle, symbolize unity and one world in [this] very arrangement.”¹¹ This layout could be likened to a compass, in the end all points intersect, north, south, east, or west in the center. Within the confines of this building Patton was seeking to reflect a microcosm of the universe.

For Patton the gathering in a round would manifest the principle of democracy that religious liberals sought to embrace and uphold. As he states, “If religious liberalism and a religion of the world are to be democratic, they must find the shape of assembly that expresses and expedites the processes of democratic sharing and equality.”¹² Patton further explains, “In the liberal societies the circular assembly would express the symbolism of the democratic fellowship. The people are assembled to share the presence, ideas, and inspiration to be found in one another.”¹³ Patton was seeking to create a welcoming congregation, and one that lived by the principle of “The inherent worth and dignity of every person.”¹⁴ He viewed the church as a sacred place for the exchange of ideas and for expressing in the open the wide variety of opinions.



In this concept, we can see that Patton places great importance on the ability of the participants to communicate. It allows for dramatic presentation, as well as gives a point of focus. With the center being a sense of community. These are observations that can

be drawn from the redesign and formation of the Charles Street Meeting House.

This would not be the first such building design that Patton had participated in developing. In 1946, he assisted in commissioning the famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright to draw up the plans for the First Unitarian Society in Madison, Wisconsin. The design was considered innovative for its day. That building would be constructed from 1949 to 1951, after Patton had left for Boston. However, Patton did have input into the sketches, and the initial blueprints. As part of that building design there was an emphasis on the structure being understood as a house. The main room, which had traditionally been called the sanctuary, was now known as an auditorium. Patton explains the purpose of this change; “We believed it was no longer efficient to set aside the major meeting area for one purpose, the holding of Sunday morning service. We began to think of the auditorium as a parish living room...”¹⁵ Each room was seen as an addition moving out from this center to be available space for a lively and growing congregation. He states what those activities might be, “This one area could... be used for worship, lectures, concerts, films, dinners, dances, [and] social events...”¹⁶ Patton brought these ideas and concepts to the Charles Street Meeting House. This philosophy would not only influence the interior decor, but the manner in which the building would be put to use.

In a manner reminiscent of the old New England meetinghouses, Charles Street Meeting House would be a multi-purpose building. Within its walls energetic activity would take place. All the while, Patton would be at the helm trying to steer a steady course. This may in fact be one of the important lessons to be learned from this “project.” Church buildings in the world of today may need to become community centers, as well as the place of cultural expression. Within such an open space, both as to philosophy and medium, culture can again begin the process of shared creativity.

However, the Meeting House was to be even more in the mind of Patton. He used the term “temple” to describe the vision he ultimately hoped to realize. He was aware of what this concept might mean to some. In fact he points out the two understandings this concept might elicit, when he writes:

Two general attitudes prevail in the building of temples. To one group the temple is a means of salvation of their souls. They view it in a self-centered way. It is a tool whereby they seek to salvage their own lives. The worst example of this is the barren, often ugly gospel tabernacle, whose sole purpose is for the preaching of evangelical sermons and the baptizing of the saved.¹⁷

Patton then gives us his understanding of what “temple,” and how it relates to the work at Charles Street can mean. He states:

To another group the temple is, in itself, an ultimate goal. It is their profoundest expression of apprehension and meaning in the face of the imponderables of life and the immensities of the universe of which they are a part. The existence of the temple is a continuous act of celebration of life and wonder on the part of the community, which erected and maintains it.¹⁸

So, the structure serves to be a place of gathering to remember and honor the greater frame of reference in which we live.

In Search of Symbols

Creativity is part of the human nature. Art is a means of creatively expressing one’s experience of life. When one studies the history of human evolution, then it becomes readily apparent that there is a creative process at work within the human mind, and heart as well.

