



*All God's Children  
No one left behind*

# The Christian Universalist

Published by the Christian Universalist Association

[www.thechristianuniversalist.org](http://www.thechristianuniversalist.org)

May 2011

## The unsung heroes of Christian Universalism

By Eric Stetson

Lost in the hullabaloo surrounding the publication of megachurch pastor **Rob Bell's** new book, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*, is the fact that various ministers and evangelists have long been preaching the message of God's all-inclusive love and the hope that all souls will be saved in the end.

They've done this by writing books, going on speaking tours, and starting websites and organizations to spread this uplifting interpretation of the Christian Gospel.

This is nothing new and it has been



Eric Stetson

going on not only for years, but for centuries. However, every time a celebrity minister comes out in favor of the wider hope of universal salvation, or even hints that they might believe it, it seems.

I would like to give a shout-out to a few people I know personally, who are not celebrities and have not received significant media attention, but whose tireless work for the cause of Christian Universalism has prepared the ground in recent years for celebrities such as **Bishop Carlton Pearson** and perhaps now **Rob Bell** to join the cause for a more inclusive Christianity that doesn't condemn people to eternal hell. I hope that the important role these unsung heroes have played in the decline of belief in eternal damnation and the advance of universalism will someday be more widely recognized.

First, I would like to recognize **Rev. Kalen Fristad**. He is the author of *Destined For Salvation: God's Promise to Save Everyone*. This is

*Continued on page 4*

### *Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*

By Rob Bell

Copyright 2011 Harper Collins Publishers; 200 pages

Review by Rhett Ellis

It has topped the sales charts in the Christian publishing industry. It has ranked in the top ten on Amazon. Christian Churches and even one seminary have held special meetings to speak against it. It has ignited debate throughout the Christian world. It is **Rob Bell's Love Wins**.

**Rob Bell** claims that he is technically not a Universalist on the grounds that God does not force anyone into His Kingdom. However, by historical definition, Rob Bell's message in **Love Wins** can only be described as Universalism. God accepts repentance in the afterlife and eventually all may be saved.

**Love Wins** is delightfully well written theology with a number of interconnected themes. The language of the book is non-technical, free in form, and flowing. With references to pop culture, Eminem and Star Wars included, it is an easily accessible read for theologians and non-theologian

*Continued on page 3*

### *Inside this issue*

<i>Board of Directors</i> .....	2
<i>Word of Mouth</i> .....	2
<i>From the Coordinator</i> .....	3
<i>Review of Rob Bell's Love Wins</i> .....	1, 3
<i>Unsung heroes of Christian Universalism</i> .....	1, 4
<i>Responses to questions about Jesus and the cross</i> .....	5
<i>New wiki about Christian Universalism launched</i> .....	6
<i>Christian Universalists urged to show kindness, love</i> .....	7
<i>Messages from Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship</i> .....	8

## The Christian Universalist

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

*Deadline is the 25th of the month preceding the month of publication. Reports and photos may be emailed to the editor Pat Moauro at: [patmor123@gmail.com](mailto:patmor123@gmail.com)*

*Please send all photos and illustrations as separate JPEGs at high resolution of at least 300 dpi.*

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

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## Word of mouth

... with Pat Moauro, Editor

### Eternal torment in a fiery hell not from a loving God

It's an honor and a privilege to serve as the new Editor of this monthly electronic newsletter, *The Christian Universalist*, published by the Christian Universalist Association (CUA). Thank you to **Rich Koster**, CUA Coordinator; **Eric Stetson**, CUA founder and current Board member; Board member **David Spatz** and other Board members for helping the new Editor put this newsletter together.

While surfing the Internet about a year ago I came across the CUA website. After researching it and other Christian Universalist-friendly websites, I realized that I have been a Christian Universalist for many decades - I just didn't know what it was called. For more than five decades I haven't believed in a fiery hell where "sinners" are supposedly consigned to eternal torment.

Early in my spiritual journey, I also learned from my study of the Bible that the God I worshiped was far too loving to even think of such barbaric punishment for his children.

Just as a loving human father, or mother, in their right minds would not even think of holding their child's hand on a red-hot stove element for any length of time, I could never believe that a loving spiritual father would punish his children in the fires of a mythical hell for all eternity. The thought is simply too grotesque to even contemplate.

