



Westwood  
Unitarian Congregation

# **Atheists, Humanists and FreeThinkers in our Unitarian Closets**

A Sermon by Terry Anderson

December 10, 2017

Westwood Unitarian Congregation  
Edmonton, Alberta

# Introduction

- How many have heard a sermon on atheism at a Unitarian Church?
- A brief History of Humanism
- Unitarian religious humanism
- Religious Naturalism
- Is 'religious humanism' an oxymoron?



**Are You Ready?**

# Definitions

- “Humanism is a progressive life stance that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead meaningful, ethical lives capable of adding to the greater good of humanity.”



# Three Unitarian 'Isms

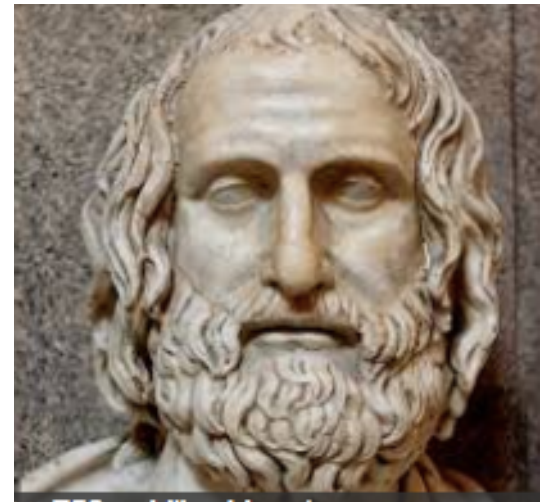
- Theism – 13.0%
- Humanism - 46.1%
- Pan Theism / Earth Centered – 19.0%



From 1997 US survey of Unitarian Universalists  
Some people checked more than one category

# First Humanists - Early Greeks

- Epicurus argued that “fear of the gods is the greatest obstacle to human happiness”
- Protagoras noted that “As to the gods, I have no means of knowing either that they exist or do not exist.”



- Getting over the dark and middle ages
- Rational assault on superstition and theistic explanations of the world
- Led to American and French Revolutions
- Excess and backlash

# The Enlightenment



The Age of Reason

# Thomas Jefferson

- Highly regarded 3<sup>rd</sup> President of USA
- Knew that no one has ever been elected president, prime minister or premier who was an out and out 'godless atheist'.
- Jefferson was a Diest.
- Jefferson bible eliminates all miracles and superstitions.



# Unitarian Christianity

William Chaney 1819

1. The Unity of God
2. Jesus as being fully human
3. The purpose of Jesus' Mission
4. The moral perfection of God



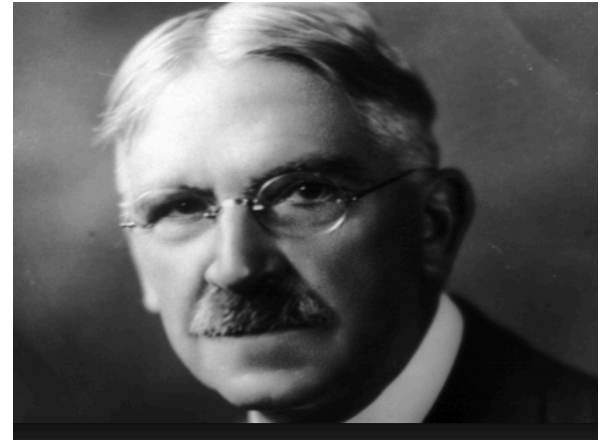


# Age of the FreeThinkers

- Freethinkers and human rights:
  - Anti slavery campaigns
  - Suffragettes
    - Elizabeth Stanton published her “Women’s Bible” in which she reinterpreted Christian scriptures so as to “exalt and dignify women”
    - Strife between pragmatics – don’t alienate the majority of women who are fine outstanding theists
    - Set back women’s vote by a generation



# John Dewey



- My connection with Dewey
- Terry Lectures
- “I believe that many persons are so repelled from what exists as a religion by its intellectual and moral implications, that they are not even aware of attitudes in themselves that if they came to fruition would be genuinely religious.”
- Religion as an adjective describing awe, compassion, service & reverence.
- Religion as noun – an institution propagation often cultural advantage
- Westwood Purpose Statement
  - “A compassionate community of free religious thought, inviting all people to rest, grow, and serve the world.

# Unitarian Religious Humanists

- 100 year anniversary of term religious humanism - Rev. John Dietrich
- Confrontation between Unitarian theists and humanists.
- Unitarian minister Curtis Reese “theism is philosophically possible, but not religiously necessary’.



