

**A Religion for One World:
Kenneth L. Patton, the Charles Street Meeting House, and the New Universalism**

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Introduction

In 1949, Universalism returned to Boston with the acquisition of the Charles Street Meeting House and the installation of its revolutionary minister, Kenneth L. Patton. The Universalist leader responsible for this undertaking was Dr. Clinton Lee Scott, Superintendent of the Massachusetts Universalist Convention. Scott had come by the position through the urging of Clarence Skinner, dean of the Crane Theological School at Tufts, who knew Scott “to be a liberal with energy and new ideas.”¹ Scott also had support from many of the younger members in the Massachusetts Universalist Convention,² including active contributions to his efforts by key leaders from a new generation of ministers.³ These “young Turks,” who had formed an earnest and tight-knit group known as “the Humiliati,” aimed to revitalize their faith by nurturing a “universalized Universalism.”⁴

It was an interesting moment to try to spark something new in liberal religion. World War II was fresh in memory. The United Nations, founded a few years earlier to help prevent another such conflict, inspired those who gathered at the Meeting House. The Cold War had begun, with J. Edgar Hoover installed in the FBI – keeping a close eye on radicals of all kinds. The armed forces had recently been desegregated, and the Civil Rights Movement would explode onto the national scene over the next two decades. As Patton led the experiments in “A Religion for One World” on Charles Street from 1949-1968, America first settled into the conformist era of the 50s, then saw social revolution unfold in the 60s.

As for liberal religion, Universalism had peaked in numbers around the time of its 1870 centennial, followed by “a period of stagnation and gradual decline that, after the First World War, steepened dramatically.”⁵ The Social Gospel had propelled Universalists into living their

faith in the previous era.⁶ But by the time of World War I, the Social Gospel was fading, and Universalists began searching for a new heart of their religion. L.B. Fisher expressed the mood of the age when he said that “Universalists are often asked to tell where they stand. The only true answer to give to this question is that we do not stand at all, we move.”⁷ While the same Christian language might be used as in past eras, he explained, “all these words and phrases take on new meanings, and therefore need new definitions, in each successive age.”⁸

Indeed, by mid-century Universalism had moved so far that humanists occupied key positions – including Clinton Lee Scott, the only Universalist signer of the Humanist Manifesto.⁹ Dr. Scott, described by Universalist historian Ernest Cassara as “one of the persistent advocates of humanism within the Universalist Church,”¹⁰ recruited for his revitalization project another humanist, Kenneth Patton. An artist by temperament¹¹ and a prophet by calling¹², Patton had already brought a creative humanist voice to the First Unitarian Church in Madison, Wisconsin. He had just led that congregation through the process of commissioning a Frank Lloyd Wright church when he was tapped to head the experiment in Boston. His charge: to offer liberal religious seekers a fresh religious encounter unlike that available in the other Universalist churches in Massachusetts.

Though the Universalists and Unitarians were still courting at this time, and had not yet married, the Unitarian connection was evident from the beginning of the endeavor on Charles Street. Not only was Patton recruited to the Meeting House from a Unitarian church – one of many ministers who passed back and forth between Unitarian and Universalist pulpits in that era – but he was welcomed at his Boston installation by Dana Greeley. Then minister of the Arlington Street (Unitarian) Church, Greeley would later become the last president of the

American Unitarian Association, and the first president of the merged Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA).¹³ With magnanimity, Greeley welcomed Patton to the city of Ballou and Channing, assured him there were plenty of unchurched people and deep spiritual and social needs for him to join in addressing, evoked collegiality among area clergy, and encouraged Patton to carry on in his righteous and pioneering efforts with dauntless courage and a humble heart.¹⁴

Dr. Scott chose Boston for this “pilot project” because, by this time, despite that the denomination was headquartered there, all the Universalist churches in the city had closed. And the Unitarian churches of mid-20th century Boston were more inclined to preserve history than to make it. So Patton and his Meeting House congregants took up the challenge: to serve the unmet needs of religious liberals in Boston who were hungry for a faith that was bold, broad, and engaging... and to offer a fresh model of ministry to liberal religionists at large.

Thesis

The Charles Street Meeting House responded to important questions that continue to confront Unitarian Universalism. While Patton’s efforts and philosophy had its shortcomings, they left a lasting imprint on our faith, and anticipated challenges that are still playing out in our tradition. Here I will focus on the effort to become “A Religion for One World.” For that’s what Patton and his dedicated Meeting House band were trying to create, and Unitarian Universalist (UU) churches still wrestle with the same quandary: what does it mean to be a liberal religious seeker today, to draw from the full range of humanity’s sources of inspiration, to make

meaning in our shrinking, interconnected, multicultural world? What kind of worship (or other religious experience) does this effectively? How can it be done respectfully?

Through a review of sampled primary sources, as well as some secondary material, I will highlight four interrelated characteristics of the Meeting House experiment, which support my thesis. Those four aspects are: seeking the universal in human experience; opening to world religions; decentering Christianity; and supporting innovation. In each case I illustrate not only what Patton tried to do, and some of the successes and limitations of this work, but also how his contemporaries responded. I finish with an exploration of how the Meeting House community lived into multiculturalism, with an eye toward what Patton's groundbreaking work at the Meeting House can teach those of us engaging in similarly broad ministries today.

In Search of Universal Human Experience

About eight years into the "pilot project" launched at the Meeting House, Patton summarized the effort in an article for *The Universalist Leader*, the journal of the denomination. He explained, "The Meeting House has one basic and simple idea: to find a religious setting for a religion of one humanity and one world. It is the United Nations idea . . . applied to religion. Our unofficial motto comes from Torrence: 'I am a man, and nothing that is human can be alien to me.'"¹⁵

Patton was at heart an explorer and creator. One colleague stumbled onto him in the Meeting House one morning, "on his knees painting a mural of the Andromeda Galaxy for the proscenium... 'He looked like a happy kid building a terrific model airplane.' His enthusiasm was contagious."¹⁶ To the humanists' scientific worldview, valuing of personal experience, and

aspirations of peace and justice for all peoples around the globe, Patton added a keen appreciation of beauty, a deep love of nature, and a singular poetic voice. His nearly thirty published books include volumes of his own poetry, and he anthologized “an immense amount of humanistic-oriented poetry from around the world” as well.¹⁷ His writings include explorations of world cultures – particularly China, “where the greatest philosophers, poets, and painters created Chinese naturalism, humanism, and universalism,”¹⁸ but also the Bushmen of the South African Cape, who “had no gods, relating their myths to the sun, stars, wind”¹⁹ – as well as perennial existential questions, like the search for one’s inner self, for love, for belonging, for “the juice of everyday.”²⁰ His resource files exhibit very broad interests, covering topics from abortion, the Chinese poetry of Wai-Lim Yip, love and protest, and the computer age, to astronomy, plants and flowers, dance, and “Christianity – revolt.”²¹

Patton described himself as a naturalistic mystic. In contrast to the traditional mystic, who “seeks to achieve oneness with God, the naturalistic mystic seeks to know his actual and living oneness with nature and with humanity.”²² This orientation was evident in the design of the Meeting House, with symbols at the macro-scale of the universe at one end, earth and humanity in the center, and the micro-scale of the atom at the opposite end.²³ The awe of the cosmos was evoked by the Great Nebula in Andromeda, reproduced from astronomical photographs. “The earth is symbolized by a large polar-projection map of the earth inlaid in linoleum in the very center of the auditorium. All national boundaries are eliminated, giving the one land mass, the one earth... the people, being seated in a circle,” with the map before them, “symbolize unity and one world in their very arrangement.”²⁴ At the microcosmic end was a piece, designed by a young Boston artist, which represented “the atom, the cell, the seed.”²⁵

The Meeting House was also adorned for universal worship through the symbol project: “sixty-five symbols taken from world religions, ancient and modern, and symbols of the ‘universals,’ of the common ideals, goals, and occupations of humanity.”²⁶ Visual art from various cultures was displayed, and collecting it was a major undertaking of the Meeting House community for several years. A collection of music from world cultures was also assembled, and with a state-of-the-art sound system, used as a background to readings from various cultures; organ, piano, and voice were used to perform great works as well. In such extensive use of the arts – “the voices of humanity” – the community’s hope was “to assemble a truly universal setting or ‘frame of reverence’ for our universalist celebrations... [Together with contemporary artists, we seek to find] a religious voice for our age.”²⁷