I learned that many church leaders in the third and fourth century fell away from the teachings of Jesus and his apostles, as foretold in the scriptures, particularly the New Testament. This highly politicized church organization deviated from the beautiful and simple truths and love-based teachings of Jesus, such as the succinct summary in his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.

The prominent, powerful religious elite brought in their own teachings, including the abominable dogma of eternal punishment in a fiery hell, likely as a means to instil fear and to control their followers. Sadly, they did bring fiery judgement upon Bible readers and



Pat Moauro

dissenters by burning them at the stake.

I managed to learn the truth about the false teaching of eternal torment in a fiery hell early on in my spiritual quest. However, for several decades I continued to believe other doctrines and creeds taught by Fundamentalist-type religious groups, who believed in an exclusive, rather than an inclusive spirituality.

No religious organization – not one – has a monopoly on the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. All religions contain varying degrees of truth, and all spiritual and religious seekers who sincerely follow the still small voice, the Inner Light, the Christ within, their Higher Self, a reasoned approach to the Bible, and the dictates of their Godly conscience will discover the truth for themselves.

After considerable searching, studying and mental anguish, I eventually realized that our loving Creator truly wants only the best for all of his children – not just those calling themselves "Christian" but for all, no matter what race, religion, culture or social standing. I guess that makes me a Universalist, and a Christian one at that because I love the teachings of Jesus so much.

God loves me, and everyone, with an everlasting love. He will never leave us or forsake us, no matter how badly we bungle and stumble along our spiritual path. Or, until we wake up to the truth that God will eventually save everyone - no matter how long it takes. cu

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## From the Coordinator

# CUA Ordination Program “has virtually exploded” in growth

... with Rich Koster, Coordinator

Thanks to the few people who responded to the question about the crucifixion of Jesus. I was hoping for more though, and maybe when you read the responses I received you will feel moved to share your own thoughts. If you do, please send them to me soon!

When the CUA was founded there was a keen awareness that there are few if any specifically Christian Universalist congregations in the United States, much less the world. There are universalist heritage churches and there are universalist churches and there are Christian churches where the idea of God saving all people seems to be at the heart of their faith. But none with the words, “Christian Universalist” in their name.

Likewise, there are no “Christian Universalist” seminaries or theological schools. And it just stood to reason that the best way to start planting



**Rich Koster**

Christian Universalist congregations is to begin training men and women to be Christian Universalist pastors, teachers, and leaders of groups. So one of the first initiatives taken by the founding CUA Board of Directors was to design an ordination course to provide that training. In 2009 four people, two men and two women, completed that course and were ordained. Another man who had a lot of religious education and ministry experience was also ordained,

and this past October two more men were ordained at our third annual conference.

For whatever reason, our Ordination Program has virtually exploded these past several months. We now have 25 men and women in or very soon entering our course of training, with more in the on-deck circle. By July that number could be 30.

No one foresaw this astonishing surge of interest – serious interest – and life commitment. We are receiving applications from some very, very capable people. These folks are in some instances making some significant sacrifices and life-changing decisions in order to pursue a CUA ordination.

We are humbled by this amazing incursion of people wanting us to ordain them. Humbled, and perhaps even a little apprehensive.

What does this mean, after all? What if the numbers keep rising? What if by the end of the year we are looking at 40 persons on their way to a CUA ordination? How will they pursue their ministries? Where will they find their support systems, their networking and community with brothers and sisters in faith? What will be our role and our responsibility after we send them out as ordained clergyfolk?

The Board of Directors is thinking about these questions. I am thinking about them. And I am sure our ordinands are thinking about them. And who are they? In the next issue we will tell you who they are. **cu**

## Review of Rob Bell’s Love Wins ... continued from page 1

alike. Bell asks: What is God’s great purpose for life? What is God’s character? What is the future? His answers are not orthodox, and that brings up the book’s weak point.

Bell claims that his thoughts are well within the confines of Orthodox Christianity. They are not. The reader may assume that Bell’s assertion either stems from a lack of understanding of the meaning of Orthodoxy or a desire not to sever ties with the Fundamentalist/Orthodox Christian community-- after all, with his Nooma videos on Youtube, Bell is a favorite resource for Christian Youth ministers. Bell encourages free-thought, asking questions, and accepting differences of belief. Not only is this not Orthodoxy, it is the profound opposite of Orthodoxy.