Patton best expressed his understanding of artistic embodiments of religion when he wrote, “The arts are the voices of humanity. Through sculpture, painting, music, literature, the dance, drama, and architecture, [humans] communicate their most profound thoughts and emotion to one another.”¹⁹ Through this interaction, various ideas are shared and reassessed, and a cultural experience begins to emerge. This is the process whereby concepts take on form. The processes of design and redesign taking place at Charles Street Meeting House was explained as just such a process, and understood by Patton. His philosophy was one of embracing the cultural experience. This was expressive of Patton’s humanistic approach to religion.

Art is symbolic of the sacred. This philosophy is what Patton sought to create in the décor of the Meeting House. The two most significant symbols used at Charles Street were the mural painting of the Great Nebula Andromeda and the Atom. These two naturalistic symbols represented the *macrocosm* and the *microcosm*.

Patton had sought out symbols for his universal religion, and in these two he felt he had found what was needed. For him, it was most important to connect religion with the reality that humans experience. The universe itself, as Patton states would best display this:

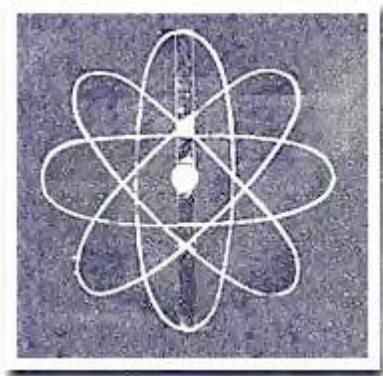


This nebula is our next-door neighbor in space, practically a twin of the Milky Way Nebula of which our solar system is a part. It gives us a “window into the universe,” and provides us with the key for our cosmic orientation since this nebula is seen through a screen of stars in our own galaxy. We call it a “symbol of fact.”²⁰

Each person would then have some sense of his or her place in the universe. This then would translate to an experience that Patton expresses in several ways as: “The heavens declare the glory of God,” or “The heavens declare the glory,” or one might say, “My heavens!”²¹

In this manner Patton was able to see the significance of art in religious thought. He interprets the symbol, here explained, as an expression of the universality of humanity. For in this mural of Andromeda can be seen the heavens which circle, embrace, enfold us. Patton in the use of the natural phenomena is able to show to all with eyes to see that we are part of the Wholeness to which we all belong. This is the macrocosm, the Big Picture that is so important to Patton’s philosophy of religion.

As to Patton’s use of the Atom as a sacred symbol, he felt that it was in keeping with the new scientific discoveries of his day. Only a few years before the atom was split and its energies released in the atomic bombs, which were dropped by the Americans during WWII at Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Patton explains his thinking on this symbol when he writes:



Atomic physics has furnished the basis for a new kind of philosophical materialism, wherein matter is equated with energy, and the old dualisms between matter and spirit seem meaningless.²²

Deep within life is the force of change, the force of creation and destruction. Patton wanted people to know this energy resides within each of them. He believed that many of the ancient creation and apocalypse myths were an expression of this notion.

His understanding of the universe was in many ways mystical. He had attended Eureka Junior College, and worked in the evening to take art lessons, having aspirations of a career as an artist. These aspirations would not be realized. In his work at Charles Street Meeting House, however, he was able to pursue this love of art, and use it to inspire others.

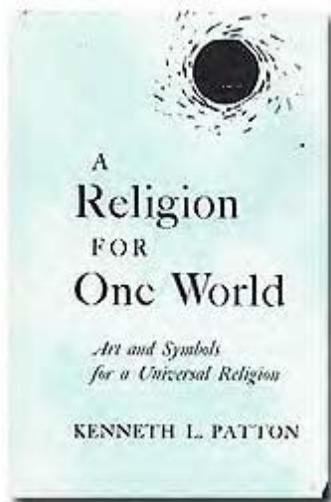
Patton gives his prophetic call to those of his time, as well as to us, when he writes concerning the use of symbols:

The paths of the migration of symbols, of sciences and arts, of humanity, are to be used according to the needs of our time. Over these paths will flow science, technology, engineering, medicine, learning, the arts, and philosophy.²³

