

Humanism's Greatest Hits
A Worship Service by the REV. JEFF BRIERE

Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga
October 11, 2009

CONNECTIONS

Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga. My name is Maurine Olin and I am a member of the congregation. We begin each Sunday at this time with Connections. This is a time of community and contemplation, where we share the joys and the sorrows going on in our lives. This is not a time for announcements, politics or expressions of personal anger, but a time of deep sharing, where we are reminded that we are all human beings and we're all in this together. Enjoy the experience of sitting in restorative silence until you are moved to speak. Please allow a breath of silence after each person speaks, so that we may focus our attention on what has been said. If you have something to share, please come forward, tell us your name and what's on your mind.



Let us pause to dwell inward. Spirit of Life, please meet us where we are, in the struggles we choose for ourselves; in the ways we move forward in our lives, and bring our world forward with us. It is right that we pause to remember those who need love and support; who are ill or in pain, either in body or in spirit; who are lonely or have been wronged. Let us open our minds and hearts to a place of quiet, to a silent prayer for the healing of pain, and the soft, gentle coming of love. In this time of silence let our thoughts be with those who have spoken or been spoken about this morning. Amen and Blessed Be.

Please rise now and greet your neighbors at the door. Welcome them

into the sanctuary with a hand of warmth and a smile.

HYMN 346, Come, Sing a Song with Me

GREETINGS

ERIC. Thanks so much for joining us in worship today. We hope you find the service rewarding and that you leave here inspired and uplifted. There is an emergency exit over here to my right; now is the time to put your cell phone in "Worship Mode" and childcare for the young and the restless is available downstairs in the nursery.

If you have a particular joy or sorrow or something you'd like added to the prayer of the people, please clearly write it on an index card and drop it in the basket back there. You may sign it or not, as you wish. Today our service explores the implications of humanism and our minister, the Reverend Jeff Briere, took a break from his weekday job as the morning drive time announcer at the radio station UUC to bring us his perspective on humanism.

A complete listing of announcements is included with the bulletin and is available on our web site. The best way to find out what's going on around here is to sign up for a weekly e-mail. To do that, please see Chris in the office.

Our service today is graced with the music of Russian composers. Steve begins with a piece by Piotr Tchaikovsky. This composition is meant to represent the month of October and it is entitled, "Autumn Song."

PRELUDE: "Autumn Song"

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

In the light of truth and the warmth of love,
we gather to seek, to sustain, and to share.

STORY: Hot Dogs & Heros

Narrator. Do you know what a dachshund is? Here's one. His name is Oscar and he lives with the Meyer family. SO that would make his name...Oscar Meyer! Right. He is about a half-dog tall and one-and-a-half dogs long. He lives in Glendon Place, right next door to Ron Littlefield. Because of his unusual shape and size, all the other dogs make fun of him.

Dogs. Wiener Dog! Wiener Dog!

Narrator. Oscar did not like it one bit. Oscar's mother, Mrs. Meyer, was no help either. Every morning when the dogs walked off to obedience school, Oscar's mother stood in the front yard and waved goodbye to her little Oscar.

Mother. Farewell, my little Vienna Sausage!

Narrator. And the other dogs laughed and laughed. Most of the time, Oscar was upset by all this, but not today. Today was Halloween, and Oscar was thinking about other things. All day long at obedience school, Oscar daydreamed about Halloween night, trick-or-treats, and scary costumes. When Oscar got home, he ran upstairs to start working on his scary Halloween costume. But when he got to his room, a surprise was waiting for him. His mother was there.

Mother. Happy Halloween, my little sausage link. I've made you a costume for you.

Narrator. When Oscar saw the costume, he nearly fainted. It was a giant hot-dog bun, complete with green pillows for relish and

yellow pillows for mustard. And guess who was supposed to fit in the middle? Oscar did not want to hurt his mother's feelings, so he decided to wear the silly costume.

That night, all the dogs on the block gathered to show off their costumes. Everyone was looking quite scary. Then Oscar showed up, looking quite frank. When the dogs saw Oscar in his silly costume, they howled with laughter.