**Love Wins** presents God’s Love as the primary theme of all existence. Love is seen as the source, meaning, and eventual destiny of all of life. One need not be a confessing or practising Christian to experience and practice it. Bell insists that this is not to say that Jesus and His message are unimportant. He argues that the non-Christian’s experience of God is nevertheless a Christian experience.

Bell does not reject the concept of Hell, at least not entirely. Hell in his understanding is living without God, whether in the present life or afterlife. A person filled with hatred is in a self-made Hell. God does not force himself upon the individual. God loves, expresses love, and waits for the individual to turn to life. Although abbreviated, Bell’s scholarship is extensive and nuanced. Bell tosses several dogma-challenging asides. For instance, he states in passing that the author of Hebrews was a woman. Why may this not be true? After all, for centuries, anonymous was more often than not, a woman.

**Love Wins** is a stimulating read with a distinctly verbal feel. It challenges the most basic assumptions of condemnation-focused Christianity. It presents a loving, parent-picture of God and predicts a hopeful outcome for our existence. There are a number of surprises even for the most well-read Universalist.

### *Christian Universalist Association*

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#### **Treasurer’s Report for April 2011:**

Beginning Balance:	<b>\$3,329.61</b>
Income:	<b>\$ 870.00</b>
Expenses:	<b>\$ 378.70</b>
Balance April 30, 2011:	<b>\$4,020.61</b>

**Sharon McCauley**

Treasurer



## The unsung heroes of Christian Universalism ... *continued from page 1*

one of the more readable, thoughtful, and Biblically sound books about Christian Universalism written in recent times. Kalen has served as a pastor in the United Methodist Church for over 30 years. Now semi-retired, he travels across America in a trailer, going from church to church to speak about the Gospel of universal salvation. He has already done this for several years and has spoken at hundreds of churches, not only Methodist but also various other denominations.

An admirer of **Kalen Fristad's** work, I contacted him in early 2007 and asked him to serve as the chair of the board of directors of a new organization I was forming at the time, the *Christian Universalist Association*. He accepted the position, helped me recruit highly qualified board members, and has done an excellent job leading the CUA board for the past few years, ever since the organization was founded. *The Christian Universalist Association* is now the premier ecumenical organization representing all types of Christians who believe in a universalist interpretation of the Gospel, with more than 1,000 members across America and worldwide.

Secondly, I would like to recognize **Rick Spencer**. Rick is a former Baptist minister, and he's not someone you're likely to hear much about, because he was never interested in self-promotion and he has mostly retired from public ministry. But for several years in the mid to late 2000s, he was one of the most important evangelists and organizers whose work brought hundreds of people into the Christian Universalist movement — many of whom have gone on to start their own ministries, write books, and themselves bring numerous souls into the cause.

### Popular "Inclusion" conferences

**Rick Spencer** organized four annual "Inclusion" conferences from 2005 through 2008, some of which were attended by more than 200 people from all over the United States and Canada. Speakers at these conferences included some of the greatest modern-

day evangelists who had been writing and speaking about the salvation of all through Jesus Christ, in some cases for decades, in house churches and small nondenominational churches and through newsletters and websites — people like **Dr. Harold Lovelace**, a Bible scholar and author who had been preaching Christian Universalism for over 50 years; **Willie Cripps**, a former United Pentecostal Church pastor; **John Gavazzoni**, a brilliant writer and engaging preacher; **Charles Slagle**, an author, former pastor, and musician; **Robert Rutherford**, a prophetic psalmist and hip pastor of a cutting-edge nondenominational church; and many others.

**Rick Spencer's** conferences were the primary place where Christians, especially those coming from an Evangelical or Charismatic background, could hear speakers they would be able to resonate with who were talking about the Gospel of universal salvation, and where they could meet and mingle with each other, make connections and get encouraged to start their own ministry projects to spread this wonderful message.

I attended **Rick Spencer's** Inclusion conferences three years in a row, and I can honestly say that had it not been for those powerful formative experiences of the early 21st century Christian Universalist movement, I probably never would have founded the *Christian Universalist Association* or written my book, *Christian Universalism: God's Good News For All People*.