All of the aforementioned named areas of human endeavor were in fact represented by the symbols located on the walls within the main sanctuary. These were not mere ideas or words for Patton. He actively engaged in seeking to create the very expressions he spoke about. Patton writes:

Therefore the time has come for the migration of a new symbol, made like all the rest out of old symbols. It will be a symbol of one world, challenging the local and tribal symbols of the past. The migration of symbols is never finished. Now is the time for a more inclusive symbol than any before invented to start on its migration also.²⁴

A Religion for One World



In his understanding of Universalism Patton had grown beyond the confines of the Christian, and theological boundaries. He states, concerning the “old universalism,” “...Universal Salvation is the inherent idea of God as the Father of all people, who, in his loving-kindness, will see that all his children are at last saved for eternal life.”²⁵ Patton rejects this idea when he further states, “This ‘universalism’ was little more than a theological concept.”²⁶ He desires to create an understanding of faith, which is rooted in human realities. The supernatural theologies would not do for Patton in this much-needed work. Patton philosophy of religion was both universalistic and humanistic. It centered on the concept of the “one world.” He gives best expression to his thought in the book; *A Religion for One World* published in 1964 by Beacon Press.

Patton points first to the pre-scientific understanding that humans held, when he states, “In earlier times it was believed that there was only one world, that the earth was the center of the universe, and the stars and planets were merely smaller accessories to decorate ‘our’ sky.”²⁷ This view has been outgrown, and continues to be as new scientific discoveries are made.

As humanity probes deeper into space, Patton in words of bold poetic imagination, he states what may lie ahead, as he writes, “Life may be as lavishly strewn among the galaxies...”²⁸ Patton sees universalism as an exploration of the universe. He would have us embrace the sciences that offer new insight and knowledge. Patton is willing to brave the unknown.

In light of these scientific discoveries we come to know that this is the “only” world for us. We may travel out into space, but we have as yet found no planet like this, which would be able to support our lives. This is well stated by Patton when he writes:

In spite of predictions that in a few centuries we will be going to the moon for winter, much as we now go to Miami, there is little prospect of finding another planet for our excess population when we have bred the earth so thick that there is “standing room only.”²⁹

The earth is our home, the only one we will ever have. However, I would add, that I believe that Patton would be willing to accept the fact that all is not yet known concerning the universe.

This “home,” however, is one that is shared by all persons regardless of race, creed, gender, sexual orientation, or nationality. In realizing this fact, we must be willing to share the earth’s resources with one another. This is our ethical, our moral duty. Patton seeks to be a “citizen of the universe.” Patton expresses this idea well when he states, “If we have any morality or religious sensitivity, should starvation, sickness, ignorance, slavery mean any the less to us, regardless of where it occurs in the human family?”³⁰ The answer, is “no,” to this question. Anywhere is part of my world. Everywhere is part of our world. Patton understands the “global village” concept very well, yes very well indeed.

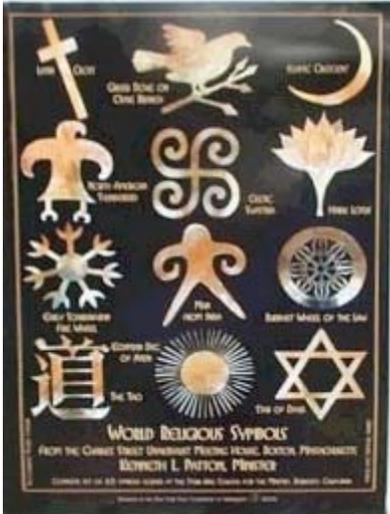
In his final of the three interpretations of “one world,” Patton gives expression to his naturalistic-mysticism. He writes:

The continents are all surrounded by one great body of water—not seven oceans, really, but *one* great ocean. There is only one atmosphere that blows about the whole earth, and the air that is over Boston now may be over Cape Town in a short time. The earth is one globe, one mass of soil and rock. How silly we are to think it is divided by the way it juts up above the surface of the one ocean. This *is* one world, so defined by the vast space of the universe that surrounds it.³¹

Patton felt the need for people to see the earth, the whole of it, as theirs. However, it is a shared possession as well. From out in space there are no national borders; there is just a “big blue ball.” The human struggle is to find a way to realize this truth before we destroy one another. Throughout his professional life and career this was the message that Patton preached. He was true to his commitment. As he states, “A religion of realities is my philosophy of religion, my way of life.”³² The realities for Patton were to be revealed by science, ethics, social conscience, and a deeply penetrating natural mysticism.

