

“What’s a Good Humanist to Do?

- Humanism in a Confusing Era”

Sermon at UUCG on Sunday, November 15, 2009

Hello. My name is Kurt, and I am a Humanist.

[Pause here for Hi Kurt response a la AAA meeting (several people bit!)]

I have been a Humanist for almost 6 decades.

I know, you're thinking I don't look a bit over 4 decades,
But I digress.

In the next few minutes, I'll try to relate my
Understanding of Humanism and its value.

I'm a bit of a news junkie.

I value the wonderful things that we humans as a race have discovered,
and consider to be true about the marvelous world in which we live.

I have also paid attention to the fact that
We have wars in progress.

And that there are human aspects always present that wish to harness the
human spirit.

It indeed is a complex and confusing world.

It's difficult to keep up - I as an individual human am awash in an
overwhelming array of media and information.

Which brings me back to my point...I'm a Humanist - but not a cold and
unfeeling Humanist.

A Humanist is one who believes in the worth of human endeavors and
thought.

And who values the purity of truth.

The concept of the Scientific Method as a tool to
Which allows for questioning and structured
examining of nature

All without the intervention of artificial constraints on the intellect.

It's been over a year since our own Reverend Martha Hodges examined this subject.

She pointed out that Humanism can be a cold and unfeeling discipline,
And questioned whether Humanism was a movement capable of the warmth
and

Soothing so desperately needed in this "age of anti-intellectualism and
pat answers."

I'd like to answer her that, yes, I value the pure and clear thought. But I'm
also a warm and feeling individual.

I believe the answer is that it is the individual who can smooth the rough
edges of the purely scientific approach.

Unitarian Universalism lists Humanism fifth among its sources....

"...teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the
results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and
spirit."

Humanism has been around a long time. Mason Olds traces religious
humanist thought back to the Greeks, and as struggling to emerge from the
Dark Ages into the Renaissance.

In middle of the last century - the 1950's,
the American Humanist Association was formed. And has an
impressive list of members and followers.

Historically, recognized Humanists are free-thinking people of science,
philosophy, and social conscience who reject the bonds of the intellect by
religious extremist organizations or political movements.

Besides the scientific bent, Humanists are strongly moral and ethical
With or without acknowledging supreme intervention.

Secular Humanism rejects religious interference -
worship is not a factor

With no favoritism for humans amid the web of existence.

Religious Humanists feel that religion can provide personal and social needs
- A sense of belonging.

But Humanism as a whole rejects organized
intervention on free thought
and rejects
Restrictions placed on the human spirit.

To me the most important distinction of Humanism is that it rejects the ill
effects of
Religions and political dogma
- manipulations of human potential,
which limit the pursuit of truth.

I personally am not against all religion - After all
I'm standing before you in a church.

But my experience with the Catholic Church, and my readings and life
experience lead me to cast off
Authoritatively dictated beliefs expressed as absolute truths and
systematically imposed in the name of religion.

Abe Lincoln said
"The Dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present"

Not much has changed
I would offer that today, we too are in a "stormy present"
It's just that our access to news and information has
increased our awareness.

Our present includes deplorable struggles for control of humans worldwide
Religious Extremism, Fundamentalism, Jihadism.
Extreme acts of violence from both the right and the left sanctioned in
the name of organized religion and politics
Overstep the bounds of reason and civility.

I believe that by imposing dogma, forces seek to chain believers' intellects,

And actions...and yes, to restrict truth and progress.

And what is truth?

Who decides what truth is
and Who owns truth?

It eludes me how the elders of a religion or the rulers of a country can absolutely say they have the truth.

We as Unitarian Universalists accept the concepts of many world religions
and welcome discussion of moral,
ethical and physical nature.

We include the teachings of many religious and philosophical sources
Including the Bible, The Torah, The Quran, Loa Tzu, and the Vedas.
But IS there any one book that cannot be questioned on its foundation of
Authority and reasoning?
I think not.

As Reverend Martha pointed out,

"Dogmatism and intolerance, once so often found in our strongly
humanistic congregations, can now be seen in our culture's growing suspicion
of science and reason. We must beware of trading one dogmatism for
another. "

The current world population is pushing 6.7 billion people.

I see the ultimate dogmatic control of all human minds as ultimately
futile,

If only foiled by sheer numbers.

But it makes me uncomfortable to see that dogma continues to be put forth
as much by

educational manipulation as well as
Through force and coercion.

The list is ugly:

genocide, ethnic cleansing, suicide bombings, antiabortionist murders
and war.

SO much is based in the conflict that results from one set of beliefs
striving to conquer another.

This will not be going away anytime soon.

I have concluded that these events of social mayhem can be likened to the volcanic activity caused by geological tectonic plates colliding -

As one plate is forced up or down by another,

As where restraints or conquest is in progress, the catastrophic results

Are inevitable - and will include violent resistance.

So what's a good Humanist to do in a confusing world?

There is much more about what Humanism has to offer as solace to a fractured and hurting world than I can hope to convey in a light weight discussion such as this.

All I can offer this:

Start as an individual with an open mind.

Accept the realities of nature and adjust our understanding as we

Learn new information.

Appreciate our fellow humans
and all nature around us.

Be tolerant and accepting of
human frailties and inconsistencies.

Refrain from imposing mental or physical constraints on others.

Be Human.

And let's be good to each other

And seek truth and fairness in all we do.

Amen.