**Rick Spencer** may not be remembered outside the movement, but I can guarantee you that he is very much remembered and admired by many people who have played key roles in the movement over the past decade.

### Tentmaker Ministries

Finally, I would like to recognize the man without whose internet evangelism Christian Universalism might never have been rediscovered and become a prominent and rapidly growing movement in recent years: **Gary Amirault**. Gary's website, *Tentmaker Ministries*, was one of the first and most substantive resources for Christians considering a universalist view of

salvation.

Even though Gary himself is mostly interested in Bible study, not organized religion, his work played a major part in getting the ball rolling for later developments such as the Inclusion conferences and the CUA.

It seems that most people I've ever talked to who have become Christian Universalists have, at one time or another, encountered Tentmaker and benefitted from reading some of the articles on that site.

But this article is not intended to provide an exhaustive list. My point is, people who are talking about **Rob Bell's** recent (possible) embrace of the idea of universal salvation should realize that he is actually just the tip of the iceberg. Below the surface, under the radar screen of the media, there are and have been plenty of people without whose courageous, foundation-building work there probably never would have been a book like *Love Wins* by **Rob Bell**.

Christian Universalism is not about a few celebrity ministers who are suddenly inventing a new heretical type of Christianity. Hardly. It is a movement and belief system with a rich history and many heroes and workers in the vineyard, both in the modern era and the ancient church.

As we praise Pastor **Rob Bell** for his courage in writing his book and facing a great deal of public criticism because of his celebrity status, let us put his work in context and give props to those who have been saying the same things for years. cu

*This article appeared on <http://www.ericstetson.com/2011/03/the-unsung-heroes-of-christian-universalism/> the website and blog of **Eric W. Stetson**, author, nonprofit entrepreneur and executive, ordained minister and progressive spiritual leader. Eric draws inspiration from a wide variety of religious traditions. Eric founded the *Christian Universalist Association* in 2007 and served as its Executive Director through 2010. He continues to serve on the CUA's board of directors and ordination committee. Eric, who lives in Northern Virginia, can be reached by email at [ericstetson@yahoo.com](mailto:ericstetson@yahoo.com)*

## Readers respond to questions about Jesus and the cross

**Rich Koster**, Coordinator of the Christian Universalist Association, posed the following questions in the April issue of the CUA newsletter:

“What happened when Jesus died on the cross? Did he take away the sins of all human beings who ever live on this planet? Did he bear all that sin in his body so that when he died we, too, died to our sin, so that when God raised him up from death we were all raised up with him?”

“When Jesus died on the cross, a violent and terrible death that mirrors the awful violence and darkness that shows up in human society throughout all the ages, was that the victory of God over the forces of evil? In the cross of Jesus, were we all rescued from the power of sin and the power of death?”

“These are two of the most common ideas about what took place when Jesus died on the cross.

“What do you think?”

Following are some of the responses received from readers:

*In the April issue of the CUA newsletter you asked members to respond to your question about their view of the cross. I am responding to state my opinion that I don't agree with either of the two options you mentioned for what is the significance of Jesus' death of martyrdom.*

*I am surprised that you only mentioned the Atonement and the Christus Victor views of the cross. Although these may be the most common views in Christianity as a whole, among liberal Christians another view of the cross is also very common, i.e. the idea that the cross was a demonstration of the love of God and the willingness of the God-possessed human to endure any suffering, bear any*

*burden, in order to stand for spiritual truth, justice, and righteousness. I don't know if this view actually has a name, but I think it's worth a mention.*

*Such a “demonstrational” view of the cross is the one I agree with the most.*

*There is also another view held by some liberal Christians which is that the cross was simply a tragedy which reflects the human tendency to sin, i.e. that the crucifixion of Jesus was an unfortunate event that people should look to as a noteworthy example - perhaps THE most noteworthy example - of how the world often rejects those whom they should be supporting and celebrating.*

*I also agree with that view, but I think it only captures part of the significance of the cross of Christ.*

*In any case, it seemed to me that you did not provide enough options when you asked the CUA membership about the cross. Polls that only mention some of the options and omit other ones which are also significant, are not generally reliable in their results.*