The Meeting House was more than a sanctuary for Sunday morning religious services; the search for universal human experience was undertaken in a variety of ways. The services themselves were followed by “a coffee hour and discussion period lasting for an hour, in which the issues of the address are freely engaged.”²⁸ With worship topics like “Is God Totalitarian?” (quoting a Jesuit priest, and exploring the political implications), how to redeem our mistakes by learning from them, and humanist gratitude,²⁹ these likely were lively and meaningful discussions. Further, evening adult study groups delved into “anthropology, psychology, comparative religion and world politics.”³⁰ Children enjoyed a “progressive, project method,” such as a “study of anthropology [adapted] for ten- to twelve-year olds”³¹ A newsletter tells of the church school viewing four astronomy movies, going to the Harvard Observatory, and then having the 9 and 10-year-olds build a hemisphere in what sounds like part science demonstration, part art project. “Each student will then observe the apparent path of the moon

through the zodiac during the following month and compare results.”³² Members also enjoyed monthly intercultural dinners, group outings to theatres and galleries, and the Charles Street Forum on Social Issues.³³ One such forum, with four expert speakers, addressed juvenile delinquency.³⁴ Another social event was listening to broadcasts of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, with coffee, at the Meeting House.³⁵

Patton’s sensibilities as a naturalistic mystic and poet-prophet have left an indelible imprint on Unitarian Universalism. He was named, with James Luther Adams and A. Powell Davies, as one of liberal religion’s modern-day saints by one of his contemporaries, David Parke.³⁶ Minister and scholar David Bumbaugh has summed up Patton's work: "It was he who taught a monotone rationalism how to sing; it was he who taught a stumble-footed humanism how to dance; it was he who cried 'Look!' and taught our eyes to see the glory in the ordinary."³⁷ In addition to his vast output of published books, Patton’s voice and perspective have shaped our denomination’s liturgy through our hymnals. He served on the Hymnbook Commission after the UU merger, and many of the pieces developed at the Meeting House were included in the 1964 *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*. Patton remains one of the most-cited authors in our current hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition* – in fact there are more selections from Patton than Emerson,³⁸ and he inspired a piece in the supplemental publication *Singing the Journey*, as well.³⁹

In addition, one of the Meeting House’s liturgical innovations bears a striking resemblance to the now-widespread practice in UU worship services of lighting and extinguishing a chalice. At Charles Street, “on the bookcase is a lamp made from Greek and Roman design, which is a symbol of light, life, wisdom, the hearth, the home, and aspiration.

The lamp is lighted at the beginning of the service and snuffed at the close.”⁴⁰ Patton further described the lamp as associated with Egyptian and Greek oracles, a symbol “whose use extends far back into the old stone age... one of the richest and most suggestive of all [humanity’s] symbols.”⁴¹ The *image* of the flaming chalice entered UU culture through the Unitarian Service Committee in 1941, as Unitarians and Jews in Europe sought to escape Nazi persecution, as told in a pamphlet about its history. The logo’s creator, Hans Deutsch, is quoted describing it as “the kind of chalice which the Greeks and Romans put on their altars”; both he and the pamphlet writer wax poetic about the symbolism of the flaming chalice, in a universalistic way quite reminiscent of Patton.⁴² The pamphlet, however, makes no mention of when the *practice* of chalice-lighting entered Unitarian or Universalist liturgy; this may have been one of the “partial imitations” of the Meeting House by other congregations.⁴³

My chief complaint about Patton’s naturalistic mysticism and search for universal human experience is that he takes the perspective of scientific materialism and positivism to be, if not universal in fact, then the evolutionary endpoint to which humans at their best eventually arrive. Yet this perspective has a particular (Western) cultural origin. Its assumptions derive from a specific time period and region of the world. If it’s a universal human question to ask which comes first, matter or spirit, the more universal answer across geography and history has been spirit. But even to pose the question that way is to impose Western dualism. In reacting against the dogmatic, the immature, the superstitious in religion, Patton repeatedly exercises a preferential option for scientific materialism and positivism. For example, he speaks of “the primordial ‘building blocks’ of matter”⁴⁴ and writes that “Spirit was a misnamed function of matter, the mind, love, and life of the flesh... There is no deity or cosmic-

consciousness, only the brains of these passing bodies.”⁴⁵ Patton advocates that people not accept “experience as authority in matters where science, logic and history can serve [them] better” – with no acknowledgment that any matter might exist in which experience might be the better guide, no acknowledgment that science as he knew it might have limits, too.⁴⁶ Still, one need not embrace this limitation in Patton’s perspective to appreciate the creativity and breadth of inspiration he brought to the project on Charles Street.

Opening to World Religions

Patton, like Emerson, looked to world religions for “manifestations of the primordial wisdom to which all humanity is heir.”⁴⁷ In his search for the common essence of human religious experience – so much like the Absolute Religion, natural religion, or religion of humanity sought by the Transcendentalists – Patton seems to have shared Emerson’s attitude “that all particular men or literatures were manifestations, at their best, of universal man and universal literature.”⁴⁸ Since Transcendentalism paved the way for humanism in liberal religion,⁴⁹ it should be no surprise that we can hear echoes of the Transcendentalists in the way Patton drew upon world religions at the Meeting House.

Patton’s experiment at the Charles Street Meeting House also reflected, and at times provoked, some of the mid-20th century conversation and soul-searching among Universalists about what the faith now stood for. The respected historian of liberal religion, Ernest Cassara, points to the Meeting House as the first time that liberal religionists in the U.S. not only expressed interest in world religions (which had been true since the first wave of Transcendentalists⁵⁰), but organized a church around the principle of “drawing inspiration from

sources beyond the Jewish and Christian scriptures and traditions. The result was an expanded view” of liberal religion. In doing this, “the Charles Street Meeting House had a profound impact on the Universalist denomination” Cassara tells us, and “on the Unitarians as well.”⁵¹

This inclusive orientation was expressed in the Meeting House design, as already mentioned, through the symbol project and the “cultural centers” displaying art from different areas of the world, much of it religious in nature. Perhaps in a nod to Transcendentalist Bronson Alcott’s proposal for a universal Bible⁵², another major feature of the Meeting House was a bookcase on a platform near the front of the sanctuary which housed religious texts from many traditions. “Whereas dogmatic religions sometimes put ‘the one book’ front center,” Patton explained, “we put the many great books of mankind together as a symbol of our acceptance of all human wisdom and poetry and literature as ours.”⁵³ Readings from world scriptures, and from poetry and literature from around the globe, were incorporated into worship.

Patton applied his liturgical chops to seasonal celebrations as well as weekly worship. These often drew on multiple faith traditions in a universalistic fashion that respected the origins of each piece, while lifting up the universal yearnings and experiences they expressed. A good example is the Mid-Winter Festival. It incorporates winter celebrations from several traditions, including: singing of “Deck the Halls,” originally a European pagan solstice song, not a Christmas tune; use of the Great Nebula art for special visual effects; a narration of a Hopi celebration of winter and the coming of spring, with Hopi musical backdrop; narration and music about Hanukkah, the Hebrew festival of lights; a narration about the followers of Mithra, the sun god, with Persian music in the background; and material about the Medieval Christians’

practice, and the gradual merging of Christian lore with pagan rites into such yule-tide ritual as the use of the “carol” (circle dance), Christmas tree, gift-giving and Santa.⁵⁴

The Meeting House legacy in relation to world religions is alive and well in our movement. After the Meeting House was closed, many of the symbols were procured for Starr King School for the Ministry, one of our two UU identity seminaries. A UU minister and professor at the school related, “there is a feeling that we have rescued something of great value” and described how the students “are clearly attached to the symbols.”⁵⁵ Configurations of many world religions symbols have become common themes on pendants and stoles worn by UUs, as well as in a number of sanctuaries.⁵⁶ As more UUs have responded to the same interconnected world situation that Patton addressed, and have come in contact with ideas and teachings from “world religions” – now so much more available in the mainstream – it has ceased to be unusual to hear scriptural quotes or mythic stories from diverse traditions in UU pulpits. In fact, whether or not they ultimately quote diverse scriptures from their pulpits, competency in world religions is now one of the credentialing requirements for every new UU minister. This cannot, of course, all be attributed to the experiment at the Charles Street Meeting House. But the Meeting House was an early exemplar and had its “various influences and partial imitations.”⁵⁷

Such mingling of world religions is anything but straightforward. Setting aside, for the moment, the ethical question of where syncretism bleeds over into cultural imperialism, there is also the functional question of how effective a buffet-style approach to religion can be. Does a Sufi appetizer, a Christian entrée with Buddhist and Taoist side dishes, and a Vedic dessert make for a satisfying meal? When children’s religious education looks like comparative religion,

and adults turn into anthropologists at church – as archival materials suggest happened in the Meeting House – there is the danger that all these spiritual tourists will stay in the head, and fail to have a *religious experience* that influences the way they meet life. Did this happen on Charles Street?

