

**This is the first Eileen Hastings Memorial Lecture
presented by The First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh
Eileen Hastings was a committed humanist and longtime active member
of the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh.**

The question:

“Does Humanism Have a Future in Unitarian Universalism?”

The Presenter: Rev. Dr. David Breeden, Senior Minister, First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis

Respondent: Leika Lewis-Cornwell, President, Unitarian Universalist Humanist Association

INTRODUCTION

First allow me to say that I am honored to be here today presenting the first Eileen Hastings Memorial Lecture for The First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh. Honored to have been asked to speak; and I am honored to have as a respondent such a talented minister and Humanist, Leika Lewis-Cornwell.

I’m also honored to explore what I see as a crucial question for our tradition: Does Humanism have a future in Unitarian Universalism? I also want to turn that question around and ask: Does Unitarian Universalism have a future *without* Humanism?

These are separate but interrelated questions.

Then, I want to think about the tradition of Humanism as it has developed, and how the resources of that tradition can be used to expand its self-understandings and to create meaning and purpose in lives today.

As we go along, I want to keep front and center these words from the entrepreneur Seth Godin:

Making your case

Conventional wisdom:

Find a large group of people.
 Explain why you're better.
 Prove that you are the right answer.
 Done.

How it actually works:

Earn attention from precisely the right people.
 Gain trust.
 Tell a story.
 Create tension.
 Relieve the tension by gaining commitment.
 Deliver work that's remarkable.
 They spread the word.

I should also add that I intend to be blunt in my assessments. If I haven't irritated everyone by the end, I probably haven't done my job.

ONE: Does Unitarian Universalism have a future without Humanism?

I. The answer is: Unlikely

Allow me first to consider the question: Does Unitarian Universalism have a future without Humanism? Because I think that answer is relatively uncomplicated to answer. And that answer is—unlikely.

Every indication is that the liberal Protestant—so-called mainline—denominations face a very dismal future of aging membership; shrinking numbers; infrastructure decay; and, finally, denominational extinction, with the likelihood that only a few of the largest of the congregations and a few isolated rural congregations will survive to carry on the traditions of the denomination.

These mainline denominations include the United Church of Christ, The Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, American Baptists, Presbyterians, United Methodists, the Disciples of Christ, Quakers, Congregationalists, and . . . perhaps, Unitarian Universalists.

Now, allow me to define the term “liberal religion,” which is almost always used interchangeably with the term “liberal Christianity,” which is what people who use the term usually actually mean.

Liberal Christianity is a product of the European Reformation that is associated with Martin Luther, though the roots of that tradition are much older and more widespread, and includes the pan-European movement called humanism.

After it began in earnest, the Protestant Reformation swept Europe, leading to centuries of bloody warfare and brutal suppressions and purges. Eventually, Protestantism figured prominently in the European invasion of North America and served as a catalyst for racialized-slavery and world-wide European colonialism.

A very bloody history. We should not remember the ideas and forget the violence.

The Protestant Reformation produced a vast number of theological innovations, leading to the vast number of Protestant denominations that existed during the European invasions of North America. Furthermore, the nature of Protestantism is to morph and fragment, which led to distinctly North American forms of Protestantism—such as Pentecostalism, Fundamentalism, and Evangelicalism—which in turn were exported back into the wider world, especially into the Global South.

#The very idea of Protestantism is corrosive, for good and ill. By removing the theological hierarchy through Luther’s notion of *sola scriptura*—scripture alone as the arbiter of theological truth—the Protestant impulse set in motion extremes, from Fundamentalism and Christian nationalism to Humanism. All are logical outcomes of Protestant thought. (These are also the extremes of the US “culture wars.”)

The Protestant Reformation led directly to another European intellectual movement, the Enlightenment. #Protestant values were at one time Enlightenment values, and continue to be so in liberal Protestant denominations. Broadly speaking, “liberal Christians” are those who accept key Enlightenment values, and “conservative Christians” are those who reject key Enlightenment values. It’s only a question of degree.