When we examine Patton’s philosophy, we find that he consistently proclaimed this message. As can be seen in his address delivered October 19, 1985 at the 157th annual session of the New York State Convention of Universalists. Patton states, “It is entirely dependent on human character and achievements, on human behavior, and dependent on the environment of planet earth.”³³ The struggle in which humanity is engaged is internal, as well as external. It is a search for harmony within and amongst us, and with nature. With our hands and hearts Patton would have us hold that we can “be saved” in this world, in this life.

Patton believes that it is possible for the religion of one world to emerge. It is within reach, if only we will take the chance. As he states further in this address to the Convention, “The future of the human venture depends on enough people becoming universal in their imagination, their learning, and their compassion.”³⁴



Lastly, he gives us that by which we will measure our success, when he states, “...universal religion is that it is world-wide, and humanity-wide.”³⁵ For Patton this is the ultimate goal. This was the spirit behind the work he sought to undertake at the Charles Street Meeting House. When his professional endeavor in the ministry are reviewed this was the thrust of his efforts. Patton, in all he did, attempted to forge a faith that would be broad as the heavens. He fashioned a religion for one world, one that would touch the lives of all humanity. For Patton the human myths and sacred stories are the treasures we all share. The human legacy, the human heritage, is a gift, which has been bestowed on all generations, and will be handed on to those who will come after us. He represented this idea through the use of symbols pointing to the long line of human religious expression.

From the Stone Age to China, through Palestine to Western Europe the legacy has been handed on. The people of Asia and Europe have a shared connection. From the cradle of human civilization in the Middle East to the Islands of the Pacific the message has been passed along to any ears that would hear.

Singing of Life



Music was to be of great importance to the formation of the Charles Street Meeting House. Seeking to realize this the launching of Meeting House Press and the mimeographing of materials from various sources began. Patton clearly knew the effect that congregational singing could have in creating an atmosphere of community. He attempted to draw on all that was available, sources both ancient and modern, to give full expression to the experience of the “universalism” he pressed towards.

Patton took on the task of giving expression to this humanistic faith. It was an endeavor that would be part of the remaining years of his life. Some of the most powerful material would come from Patton himself. However, he poured over volumes and volumes of poetry and other writings in an attempt to fulfill this need.

The traditional hymns and readings were not sufficient to express the humanistic faith that Patton embraced. As he states, “It was not so much that [I was] against theistic hymns and readings, but that these materials simply [do] not convey the emotions, insights, and aspirations that humanists [seek] to express in their services.”³⁶ However, in time, Patton would create a storehouse of rich spiritual treasures to use in the celebration of life in the gathered community.

He would create the idea for an “open hymnal.” Like the openness to the many sacred scriptures and texts, so too, there would be an openness to changing resources for the act of worship. The Charles Street services would be an exploration of new materials, along with the willingness not to be limited to sources of the past. Patton’s concept of worship was bold and inventive. He gives the intention behind this idea stating:

This method opens the services to a fully experimental and creative process. The society is no longer limited to whatever happens to be in the hymnbook it may own, nor to the type of material this presents. Each society can create and collect those hymns, readings, and other elements adapted to its peculiar disposition.³⁷

Patton was himself a prolific writer, and his contributions to the liberal religious cause in the area of literature are a treasury of spiritual thought and reflection. In all, the published volumes containing his writings number seventeen. In addition there are the various selections which appear in hymnals and other collected works. Among the

published works by Patton are the following: *Hymns for Humanity* (1954), *Readings for the Celebration of Life* (1957), and *Services and Songs for the Celebration of Life* (1967). He also made several contributions to the hymnal entitled, *We Sing of Life and Speak of Life* (1955), edited by Vincent B. Silliman, published by the Ethical Culture Union.

