

“Visioning a Universalist Future”
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During a recent visit to a retirement home I was introduced to Gertrude, who just celebrated her 99th birthday. “This is my minister,” my host said, “from the Unitarian church in Westport.” Her eyes brightened and opened a little wider and she grinned enthusiastically and said, “Just think, in one more year I’ll be 100. I never thought I’d live that long – no one else in my family did, but I think I have a good shot at it.”

“Unitarian,” she said, slowly, pausing pensively, then, with a big smile again, she said, “You know, I’m Episcopalian, always have been, but I agree with you Unitarians – we’re all one.” Then she added, “Isn’t that right?”

I said, “You don’t get to be 99 without coming to realize that we’re all one.”

The Universalism I inherited says, very clearly, ‘*we are all one.*’ The vision of universalism I see for future generations is the realization and acceptance of the fact that ‘we are all one.’ The first is spelled with a capital ‘U,’ and the second with a small ‘u.’ It’s not about a particular religious system; it’s an inevitable change in consciousness, like the change from believing that the sun revolves around the earth to the other way around. That change is happening now.

Science advances as we discover the way things work, from atoms to stars. Science is, in essence, the philosophy of discovering the story of the universe, and our part in it.

The less we *know*, from a scientific standpoint, the more we *believe*. Belief, by definition, is the process of filling in those blank spaces to provide the comfort we need to move through the days and years, hoping to hang around long enough to realize, in the deepest sense, the one-ness we feel in an intuitive sense—each of us is different from all others, but we’re all one.

My vision of a Universalist future, then, is not about religious systems, but it’s the essential aspect of all the religious systems that manage to survive science’s onward march—that we’re all one; that whatever happens to anyone after death, happens to everyone. That’s the path our Universalist forebears cleared for us through the wilderness of primitive belief systems that separated the saved from the damned, with an angry god handing out punishments.

I can’t envision a future without *religion* in some form: we humans need something more than mere knowing – we need a sense of meaning and purpose to move through the days, especially the difficult days. The more the world becomes comprehensible, the less point there seems to be in this temporary human existence, so, paradoxically, the more we need something akin to religious belief, in the deepest, non-institutional sense.

Whitman summarized it nicely: “Now understand me well -- it is provided in the essence of things that from any fruition of success, no matter what, shall come forth something to make a greater struggle necessary.” (Song of the Open Road)

He wrote, “In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barley-corn less, and the good or bad I say of myself I say of them.” (Song of Myself)

Humans won’t change, except that we’ll keep evolving, which just *looks* like change.