What are Enlightenment values? Broadly speaking those are

- a trust in reason, science, and democracy as ways of arbitrating collective (as opposed to subjective) meaning;

- a belief in the inherent worth of individual human beings;
- secularized government.
- We can add to this list the social developments of capitalism, Christian triumphalism, American exceptionalism, and white supremacy.

In sum, liberal Christianity has, from the beginning, found ways to compromise with science and changing social attitudes—those methods of compromise comprising what the theologian Charles Taylor calls “secularism.”

It is the liberal Christian denominations that are quickly disappearing today as their members become entirely secular—though this demographic retains key Enlightenment values and often embraces the descriptive phrase “spiritual but not religious” in its many manifestations.

II. Losses by the Decimal Point

A headline in a report looking at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the largest Lutheran organization in the United States, reads like this: “New projections forecast just 16,000 in worship across the entire ELCA by 2041. Why is this happening and what can be done?”

This report shows Sunday attendance at 899,000 in 2017 and projects only 16,000 in 2041. Total membership in the ELCA was 3.4 million in 2017; the forecast for 2041 is 66,500.

That is a catastrophic collapse that will very likely occur in the next two decades.

Liberal Christianity is in trouble.

One more case: the United Church of Christ, which shares the same Puritan, Massachusetts origins as Unitarianism, and shares the same liberal politics as Unitarian Universalism.

In 1957, the UCC had 2.1 million members. In 2017 that number was 853,000. Projections are that by 2050, membership will be down to about 200,000.

From 2.1 million to 200,000 in a century, while the US population has *doubled*.

Liberal Christianity is in catastrophic decline.

It should not escape your consideration that the dates 2041 and 2050 have significance: the majority of the Baby Boomer generation will be dead by those dates.

Then reflect on the median age of UU congregants today. Last time I checked, that was sixty-two years of age.

As is the case with all mainline Protestant denominations, the majority of UUs are Boomers. If the median age continues to go up—72, 82, 92 . . . UUism will end exactly like other liberal denominations.

III. Can Liberal Christianity Reinvent Itself for a New Age?

As the headline about Lutheranism put it: Can anything be done?

The theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer justly gets credit for changing the conversation in post-World War II liberal Protestantism. He began as a neo-orthodox *wunderkind*, but the Nazi rise to power and its consequences—including his own resistance and imprisonment—led him toward seeing a post-Christian Europe of the sort that does exist today.

While in prison, Bonhoeffer wrote letters speculating on what he termed a “Religionless Christianity:”

We are approaching a completely religionless age; people as they are now simply cannot be religious anymore. Even those who honestly describe themselves as “religious” aren’t really practicing that at all; they presumably mean something quite different by “religious.”

The questions to be answered would surely be: What do a church, a community, a sermon, a liturgy, a Christian life mean in a religionless world? How do we speak of God—without religion, i.e., without the temporally conditioned presuppositions of metaphysics, inwardness, and so on? How do we speak (or perhaps we cannot now even “speak” as we used to) in a “secular” way about God? In what way are we “religionless-secular” Christians, in what way are we

those who are called forth, not regarding ourselves from a religious point of view as specially favored, but rather as belonging wholly to the world?

“Religionless-secular’ Christians.”

Bonhoeffer’s questions, I think, have yet to be answered, although another preacher murdered by the Nazis, Norbert Čapek, had also wrestled with the questions and began to practice in Prague the Unitarian Humanist approach then developing in the United States.

Yes, Bonhoeffer’s questions remain valid and largely unanswered: “What do a church, a community, a sermon, a liturgy” mean in a post-Christian world?

By exploring the term “religionless,” wasn’t Bonhoeffer anticipating the “spiritual but not religious” movement in our own time? He defined “religionless” as “without the temporally conditioned presuppositions of metaphysics, inwardness, and so on.”

Isn’t the rising secularity of our own time about dismissing the “temporally conditioned presuppositions” of metaphysics and inwardness and questioning the entire concepts? Indeed, the shorthand of contemporary US Christianity has become unmoored from—and ignorant of—the historical developments within Christianity over two millennia.

