



## Humanism and Theism in Conversation

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(Duet song) I Am Theist, You Are Humanist:

You are Theist, I am Humanist  
I think that you're naive  
You have no proof to offer as truth  
You simply say "I believe"

New age bubbles get you in trouble  
Lost in a feel-good fluff  
True understanding is quite demanding  
Praying is not enough.

Totally unprepared are you  
To make a case that's plain  
Maybe the incense, chants and drums  
Have ruined your poor brain.

You need someone older and wiser  
Telling you what to do,  
You are Theist, I am Humanist  
I -will think-for you!

I am Theist, you are Humanist  
You're locked inside your head.  
You're existential, self-referential

Claiming that God is dead,

Occam's razor, Pascal's wager  
Soul-less tautology  
Wisdom, traditions, not erudition  
Make much more sense to me.

Totally unprepared are you  
To let go of your mind.  
How bout a leap of faith, my friend  
You might like what you find.

When you find that you're out of answers  
You won't know what to do  
I am Theist, you are Humanist,  
I--will pray--for you.

We cannot agree on anything  
Each has a point of view,  
I am Theist---I am Humanist  
That's why we're UU.

## **HUMANISM AND THEISM IN CONVERSATION**

(Diane) We at First Church have a strong enduring tradition of seeking our own spiritual paths. Two of the most traveled choices have been that of Theism and Humanism. And we frequently include elements of both in our services. Still, like any duality, there can be friction or discomfort at times, and too often, we back away from those uncomfortable conversations and different opinions of the other. What if we didn't?

Today, Jamie Moore, a Humanist, and Akera Moi, a Theist, have volunteered to talk with each other about how they arrived at their beliefs, to better understand their differences, and to seek what they have in common, so that they can determine how they wish to work together.

(Diane) Jamie, what was your religious upbringing like?

(Jamie) I was raised in the United Church of Christ. Our congregation was probably more conservative than the average church when compared to the spectrum of UCC congregations as a whole. I learned the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the bible stories.

In contrast, my mom was Unitarian before we even knew that was a “thing.” She added a layer of curiosity and acceptance to my religious education that expanded beyond Protestant Christianity.

The contrasting viewpoints of my mom's very open teachings and my church's very set views created a lot of turmoil for me. We joined the Unitarian Universalist Church in Muncie when I was in high school. It felt like coming home. At last I was in a spiritual home where my questions didn't marginalize me...a place where I didn't have to whisper my dissenting opinions.

**(Diane) Akera, how did religion play a role in your childhood?**

(Akera) I was born a Catholic and later through my parents, I went through various denominations before settling on a particular denomination. Namely, I started Catholic, and attended Baptist, Assemblies of God and then finally ended up as a Wesleyan Armenian. Regardless, of what denomination, although slightly different in some way, the constant was a belief in God.

My parents started out not as strict religiously, but later on, turned out to be quite strict religious. It is somewhat curious, but I bet if I were to ask them, they would say the older they got, the wiser they also got. I learned to play guitar in church and at some point in my life, led worship and played music at church. I attended Sunday school and became an avid member of the youth group. For me, Christianity provided a moral compass for a young man who could be easily swayed by peer pressure, and other unlikely temptations that any mother and father would wish their child away from. I didn't heed everything but the tenets were there, and without it, I could have easily been swept away, battered by the winds 'of the world' as my parents would call it. When my parents held Bible study in our home, I felt no resentment as possibly being forced to partake, I played the guitar so that was nice. In short, it was a part of who we were, and I had accepted in and felt no different of being a Christian as being a part of a family. It was something simply we did, just as many of you have grown in your faith with your families. Of course, I did have many questions, some of which still remain unanswered, such as after we are saved – then what?

**(Diane) Akera, have your beliefs changed over the years, and why do you consider yourself a Theist?**

(Akera) I see God in the wonders of the world, in the birth of my child and I've asked myself, no human being could construct a baby together from scratch, I mean we can't physically put together the human body and know where each organ goes and what its function should be from scratch. Someone much bigger than me created this wonder, which fills me with such awe that I cannot simply explain away. I need to believe that there is someone out there that is bigger than pettiness of mankind that has all but filled this world with war, hate and despair. I needed a role model and to me, God was my role model.

So when I entered a Wesleyan Armenian High School (on Mt. Auburn) I kept these ideals and my faith. Although the school centered primarily to traditions and customs, it gave me a

foundation for the rest of my life. Today, I still read the Book of Proverbs for guidance and directions and refer to its sensible instructions as you would a great self-help book or a reliable parent.