*JMHO.*

**“Eric”**

*The meaning of the cross was expressed in language appropos to the first century Jews who were followers of Jesus. I don't think they expected Jesus to die on the cross, but rather to establish the kingdom. When he was condemned to the cross, it produced a dilemma - was Jesus a failed messiah, or was something else happening? What they saw was not a failed Messiah, but a high priest making atonement for the people. The imagery of the role of the high priest and of sacrifices was common to them.*

*What they saw was the paschal lamb. This atonement was unlike that of the current Jewish sacrificial system, but was an atonement that included all people. I think the powerful message of the cross is the persistence of grace over adversity. This is a lesson for us all. Whatever the circumstance, no matter how tragic or heinous, grace still abounds. Defeat is not final. Tragedy does not have the upper hand. Grace, as **Rob Bell** suggests, means that “love wins.”*

*With the cross, it is important to understand what it meant to Jesus' followers. However, we do not think in terms of blood atonement today, that is not how problems are resolved. We need to take their understanding of the cross and put it into a modern context. What does sacrifice mean to us today? Is sacrifice important? What is repentance? Is it necessary? How do we handle tragedy? What does the “Kingdom of God” mean for us today? How do we fulfill the Divine Plan in the world? These questions - and certainly many more - are posed by the cross today.*

**Joel Bjorling**

*When Jesus Christ died on the Cross, I think he manifested the God who is pure Love.*

*He died for love and life. He demonstrated the power of love over hate and life over death. Whenever I look at the Cross, it reminds me of Universal Salvation, because it points in all the cardinal directions.*

*The essence of Universal Salvation is that God is Love.*

**Adam Triggs**

*More responses will appear in the June issue of this newsletter.*

# New Christian Universalism wiki: AgapeWiki.org launched

**William Henry Roll**, of the Los Angeles area, has created an online wiki about Christian Universalism. It uses the same software as Wikipedia.

William, a sustaining member of the *Christian Universalist Association*, describes himself as an "Independent Religious Institutions Professional." He said he believes that this new wiki "will be a very powerful tool for the advancement of the doctrine."

As Administrator of the site, located at **Agapewiki.org**, William will be responsible for maintaining it. He noted that AgapeWiki can easily be moved



**William Henry Roll**

by a knowledgeable person to another server if that is ever desirable. For example, an organization may want to assume control over the wiki. William,

who launched the wiki April 23, 2011, also designed the logo below.

AgapeWiki is intended to be a free-content encyclopedia and information center for Christian Universalism that anyone can edit. Anything related to this subject can be included. As an encyclopedia-type collection about a limited subject area, it will also allow some leeway. Initial standards for entries can be found at About AgapeWiki. You can edit these standards.

"You are invited to contribute and to edit articles that are not your own," William said. "You are also invited to invite others to contribute items of information and to edit articles that are not their own."

Even if you are unfamiliar with making entries on a wiki, just go to **Agapewiki.org**. It is fairly easy. If you have problems with the interface, you can always send the articles to William, the site Administrator, by email, and he will enter them. Later, he said, "I'm sure you will want to do that yourself!"

He also suggested it would be best to create a free account before entering any information.

**William Henry Roll**, OSL (*Order of St. Luke*), can be reached at: [whroll@alumni.sandiego.edu](mailto:whroll@alumni.sandiego.edu); [whroll@gmail.com](mailto:whroll@gmail.com); Blog: *Maranatha - maranatha.us*; Wiki: *AgapeWiki - agapewiki.org* Facebook: [facebook.com/whroll](https://www.facebook.com/whroll); phone (760) 278-4121.

## Interest in Maryland group meetings growing

**David Spatz** has reported to fellow Board members of the *Christian Universalist Association (CUA)* that two more people have indicated interest in meetings the fledgling CU group plans to hold in David's home area of Maryland.

"It appears the note in the (April) newsletter garnered some interest in the soon-to-happen meetings here in Maryland," David said.

"I received emails from **Ronald Gillespie** and **Clyde Ragland** and added them to my list, put-

ting us just right about 10 now - perfect start! A primary task of mine now is finalizing our first meeting place for Sunday afternoons. I will keep you posted on how that goes."

**Rich Koster**, CUA Coordinator, also reported to the Board recently that two new members in Louisville, Kentucky have joined the association, and they will be discussing the prospect of starting a CU group in their area.

"I'll be meeting with them soon," Rich said.