Universalist Christianity and Unitarian Christianity both have unique traditions and unique variations on orthodox Christian thought. How many Unitarian Universalists understand those variations and traditions?

Or is much of Christian thinking in UUism a mish-mash of various traditions?

IV. Humanist Answers to Bonhoeffer’s Questions

#The insight of the early Unitarian Humanists such as Curtis Reese and John Dietrich was that Protestant-style congregational gatherings could be conducted without any reference to the supernatural or to the theological underpinnings of Christian liturgy. These were major innovations. And they were for the most part subsequently abandoned by most Unitarian Universalist congregations.

#The ideal of a Humanist Assembly, *contra* a Protestant Christian “service,” is to be *religion-neutral*. Not pro- any particular religious tradition and not anti- any particular religious tradition . . .

–but “without the temporally conditioned presuppositions of metaphysics, inwardness, and so on” as Bonhoeffer phrased it.

Religion-neutral.

Prayer, for example, *can be* ecumenical, but it *cannot* be religion-neutral because any particular prayer style simply can’t fulfill all the requirements of all religious traditions. It necessarily can’t be neutral.

The use of the word “god” or the use of the god-symbol can be ecumenical, but it cannot be religion-neutral.

Use of the dominant-culture Christian norms within contemporary UU congregations is a loss of UU-Humanist traditions and a failure of the imagination. The religious imagination.

No Humanist would confidently dismiss the concept that *homo sapiens* has a “biologically instantiated religious instinct,” as the controversial conservative psychologist Jordan Peterson phrases it. Humanists do not confidently dismiss that concept because the jury is still out on the question. Perhaps it always will be.

Yet, a “biologically instantiated religious instinct” has taken so many forms through the time that *homo sapiens* has dwelt on the planet that very little flows from that claim: The variety of religious expression is just too large.

To limit our practice to one set of traditions from geographically bound—meaning European—“temporally conditioned presuppositions of metaphysics” is a waste of creativity and imagination.

No, I don’t mean that liberal religionists should culturally appropriate Buddhism or Navajo shamanism or any other tradition. I mean that we would do well to go back to that presumed “biologically instantiated religious instinct” and see what might be new and exciting—and relevant to our contemporary cultural context—in that instinct, should it exist.

Let's test the hypothesis rather than falling back on outmoded terms and lifeless tropes.

As he awaited his fate, Dietrich Bonhoeffer began to see the situation of Euro-American Christianity and what it would look like post-war. He asked the questions. He offered the challenge.

Some liberal Christians have taken up Bonhoeffer's gauntlet. Some Humanist congregations have taken up the gauntlet. It is time that Unitarian Universalists in general take up that gauntlet as well.

Or else . . .

V. My Answer

Does Unitarian Universalism have a future without Humanism? Yes: it has the same future as *all* liberal Protestant denominations unless those denominations can answer Dietrich Bonhoeffer's challenge.

That future is inexorable decline.

But one question along this line remains: Why has Unitarian Universalism so far avoided the catastrophic collapse of most Protestant denominations?

Instead of collapse—or "drowning" in this metaphor—Unitarian Universalism has managed to dog-paddle since the merger of 1961.

In 1961, the UUA reported 151,557 adult members; in 2020 the UUA reported 152,921 adult members. A gain in sixty years of a whopping . . . 1,364 adult members.

In 1961, the US population was 180 million; today that number is 330 million. That's growth of a 150 million in the US population, not quite doubling.

The United Church of Christ during those years went into catastrophic decline; and Unitarian Universalism dog-paddled. I wonder if one difference between those two denominations is the number of Humanists who have stuck with Unitarian Universalism, often holding our noses and covering our ears all the while to avoid those moldy Christian tropes.

How many UUs consider themselves Humanist today? We don't know because the question doesn't get asked.

Would UUism have traced the same decline as the United Church of Christ without Humanism? That, too, is an unknown.

How many non-United-Church-of-Christ style UUs are there? We don't know, though we often pretend that those are the majority.