In 1964 the denomination would greatly benefit from Patton's work on the first hymnal following the consolidation in 1961. The hymnal would reflect the new approach that would be taken by the Unitarian Universalist Association. Though at the time he was serving the Unitarian Society of Ridgewood, New Jersey, the sources that Patton would draw from had been gathered in his days at Charles Street Meeting House. This was in many ways the fruit of his earlier labors.

It was entitled, *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*. On the Hymnbook Commission, along with Patton were, Arthur Foote II, who served as chairperson, Lorraine W. Bays, Henry Leland Clarke, Ida M. Folsom, Christopher Moore, Kenneth Munson, Robert L. Sanders, and Vincent B. Silliman. In all there were 327 hymns selected for this volume and of those 13 were authored by Patton. As well there were 231 readings of which he was authored 30. Patton was by far one of the major contributors to the project.

There were thirty-six topic sections in all. When one looks at the topic sections of the hymnal it becomes apparent that this is a book for a *humanized* faith. Selections by Patton can be found under the topics: *Celebration and Praise, Man, The Arts of Man, Here and Now*.³⁸ These section headings stand out from the rest of the list, and express a humanistic approach to religion.

The hymn, *Brief Our Days*, can be found within the section entitled: *Celebration and Praise*. This selection is dedicated to expressing his naturalistic concepts. I quote here the final of the two verses, in which Patton writes:

Planet earth for men a dwelling, cool in wind and warm in light. In its praise our song is swelling, grateful for this day and night. We, citizens of heaven, riding earth as it is driven down the spangled course of space, know the glory of this place.³⁹

Patton attempts to give a sense of how humanity could view itself in relation to the universe. This hymn implies the idea of understanding ourselves as a family sharing a common dwelling. It also makes evident the smallness of humanity in the vastness of the expansive stretches of space. Patton would have us see that there is still much that lay beyond our knowledge as yet.

Patton's hymn *O Man, Acclaim Your Heritage*, is found in the section entitled: *Man*. This hymn is an example of his philosophy of the shared human legacy. The third verse states:

O man, acclaim your heritage, your noble history of fire. You are the heavens come of age, the bearer of the sun's desire, A prophet come to life at last, a thinker from its molten streams, A valiant poet of the vast, to dream the universe's dreams.⁴⁰

Here can be seen Patton proclaiming the humanistic faith. He sings of the human potential, the possibilities that might be achieved. It is written in an exuberant spirit of optimism.

Then there is the selection, *Ours Be the Poems of All Tongues*, located in the section entitled, *The Arts of Man*. This one-verse response states:

Ours be the poems of all tongues, All loveliness and worth, All arts, all ages, and all songs, one life, one beauty on the earth.⁴¹

This short versicle displays his religious humanism as expressive of his universalistic faith. He makes mention of all languages, all artistic forms and cultures, and this is part of the common human story. This is our legacy, the accomplishments of all our forebears. Patton seeks to incorporate the idea within the congregational singing that the participants are joining with all humanity. This is a corporate spirit that attempts to give a sense of wholeness to the human experience.

We find a hymn by Patton, *When We Have Ended Searching*, within the section entitled,

Here and Now. The first verse proclaims Patton's view that there must be an end to searching for supernatural realms beyond this world, and this life. The verse states:

When we have ended searching for lands beyond our ken, When we have ended reaching beyond the grasp of men, And take devotions given to other shapes of worth, And turned our dreams of heaven to glorifying earth.⁴²

Patton wishes to convey the need to be devoted to the present state of affairs. He expresses the desire to end "idolatries," and have humanity become devoted to one another, and their life on this planet.

