Meadville and the Manifesto

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The Humanist Manifesto of 1933 is largely a product of Chicago. It was at a University of Chicago lecture that Raymond Bragg talked to Roy Wood Sellars about formalizing for publication the thoughts about humanism of a circle of colleagues, a concept earlier suggested to Bragg by Kansas City Unitarian minister Leon Birkhead and former Unitarian then First Humanist Society in New York leader Charles Francis Potter. Sellars, a philosophy professor at the University of Michigan, wrote the first draft a few weeks after that lecture, and then it was in Chicago that Bragg coordinated the editing of the draft by four people: Curtis Reese (the meetings were held in Reese's office at the Abraham Lincoln Center, where he was dean), Eustace Haydon (a religion professor at the University of Chicago), Edmund Wilson (minister of Third Unitarian Church), and Bragg (secretary of the Western Unitarian Conference). The four would turn to at least five consultants, including J. A. C. F. Auer, E. Burdette Backus, Albert Dieffenbach, and John Dietrich, all of whom had connections to Chicago's Meadville Theological School, during development of the Manifesto.

William Schulz has written in detail about the making of the Humanist Manifesto in his 1975 doctor of ministry dissertation from Meadville Lombard Theological School, published in book form in 2002 by Skinner House. A personal recollection about the making of the Manifesto by Meadville graduate Edwin Wilson was posthumously published in 1995 by Humanist Press.

There were thirty-four signers of the Manifesto. At least half of the signers were Unitarians. There was one former Unitarian minister who had started a Humanist church in New York City (Charles Francis Potter), an Ethical Culture leader who also held Unitarian fellowship (W. Francis Swift), and one Universalist minister who had been a University of Chicago student (Clinton Lee Scott). Potter and J. A. C. F. Auer held Universalist fellowship as well as Unitarian. One-third of the signers, as well as other humanists who did not sign the Manifesto, already had or would form connections with Meadville Theological School—students, honorary degree recipients, faculty, and board members.

This paper highlights the connections to Meadville Theological School of those who were associated with the Humanist Manifesto. The Humanist Manifesto is a major document in Unitarian Universalist history. Those who had ties to Meadville Theological School—located in Meadville, Pennsylvania, the school moved to Chicago in 1926—played a central role in its development and publication. There was no institutional affiliation between the school and the document, and Meadville resisted humanism in the early stages of the movement; when Curtis Reese, then secretary of the Western Unitarian Conference, delivered a controversial address on humanism at the Harvard Summer School of Theology in 1920, Meadville "was so alarmed that it summoned a Presbyterian theologian from the Union Theological Seminary to assure the autumn convocation that the new age, far from being Humanistic, would worship a God who is personal, austere, majestic, yet responsive to mystical intercourse with his worshippers" [Lyttle, 245]. By the time of the Manifesto, there was less resistance to humanism, but not a complete welcoming of nontheism. With the majority of the 1933 Manifesto signers

being Unitarian, including fifteen men who held Unitarian fellowship, and the Manifesto being developed in Chicago, many individuals would likely have ties to the local Unitarian seminary without the school itself having a role, and those at Meadville might, and did, look to other Chicago humanists for support in their vocations and interests.

As a study of the Meadville connection, this article highlights community, connections made by those who have ties to an institution and thoughts about the subject that that institution advances—in this case, thoughts about theology, and how the conventional and traditional views do not fit with their beliefs. This article notes the relationships, the human connection among the humanists. The Humanist Manifesto of 1933 cannot be called the Meadville Manifesto—to do so would rewrite history—but the "second generation" (Schulz, 41) of religious humanists who signed their names to the document, so many of whom attended as students or were acknowledged by the school as honorary degree recipients, had common ground not just as Unitarians but through the school that educated many for the ministry.