I suspect, though I can't prove, that UUism has dog-paddled these six decades because we have embraced—if only half-heartedly—a big tent. (More on that later.)

We know that there are lots of "hyphenated UUs:" UU-Humanists; UU-Jews, UU-Buddhists, UU-Muslims; UU-Hindus; UU-Pagans, UU-Wiccans; UU-Religious Naturalists, and that list goes on. Also, there are lots of people who don't identify specifically with one of the hyphenations but who are drawn by both the diversity and the theological openness of UU congregations.

However, with congregational polity, each congregation has its own tone and flavor. And its own prejudices. One—and sometimes all—of the hyphenated UUs feel dismissed and unwelcome in some congregations.

Bottom line: Unitarian Universalism *does* have a future, *if* we can keep—and expand—our theological diversity.

And I believe that religion-neutral Humanist liturgy is the way to do that at the congregational level.

TWO: Does Humanism Have a Future in Unitarian Universalism?

I. Lived Experience / Regular Experience

All that said, the American Humanist Association—the largest specifically Humanist organization in the US—has 34,000 members. That's not many.

I think lots of people—both secular people and those who hold onto various denominations and religions because they don't know what else to do—lots of people are thirsting for the good news of Humanism.

But *not*, I hasten to add, the old, very Euro-centric, post-World War II form of Humanism.

#When people say that reason and science aren't enough, they are not necessarily denigrating reason and science. What they *are* saying is that they are searching for *more meaning*. That is not a search to be dismissed. But too often second-generation Humanism—the Humanism that rooted itself in Unitarian Universalism and hasn't changed since the 1950s—has dismissed that search.

#The mass migrations that occurred as a consequence of the two world wars caused for many people angst-filled questions:

"Am I merely an abstraction?
A statistic?
Am I expendable?
Do I even exist?"

In that situation, religion and philosophy functioned to say, "You *do* exist, individual. You have not disappeared into the war's mass graves."

All of the mainline Protestant denominations, Unitarian Universalism, and Humanism were all too happy to cater to this angst-filled individualism, including the racist race to the sprawling American suburbs.

Today, we live in a very different situation. The individual proved to be the perfect marketing unit for everything from shoes to automobiles to yoga. The individual also proved to be a disastrous fiction. #Now, the gospels of individual freedom and individuality ring hollow to many Americans. After all, look where it has led us as a nation! (One obvious example is that the individual right to own semi-automatic weapons outweighs the collective right to not get shot.)

The Humanism of post-World War II America was a triumphalist, American exceptionalist, white-flight, white supremacist affair. No beating around the bush about that.

Now, please hear me, because I don't believe in scolding the dead. Unitarian Universalism was what it was; and Humanism was what it was because . . . the world was

what it was; the Second World War was what it was; the United States was what it was; American culture was what it was; the American economy was what it was, and on.

Judging the past by present standards is a fool's game.

Fact is, UU-Humanists were among the most likely to oppose segregation, Jim Crow, capitalism, militarism, atomic proliferation, environmental degradation, and Christian hegemony. The list goes on.

Just as secular people today are the most likely group to fight racism, sexism, and the social conditions of our own time. (Remind yourself that Black Lives Matter is a *secular* movement.)

As a Hebrew guy said some time ago, putting new wine into old wineskins is a fool's game. Old patterns are for old ways of doing things.

#We can't change the past. We *can* change the future, and we *need* to change the future of UU-Humanism by waking up to some philosophical movements that have passed us by as we sat isolated in our smug American techno-state.

Catch phrases often seem to come out of nowhere and catch on fast, leaving some of us scratching our heads all the while. A recent example is "lived experience." As in, "Sorry, but that's not my lived experience."

You may be one of those still left scratching your head: Isn't *all* experience *lived* experience?

The answer is: yes and no.

The term "lived experience" has a pedigree: it is a term used in the philosophical field of phenomenology, most famously articulated by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) in the early twentieth century.

Phenomenology is the study of lived experience. #Lived human experience is never abstract: it is always oriented *toward* or is *about* something. Lived experience is how each of us experiences existence.

