

Visioning a Universalist Future
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Usually not one of a cynical nature, nor one that is pessimistic, I am often accused of such when I have suggested to colleagues that there is no bright shining future for our denomination. Sometimes, I have feared we are destined to remain a small and fairly insignificant one. The reasons are many including an unclear theology to outsiders (as well as insiders), the nature of a critical thinking religion, lack of class and racial diversity and a vague sense of overarching mission that speaks to some but leaves others cold.

However, after reading Mark Harris' article entitled "Hosea Ballou's Treatise at 200" I have changed my mind and my heart. He reminded me of the *lingering Calvinism* of our faith- "humans live in total dependence upon the creator or what we call creation, and must respond to that creation with a degree of reverence and humility: it offers a vision of wholeness...we are all tied together in a community of the whole...everyone is acceptable in God's sight, and is a recipient of God's grace, regardless of who you are or where you are from." This is an incredible message that unites Unitarian Universalists- we see this in our efforts of social justice, particularly and currently around issues of the environment and of same sex marriages, just to name a few.

In our culture today, the emphasis is on the individual to the point that his or her needs, comforts and issues take priority over the other. The focus in capitalism is immediate gratification and the rise of the fittest. Democracy is overrun by corporations that place the needs of these "false individuals" before the needs of the community. Those on the edges are left defenseless and struggling. Our priorities, as a whole in society, are immediate gratification, lack of pain, desire for money and items, and disregard for the concerns of others (unless it is a major disaster that draws us out of our own worlds into the reality of human suffering.)

Our Universalist future is found in response to the prevailing culture. It comes from the message of Hosea Ballou: "There is no individual salvation; we are bound up in the community of the whole." In our treatment of the Earth, in how we conduct our personal relationships, in the actions of corporations, in the configurations of government we are all bound up in the community of the whole. Our salvation is not an individual endeavor, says Ballou, but is connected to others.

How to get this message, counter to the Christian understanding of salvation, counter to the culture out to the world? I believe our message of salvation and wholeness must rise above anything else. The world needs this message, it hungers for it.

I believe only in gathering to this core message can we hope to be a vital part of the future of this country.