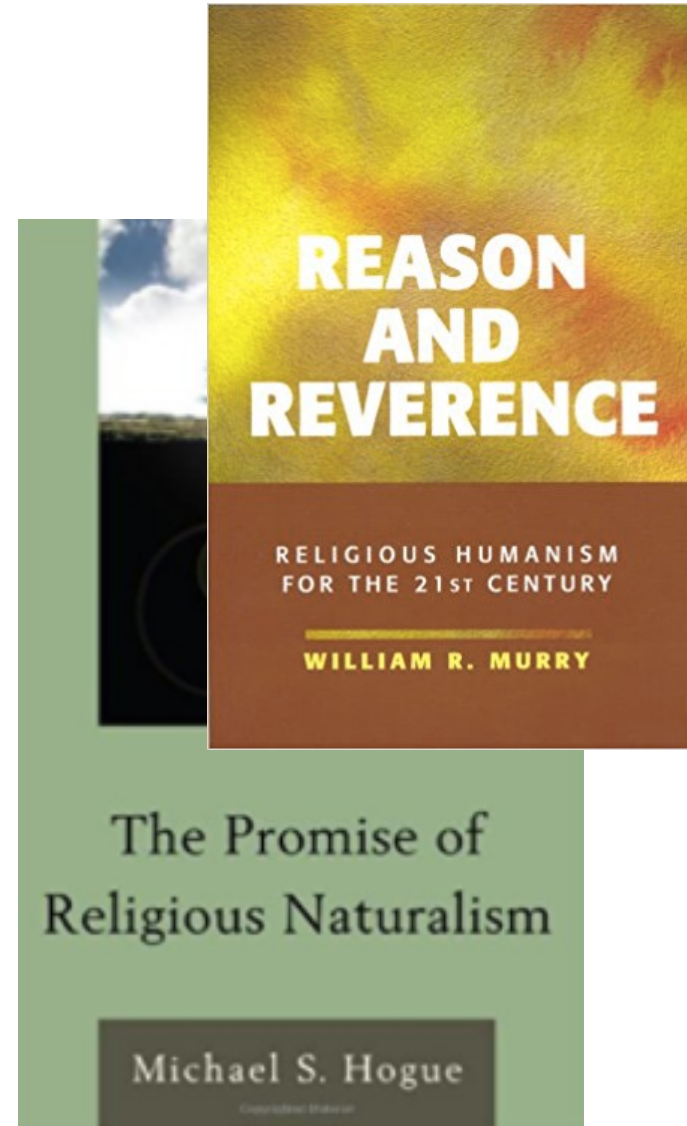
# 3 Humanist Goes Mainstream

- Three Manifestos 1933, 1973 and 2003
- Each version shorter and more social
- Many signatures were Unitarian ministers
- Humanism becomes mainstream??



# UU Religious Naturalists

- William Murry “naturalism is not a sufficient source of religious meaning because nature is morally neutral or simply amoral”.
- Adds Religious (as an adjective)
- “nature as both exhaustive of reality and worthy of deep reverence and devotion.”
- Sadly no action on website or membership
- Potential for connecting Nature Centered with Humanists



# Angry Atheists

- Discredit opponents by putting them down as angry, shrill, or for YOUR anger.
- Familiar to women and civil rights activists
- Can we ignore righteous anger?



**WHY ARE YOU ATHEISTS SO ANGRY?**

☞ ✝ ⚡ 99 Things That Piss Off the Godless ☞ ☹ ☞

by  
**GRETA CHRISTINA**

# Theory - Stages of Religious Development

1. Primitive consciousness, in and of nature
2. Tribal superstition and magic
3. Age of Myths – gods and humans
4. Formal institutional religions
5. Enlightenment and rational
6. Integrative Stage – best of all ?

Where are you in the cycles?

# Why care about Humanists – The ‘Nones’

- 23.9 % of Canadians are nones
- Younger you are, higher percentage of nones in your age group
- Why did these nones stop identifying with a religion?
  - 60% stopped believing
  - 32% weren't raised as religious
  - 29% experience of treatment of GBLTQ+ by religion
- We need them – they need us.





# Today's Issues for Canadian Humanists

- Catholic Schools
- Opening prayers at Government Events
- Environment and tar sands
- Theist influence in schools



# Conclusion

- For Westwood
  - rational and empowered Atheism, Humanism and Freethinking empowers us to ‘Rest, Grow and Serve the World’
  - Mission to the ‘nones’??
  - New opportunities and learning from Religious Humanism and Religious Naturalism



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# Conclusion

For myself:

Less use of a-thiest – I'm also an A-Santa

I am an Atheist,

I am a Humanist,

I am a Religious Humanist.

I am Religious Naturalist.

I am a FreeThinker and

I am glad to have been able to speak with you today. Thank you.