One tweak that may be helpful is an idea from the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), who distinguished between the *explanatory* and the *descriptive*.

Dilthey claimed that the descriptive belongs in the field of natural science, the explanatory to the liberal arts.

Yes, the distinction falls into the traditional categories of objectivity and subjectivity, but phenomenologists warn us to look closely at that distinction. #Who says that reason and emotion can be so easily distinguished? Whoever told Europeans and Euro-Americans that intellect and emotion are separate faculties? Why would we want to make such a distinction?

What are the *politics* of such a distinction? The intellect/emotion distinction clearly derives from racist and misogynistic thinking. We have to ask ourselves if it has any value . . . and I think the answer is . . . “yes, no, both, and.”

Another example: naturalism and theism are treated as if they are incompatible in much of Western thought, certainly in the analytic tradition of Western philosophy and science. This is not lived experience, nor is it lived religion.

Lest you think that this is all yet another way to go down the post-modern “it’s all relative” rabbit hole, Edmund Husserl already thought of that, proposing *Epoché*, an old Greek philosophical term meaning “bracketing,” or “suspending judgment.” #Though each of us lives in our lived experience, we *can* bracket—put aside—our assumptions and beliefs and make an effort toward objectivity—meaning in this case—outer reality understood in rational terms.

Phenomenology is an important current in what is often dismissed in the US as Continental philosophy, another word for “incomprehensible” according to many Americans. This dismissal is unfortunate. It robs us of a valuable way to talk about both how it *feels* to be alive, and offers a method for making considerably more subtle distinctions than merely “religion versus science.”

Humanists prone to debate with religious people need to learn some continental philosophy, not just the tired—and discredited—analytic philosophy of Anglo-American culture which has become a cliched truism for many Americans.

THREE: How can a non-theistic life stance help us as Unitarian Universalists figure out what to do in our lives?

I. Structures of Value

Now to the question of what a non-theistic life stance can do to help Unitarian Universalists in living our lives.

Here's the essence as I see it: #Human beings have a deep wish and a deep need for seeing the world through a *structure of value*. All of us want and need an answer to that very old philosophical question: "How might I live my life?"

Think about that blog post I shared earlier from entrepreneur Seth Godin called "**Making your case.**" He tells us how most of us assume it works:

Conventional wisdom:

Find a large group of people.
 Explain why you're better.
 Prove that you are the right answer.
 Done.

Then he proposes how it actually works:

Earn attention from precisely the right people.
 Gain trust.
 Tell a story.
 Create tension.
 Relieve the tension by gaining commitment.
 Deliver work that's remarkable.
 They spread the word.

#What is the story of Humanism? What is the tension that those who might become Humanists feel? How does committing to Humanism relieve that tension?

These are crucial questions.

#Secular people are secular because we have found meaning and value within the secular propositions that we have learned. I would add one nuance to this thought, and that nuance comes out of phenomenology: #When we are talking about "secular people" we are painting with too wide a brush. There *are no* "secular people." There are secular-Protestants; there are secular-Roman Catholics, secular-Muslims; secular-Asian-Americans, secular African-Americans; secular Native-Americans, secular Euro-Americans, and the list goes on.

#Lived experience matters.

#If you haven't read the work of UU-Humanist Paula Cole Jones on the proposed Eighth Principle of Unitarian Universalism, I suggest you do ASAP. Paula argues that the Eighth Principle clarifies and sharpens the existing Seven Principles into action. The proposed Principle reads:

Journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural "Beloved Community" by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.

Paula believes the future of Unitarian Universalism is as a "community of communities." (When I mention all those ways to be a hyphenated UU, that's what I'm talking about. A community of communities.)

Lived experience. Phenomenologists are right about that: *lived experience matters*. Lived experience is who you are.

#Everyone comes from somewhere, and everyone longs to see the world through a structure of values. Those structures of values are created through the lens of the world people happen to inhabit. No: we don't all live in the same lived experience, and we don't all *want or need* the same lived structures of value.