It certainly wasn't what Patton was going for. Rather, he "understood that the diverse traditions of the human community are not interchangeable, but he acted on the faith that beneath the apparent chaos of the religious venture, there is an underlying order resulting from a common human encounter with time and death and the plenitude of being – an order which made the insights of various cultures translatable. He sought to make those insights accessible by creating a religious expression that could lift people out of their little local universes and situate them firmly in the larger context of the total human venture, the incomprehensibly vast evolutionary universe."⁵⁸ Still, if we emphasize in world religions what is translatable – or as has been said of the Transcendentalists, what is abstract-able⁵⁹ – much of the richness that makes a tradition what it is, may be lost. At least, much of what the tradition was to those who developed it. To the loyal core at the Meeting House, however, the whole venture was exhilarating; they shared Patton's philosophical approach, saw value in his creative and syncretistic ideas, and as one participant (later a minister) put it, Patton was "the most stimulating, thoughtful, and instructive religious teacher and leader that I have had the privilege of encountering."⁶⁰

Judging by the faith formation activities of many contemporary UUs, the Meeting House members look more like forerunners than oddities in their embrace of world religions.⁶¹ In any case, there is no turning back now. Unitarian Universalism formally and democratically

embraced the broad-tent approach five decades ago. (Or even seventeen centuries ago, to acknowledge Unitarianism's choice at its very first such fork in the road – when Theodore Parker and the Transcendentalists were allowed to stay in the fold, because the Unitarians were willing “to take the principle of free inquiry with all its consequences.”⁶²) At the time of the Unitarian and Universalist merger in the early 60s, in Patton's later years at the Meeting House, the humanist and post-Christian attitudes expressed at Charles Street surfaced as the new UUA sought to develop a statement of purpose. “The statement's precise wording had been a matter of such heated debate that it nearly derailed the merger at the concurrent but separate preparatory sessions of the two denominations the year before. The contention revolved around whether to include such phrases as ‘love to God and love to man’ and a reference to ‘our Judeo-Christian heritage.’ A compromise version, including a critical change from ‘our’ heritage to ‘the’ heritage, was finally hammered out.”⁶³

By 1984, when the original wording was updated, Principles and Sources were separated out, and the changes were approved nearly unanimously and without controversy.⁶⁴ The congregation of the Charles Street Meeting House anticipated by several decades the newly enumerated Sources of our movement, including these three carefully-framed Sources, in this order: “Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life,” “Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves,” and “Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit.” The community that Patton led would also have been right at home with our sixth Source, adopted in 1995:

“Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.”⁶⁵

The Meeting House experiment was undoubtedly an influence in this evolution of our faith. But the issues were part of a much broader conversation in both denominations, stretching back to at least a decade before the merger. A sampling of mid-1950s pieces from the *Universalist Leader*, that denomination’s publication prior to the merger, illustrates the grappling going on in regards to the place of world religions and the centrality (or lack thereof) of Christianity to the Universalist tradition. Writing in Feb. 1954, one Universalist presents the point-of-view of Universalists and Unitarians, “that there is no one religion which has a monopoly on truth,” and that the role of religious liberals is to “quest eagerly for appreciation and understanding of the religious feelings of all people” – well beyond mere tolerance – although “the power of our [Judeo-Christian] cultural inheritance is such that inevitably Christmas, Easter,.. are going to be more moving than Mohammedan or Buddhist celebrations.”⁶⁶ In the next issue, another Universalist concurred that while “I do not feel any Christian superiority” and “believe in the universal quality of religion,” still “I confess I have been brought up in the Christian tradition and . . . I believe that by being real Christians we will be real world religionists.”⁶⁷ In the October issue that year, the editors gave a short numbered list of “What Universalism Means Today,” including “three kinds of manifestations” and nine principle beliefs. The three kinds of manifestations were listed as: “1. *A World Religion* – a composite of various religions of the world. 2. *A Liberal Religious Spirit* – found in most religions. 3. *A Liberal Church Fellowship* – based on the faith and way of life of Universalists.”⁶⁸ Clearly, Universalists far beyond Boston were seeking to find the place of their faith in relation

to both their Christian roots and the liberal religious spirit that could be found across many traditions.

Decentering Christianity

One of the crucial issues in all this is the de-centering of Christianity – as so strikingly illustrated visually by the Humiliati's chosen symbol of the off-center cross.⁶⁹ In Patton's case, he did not just bring in world religions, he put them on equal footing with Christianity, and at times may have favored these newcomers over the religious heritage whose faults were all too familiar to him. (As one of Patton's fellow ministers put it, "We are close enough to Christianity to be realistic about its" problems.⁷⁰) Patton could speak graciously, like those Universalists quoted above; for example, "Having begun within the Christian tradition," he said, "we can escape its limitations, and keeping the best of its idealism and spirit, move on to universality of affection and understanding, and a sense of unity in belonging to all humanity."⁷¹ But he could also approach the matter with as much disdain as affection for his religious origins: "Granted that our roots were in the Judeo-Christian tradition, but do we have to be stuck in the rut in which we originated?"⁷²

Those appreciative of Patton's approach found themselves in the position of defending not only his wider vision of Universalism, but his humanism – as occurred in an article from a layman titled "Beyond Universalism." The writer described a group of laymen in Washington, D.C. who "defeated, by sizeable majority vote, a resolution to exclude the so-called 'new Universalism' (humanism, naturalism, atheism, and the Charles Street Meeting House in Boston were clearly meant)."⁷³ The writer went on to summarize the "real attitudes and beliefs of

humanism” and to clear up “misconceptions, straw men, red herrings, and bugbears” related to humanism.⁷⁴

To understand Patton’s bringing to life of a universalized Universalism, we must return to the historical context of a post-World War II reality, in which religious liberals found great hope in the United Nations as a means to world peace. Patton described the Charles Street venture thus: “We see the Universalist Church as an attempt to establish an idealized world community in miniature.”⁷⁵ In his “Letter to Japan” – a country where Universalists had undertaken missionary work, and been influenced by the encounter – Patton expanded on this world vision: “Today a universal and international world religion is no more an impossibility than is the United Nations in the political world... It will be the work of the liberals in the various cultures, for internationalism and universalism are liberal sentiments and disciplines... Liberalism,... seeks to receive teaching, not to proselytize. It seeks to join, not to conquer and submerge others.”⁷⁶

Patton believed that “an increasing number of people are dissatisfied with any religion or world view that establishes one tradition as supreme. In the West they disassociated themselves from Christianity. They do not deny that Christianity possesses many virtues, but they no longer wish to be named Christians or to be limited to Christian beliefs.”⁷⁷ Rather, Patton told his Japanese audience, he believed that liberals from other traditions – “Confucian, Hindu, Taoist, Buddhist, Shinto, and Islamic” as well as Christian and Jewish – shared this attitude: “none of these people would seek to identify themselves with the religion they had outgrown, the religion whose dogmatism and provincialism they had repudiated. They would declare themselves to be members of a universal and world religion which included the

religious ideals and traditions of all peoples.”⁷⁸ Patton did not expect this new Universalism to be *the* world religion, but rather *a* world religion; in fact, in his assessment, “Only a small minority of the people from any land have sufficiently matured to become citizens of one world and members of one humanity,” who might thus be attracted to a religion for one world.⁷⁹

One might argue that people could choose to practice non-dogmatic forms of their faiths, rather than create a new world religion. And in fact, that has been the point-of-view of some UU critics who prefer “the road not taken” by Patton – engaging world religions “from within our historic position on the far liberal edge of Protestantism”⁸⁰ and waiting to “plunge wholeheartedly into the rough and tumble of world community” until we are more aware of the “limited domain” of our own liberal religious ideas.⁸¹ The encounter with world religions has deeply influenced people raised in the liberal religious tradition, not just those still smarting from early encounters with creedal or rigid or fundamentalist expressions of Christianity. Still, it may be no coincidence that Patton falls into the latter category. He grew up in a strict Methodist church and family, started his ministerial career within the firmly Christian Disciples of Christ tradition, and switched to serving Unitarian and Universalist congregations after theological studies at the University of Chicago, where he was deeply influenced by humanist mentors.⁸² It is to this personal history, as well as the ascendance of scientific materialism among the educated classes, that I attribute Patton’s tendency to stand subjectively in the position of humanism, rather than liberal (theistic) Christianity, as he explored world religions and sought to develop a religion for one world.