Dogs. Look at Oscar! He really is a Wiener Dog! Wiener Dog! Wiener Dog!

Narrator. Poor Oscar was so embarrassed. He tried to keep up with the dogs, but his silly costume kept slowing him down. All night long the other dogs grabbed every treat they could get their paws on. So by the time Oscar got to each house, there were no treats left. Soon trick-or-treating was over, and the dogs walked home past the giant Wal-Mart on Brainerd Road.

Suddenly, a horrible hissing sound filled the air:

Cats. Hssssssssssssssssss!

Narrator. The dogs stopped dead in their tracks. Then, out of the graveyard rose a ghastly monster. The dogs screamed for their lives! They dropped their treats and jumped right into Chickamauga Creek! But the monster moved closer.

Dogs. Please don't eat us!

Narrator. The monster yowled and hissed.

Dogs. Boo-hoo-hoo!

Narrator. The monster jumped up and down.

Dogs. Somebody save us!

Narrator. Just then, somebody showed up. It was Oscar. Because Oscar was so short, he saw something that the other dogs had not seen. There was no monster. It was just a couple of alley cats inside a big grocery bag. And with a loud bark, [*ARF!*] Oscar waddled to the rescue! He chomped and tugged with all his might.

[*Snarling & growling.*] He summoned all the fierce dog spirit within himself and told the cats to buzz off. [*More snarling & growling.*] The cats were terrified.

Cats. Help! We're being attacked by a giant frankfurter!

Narrator. In the darkness, because they were alley cats, they couldn't see where they were going and they ran right into Chickamauga Creek. Of course that frightened all the dogs so much they jumped out and landed right next to Oscar.

But Oscar was a true friend. He took off his silly costume and used it to towel-dry the dogs. Because Oscar had been so brave, the dogs changed his nickname from "Hot Dog" to "Hero." And from that night on, nobody ever made fun of Oscar again.

CHILDREN'S RECESSIAL

We hold you in our love
as you go, as you go.
May your heart
be at peace as you go.
To nurture the spark
of your precious life
we hold you in our love
as you go.

OFFERTORY: "Regrets"

Do you know the poet, Mary Oliver? She is widely celebrated as one of America's best poets. She is the author of three readings in our hymnal. I thought to bring us a couple of her poems today.

In this poem, she gives us a good reason to start the day in a positive mood. This is "Why I Wake Early."

Hello, sun in my face.

Hello, you who made the morning
and spread it over the fields
and into the faces of the tulips
and the nodding morning glories,
and into the windows of, even, the
miserable and the crotchety –

best preacher that ever was,
dear star, that just happens
to be where you are in the universe
to keep us from ever-darkness,
to ease us with warm touching,
to hold us in the great hands of light—
good morning, good morning, good morning.

Watch, now, how I start the day
in happiness, in kindness.

We often hear Buddhist sages advise us to be mindful, to be aware of our environment and what's going on around us. Mary Oliver took this advice to heart. This is "Mindful."

Every day
I see or I hear something

that more or less

kills me
with delight,
that leaves me
like a needle

in the haystack
of light.
It is what I was born for
to look, to listen,

to lose myself
inside this soft world
to instruct myself
over and over

in joy,
and acclamation.
Nor am I talking
about the exceptional,

the fearful, the dreadful,
the very extravagant—
but of the ordinary,
the common, the very drab,

the daily presentations.
Oh, good scholar,
I say to myself,
how can you help

but grow wise
with such teachings
as these—
the un-trimmable light

of the world,
the ocean's shine,
the prayers that are made
out of grass?

And lastly, in this one, she sees the effort we all put forth to build
our world. This is "Song of the Builders."

On a summer morning
I sat down
on a hillside
to think about God—
a worthy pastime.

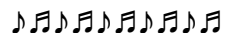
Near me, I saw
a single cricket;
it was moving
the grains of the hillside
this way and that way.

How great was its energy,
how humble its effort.

Let us hope
it will always be like this,
each of us going on
in our inexplicable ways
building the universe.