MEADVILLE HUMANISTS

Humanism was discussed and advanced at Meadville prior to that second generation. Schulz writes:

> Perhaps the first Unitarian minister to use the term *humanism* was Frank C. Doan of Meadville [who] introduced a philosophy he dubbed *cosmic humanism* to the American Philosophical Association in 1908.…
>
> Doan's humanism had a profound impact on three Meadville students, each of whom would play a significant role in the development of religious humanism: J. A. C. Faginner [*sic*] Auer, later a leading humanist church history scholar at Harvard Divinity School and author of the popular *Humanism States Its Case*; [note omitted] Charles H. Lyttle, who would later serve as church history professor at Meadville and influence a younger generation of humanists; and E. Burdette Backus, who would become a distinguished humanist minister in Los Angeles and Indianapolis. Both Auer and Backus were signers of the Humanist Manifesto [Schulz, 19].

Auer (B.D. 1906), Backus (B.D. 1912), and Lyttle (B.D. 1912, Th.D. 1923) are that first generation. Especially Doan, faculty member from 1904 through 1913, but also Frank S. C. Wicks, an 1894 Meadville graduate, might then be considered progenitors, predating the generational designation. Wilson shows the relationships of the "second generation" and their mentors and names some of those students:

> Exactly one decade (1916-1926) after Revs. John Dietrich and Curtis W. Reese pronounced their humanism to their congregations, a generation of humanists was emerging that would see the movement into the 1930s and beyond. Concentrated in Chicago—and, more specifically, at Meadville Theological School—this second generation [Wilson's note: The most prominent members of the second generation were probably Edwin H.

> Wilson (Meadville class of 1926) and Raymond B. Bragg (1927), but other active Meadville humanists included Harold Buschman (1928), later editor of the *New Humanist*; Alfred W. Hobart (1938 [*sic*; actually, 1928]); W. Francis Swift (1938 [*sic*; actually, 1928]), signer of the Humanist Manifesto; John G. MacKinnon (1930); and Melvin L. Welke (1930)….] came under the formative influence of a triumvirate of leaders: Reese, who as a denominational official headquartered in Chicago, served as a ministerial model and introduced the students to applied humanism as it was practiced in Western Unitarian Conference (WUC) churches; Charles Lyttle, a Meadville professor of church history, who taught the "provenance of humanism from Greco-Roman ethical philosophy and the Christian Humanism of the Renaissance"; [citing Lyttle, *Freedom Moves West*] and, most profoundly, Haydon [Schulz, 41].

Lyttle remarks that students in Chicago theological education at the time of the Manifesto had many opportunities to learn about humanism from experts, even those who had some resistance to the reconsideration of theism:

> What with [Robert J.] Hutcheon, the Meadville School's professor of religious philosophy [D.D., 1926; professor, 1913-40], and its president, Rev. Sydney B. Snow [D.D., 1923; president, 1929-44], both professing "Humanism plus," while Lyttle, in the chair of church history [B.D., 1912, Th.D., 1923; professor beginning 1925], was teaching the provenance of Humanism from Graeco-Roman ethical philosophy and the Christian Humanism of the Renaissance; with Haydon in the chair of the history of non-Christian religions at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, and Professor Shirley Jackson Case stressing the Humanist elements in early Chirstianity—it is easily understandable that so many graduates of these institutions later avowed Humanism [Lyttle, 253].

Schulz notes that "Theism as 'humanism plus'…was a convenient way of appearing conciliatory while absorbing the new and troublesome position [of humanism] into the older and more comfortable one.…But understandably, the 'humanism plus' ploy was frustrating to many humanists, and when [Rev. Augustus] Reccord repeated the assumption [note omitted] in 1927, a group of Meadville Theological School students felt compelled to refute the claim" in a *Christian Register* article, "Theism Is Humanism Plus?" by W. Frank Swift, Raymond B. Bragg, and Alfred W. Hobart [Schulz, 39].