Supporting Innovation

The experiment at Charles Street was shot through with a spirit of innovation, as Dr. Scott had intended when he conceived it. In addition to creative worship practices and the development of a unique worship setting, as already described, Patton's band of innovators created an "open hymnal," to which new anthems from diverse sources were continually added. Likewise they compiled written worship materials – meditations, responsive readings, benedictions and the like. These came from religions and cultures of the globe, as well as fresh from Patton's pen, and in time the Meeting House published these materials for use by others.⁸³ One limitation of Patton's approach was that this creative liturgy "hung from a worship structure identified most closely" with Protestant Christianity; while the content varied tremendously, it was confined to this familiar form.⁸⁴

One of the outstanding features of the Meeting House was the shared nature of its innovative work. Patton wrote, "We have discovered that the best part of a religious fellowship is doing things ourselves and doing them together."⁸⁵ Like most churches, especially start-ups and small congregations, the members of the Meeting House helped keep the building clean and in good repair, volunteered in the kitchen and the nursery, served on the board or the social committee, and did various and sundry other volunteer jobs that keep a church running and that draw its membership together.⁸⁶ But in the "workshop" of the Meeting House, members also participated in creating art, putting together all manner of programs, and curating the many forms of art that were displayed or performed there. They had the sense of being pioneers. While Ken Patton was the spark behind it all, "there was a strong and dedicated core of loyal members who stuck by" the Meeting House experiment – and Patton himself – over the years.⁸⁷ In part this may be attributed to the participatory spirit of the Meeting

House.⁸⁸ But it is also because people felt that what was happening there mattered on some larger scale. As one participant later said, “we were all forgiving [of Patton’s shortcomings] and loyal because we all believed that the work we were part of was so important.”⁸⁹

Financial support was another critical ingredient to the experiment in a New Universalism. As a first step, Clinton Lee Scott had acquired “a high maintenance building with creaky pews and a malfunctioning pipe organ at the foot of Beacon Hill, all for \$4500,”⁹⁰ and recommended Patton to lead the effort there.⁹¹ Scott would stay busy into the mid-50s, defending the Meeting House’s controversial minister, and ensuring continued financial support from the state convention for the venture.⁹² Alas, the Meeting House “never grew in membership to a self-supporting level” – it capped out at around two hundred members – and with the UU merger the Massachusetts Universalist Convention, and its financial support, came to an end.⁹³ Patton accepted a pulpit in Ridgewood, New Jersey to better support his family, and though he continued to minister to the Meeting House on a part-time basis for a few more years, with insider Alan Seaburg as co-minister,⁹⁴ the project lost steam under subsequent leadership and petered out in the 70s. The Unitarian Universalist Association has been criticized for failing to recognize the Meeting House for the hotbed of liturgical creativity it was, and invest in it accordingly.⁹⁵ Dana Greeley, who had so magnanimously welcomed Patton to his pulpit at his installation at Charles Street, pressed board members to close it down, while his wife encouraged consolidation with the Arlington Street church.⁹⁶

It is hard to know to what degree the poor record of membership growth on Charles Street traces to the demographics of the area (few families, lots of turnover), the unique one-world worship taking place there, or the cantankerous personality of its minister.⁹⁷ Patton

acknowledged to his congregants that he lacked in the relational skills which were the hallmark of many a more pastoral minister. In one minister's column, he noted, "I know that some of you consider it a pity that I am so tactless, and perhaps some of you would say boorish, in the way I approach people."⁹⁸ He goes on to offer "a frank apology for the many times when I have been stupid and obnoxious" and confesses that "sometimes I get very provoked with my own ill-temper and bad manners."⁹⁹

At the same time, Patton indicated that if you want a creator and prophet, you have to take the rest along with it: "... there are times when I am fed up with the social demands of the ministry. But if you want someone interested in the poetic, musical, artistic and experimental side of religion, you have to be willing to put up with some of the temperamental liabilities that go along with it. . . I believe it is my task to disturb, to challenge,.. I am ready to be the friend, counselor and helper of anyone who thinks I can assist him. But," he told his parishioners, "I consider myself to be of the genus prophet. This is merely to identify myself. I may be a very poor prophet... There is one characteristic shared by both the good and the bad prophets: ...they always have many more enemies than friends. They are always very irritating, even when one would like to agree with them. They feel so strongly about things that they sound very dogmatic and overly sure of their opinions."¹⁰⁰ Indeed, his contemporaries said quite similar things about Patton,¹⁰¹ and he is remembered as disrespectful of colleagues and far different in person than in his idealistic writing.¹⁰² Whether or not it is inevitable that prophets should lack people skills and alienate the institution-builders, it is clear that Patton did.

Yet there may be more to it than this. At least one chronicler of our tradition, looking back, argues persuasively that the reasons for dislike of Patton go much deeper: "There is a

widespread belief that a minister with a nicer, more winsome and less combative personality might have been able to build a substantial congregation. However, few, if any, would have gotten beyond first base, let alone led an experiment to the achievement of a model temple, sustained a high creative output, and found widespread notice in the Unitarian Universalist movement. Much of the criticism of Patton has been what Edwin Friedman, in the context of family systems theory, called sabotage.”¹⁰³ Indeed, any person trying to lead change in the dense family systems called churches is likely to encounter resistance to their efforts.

Perhaps just as importantly, at least in Patton’s case, the professional establishment may feel threatened at the prospect of a major shake-up in identity, vision and practice. Some ministerial colleagues talked about Patton behind his back, argued vehemently with him at national meetings, routinely tried to cut off financial support from the Massachusetts Universalist Convention, and even discouraged young ministers from looking upon Patton as a role model.¹⁰⁴ (This didn’t keep them from doing it, of course. One upstart minister echoed Patton’s view: “a specifically Christian liberalism is a much too parochial answer to meet the deep spiritual needs of the enlightened citizens of this one world. In this I am in completed agreement with the theologically Young Turks who would expand the meaning and relevance of the unities and universals implied in the given history of Unitarianism and Universalism. In this we are our fathers’ sons, not destroying but seeking to fulfill our inherited faith.”¹⁰⁵) Clinton Lee Scott worked to soothe anxious ministers in his convention, and persuade them to keep an open mind, noting that “new churches will not be replicas of the old... Variation is as much a principle of survival as conformity. To know this is to be unafraid when we encounter unfamiliar patterns in congregations as well as in persons. . .”¹⁰⁶

Despite the resistance Patton encountered from the old guard as he sought to develop new tradition, and despite the shortcomings of his own personality, he and his committed crew succeeded in creating something new. His vision of a religion for one world, and the prodigious worship materials and practices produced at the Meeting House, remain a lasting influence on the evolution of our liberal religion.

Living into Multiculturalism

Patton's quest – to seek the universal in human experience, to engage UU minds and hearts with the spiritual wisdom of all cultures, and to create an innovative religion for one world – led to extensive exploration of traditions beyond his own. Cross-cultural encounter was at the heart of Patton's methods. While he cannot be expected to have met in the mid-20th century the guidelines for cultural borrowing that developed by the 21st century, a review of some instances of cultural borrowing and cross-cultural encounter at the Meeting House suggests the community there was remarkably inclusive and respectful.

The Meeting House was itself multicultural, “non-segregated on racial and cultural lines,” with members “from many racial and national and religious backgrounds.”¹⁰⁷ There is evidence of programming that drew upon the diverse experiences of congregants. From Patton's archived files comes notice of a young adult program in which two groups members, Masoud Azam Zangenah (a Moslem) and Amarjit Chopra (a Hindu), spoke on marriage customs in Iran and India; and a Javanese dinner featuring authentic cuisine, plus “an exhibit of Javanese literature, sculpture, and embroidery,” sharing of Javanese music and Q&A with the hostess,

Mrs. Boonstra, who “spent the first seventeen years of her life on the islands of Java and Sumatra.”¹⁰⁸

The space on Charles Street was also opened to other groups that shared the liberal religious spirit. For example, one newsletter announced enthusiastically that Vedanta, “a kind of Hindu universalism,” was “meeting here on Thursday evening and Sunday afternoon, and also have a reading room and library open during the week.” The brief article further relayed that “Their outlook is typified by a bas relief plaque that has been hung in the ‘living room,’ which has three figures, Buddha, Krishna, and Jesus, the leaders of the great religions of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity.”¹⁰⁹