We'll collect the morning offering now, for the support and ministry
of this church. And let us hope it will always be like this; each of us
going on in our inexplicable ways, building the church. If you have
an annual pledge payment, please mark it as such. As always, the
Wood-Wilhoit Memorial Food Bank is happy to accept your
donations of non-perishable food and household items for the
Community Kitchen. The collection basket for that is by the front
door. And thank you very much for your generosity. If you wish to

light a personal candle of joy or sorrow, you may step up here and Mary Hunter will assist you.



Eternal Spirit of life and love, we are profoundly thankful for the blessings we experience today. Would that we recognize our blessings every day and be thankful for them. Christina, please lead us in our Hymn of Thanksgiving.

HYMN OF THANKSGIVING

Oh, we give thanks, for this precious day,
For all gathered here, and those far away,
For this time we share, with love and care,
Oh, we give thanks, for this precious day.

ORISON

Dona Nobis Pacem. Give Us Peace. Dona Nobis Pacem.

Tim McKee sent us a message the other day. He writes, “My daughter Mara left me a phone message Thursday that her my son Matt had injured himself in some type of accident with his bicycle. He apparently tripped over his bike and hit a rock. He lost two teeth and broke his nose. I am not sure if there were any bone injuries or fractures. His girlfriend Betsy has been bedside at the hospital for part of this time of recovery. Matt was quite accident prone when he lived with me for four years of elementary school. He’s been fortunate living back in Asheville since 1993. Keep him in your prayers. It would mean a lot to me.”

Carolyn Moore dislocated her hip and now is wearing a big old awkward brace. She’s not in any great pain, but it sure is awkward living with a giant thing attached to your hip. She’d appreciate

hearing from you, I’m sure.

Today, in our nation’s capitol, many people are marching for equality. Actually, they will begin marching in about 25 minutes. The march itself will be from Lafayette Park behind the White House, down Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol. Organizers expect several thousand people, and among them will be many Unitarian Universalists. The March will demonstrate support for full civil equality for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people. This weekend has seen a slew of activities in Washington in support of this basic human right: That all citizens, regardless of their sexual orientation should enjoy the benefits accorded to citizens of the United States. In some instances, I regret that is not the case. We hope that it shall be so in the future.

The president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Rev. Peter Morales, had this to say: Our Unitarian Universalist faith compels us to call for full social and legal recognition for gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans-gendered people, for our sons and daughters, our mothers and fathers, our friends and neighbors. Full equality under the law is the right of all Americans. A lesbian who wants to serve her country in the armed forces, a bisexual many who wants to provide a loving home to a child in need, a trans-gendered couple who want to join together in marriage, should not be treated as second-class citizens. On October 11th, we will take one more step towards the day when the laws of this country protect the basic human rights of all Americans. I invite you all to stand with us on the side of love.

Stand on the side of love. That’s a line from a hymn written by Jason Shelton, the minister of music at the Nashville Unitarian Universalist Church. Stand on the side of love. You can’t go wrong when you stand on the side of love.

Thou, which are everywhere,
Many are your names.

May we always feel your presence,
May your wisdom guide us,
In our deeds as well as in our dreams.
May we have what sustains our body and soul;
Lead us first to forgive the mistakes of others
Even as we hope our own mistakes will soon be forgiven.
May we resist the temptation of the quick and easy,
And be delivered from that which demeans and destroys life.

May we live purposefully and joyfully
in every moment, in every encounter,
now, and in the time to come.

In this time of silence, let us hold close to our hearts those
everywhere who are persecuted because they are gay or bisexual or
lesbian or trans-gendered. Let us remember always to work for full
equality under the law, but let us never forget those who suffer the
fallout of war.

Dona Nobis Pacem. Give Us Peace. Dona Nobis Pacem.

RESPONSE

When our heart is in a holy place
When our heart is in a holy place
We are blessed with love and amazing grace
When our heart is in a holy place

RESPONSIVE READING 647

An Eternal Verity

Ancient as the home is the temple;
ancient as the workbench is the altar.

Ancient as the sword is the sacrificial fire;

ancient as the soldier is the priest.

Older than written language is spoken prayer;
older than painting is the thought of a nameless one.

*Religion is the first and last—
the universal language of the human heart.*

Differing words describe the outward appearance of things;
diverse symbols represent that which stands beyond and within.