## Light of the World Ministries expands to U.S.

*Light of the World Ministries*, Emerald Australia, has expanded to the United States. **Michael and Diane Nevins** started *Light of the World Retreats*, an outreach of Union Life Ministries, in October 2010.

They hold monthly retreats on Friday and Saturday at their home in Jackson, Michigan, USA.

"We teach the unconditional loving kindness of the Father to all men," the Nevins said in an email to CUA. "The message in Righteousness of a Father that 'judges no man' has been lost today in the minds of humanity bound by religion.

"We believe that the time for the country to see the True God and Father of Jesus has come upon us and we proclaim that message of peace to all. To know the true God is life eternal."

Light of the World Retreats  
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**AgapeWiki**  
Christian Universalism

## Website dedicated to Christian Universalism

Another website dedicated to spreading Christian Universalism is: Hearing The Truth Of God (A Website Dedicated To Promoting Truth): <http://www.hearingthetruthofgod.com/>. Owner is **Tom Kissinger**.



# Christian Universalists urged to demonstrate kindness, love

By David Spatz

I'd like to comment on our attitudes and how we should strive to love others. I love a good debate, but sometimes these things just turn nasty and accomplish nothing.

Sometimes the comments I see by Christian Universalists actually resemble those of Fundamentalists, in the sense of: "we have the truth and you don't", as we proceed to hammer people with why Christian Universalism is true.

Now there is surely mixed motivation behind this. We want to be right. Everybody does. But if people looking in on these debates see things get mean-spirited or detect a lack of forgiveness and grace on our parts, they are likely just to chalk the truly good news up as "religion" and may tune out this wonderful truth: God is not a monster who will torture all who have not done, said, or believed certain things about him forever without mercy; rather, God is love and the Savior of the entire world and he wants the best for us!

## Maintain spirit of understanding

What wonderful news that is! I just hope we maintain a spirit of understanding when dealing with all people, even those who may really irritate us. The majority of such folks are likely not going to change their minds - they are utterly convinced that they are right, and believe that we (as well as most of the rest of the human race, all God's children) are heretical and dangerous, deceiving people into spending eternity in hell.

This is clearly a terrible, warped view of God. I have said before that I believe it to be "satanic," in that only the most evil being imaginable would do something like that to his own creatures. And, there is the old saying that people tend to resemble



David Spatz

the gods they serve. It's surprising how accurate that statement turns out to be oftentimes. We do not want to resemble that God by being unmerciful and downright mean.

The point of this is that in many cases we need to strive not to defeat this warped view of God by behaving as some Fundamentalists do, but by actively striving to resemble the God that we serve, seen most perfectly in the life of Christ, healing and helping people. We can do this, not with the goal of getting them "saved" or to coerce a "sinner's prayer" out of them or any other kind of ulterior motive, but out of love.

## Rob Bell book fuels ire

It is true the Fundamentalists are back on the attack. **Rob Bell's** book *Love Wins* has fueled their ire. We see religious leaders such as **John Piper** effectively excommunicating **Rob Bell** and consigning him to the realm of apostates.

Piper represents many people with hardened hearts to the true good news. That true good news is not Piper's bad news which is: "accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior or burn in hell for all of eternity," but that all people will receive the mercy of God, who loves each person he has created and wants us to grow in this love

by practising this love to our fellow creatures!

We don't necessarily have to sit back and let the fundamentalists beat us up, but let us not be unnecessarily argumentative; instead let's go out and DO acts of kindness and love. Think of the hours we might be spending online or otherwise debating with fundamentalists. Couldn't we take a few of those hours and go perform some acts of service to needy people?

You see, the battle has already been won. We don't have to convert the world to save them from the pit of an eternal hell. God is going to save all people ultimately. But it is wonderful to see people released from this view of God as a monster to be feared.