As already described, at the Meeting House, art, music, readings and so forth from other cultures were explored on equal footing with those from American and Christian sources. Patton was sure that “[Humanity’s] cultural differences would be inherently creative and fertile, were we to allow them to freely mix and stimulate each other.”¹¹⁰ This attitude is echoed in recent years by the esteemed historian of the struggle for racial diversity in our movement, Mark Morrison-Reed – he encourages UUs to embrace multiculturalism not “to alleviate our conscience,” but rather because we hunger for “the richness in human diversity” and are “excited by its possibility.”¹¹¹ Patton sought to do this at the Meeting House. My review of primary sources (such as materials for the Mid-Winter Festival described earlier) suggests that cross-cultural materials were given appropriate context as they were shared.¹¹² And the motivation for all of this was crystal clear: “Cannot the earth be one country, with one united patriotism for all mankind?” Patton bubbled. “We have travelled in far, hidden places, and discovered unknown cousins. Many is our family, rich and various. It is pleasant to have so

many brothers and sisters. The wise and good man will welcome the reunion of the family of mankind. He will know his grandeur as a child of earth and his fellowship with his fellow creatures... Take war and pestilence, arrogance of culture and nation from them, and [people] will find their common humanity.”¹¹³

As this quote suggests, Patton’s interest in a religion for one world was inextricably tied up in his hopes for a just and peaceful world. So it is not surprising that he brought his prophetic approach not only to the future of (Unitarian) Universalism, but to all manner of modern social ills. Colleagues knew him as “an aggressive prophet, a prophet of the old school, proclaiming doom about one and another kind of societal injustice,” most frequently the military-industrial complex.¹¹⁴ Often he “appealed to the citizen in us to force our nation and the expanding global civilization to eliminate poverty, racism, ethnic rivalry, and warfare.”¹¹⁵

But it’s one thing to preach and publish views that many would consider radical; another thing to take real risks to live by one’s principles. Patton had done both in the year or two before Clinton Lee Scott recruited him to Boston. In a sermon and radio broadcast, he had made “an intentional expression of his long-held beliefs about race and color,” he had spoken to both white and black groups on the need to combat discrimination, and he had drafted a provocative “platform” of actions that white people, in particular, could take to help in this regard, which he publicized.¹¹⁶ It is not clear whether he went to Selma or otherwise participated in activism during his Charles Street years,¹¹⁷ but his inclusive, prophetic attitudes remained constant, and the community at the Meeting House responded. They not only participated in humanitarian projects, like collecting warm clothes for people in Korea,¹¹⁸ but provided support to groups much closer to home who worked for social justice. One member of

the Meeting House recalls, “the African-American Museum kept its collections and meetings there until they acquired their own space in the neighborhood. Stokely Carmichael (later Kwame Ture) was hidden (from the FBI I think) one Sunday morning in our Sunday school room; all types of anti-war, Black activist, political groups and later women’s rights, feminist, and gay and lesbian groups used our building. Often we were an embarrassment to the UUA and conservative Beacon Hill groups at that time.”¹¹⁹

Such glimpses of Meeting House history make it tempting to guess where Patton and his project might fall on various developmental models. (Stage 6, Universalizing Faith, in Fowler’s stages of faith?¹²⁰ The “self-transforming mind” in Kegan’s mental models for making sense of the world?¹²¹ In one of the later “ethno-relative” stages of Milton Bennett’s stages of intercultural competency?¹²²) It is beyond the scope of this paper to make a firm case for such judgments. However, it is worth noting that before the Meeting House project began, Patton was transformed by witnessing the operation of racism firsthand. After his remark in Madison about his desire to “resign from the white race and become a colored man,” he was invited to help integrate housing, restaurants and hotels in Chicago.¹²³ (The conviction underlying Patton’s statement was that “the whole construct of race was an illusion” that we must overcome.¹²⁴) Maryell Cleary describes how, “After being repeatedly turned away when he averred himself a negro or when accompanied by people of color, Patton visited an interracial housing project” and witnessed children playing together and people of all backgrounds living as neighbors.¹²⁵ It changed him. He later wrote, “In those two days I became colored in a more profound sense than mere verbal profession can ever consummate. I have ‘crossed the line’ through a deeply emotional experience and I have no desire to cross back. Where I now am is

where every honest man will one day have to be.”¹²⁶ Furthermore, he felt moved to action. “I determined never again to be self-regarding and cowardly when I could do even the smallest thing to bring the equality of mankind closer to fruition... Only as unqualified members of one human race can we find our full humanity.”¹²⁷

The sensitive listener can hear echoes of this experience in Patton’s frequent pronouncements on social issues. He spoke out on the need to “overcome tribalism” and avoid “spiritual imperialism,” particularly in our religions (although here he was more concerned about not imposing one’s own religion on others, rather than about not utilizing others’ cultures).¹²⁸ Repeatedly Patton made the case that “deep-lying differences” in religion and culture “need not separate people into isolated sects [but rather could] enrich and enliven the religious communion *within* one religious community.”¹²⁹ He believed it to be the most important challenge of the age: “The earth must become our neighborhood, and the human race our in-group... world citizenship, like charity, begins at home.”¹³⁰ At least one contemporary historian believes that Patton’s racial awakening “was central to the outlook he carried with him for the rest of his life and guided much that he did in his ministry. His vision anticipated the upheavals that finally challenged Jim Crow America. His vision remains, after half a century, at the heart of the New Universalist message of today.”¹³¹

Patton brought this same boundless spirit of a New Universalism to religion as to race. But some dispute the “pretend pluralism” of those who promote a perennial philosophy, and claim to find expressions of it in every major religious tradition – people like Huston Smith, Karen Armstrong, Joseph Campbell, Swami Sivenanda (a proponent of Vedanta), and quite likely people like Kenneth Patton.¹³² Religions scholar Stephen Prothero admits that Huston

Smith's best-sellers "struck just the right chord" in the aftermath of World War II¹³³ – around the same time as the Charles Street Meeting House venture. But Prothero insists that despite how different traditions may converge in matters of ethics, "they diverge sharply on doctrine, ritual, mythology, experience, and law;" he believes these differences are important to understand in our world still rife with religious conflict.¹³⁴ "These differences may not matter to mystics or philosophers of religion, but," he emphasizes, "they matter to ordinary religious people."¹³⁵

No doubt this is true. But what Patton, the naturalistic mystic and prophet, hoped, is that these differences would matter to fewer people – that we could develop and serve more extra-ordinary religious people, people who "have sufficiently matured to become citizens of one world and members of one humanity" and practitioners of a religion for one world.¹³⁶ As even Prothero admits, "we cannot help but be drawn to such vision, and such hope"¹³⁷ as we are offered by those mystics and dreamers who are, if not describing the world as it, "reimagining it" as what it could be.¹³⁸

Yet, as Patton attempted this, inevitably he did filter other traditions through his own, culturally-developed point-of-view. For him, scientific humanism was fundamental. "The criteria of evidence, reasonableness and consistency are applied to all," Patton said. "The scientific method and attitude, with the findings of the various branches of science, are allied to the arts, to philosophy and to 'naturalistic mysticism,' to give us a religious approach that is at once hard-headed, tough-minded, and *appreciative and warm-hearted*... we can accept the other person's faith as part of the human scene, *and appreciate it*, without accepting it as adequate for our own use."¹³⁹ One of Patton's contemporaries, Jack Mendelsohn, wisely

cautioned against thinking we religious liberals have a uniquely accurate grasp of truth. Writing side-by-side with Patton in a feature on “Preparing to Live in World Community,” Mendelsohn urged religious liberals to “divest ourselves of the basically smug assumption that human progress and happiness are possible only in terms of our ‘realities.’”¹⁴⁰ This is an attitude which Patton does not appear to have overcome.

Further, what are we to make of the way Patton speaks frequently of “taking” and “using” ideas found in any culture, which from a white leader in a predominantly white, American institution, could easily smack of cultural imperialism? Here we come to the problem that this UU, at least, has yet to resolve. Patton says grandly, “The resources of the world are ours, the poems, music, art, prophecy, moral teachings and mystical outreach of all peoples in all times. Can we gather them together in a common setting, and through them open ourselves to the most profound influences of our fellow men?”¹⁴¹ In a pamphlet he further explains that “The entire spectrum of religious ideas, in time as well as geography, is open to the consideration of the liberal, and any idea can, if he chooses to espouse it, become a part of his religion. Thus he does not essentially take the position of having a religion that stands counterposed to the other religions of the world. His personal religion is made up of elements which he has adopted or adapted from the pool of human religion, the religious experience and expression of humanity at large.”¹⁴²

This is far from a risk-free approach, entailing dangers of not only cultural colonialism, but excessive individualism as well. It is an important issue to wrestle with, because many UUs today take a similar approach in their own religious journeys – sometimes with the active encouragement of those from whom they “borrow.”¹⁴³ In Patton’s case, even if we apply

current standards to this pioneer of an earlier era, he does seem to have much to his credit in how he borrowed from other traditions.¹⁴⁴ I appreciate the suggestion of one of our UU leaders of color, Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley, in this connection. Recognizing the complexity of these questions, Bowens-Wheatley writes, “we might begin by actively acknowledging that cultural formations and traditions come from the organic experiences of a people and are sacred; and that many religious and cultural traditions have been historically violated.”¹⁴⁵ Any religious leader today who approaches religion as broadly as Patton would do well to practice this type of mindfulness as a spiritual discipline.