*Yet every person's hunger is the same,
and heart communicates with heart.*

Ever the vision leads on with many gods or with one,
with a holy land washed by ocean waters,
or a holy land within the heart.

*In temperament we differ,
yet we are dedicated to one august destiny;
creeds divide us, but we share a common quest.*

Because we are human,
we shall ever build our altars;
because each has a holy yearning,
we offer everywhere our prayers and anthems.

*For an eternal verity abides beneath diversities;
we are children of one great love,
united in our one eternal family.*

SERMON: *The Implications of Humanism*

You may know that I used to make my living in radio broadcasting.
Before that I was in the army for eight long years, and then went back
to college and drew unemployment for awhile. After my radio days,
I sold clothing, drew unemployment, sold cars and following the

natural career path, went back to school and entered the ministry.

During my time in radio, disc jockeys often announced their phone number on the air. People would call up and ask that certain records be played. The DJ's would actually take requests. This was popular when the DJ had access to hundreds of records and the memories of the listeners were short and their musical tastes somewhat predictable.

Today that's not possible. Many radio stations are formatted so tightly they would have trouble finding time to report the landing of aliens in Ecuador. Some stations are completely automated with no human presence at all. The voice you hear on the radio today may be a recording made three years ago in Omaha.

I'm pleased to tell you that the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga is not a radio station and I am not a disc jockey. Actually, I never was a disc jockey. I worked in *public* radio. I was an announcer.

JEFF. [As DJ] Even though this is a church and not *The Drive*, I do take requests. If you want to hear the latest theological yarn spun by your favorite minister, you only have to ask, baby, and it shall be given unto you. And we have our first caller this morning on the line right now. This is it, baby! Who's calling me at this hour?

KAREN. Hi! This is Karen. Thanks for taking my call.

JEFF. Not a problem, Karen. Where are you calling from?

KAREN. I'm at church.

JEFF. Really? That's cool, baby. What would you like to hear?

KAREN. Well, I'd be interested in hearing all about humanism.

JEFF. Wow! Karen, that's a big request.

KAREN. I know, but I'm really confused about what people mean by humanism. I'm OK with giving up Jesus and an afterlife, but are humanists supposed to give up God, too?

JEFF. Well, I'll be frank with you, Karen. I can't take your request. I don't have the perfect answer for you. Or for anyone else but myself. As you know, Unitarian Universalism is a non-creedal religion. No one says you have to "give up" anything. You can give up whatever doesn't work for you and keep whatever floats your boat, baby.

Within reason. Most Unitarian Universalists I know would frown on a "truth" that hurts people. For example, I have a problem with the "truth" of the Ku Klux Klan and skinheads. I have problems with the beliefs of John Wayne Gacy and Timothy McVeigh. So you can't just believe whatever sounds good. You gotta check it out.

I can tell you one thing though, about humanism. Humanists are concerned with what's in front of them, you know? Like, what's on earth, at hand in sight. You know everything in the afterlife is sooo unpredictable, they prefer to focus on the here and the now, baby, what's real to them. And that is what is human.

KAREN. Oh.

JEFF. But I like your words, "the implications of humanism." Tell you what, Karen. I'll dig out humanism's greatest hits and a few oldies by theism and that may help you sort it all out. Stay on the line, Karen. We'll talk.

We're gonna start this set off with a few definitions from the dictionary. First we'll hear that old standard religion, then we'll listen to a Golden Oldie, and finally we'll hear some of humanism's greatest hits. Now, folks, sit back, relax and listen to the sweet

autumn sounds spun out just for you by your Radio Prime Minister and Pulpit Master, Jeff Briere, sometimes known as “The Big Kahuna.”

Now about religion: Most people understand religion as a belief in a supernatural power regarded as the creator and governor of the universe. Like, God, baby. Or Allah. Some people expand on this concept to include a personal or institutional system grounded in that belief. Like Christianity or Judaism. Others think of religion as a set of beliefs, values and practices based upon the teachings of a spiritual leader. Like Buddhism or Sikhism.