**(Diane) Jamie, how have your beliefs changed as an adult, and why do you consider yourself a Humanist?**

(Jamie) As a young child, I remember standing next to my grandpa at church and learning that those who didn't accept Christ into their hearts would go to Hell. I thought about the whole big world in the way that a child understands it, and all the other religions and all of those other people... and my little 7-year-old brain just couldn't reconcile a God that would send people to Hell for practicing the religion they were raised in with the all loving God that I was learning about in Sunday school.

I am a literal person. I do not deal with ambiguities and contradictions well. I struggled for a long time with the fact that there were all of these denominations out there, many of which claimed to be "right." Eventually, I found myself thinking that if they couldn't all be right, then probably none of them were. We are faulty, human sinners, after all.

So, for me, Protestant Christianity gave way to Agnostic Theism, which gave way over the last couple of years to Humanism. Which is not to say, that this was a comfortable shift for me. When I let go of my belief in a benevolent god, I had to face the true vulnerability of my humanity. With no divine force to defend me against the evils of the world, I'm alone in this soft, fragile, temporary body.

So now, my spirituality stems from a belief that the universe is knowable and based on measurable sciences -- physics and chemistry. My curiosity in science has led me to a perspective that while I no longer believe in God, I do believe in the fact that we are here. Now. And that we should make the most of our time here together. My faith is now in community. I believe that we are stronger when we work together.

(Diane) Listening to Jamie and Akera, I hear that you are both interested in seeking out a continually evolving response to your spiritual journeys. You were both raised in one or more faiths as a child, and you have chosen different paths as young adults, now sharing our Unitarian Universalist values.

**(Diane) So what do you want from each other in the process? And how will you support each other?**

(Akera) Jamie, I mentioned earlier that there were many unanswered questions, and I later found out in life topics that I struggled with that the church had taken a more active role in, and that had caused me to be somewhat disillusioned. For example, in politics, why is the church predominately Republican? Since when did Republicans have a monopoly on God, or empower ministers to preach politics from the pulpit. Are we not sensible enough to make our own political decisions?

And why the hate? Why do we not embrace our lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender community? Isn't God about love? Rather than blaming God, I have faulted mankind in churches who have used God as a reason to advance their own agenda, whether it be politics, war, discrimination and hate. I believe that some churches have taken a message of love and barbed it to divide us. I struggled to reconcile these differences and over time sought a different community where standing in judgment would not be trademark, but standing on the side of love would be. Where differences would be celebrated and respected rather than despised. I found that here at First UU and while I don't hear from the book of Proverbs every Sunday, I am filled with the love and non-judgment that permeates our Church.

(Jamie) Akera, I also want a measure of respect, which can be a difficult thing to ask for. It has taken me years to develop my current perspective, and this is likely just another data point on the plotline of my life. I did not lay down my Christianity lightly. This was not a snap decision, lightly made. It was years and years of prayer, and education, and angst. I will not judge someone harshly for believing in his/her God, and I crave that respect in return.

While, I believe we're an interesting quirk in the long evolution of universal dust into cognizant humanity, this doesn't mean I lack respect for the values and love evident in theism.

What I want from the Theists in my life is simple. I want the freedom to believe as I wish. I want the ability to work together to help one another, to lay down tired arguments of religious doctrine, and focus on common goals. I want community and family, and room to grow.

When it comes down to it, I'm Unitarian Universalist because I feel that the UU principles tie us together and allow us to move forward together, rather than driving us apart.

(Diane) And now, I would like to know from the congregation, will you support Jamie and Akera by standing shoulder to shoulder with other Humanists and Theists to work for justice? And will you keep your minds and hearts open to the many ways we encounter the unknown or the divine? If so, shout out, "we will"!

**Thank you. We need not think alike to love alike.**

In many ways, humanism and theism are like a yin and yang; rather than competing with each other, they complement each other by helping us find answers to two of our deepest questions...our need to **understand** our world, and our desire to **find meaning** in it.

In closing, I'd like to quote Reverend Gupton, a dear colleague of Sharon's, who says, "May that balance of religion and reason, of compassionate trust and critical thinking, always remain a defining aspect of this beloved congregation...and of its ministry."

Thank you Akera and Jamie, for sharing your thoughts with us. And thanks to all of you for your support as we move, with different paths, along a mutual journey.