Forget that, and I'd say you are missing a goodly portion of the profound and beautiful story that is human existence.

II. Human Beings Can Fix Human Problems

Seeing the world through a structure of values is where the great twentieth century UU theologian, Rev. Dr. William R. Jones, comes in strong and points us prophetically toward a possible future.

Jones was a UU-Humanist. He wrote what is considered the foundational book in African American Humanist theology, *Is God a White Racist?*

Spoiler alert: The answer Jones gives to the question his book's title poses is an unequivocal "yes: God *is* a white racist."

Why? Because white supremacist assumptions concerning god permeate European Christianity, American Christianity, and European and American culture.

For Jones, and many Humanists, that has meant throwing out the god symbol altogether. But Jones was very careful to say that agnosticism or atheism aren't for everybody, and should not be the criteria for the label "humanist." #Theologian William R. Jones argued that atheists, agnostics, *and* theists of various stripes only need to agree on one thing: *That human beings can fix human problems.*

Some theists express this by saying that we human beings are the hands of god. Others of us would express this by saying that human beings *created* the hands of god as an expression of our highest human aspirations.

What William R. Jones mostly meant is this: #Those of us who agree that a mighty god is not going to sweep down and save us from all our problems had better band together and figure out *how* we can save ourselves, save each other, and save the world.

#That is the essential message of Humanism: Nothing can save us from ourselves, except . . . all of us . . . together.

That is the common task we join together in covenantal community to accomplish. It is why Unitarian Universalism in general and Unitarian Universalist-Humanism in particular continue to exist.

It is the path to human liberation.

III: Committee on Institutional Change Report

All Unitarian Universalists need to take seriously and understand the report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change that appeared in 2020 titled Widening the Circle of Concern.

Their Guiding Principle was this:

To keep Unitarian Universalism alive, we must privilege the voices that have been silenced or drowned out and dismantle elitist and exclusionary white privilege, which inhibits connection and creativity.

The report also says,

... amidst the diversity of the theologies represented in our congregations, justice work has been a proxy for what we believe in some congregations, while in other congregations, engagement with the intellect, debate, and social ties have been the substitute. Our justice work without theological resources and spiritual practices leads us down the path of burn out.

Under "Take-Aways" the report says:

- These times require a liberatory faith that invites us each into the spiritual work of empathy and healing.
- Justice making is not a substitute for a coherent theology, and faithful justice making requires a liberatory theology.

and,

- A greater emphasis on the theological basis for our work for diversity, equity, and inclusion will help us to make decisions about the forms of this work most appropriate for our individual and shared faith lives.

I agree with the commissioners that these points are vital if Unitarian Universalism is to survive.

Unitarian Universalism has as resources first its long theological tradition, which is difficult to summarize but profound. It also has as resources two concise theological anchors based in that long theological tradition written by theologians who deeply grasped the traditions: The "Five Smooth Stones" as articulated by James Luther Adams and the liberationist-Humanist theology as begun by William R. Jones and as continued by Dr. Anthony Pinn. (What resources we have! One of the greatest living American theologians is an African American Humanist building on the work of William R. Jones!)

Those two theological anchors are all about liberation; they are all about serving the common good; they are about pro-social behavior; they are about the work of liberation. And neither are based in theist dogma.

I'm convinced that there is a moral force to free thinking; a moral force that burns away creeds and dogmas; a moral force that burns away platitudes and lies. #When the human moral imagination is loosed from the bounds of traditions and dogmas and creeds, it is a wondrous thing.

(Sadly, there isn't time today to look at the "Five Smooth Stones" of James Luther Adams, but that is easily findable online. For a look at this discussion in the larger US context, see political scientist Shadi Hamid's writing in the April issue of *The Atlantic*, "America Without God: As religious faith has declined, ideological intensity has risen. Will the quest for secular redemption through politics doom the American idea?" *The Atlantic*, April 2021.)

III. Not Much in a Name

In terms of Humanist theology, or philosophy if you will, you may have seen the poster from the American Humanist Association: "The Ten Commitments." The poster contains a list of things that most Humanists consider moral imperatives.