Now about theism: It’s a belief in the existence of a god or gods, especially in a personal God as the creator and ruler of the universe. This is the traditional Christian, Islamic and Jewish belief. This is the belief in the omnipotent, omniscient, omni-present, eternal God. This is a belief in Big Daddy.

Now about humanism: It’s a system of thought that centers on human beings, their values, capacities and worth. Notice that the dictionary does not use the word religion when defining humanism.

KAREN. But Jeff, I understand theism and religion. I just don’t understand humanism. How can there be a religion without God?

JEFF. Well, the dictionary suggests there can’t be. But then where does that put Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and thousands of smaller sects that have no omnipotent, everlasting God? Are they not religions?

One of the criticisms leveled at humanists is that they redefine the word religion to suit themselves, and there is really no defense against such a charge. You heard the definition. However, re-defining something to suit yourself is nothing new. Jackson Pollock redefined painting. Phillip Glass redefined music. Phillip Calder redefined sculpture. I look at it this way: Humanists practice a

religion with a different aesthetic. Humanism looks like a duck, talks like a duck and walks like a duck. I think it’s a duck.

KAREN. OK. Humanism is a religion. I think. But these other religions have been around a long time. Humanism is a new thing.

JEFF. Not really. Here’s a little humanist history. The first humanists were ancient Greeks. As early as five hundred years before the common era, Greek philosophers such as Anaxagoras and Protagoras rejected the superstitions of their time. The Italian Renaissance produced artists and writers who focused on this world and the humans in it instead of heaven and hell. Humanism is not so new.

But humanism has gotten a lot of press lately, and it’s been building steadily since the early 1800's. That’s when the Congregational ministers of New England began to see themselves as Arminians.

Karen. Armenians? I know about them. The Turks tried to destroy them in the 1900's.

JEFF. Arminians, Karen. The Armenians lived on a different continent. I’m talking about Arminians, followers of the ideas of Jacob Arminius. Jacob Arminius was a Dutchman who thought that humans had some part to play in their own destiny. Now this idea, that people could affect their own destiny, ran counter to the accepted notion of God. For if God knew everything, God would know who would do what and when and so forth. God would even know who would go to heaven and who would go to hell. But if humans could affect their own destiny, then they knew something that God did not.

And those Congregational ministers began to think seriously about free will. If humans had free will, and could affect their own future, then God could not know everything and this called into question the nature of God. For if God was not omniscient, maybe he wasn’t omnipotent, either. Can you see where this type of thinking leads?

KAREN. *[Deep in thought.]* Yeah. It makes you question God's existence.

JEFF. Or the nature of God. The Congregational ministers did not carry their thoughts to their logical conclusion all at once. Their ideas grew over time into what we know today as humanism. They eventually formed their own association, The American Unitarian Association, which has evolved into the Unitarian Universalist Association. Humanism began to grow only because society became less influenced by the church. People began to be political instead of religious, more secular and scientific and less ecclesiastical.

The growth of humanism was influenced by Copernicus, Shakespeare, Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and Mark Twain. These people told us more about ourselves, more about humans and more about our world. The horror of World War I drove many people to reject a God who controls the universe, for if that were true, how could God allow so much misery? The Great Depression, which produced abysmal poverty and stunning wealth convinced many people that if God was in the driver's seat, he was asleep at the wheel.

A humanist might look at human development this way: The more that human beings understand about life, the less they rely on supernatural intervention to get them through another day. For example, since we know that topsoil must be periodically replenished, we don't make burnt offerings to the almighty God of Agriculture anymore. Instead we devise strategies to control erosion, we rotate crops, irrigate fields, and we developed the science of soil management. And we have pretty good results every year. The same development can be seen in all areas of human knowledge.

Nowadays, there are very few phenomena which defy explanation. Human beings know an awful lot, can do an awful lot and there's no stopping them. We know how the solar system operates, we predict the weather with reasonable accuracy, we understand how to make

plants and animals grow better. We descended to the deepest parts of the ocean and flew to the moon and returned safely. We eradicated smallpox. I think.