None of the above-mentioned hymns made it into the current hymnal, *Sing the Living Tradition*, which was published in 1993, nearly thirty years after the first UUA venture. In *Singing the Living Tradition*, there unfortunately are only eight hymn texts by Patton remaining. One of his most popular hymns, entitled *We Are the Earth Upright and Proud* had originally appeared in *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*, and is Patton's most clear statement of religious humanism, and might even be called the "Anthem of Humanity." In the hymn there are only two verses, but he powerfully states:

We are the earth upright and proud; in us the earth is knowing. Its winds are music in our mouths, in us its rivers flowing. The sun is our hearth-fire; warm with the earth's desire and with its purpose strong, we sing earth's pilgrim song; in us the earth is growing. We lift our voices, fill the skies with our exultant singing. We dedicate our minds and hearts, to order beauty bringing. Our labor is our strength; our love will win at length; our minds will find the ways to live in peace and praise. Our day is just beginning.⁴³

Patton did much to connect religion to human experience. He sought to put this understanding in lyrical form for Sunday services. The fact that there is a section entitled, *Humanity: Women and Men*, in *Singing the Living Tradition*, I believe is evidence of the continuation of the work Patton begun in 1964. As has been stated, "Religion is a present reality; it is also an inheritance from the past."⁴⁴ Unitarian Universalism has inherited from Patton a humanistic faith. Through our singing can still be heard the echoes of his voice.

Though his early works in hymnody did not use inclusive language, Patton made every effort later to translate them in light of the changing needs of society. He was very aware of this matter. He was ever creating and re-creating the spirited words for celebration of life.

Conclusions

In this brief presentation I have attempted to cover some of the contributions Patton has made to the cause of liberal religion, and the efforts of the Unitarian Universalist Association. However, there are many more contributions beyond the ones here mentioned. I have only been able to trace a cursory sketch of this man and his career.

The most important contribution is to be found in his work at Charles Street Meeting House. It is from that point I have sought to draw out the philosophy that was embodied in the career of Kenneth Patton. The views, methods, and projects undertaken back in 1949 would be the very sources of further efforts he would pursue throughout the remaining years of his life.

Patton showed to us a creative ways in which to utilize our buildings. At first in the First Unitarian Society in Madison, and then at Charles Street Universalist Meeting House, the buildings were either designed, or re-designed, to serve a multifaceted community. We would do well to look more closely at the philosophy that Patton developed in understanding the role of the church.

His use of symbols, both old and new, were signs of a true universalistic mind at work. Among those employed were the Latin Cross, the Star of David, the Crescent Moon, and the Wheel of Dharma, as well as, symbols for natural elements, the Earth, Sun, and galaxies gracing the walls. Patton showed the kind of imagination necessary for the times in which he lived. He gave expression to the shrinking global situation, as well as the dawning of the Space Age. Our microcosmic “worlds” are connecting to the macrocosmic “World.”

Within the four walls of the building on the corner of Charles and Mt. Vernon, Patton sought to work out his liturgical ideals. He attempted to present the humanistic faith as one that felt the pulse of life deeply. Patton sought to raise the cold corpse of rational humanistic religion from the dead. As has been stated so well by David Bumbaugh, "...under the leadership of Kenneth Patton, ...a stumble-footed humanism learned to dance and a monotone rationalism learned to sing."⁴⁵ In Patton's readings, responses, anthems, and hymns he gave religious humanism a new voice, a voice of celebration.

In Patton's philosophy of religion the individual human experience is celebrated, but he does not forget the communal experience as well. Even more he seeks to have each person experience a global sense of his or her humanity. Each culture is yet another expression of our human consciousness. Patton was aware of the shrinking "world" in light of the technological advances.