Whether they admit it or not, people with this view of God as a being who created an eternal hell especially for sinful people to torment them - a God who is waiting for them to screw up and then to punish them instead of welcoming them with open arms - will generally spend an awful lot of time trying to make sure they are in the clear with him. It is awfully hard genuinely to love such a being or have a relationship with him like a brother or Father. **cu**

*This edited article is from <http://www.noeternaltorment.blogspot.com>, a blog written by **David Spatz**, a Board member of the Christian Universalist Association (CUA). David, who was recently ordained as a CUA minister serving in Eastern Maryland, is working to get a new group of Universalist Christians started in the area around his home town of Pasadena. He can be reached by email at [daspatz@gmail.com](mailto:daspatz@gmail.com)*

# Avoid cynicism, “open your hearts to wonder”

From the **Rev. Anita Farber-Robertson**:

“...Cynicism protects us from being duped, from being hoodwinked, from being somehow fooled into believing that life is wonderful, that people are good, that peace is possible, that God is love. Cynicism may be a protection against an imagined shame...but it is also a protection against a spiritual life. It is not by accident that the language of a spiritual life, is of faith. The life of the spirit requires an opening of the heart and mind, a presumption of trust, the disarming of the layers of protection and a willingness to risk disappointment as well as joy.

That is what we need today, this Easter ...open heart, open mind, and a willingness to risk disappointment, so that we might also chance experiencing true joy.

**Tom Owen-Towle**, minister emeritus of the First Unitarian Church in San Diego has said that “Cynicism is spiritual treason.”

“Cynicism is spiritual treason.” Remember that - not only for Easter, but for the days that spread before you.

Do not be afraid. Open your hearts to wonder. Be the Easter people - the people who know that with love, anything can happen and dreams can come true.

## Focusing Questions:

What beliefs do you long to embrace, and resist nonetheless?

What about these beliefs are compelling?

What would you have if you let them become a part of you?

What would you lose?

What are the fears, the barriers that hold you back? Have a conversation with them.

What will open your heart and mind this Easter to the possibility that hope does not always need

## Virtual Monastery Reflections for the Season

to be explained, love does not always need to make sense, and the movement of the Holy Spirit is free and unencumbered?

What do you need to be an Easter person?

## Prayer:

Gracious God, Worker of Wonders, Healer of Hearts, Solace in Sorrow and Lover of All, we thank you for your presence. We are glad that you do not give up on us; that your love is not contingent on our response, that your watchful companioning is not thwarted by our days of doubt or confusion. Help us to honor the Risen Christ wherever we meet him. Help us to welcome him into our lives, our minds, our hearts, our stories. May this Easter day be for us a day of resurrection, when all that held us back and held us down is lifted and we are free to rise and stretch and meet the day with gladness. May the renewal of the earth kindle a renewal of our spirits. And may our joy be a blessing that helps heal the world. Amen.”

Be sure each week to read and reflect on the weekly biblical passages from the revised common lectionary that are a part of the UUCF Virtual Monastery site. Here is a sample from this special UUCF resource for this special season:

## From the Rev. Marguerite Sheehan:

“...We have encouraging models around the world this spring as we walk through the season of Lent and into the hope of Easter. First in Egypt and now across the Arabian Peninsula we have models of people standing out against tyranny, foolishly facing the Empires and de-

manding that the people be heard. Hosanna! Perhaps they are not standing in full accord and of one mind, but they are standing brave and tall against all obstacles so that freedom might reign.

Today in our Gospel we hear an echo of a more ancient Scripture, calling forth blessings for those who of us who come, waving our palms in the name of the LORD. And in that word “blessed” I am reminded of one of the most central teachings of Jesus, in which he showed his mind and asks us to come inside. Jesus is on the road to death and in his resurrection we will be left with his mind and his spirit. Listen to his teaching about who will be blessed and find there a clue as to how we, those left behind, may find encouragement, consolation, and love.

Blessed be the poor in spirit, blessed be those who mourn and those who are meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who are merciful, pure in heart, those who are peacemakers and those who are persecuted.

The Greek word makarios is often used in the Beatitudes to mean “blessed.” Makarios is a passive and yet hopeful teaching that someday the disinherited will see God. The Aramaic words for blessed have an entirely different meaning and today, on Palm and Passion Sunday, they speak volumes. Ashrie and to-vahoun mean “awake” or “get up.” Awake you poor in spirit. Get up you who mourn. Awake you who hunger and thirst for all things righteousness. Awake you who are meek. Get up you who are persecuted. May the merciful get up and make peace.....”

*These articles appeared in the Easter/April 2011 issue of The Good News, an electronic newsletter published by the Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship at [www.uuchristian.org](http://www.uuchristian.org)*