Human development has a dark side, too. We are determined to be the masters of life and death. We can make a woman pregnant with a baby conceived in a test tube. We can make a sheep in a petri dish. It only takes twelve people to decide to kill a person. It's tempting to believe that we want to be God.

KAREN. That's what humanism is? Human beings are God?

JEFF. That's what Rush Limbaugh might say. I don't buy it, though. My guess is that humanists understand God differently than their critics. Just as Galileo understood the solar system differently than the pope. Some humanists reject the concept of God altogether, others only reject the guy with a beard who lives on a cloud. In any case, humanists think for themselves. That is, they reject revelation or transcendent knowledge from another reality. They stress reason and the scientific method. They are focused on the here and the now, they are realistic and utilize technology to achieve their goals. They take responsibility for their own lives.

Here are some concepts that humanists reject because they cannot be proven: a God with the ability to interfere in human affairs, Jesus as the Son of God, heaven, hell, any kind of afterlife, a human immortal soul, eternal morals, good and evil as originating from God, a human dual nature. If you think about it, all these things I just mentioned are taken on faith.

To be a Muslim, a Jew or a Christian, you have to accept some things on faith. Like going to the theatre, you suspend your disbelief a little bit. Some Christians accept that a virgin gave birth and that a dead man came back to life. Some Jews believe they escaped the Pharaoh's army because Moses parted the Red Sea. Devout Muslims believe that God's voice came through the lips of Muhammad and

scribes wrote down every word—in Arabic—without error to produce the Koran.

Some humanists accept nothing on faith. With my tongue firmly planted in my cheek, I call these folks “flat-earth humanists,” because they accept only what can be demonstrated, what can be proven. Now I suspect there are degrees of humanism. Just as there are Catholics who reject the virgin birth, there are probably humanists who believe they have a soul. I used a pretty broad brush to paint their picture. That’s the interesting thing about defining yourself. You can make the definition as general as you wish.

KAREN. Well, I understand more about humanism now, but I feel like Peggy Lee, when she sang, “Is that all there is?”

JEFF. I hear you, Karen. Humanism requires a lot of inner strength and self-confidence. And that is something that others develop from their faith. I can’t begin to count the times I’ve heard Christians say that they depend on Jesus in times of trouble or Muslims say that a disaster is the will of Allah. Jews, on the other hand, seem to have a problematical relationship with God and tend to argue with Him. They rarely win.

With humanism, there’s no one to blame but yourself when things go wrong. No God to rail against when your spouse dies, no God to blame for AIDS, no God to ask for a new liver, no God to help the Cubs win the pennant. I’m not suggesting that blaming God gets anyone off the hook, but it sure does help when the enormous weight of responsibility for administering the universe rests on God’s shoulders. It’s the Greyhound life: “Take the bus—leave the driving to us!”

I also think humanism requires some measure of optimism, for if you think life is a shambles and there is no one to blame but human beings, how could you get out of bed in the morning? I think most humanists believe that things are going as well as can be expected.

Otherwise they’d all be in the looney bin.

On the other hand, humanism is *reasonable*. No hocus pocus with death, no funny stuff with virgins, no submission to the will of an unseen Allah, no *Waiting for Godot*. Everything is right here.

What I think religious humanists do is take the feeling of religion and ascribe it to another source. I think they recognize that the salutary effect of religion—that can be demonstrated—is the creation of community. By engaging in ritual community-building practices, they support one another in their struggle to live out their dreams. In effect, they have separated traditional religious practice from traditional religious belief. They find strength in their community. As do we all.

And there’s nothing wrong with that.

KAREN. So is humanism a religion?

JEFF. Religious humanists would say it is. Others would not. It depends on what you mean by religion. I mean, people make a religion out of Elvis, but they don’t get 501(C)3 status. So you have to decide what religion means. To do that, I always start with the dictionary, but in this case, it’s not much help, because the root of the word religion has shady origins, that is, we are unsure of its exact meaning. Which may be appropriate for religion. It comes from Latin and etymologists think it means to bind oneself to something. It also indicates repetition, which suggests a ritual.

So the best definition of religion I have is a practice that helps people re-connect with what’s really, really important to them.

KAREN. So *is* humanism a religion?