For Patton it was most important to keep up with the changes occurring due to increased knowledge, whether in the areas of science, art, or philosophy. In this way the religious truths that one embraced would be based in reality, and not in outdated myths of long ago. He makes this point very clearly:

The making of this religion of realities never ceases. Our inheritance is not that of receiving a scripture intact and canonized. We are agents, participators, provocateurs, creating and collecting another religious tradition, in which we will creatively include all religions of the past.⁴⁶

However, Patton was aware of the need for a sense of historical continuity. He speaks to this point as well. He writes: "A religion of realities has its scripture, world-wide in origin, old as human culture, of a richness and beauty drawing from all earth's peoples, religions, and traditions."⁴⁷

He was a true citizen of the world. I would even go further and state that Patton was a citizen of the universe. He shows the depth of thought, which can touch the stars. In this way he can be found a seeker of the highest order. Patton's vision seems to have never reached a limit. Is it possible that we too can broaden our own vision of faith? It is my

hope we can, and will realize this dream.

Kenneth Patton was a prophet voice calling religious liberals to a larger and more challenging faith. Unitarian Universalism must become truly a unified and universal religion. Then we can be a spiritual community for the present, and the future. In this way we answer the call made by Patton so many years ago. Then we too can become “citizens of the universe.”

Notes

1 George Huntston Williams, *American Universalism*, 4th ed., 78 (Boston: Universalist Historical Society, 1971)

2 Ernest Cassara, *Universalism in America: A Documentary History of a Liberal Faith*, 270 (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1971)

3 *Ibid.*, 270

4 Charles A. Howe, *The Larger Faith: A Short History of American Universalism*, 107–108 (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1993)

5 Ernest Cassara, *Universalism in America: A Documentary History of a Liberal Faith*, 271

6 Charles A. Howe, *The Larger Faith: A Short History of American Universalism*, 115

7 Ernest Cassara, *Universalism in America: A Documentary History of a Liberal Faith*, 273

8 George Huntston Williams, *American Universalism*, 4th ed., 78

9 Peter Lee Scott, Growing Up with the Charles Street Meeting House, *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary, 79 (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002)

10 *Ibid.*, 79

11 Kenneth L. Patton, Art and Symbols for a Universal Religion, *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary, 136

12 Kenneth L. Patton, *A Religion for One World*, 325 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964)

13 *Ibid.*, 325

14 Unitarian Universalist Association, *Singing the Living Tradition* (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1993)

- 15 Kenneth L. Patton, *A Religion for One World*, 322
- 16 *Ibid.*, 322
- 17 *Ibid.*, 83–84
- 18 *Ibid.*, 84
- 19 Kenneth L. Patton, Art and Symbols for a Universal Religion, *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary, 138
- 20 *Ibid.*, 136
- 21 *Ibid.*, 136
- 22 Kenneth L. Patton, *A Religion for One World*, 475
- 23 *Ibid.*, 77
- 24 *Ibid.*, 77
- 25 *Ibid.*, 22
- 26 *Ibid.*, 22
- 27 *Ibid.*, 22
- 28 *Ibid.*, 23
- 29 *Ibid.*, 23
- 30 *Ibid.*, 25
- 31 *Ibid.*, 25
- 32 Kenneth L. Patton, *A Religion of Realities*, xi (Ridgewood: Meeting House Press, 1977)
- 33 Kenneth L. Patton, The Future of Universalism, *A Bold Experiment: Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary, 174
- 34 *Ibid.*, 180
- 35 *Ibid.*, 175
- 36 Kenneth L. Patton, *A Religion for One World*, 284
- 37 *Ibid.*, 285–286
- 38 Unitarian Universalist Association, *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.)
- 39 *Ibid.*, 28
- 40 *Ibid.*, 66

41 *Ibid.*, 138

42 *Ibid.*, 181

43 Unitarian Universalist Association, *Singing the Living Tradition*, 303

44 Unitarian Universalist Association, *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*

45 David Bumbaugh, *The Charles Street Meeting House: An Unfinished Dream, A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary, 15

46 Kenneth L. Patton, *A Religion of Realities*, 220 (Ridgewood: Meeting House Press, 1977)

47 *Ibid.*, 220

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