Conclusion

It is somehow reassuring to find that Patton was (at times, anyway) as humble about his religious efforts as he could be about the rough edges of his personality. In the introduction to the book-length description of his work at Charles Street, he puts it this way: “the future condition of humanity will be so radically different from anything that we can now envision that any experiment made in this age can have only an incomplete and suggestive importance to the ages to come. Future [people] will look back at our present fumbings as our modern astronomers now regard the astrologers of only a few centuries ago.”¹⁴⁶ I do not think we are quite that far from Patton’s “fumbings” yet when it comes to world religions, though he might not have been able to anticipate our current fumbings toward innovations “beyond congregations.”¹⁴⁷

What *does* it mean to be a liberal religious seeker today, to draw from the full range of humanity’s Sources, to make meaning in our shrinking, interconnected, multicultural world?

What kind of worship (or other shared religious experience) does this effectively? How can it be done respectfully? Patton's work at Charles Street crystallizes – or perhaps mushrooms – these questions for me more than it answers them. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to learn more about those who aspired to a universalized Universalism over a half-century ago. And it is instructive to see how their efforts not only fed their spirits, but shaped our movement, in spite of their failures and blind spots. They beckon us to bring to life a religion for *our* time, one which nurtures the vision of one human family living in peace around the globe.

As Patton said of the Meeting House workshoppers, “We are not at the end of the play; we have declaimed only a few words of the prelude. But even so, we must live out our lives within the limitations and opportunities which our era affords us.”¹⁴⁸ And so must we today, as we continue the search for universal human experience, as we draw respectfully upon both “world religions” and our own liberal Christian roots, as we make new experiments in liberal religion and live into the multiculturalism of our age.

¹ Charles A. Howe, “He Lives Tomorrow: Clinton Lee Scott, Revitalizer of Universalism,” in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 38.

² *Ibid.*, 39.

³ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴ David Bumbaugh, “The Charles Street Meeting House: An Unfinished Dream,” in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, 2002, ed. Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 12.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷ From Fisher's 1921 book *Which Way*, quoted in *Universalism In America*, by Ernest Cassara, 253.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 254.

⁹ William F. Schulz, *Making the Manifesto: The Birth of Religious Humanism* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2002), 100.

¹⁰ Ernest Cassara, *Universalism In America* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1971), 261.

¹¹ Maryell Cleary, “Kenneth L. Patton: A Biographical Sketch,” in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 20.

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- ¹² “I consider myself to be of the genus prophet,” Patton wrote in one of his minister’s columns at the Charles Street Meeting House. (Undated column in Patton’s ministerial file shared by the Andover-Harvard Theological Library.)
- ¹³ Greeley’s career progression confirmed in an online biography at <http://www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/danamcleangreeley.html>
- ¹⁴¹⁴ Dana Greeley, “Welcome to Kenneth Patten,” dated Feb. 6, 1949. (From the Dana Greeley Papers collection at Andover-Harvard Theological Library.)
- ¹⁵ Kenneth L. Patton, “Art and Symbols for a Universal Religion,” *Universalist Leader*, October 1956, p. 220.
- ¹⁶ Maryell Cleary, “Kenneth L. Patton: A Biographical Sketch,” in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 21.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.
- ¹⁸ Kenneth L. Patton, “The Future of Universalism,” in *The Universalist Heritage: Keynote Addresses on Universalist History, Ethics and Theology*, ed. Harold J. Burkart (Syracuse: New York State Convention of Universalists, 1993), 109. Patton’s was the eleventh annual address, delivered to the 157th Annual Session of the New York Convention of Universalists on Oct. 19, 1985.
- ¹⁹ Kenneth L. Patton, *Kaggen, The Mantis - Folklore of the Cape Bushmen*, (Boston: Meeting House Press, 1976).
- ²⁰ Kenneth L. Patton, *Man’s Hidden Search*, (Boston: Meeting House Press, 1954).
- ²¹ From files held in the archives of the Wiggins Library at Meadville Lombard Theological School; files viewed, and pictures taken, on January 8, 2014. Patton files are in the Vincent Silliman collection.
- ²² From Patton’s 1965 Berry Street lecture, delivered at the UUA’s General Assembly on May 22nd of that year, accessed online at <http://www.uuma.org/Page/BSE1965>.
- ²³ All of the art, symbols and the layout of the Meeting House are summarized both in “Art and Symbols for a Universal Religion” in the October 1956 *Universalist Leader*, and in Patton’s book, *A Religion for One World* (Boston: Meeting House Press and Beacon Press, 1964).
- ²⁴ Kenneth L. Patton, “Art and Symbols for a Universal Religion,” *Universalist Leader*, October 1956, 221.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 221.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 221.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 222.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 223.
- ²⁹ From Patton’s ministerial file, shared by the Andover-Harvard Theological Library, undated. These were three of the topics of Sunday services highlighted in one November newsletter.
- ³⁰ Kenneth L. Patton, “Art and Symbols for a Universal Religion,” *Universalist Leader*, October 1956, 223.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 224.
- ³² From Patton’s ministerial file, shared by the Andover-Harvard Theological Library, undated.
- ³³ Kenneth L. Patton, “Art and Symbols for a Universal Religion,” *Universalist Leader*, October 1956, 223.
- ³⁴ From Patton’s ministerial file, shared by the Andover-Harvard Theological Library, undated.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ Order of service and sermon notes dated May 17, 1959, from the David B. Parke Papers at Andover-Harvard Theological Library.
- ³⁷ Maryell Cleary, “Kenneth L. Patton: A Biographical Sketch,” in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), quotation at p. 19.
- ³⁸ *Singing the Living Tradition* (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1993). There are only a couple of our ministers cited more than Patton.
- ³⁹ *Singing the Journey: A Supplement to Singing the Living Tradition* (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 2005). Jim Scott lists the words to his song, Let This Be A House of Peace, as “inspired by Kenneth Patton.”
- ⁴⁰ Kenneth L. Patton, “Art and Symbols for a Universal Religion,” *Universalist Leader*, October 1956, 221.
- ⁴¹ Kenneth L. Patton, *A Religion for One World: Art and Symbols for A Universal Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press and Meeting House Press, 1964), 480.
- ⁴² Dan Hotchkiss, “The Flaming Chalice,” a UUA pamphlet accessed at <http://www.uua.org/beliefs/chalice/151248.shtml>.

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- ⁴³ Kenneth L. Patton, "The Future of Universalism," in *The Universalist Heritage: Keynote Addresses on Universalist History, Ethics and Theology*, ed. Harold J. Burkart (Syracuse: New York State Convention of Universalists, 1993), 107.
- ⁴⁴ Kenneth L. Patton, *Man's Hidden Search* (Boston: Meeting House Press, 1954), 84.
- ⁴⁵ Kenneth L. Patton, *A Religion of Realities: A Philosophy of Religion*, (Boston: Meeting House Press, 1977), 13-14.
- ⁴⁶ Kenneth L. Patton, *Man's Hidden Search* (Boston: Meeting House Press, 1954), 114.
- ⁴⁷ Arthur Versluis, *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 72.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.
- ⁴⁹ William R. Murry, *Reason and Reverence: Religious Humanism for the 21st Century*, 2007 (Boston: Skinner House Books), 28.
- ⁵⁰ With journal *The Dial*, and with books published as early as the 1850s (when Lydia Maria Child's series *The Progress of Religious Ideas Through Successive Ages* came out), the Transcendentalists were bringing attention to Asian religions. (Arthur Versluis, *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993], 7.)
- ⁵¹ Ernest Cassara, "Preface," in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 1-2.
- ⁵² Arthur Versluis, *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 7.
- ⁵³ Kenneth L. Patton, "Art and Symbols for a Universal Religion," *Universalist Leader*, October 1956, 221.
- ⁵⁴ From the "Who's Who" file for Kenneth Patton shared by the Andover-Harvard Theological Library, undated.
- ⁵⁵ Alice McNary Forsey, "The Meeting House Symbols at Starr King School," in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 170.
- ⁵⁶ Direct observation as well as conversation with colleagues confirms that displays of the world religions symbols are common. Maryell Cleary describes a number of other ways the inclusive spirit of the Meeting House influenced other UU congregations, including banners that many displayed. (Maryell Cleary, "And Afterwards...", in *A Bold Experiment: the Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary [Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002], 181-182.)
- ⁵⁷ Kenneth L. Patton, "The Future of Universalism," in *The Universalist Heritage: Keynote Addresses on Universalist History, Ethics and Theology*, ed. Harold J. Burkart (Syracuse: New York State Convention of Universalists, 1993), 107.
- ⁵⁸ David Bumbaugh, "The Charles Street Meeting House: An Unfinished Dream," in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, 2002, ed. Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 16.
- ⁵⁹ For example, Emerson's "later reading of Vedantic and Confucian sources corroborated what he had learned in the Platonic school and, to a lesser extent, from Christian mysticism; he joined them all by abstracting exhortations to self-transcendence and moral strictures" (p. 58). Further, Versluis suggests that Emerson "tended to extract from the world's religious traditions moral strictures, on the one hand, and passages suggesting self-transcendence, on the other hand, *precisely because these can be so abstracted*. In the construction of a literary religion built from many sources, this abstraction is most important" (p. 62, emphasis mine). (Arthur Versluis, *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993], 72.)
- ⁶⁰ Alan Seaburg, "Meeting House Days," in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 115.
- ⁶¹ To offer just a few anecdotes, at my intern congregation, the most active and vibrant pocket of adult faith formation is in the Buddhist sangha; the adult RE prospectus at my home congregation carries offerings like Datta Kriya Yoga, Tai Chi, and Sufi practice; and scriptures and spiritual writers from outside the Judeo-Christian tradition are frequently quoted in both pulpits.
- ⁶² Conrad Wright, "Introduction," *Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism: Channing – Emerson – Parker*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 44.
- ⁶³ Warren R. Ross, "How the UUA's Principles and Purposes were shaped and how they've shaped Unitarian Universalism," *UU World*, November/December 2000.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