JEFF. Does it matter?

KAREN. I don't think so. What's important is what people do with humanism.

JEFF. I agree. And religious humanists are alive and well and living in the Ethical Culture Society, in Unitarian Universalism, in the American Humanist Association, in Humanistic Judaism, and in the Fellowship of Religious Humanists. They are doing the best they can everyday to be better people, to love life a little more, to be more a little more human.

KAREN. That helps, Jeff. Thanks for taking my request.

JEFF. No problem, thanks for calling. Karen, let me speak from my own experience for a moment.

I used to think I was a humanist. I liked all they stood for and I felt comfortable living in a black-and-white world. But then I began to feel unsatisfied, if you catch my drift. To have it all figured out leaves nothing to discover. If all that we experience in this world can be explained in human terms, if all of this world can all be traced to something in this world, then I want to quote Peggy Lee, "Is that all there is?"

It seems to me that humanism is a theological dead-end. Human beings need a mystery, I believe. It would be pretty boring around here if we could explain everything, or thought we could. How much more exciting it is to think that there might be as much to discover as we have already discovered!

Now I'm not saying that humanism doesn't have some pretty good ideas. I like much of the humanist viewpoint. But not all, so I call myself a mystical humanist these days.

Tell you what, Karen. We're gonna send you out something that you oughta look at. It's the original Humanist Manifesto from 1933, and the revisions from 1973 and 2003. And the first ten callers will get

a copy, too.

"The Humanist Manifesto" is a trademark, believe it or not, of the American Humanist Association. The manifesto was first published in 1933, and it has guided religious humanists thoughts and actions since then.

In the original, you can see where religious humanists started out. The signers were mostly academicians and scientists, a few Unitarians and one Universalist minister. Their ideas were a reaction to the events of World War I and the many scientific advancements of their day. These are the opening sentences: "The time has come for widespread recognition of the radical changes in religious beliefs throughout the modern world. The time is past for mere revision of traditional attitudes. Science and economic change have disrupted the old beliefs." It was like Bob Dylan singing, "The Times, They Are A-Changin.'" The signers, all men, and all living close to Chicago, numbered 35. They wrote 1106 words, never once admitting that women existed.

In the first revision, in 1973, they expanded on their original statements, but they also got into new concepts, such as feminism, environmental stewardship, sexual misconduct, prison reform and other causes. This passage is from the opening paragraph: "Using technology wisely, we can control our environment, conquer poverty, markedly reduce disease, extend our life-span, significantly modify our behavior, alter the course of human evolution and cultural development, unlock vast new powers, and provide humankind with unparalleled opportunity for achieving an abundant and meaningful life."

A bit optimistic, I'd say. It was like the new age sensitive guy.

The language was scrubbed of all patriarchal and chauvinistic words, the signers lived all over the world and among them were many women. Progress, at least in human relations. The revision tried to

nail down everything; very detailed and comprehensive. 263 signers wrote 3291 words. They were getting verbose.

In the final revision, from 2003, they got a lot more succinct. This time, it only took 629 words to disseminate the good news. Reading this latest version, I felt the American humanist is, if not tired, at least resigned. The revolutionary fervor and wide-eyed optimism of the earlier versions are gone, replaced by a stateliness and grace that comes with maturity. This is from the opening paragraph: “The lifestance of Humanism—guided by reason, inspired by compassion, and informed by experience—encourages us to live life well and fully. It evolved through the ages and continues to develop through the efforts of thoughtful people who recognize that values and ideals, however carefully wrought, are subject to change as our knowledge and understandings advance.”

HYMN 323, Break Not the Circle

EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE

Mary Hunter, would you extinguish our chalice, please?

We extinguish this flame,
but not the light of its truth
the warmth of this community
nor the fire of our commitment.
These we carry in our hearts
and share with all the world.

BENEDICTION

I would hope for all of us a graceful acceptance of life; that in our darkest—or last—hours, we will somehow know who loved us and whom we loved.

Let this place be a temple where our journeys in life are seen with

clarity and appreciation, and where we take our precious wins and losses, and make them the most precious of all good memories.

POSTLUDE: “Sad Story”