The Ten Commitments are on an easy-to-read chart. This is the sort of thing that Humanists have not done well: making our ideas simple and accessible.

I think these can be summarized succinctly with a question: "How can I help? How can I help my fellow human beings; how can I help all living things; how can I help the planet?"

Critical thinking, ethical development, peace and social justice, service and participation, empathy, humility, environmentalism, global awareness, responsibility, and altruism

I suspect that everyone listening to me today resonates with these commitments: you're already committed to most or all of them. You *already know* that these commitments are central to living a life of meaning and purpose. You don't need convincing that these moral commitments are relevant.

And so do many, many secular people in the US today.

#I'm sure you've heard the most common response when someone learns about Humanism—you may have even said it yourself: "Wow. That's what I've always believed. I didn't know it had a name!"

Well, it *does* have a name. Like many, I wish it had a *different* name. But history has given us this one, and it's difficult to get those horses back in the barn. So "Humanism" is kind of it . . . at least for now.

But much more than the name "humanism" is *how* we act in the world. As Thomas Paine phrased it long ago, "My religion is to do good." That's a simple phrase to latch onto: "My religion is to do good."

Or: "How can I help?" Helping is about compassion and listening; it's about getting into the moment, looking around, and acting responsibly.

#For Humanism to survive, we must drop the Enlightenment baggage, which means leaving behind world views and assumptions based in threadbare Western philosophy, threadbare Western religions—mostly centrally Christianity—and assumptions of whiteness and misogyny.

CONCLUSION: Small Differences

Yes, I believe that Unitarian Universalism has a future, *if* we can develop a clear, coherent, relatable theology of liberation and a structure of what Paula Cole Jones calls "a community of communities." That is the theology of the proposed Eighth Principle. It can be achieved.

Yes, I believe that Humanism has a future in Unitarian Universalism, *if* UUism can achieve that theology of liberation and that theology of a community of communities. And *if* we UU-Humanists can heed the most basic call of Humanism: pro-social behavior. Yes, watered-down and reheated liberal Christianity is thin gruel indeed, and it's difficult to listen to. But if we UU-Humanists can help build that community of communities, Unitarian Universalism will survive.

#The numbers don't lie: More and more people agree with us. But, sadly, most of them have never heard of us. That's what projects such as the Ten Commitments are designed to fix.

That's what *your* story of *your* lived experience can fix.

Keep in mind those wise words from entrepreneur Seth Godin about making your case. Here is "How it actually works:"

Earn attention from precisely the right people.
 Gain trust.
 Tell a story.
 Create tension.
 Relieve the tension by gaining commitment.
 Deliver work that's remarkable.
 They spread the word.

Let's get out there and tell our story and make our case. And, in so doing, liberate humanity, all living things, and the planet.

SOURCES and Further Reading

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

Christopher Cameron, *Black Freethinkers*.

Sarah CR Clark, "Luther Seminary lands \$1.5 million grant for studying congregations," February, 2021.

Decline in Lutheranism.

Fiona Ellis, "New Models of Religious Understanding: Introduction."

Clifford Geertz on the oddness of individualism.

The Ten Commitments of Humanists

Seth Godin, Blog post, Friday, 20 December 2019

Shadi Hamid, "America Without God: As religious faith has declined, ideological intensity has risen. Will the quest for secular redemption through politics doom the American idea?" *The Atlantic*, April 2021.

Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," *Basic Writings: Nine Key Essays, plus the Introduction to Being and Time*, trans. David Farrell Krell (London, Routledge; 1978), p. 208:

Existentialism says existence precedes essence. In this statement he is taking *existentia* and *essentia* according to their metaphysical meaning, which, from Plato's time on, has said that *essentia* precedes *existentia*. Sartre reverses this statement. But the reversal of a metaphysical statement remains a metaphysical statement. With it, he stays with metaphysics, in oblivion of the truth of Being.

"Humanistic Phenomenology" <http://www.personalityresearch.org/courses/B15/notes/phenomenology.html>

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