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- ⁶⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶⁶ Carl J. Westman, "Religion for One World," *Universalist Leader*, Feb. 1954, 31.
- ⁶⁷ Seth R. Brooks, "Why Are There Universalists?," *Universalist Leader*, March 1954, p. 65-66.
- ⁶⁸ "What Universalism Means Today," a half-column boxed list, apparently from the editors, *Universalist Leader*, Oct. 1954, 226.
- ⁶⁹ The Humiliati developed a new symbol for the new Universalism, "a cross off-center in a circle, intended to demonstrate that while Universalism had emerged from the Christian tradition, Christianity was no longer central to the Universalist gospel." (David Bumbaugh, "The Charles Street Meeting House: An Unfinished Dream," in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, 2002, ed. Maryell Cleary [Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002], 13.)
- ⁷⁰ Jack Mendelsohn, "Preparing to Live in World Community," *Universalist Leader*, Feb. 1957, 49. (Mendelsohn's piece was mirrored with another by Kenneth L. Patton under the same title.)
- ⁷¹ Ibid., 53.
- ⁷² David Bumbaugh, "The Charles Street Meeting House: An Unfinished Dream," in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), quoted on p. 13.
- ⁷³ Kingsbury Badger, "Beyond Universalism," *The Universalist Leader*, March 1957, 68.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., 69.
- ⁷⁵ Kenneth L. Patton, "Art and Symbols for a Universal Religion," *Universalist Leader*, October 1956, 224.
- ⁷⁶ "A Letter to Japan," adapted from an article published in a liberal religious journal in Japan and included in Patton's 1964 book, *A Religion for One World* (Boston: Beacon Press and Meeting House Press, 1964), p. 1.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 2.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 3.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 3.
- ⁸⁰ Thomas R. Schade, "The Road Not Taken: A Critical Response to *A Religion for One World: Art and Symbols for a Universal Religion*," in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 153-154.
- ⁸¹ "Jack Mendelsohn, "Preparing to Live in World Community," *Universalist Leader*, Feb. 1957, 54.
- ⁸² "Kenneth L. Patton: A Biographical Sketch" by Maryell Cleary, in *A Bold Experiment: the Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. by Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 19-20.
- ⁸³ Kenneth L. Patton, "Art and Symbols for a Universal Religion," *Universalist Leader*, October 1956, 223.
- ⁸⁴ Alan Seaburg, "Meeting House Days," in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 123.
- ⁸⁵ Kenneth L. Patton, "Art and Symbols for a Universal Religion," *Universalist Leader*, October 1956, 219.
- ⁸⁶ Patton explained that members "do janitorial and secretarial jobs, build furniture, wash and paint walls, teach, sing, compose, print, gather, staple and bind books and leaflets, sort type, cook – you name it. Because of all the work we do together, we have the feeling and fellowship of a family." ("Art and Symbols for a Universal Religion," *Universalist Leader*, October 1956, 224.)
- ⁸⁷ Peter Lee Scott, "Growing Up with the Charles Street Meeting House," in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 87.
- ⁸⁸ Member Paul Sawyer names as one of Patton's two distinguishing contributions that "He believed in and set up a structure allowing democratic participation and dialogue in shaping our contemporary faith." (Paul Sawyer, "The Charles Street Meeting House and a Naturalistic Philosophy of Religion," in *A Bold Experiment: the Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. by Maryell Cleary [Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002], p. 108.)
- ⁸⁹ Charlotte Sawyer Fish, "Personal Experiences at the Charles Street Meeting House," in *A Bold Experiment: the Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. by Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 108.
- ⁹⁰ Peter Tufts Richardson, *The Boston Religion: Unitarianism In Its Capital City* (Rockland, Maine: Red Barn Publishing, 2003), 131.

⁹¹ Charles A. Howe, "He Lives Tomorrow: Clinton Lee Scott, Revitalizer of Universalism," in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 44.

⁹² Charles Howe writes that "By the mid-1950s the controversy surround the Meeting House had largely subsided." (Charles A. Howe, "He Lives Tomorrow: Clinton Lee Scott, Revitalizer of Universalism," in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary [Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002], 53.)

⁹³ Peter Lee Scott, "Growing Up with the Charles Street Meeting House," in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 83.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Peter Tufts Richardson, *The Boston Religion: Unitarianism In Its Capital City* (Rockland, Maine: Red Barn Publishing, 2003), 140. Richardson has harsh words for the lack of vision and bureaucratic inertia of the UUA, which squandered opportunities to support the Meeting House experiment in ways that could benefit the wider movement, and ultimately called the mortgage and sold the property to a developer.

⁹⁶ Charlotte Sawyer Fish, "Personal Experiences at the Charles Street Meeting House," in *A Bold Experiment: the Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. by Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 108.

⁹⁷ Charles A. Howe, "He Lives Tomorrow: Clinton Lee Scott, Revitalizer of Universalism," in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, 2002, ed. Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 53-54.

⁹⁸ "The Minister's Column" from newsletter in Patton's ministerial file, shared by the Andover-Harvard Theological Library, undated.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Some examples:

- A reviewer of *A Religion for One World* wrote that he "was tempted to throw the book aside" while reading, and described Patton's "capacity at times to make the reader cry aloud with shock and dismay, sometimes to squirm with pain at his unethetized probing and sometimes to shout with delight at the right point rightly made." But in the end his main criticism is that the book had too few readers, concluding, "The book is worth every penny of its price. Some may think this book a bitter medicine, and others, a nourishing tonic. In either case, we take it to our good." (John Wallace Laws, "One Man's Meat...", *Unitarian Universalist Register-Leader*, Mid-Summer 1964 , 19.)
- An April 1954 Patton article in *The Universalist Leader*, "The Thickening of Liberal Religion," drew a one-page "reaction from our readers" in the June issue, which the editors titled "We Need Not Be Overwhelmed by Mr. Patton" and printed in full. A Mr. Theodore Webb characterized many of Patton's points as "half-truths," describing in brief the truth and falsity in each. The writer also defends those who are called to a pastoral type of ministry rather than the prophetic type that Patton espouses. But he agrees with the thrust of Patton's view, closing: "I believe [Patton] is profoundly right when he says, 'We must discover the valid visions emerging in our own time . . . and moving into those visions we may find a new vigor and youthfulness that will save us and use us.' Let us have more discussions of those 'visions,' for they *are* among us."
- In Sept. that year, the editors of *The Universalist Leader* express their disagreement with a recent Patton sermon, in which the prophet severely criticized the leaders of the A.U.A. and the U.C.A. "... we are convinced that the Patton sermon was ill-timed, inaccurate ad quite unjust," the *Leader's* editors said. They closed by acknowledging that "all men make mistakes," including denominational leaders, and including "even Kenneth Patton."

¹⁰² Personal communication with James Hobart (who interned at Arlington Street during Patton's Meeting House days, and met him then).

¹⁰³ Peter Tufts Richardson, *The Boston Religion: Unitarianism In Its Capital City* (Rockland, Maine: Red Barn Publishing, 2003), 140.

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- ¹⁰⁴ Charles A. Reinhardt, "Patton Rites," in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, 2002, ed. Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 37.
- ¹⁰⁵ Robert L. Cope, "What Makes the 'Young Turks' Run?", *Universalist Leader*, Feb. 1957, 37.
- ¹⁰⁶ "Dr. Scott On Our Opportunities and Needs," an item from the editors of *The Universalist Leader*, June 1954 issue, excerpted Dr. Scott's address to the Massachusetts Universalist Convention.
- ¹⁰⁷ Kenneth L. Patton, "Art and Symbols for a Universal Religion," *Universalist Leader*, October 1956, 224.
- ¹⁰⁸ From Patton's ministerial file, shared by the Andover-Harvard Theological Library, undated.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁰ Kenneth L. Patton, *A Religion for One World* (Boston: Beacon Press and Meeting House Press, 1964), 71.
- ¹¹¹ Mark D. Morrison-Reed, *Black Pioneers in a White Denomination* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1980), 177.
- ¹¹² Additionally, the librarian from Andover-Harvard who helped me noted that, beyond those things I bought copies of and reviewed directly, what she observed in the files related to Sunday services suggested that usually Patton went deep with one tradition (even on myth or poem or piece of art); the stringing together of multiple pieces from multiple traditions, as in the Mid-Winter Festival, appeared to her to be more the exception than the rule.
- ¹¹³ From a responsive reading titled "The Final Country," in ministerial file, shared by the Andover-Harvard Theological Library, undated.
- ¹¹⁴ Charles A. Reinhardt, "Patton Rites," in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, 2002, ed. Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 99.
- ¹¹⁵ Ibid., 100.
- ¹¹⁶ Jaeger, James A. "Declaring for Color: Kenneth Patton, Race 'Nonsense,' and the New Universalism." *Journal of Unitarian Universalist History* XXXV (2011-2012), 140-155.
- ¹¹⁷ Personal communication with James Hobart, who interned at Arlington Street during Patton's Meeting House days, and met him then. I was particularly curious whether, given his racial wake-up call, Patton had gone to Selma. Jim's response: "To my knowledge, Kenneth Patton did not participate in the 1965 Selma-Montgomery events. However, that does not necessarily mean he did not. Patton is not in the list of minister participants in Richard Leonard's book, *Call to Selma*, but that list is not a complete list. Some participants were omitted."
- ¹¹⁸ From Patton's ministerial file, shared by the Andover-Harvard Theological Library, undated.
- ¹¹⁹ Charlotte Sawyer Fish, "Personal Experiences at the Charles Street Meeting House," in *A Bold Experiment: the Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. by Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 107.
- ¹²⁰ It is easy to read Patton into Fowler's descriptions of stage 6, for example: "Universalizers are often more honored and revered after their death than during their lives... Their community is universal in extent. Particularities are cherished because they are vessels of the universal, and thereby valuable apart from any utilitarian considerations. Life is both loved and held to loosely. Such persons are ready for fellowship with persons at any of the other stages and from any other faith traditions." (James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, [New York: HarperCollins, 1981], 201.)
- ¹²¹ The self-transforming mind not only has mastered the skills of all previous stages, such as being able "to subordinate their desires to the needs of others" (the socialized mind) and able "to empathize with others without being torn by conflict" (the self-authored mind), but is also "less likely to see the world in terms of dichotomies and polarities," and "prefers practices that promote the sense of a 'full humanity.'" (From Robert Kegan's mental models for making sense of the world, as articulated by Jennifer Garvey Berger, PhD, and presented in *Religious Education for A Changing World* by Dr. Mark Hicks, January 2014.)
- ¹²² As presented at the October 2013 Heartland UU Ministers Association chapter retreat, in a facilitated program called "Who Are Our Neighbors?"
- ¹²³ Maryell Cleary, "Kenneth L. Patton: A Biographical Sketch," in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 20.
- ¹²⁴ James A. Jaeger, "Declaring for Color: Kenneth Patton, Race 'Nonsense,' and the New Universalism." *Journal of Unitarian Universalist History* XXXV (2011-2012), 151.

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- ¹²⁵ Maryell Cleary, "Kenneth L. Patton: A Biographical Sketch," in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 20-21.
- ¹²⁶ Reported in "A Personal Experience of Brotherhood" in the *Unitarian Christian Register* for Dec. 1947, as quoted in Maryell Cleary, "Kenneth L. Patton: A Biographical Sketch," by Maryell Cleary, in *A Bold Experiment: The Charles Street Universalist Meeting House*, ed. Maryell Cleary (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2002), 21.
- ¹²⁷ James A. Jaeger, "Declaring for Color: Kenneth Patton, Race 'Nonsense,' and the New Universalism." *Journal of Unitarian Universalist History* XXXV (2011-2012), 150-151.
- ¹²⁸ Kenneth L. Patton, "Preparing to Live in World Community," *Universalist Leader*, Feb. 1957, 52. (Patton's piece was mirrored with another by Jack Mendelsohn under the same title.)
- ¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.
- ¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.
- ¹³¹ James A. Jaeger "Declaring for Color: Kenneth Patton, Race 'Nonsense,' and the New Universalism." *Journal of Unitarian Universalist History* XXXV (2011-2012), 153.
- ¹³² Stephen Prothero, *God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions that Run the World*, (HarperCollins: New York, 2010), 5-6.
- ¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- ¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- ¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- ¹³⁶ "A Letter to Japan," adapted from an article published in a liberal religious journal in Japan and included in Patton's 1964 book, *A Religion for One World* (Boston: Beacon Press and Meeting House Press, 1964), p. 3.
- ¹³⁷ Stephen Prothero, *God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions that Run the World*, (HarperCollins: New York, 2010), 7.
- ¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.
- ¹³⁹ Kenneth L. Patton, "Art and Symbols for a Universal Religion," *Universalist Leader*, October 1956, 220.
- ¹⁴⁰ Jack Mendelsohn, "Preparing to Live in World Community," *Universalist Leader*, Feb. 1957, 54. (Mendelsohn's piece was mirrored with another by Kenneth L. Patton under the same title.)
- ¹⁴¹ Kenneth L. Patton, "Preparing to Live in World Community," *Universalist Leader*, Feb. 1957, 53. (Mendelsohn's piece was mirrored with another by Jack Mendelsohn under the same title.)
- ¹⁴² Peter Tufts Richardson, *The Boston Religion: Unitarianism In Its Capital City* (Rockland, Maine: Red Barn Publishing, 2003), 133.
- ¹⁴³ My own most important spiritual teacher, Sri Eknath Easwaran, grew up Hindu and became a proponent of the perennial philosophy, and a mystic who lived it. He spoke of the religious traditions of India as that country's gift to the world, a spiritual legacy belonging to all of humanity. He also encouraged those who took up his multi-faith method of meditation to include selections from their own religious heritage in their spiritual reading, choice of mantram, and meditation passages, along with those of many other traditions (and he himself spoke and wrote extensively about mystics and mystical writings from many traditions). Further, one of my mentors, the executive minister in my home congregation (a white woman), studies with a teacher of Native American heritage, and has been encouraged to share these teachings as part of her ministry.
- ¹⁴⁴ My own gut evaluation of Patton, having reviewed a significant sample of his work – though still a modest portion of the total – is that in terms of the "Considerations for Cultural Borrowing" currently put forward by the UUA's Office of Multiculturalism (<http://www.uua.org/multiculturalism/introduction/misappropriation/23371.shtml>), Patton does well in the categories of Motivation, Goal, Context, Preparation, and Language, is mixed in terms of Relationship, and would find the Identity part irrelevant in that UU identity was not important to him (unfortunately); I won't hazard a guess as to how he did in the categories of Adaptation.
- ¹⁴⁵ Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley, "Cornrows, Kwanzaa and Confusion: the Dilemma of Cultural Racism and Misappropriation," in *In the Middle of A Journey: Readings in Unitarian Universalist Faith Development*, ed. Richard S. Gilbert (iUniverse: Bloomington, Indiana, 2013), 324.
- ¹⁴⁶ Kenneth L. Patton, *A Religion for One World* (Boston: Beacon Press and Meeting House Press, 1964), 6.

¹⁴⁷ The UUA, under president Peter Morales, is trying to encourage innovation with a focus they call Congregations and Beyond (<http://www.uua.org/vision/beyond/index.shtml>).

¹⁴⁸ Kenneth L. Patton, *A Religion for One World* (Boston: Beacon Press and Meeting House Press, 1964), 7.