It is not possible to paint a thorough picture of the relationships between the Manifesto's contributors; such an in-depth study is beyond the bounds of this article. However, as an example of the challenge of exploring humanism and of the "Meadville connection," Wilson gives this personal vignette:

> At the Meadville school, as I climbed the stairs to my assigned room in Divinity Hall, I encountered three students who had packed their bags and were already leaving at the beginning of the term. In answer to

> my question, "Why?" I was told, "We are humanists and the faculty has made it clear that our presence is not appreciated." Three good men were lost to the liberal ministry: one to become a professor of anatomy; one, a professor of English; the third, ultimately, president of a liberal college. Today this would not happen.
>
> But this was January 1924. In the months following, I did all my required class work, but I spent my own time avidly reading everything about humanism that I could lay my hands on. By mid-June, I had said to myself, "That is it! Humanism has time, science, and human need on its side. I'll stick with it!" It proved to be a lifetime commitment. The school was eventually moved from Pennsylvania to a site adjacent to the University of Chicago. Because of my growing doubts, I hedged by taking some sociology courses in the university as a possible alternative career. But I was turned off by behaviorists who disclaimed any compassionate interest in how their research was used and by graduates in sociology who were planning to go into private industries as advisers to profitmakers. A lecture by L. L. Bernard, entitled "The Transition to an Objective Standard of Social Control," especially turned me off. Humanity got that objective social control under Hitler.
>
> I then sought an interview with Dr. Curtis W. Reese. He helped me reach the conclusion that I could best serve my goals in the liberal ministry. [Wilson, 14]

Perhaps the educational atmosphere of the University of Chicago made inquiry more open than in Meadville, Pennsylvania, but Raymond Bragg appeared to have an easier time in his humanist pursuits, with faculty to turn to:

> When Raymond Bragg undertook the organizing of "A Humanist Manifesto," he was only thirty years old.…Having explored Unitarianism himself, Bragg decided to enter the theological school at Meadville, Pennsylvania. In 1926, he moved with the school to Chicago, where he became exposed to humanism under the tutelage of Dr. A. Eustace Haydon, Curtis Reese, and others. Bragg graduated from Meadville in 1928 [Meadville's *General Catalogue* says 1927] and went on to a two-year ministry in Evanston, Illinois. He then moved back to Chicago to take the post as secretary of the Western Unitarian Conference [Wilson, 24].

THE HUMANIST MANIFESTO

Before further examining community in relation to Meadville and the humanist movement, here the Manifesto itself is summarized and its appeal to the public and absorption by Unitarianism are noted. The Humanist Manfesto is a short document, about eleven hundred words. Starting "The time has come for widespread recognition of the radical changes in religious beliefs throughout the modern world," it succinctly states fifteen affirmations as "a new statement of the means and purposes of religion," seeking to establish a religion "that can hope to be a synthesizing and dynamic force for today

[and] shaped for the needs of" the twentieth century. The religious humanist affirmations are (1) that the universe is self-existing and not created; (2) that man (in the language of the time) is part of nature and emerged as a continuous process; (3) that life is organic, rejecting mind/body dualism; (4) that religious culture and civilization develop through interaction with an individual's environment and society; (5) that science makes the supernatural unacceptable; (6) that theism and other God-oriented approaches are passé; (7) that human significance is the objective of religion, obtained through human expression, and therefore the sacred and secular cannot be distinguished from each other; (8) that realization of the human personality is the aim of life; (9) that sense of personal life and social well-being supplant worship and prayer; (10) that humanism will not have emotions and attitudes associated with belief in the supernatural; (11) that naturalness, probability, education, and custom are what informs man in life's crises; (12) that the creative is encouraged to provide joy in living; (13) that associations and institutions exist for the fulfillment of human life, and the Manifesto calls for the reconstitution of religious institutions in this light; (14) that a socialized and cooperative economic order be established (this provision was retracted during the Cold War); and (15) that humanism would be positive about life [Schulz, xxv-xxviii].

Determining who might sign is a strong example of community and relationships. Schulz states, "The process, it appears, was highly informal; the members of the Chicago committee simply decided among themselves who should be approached. The major criteria seem to have been first, personal acquaintance, and second, intellectual contribution to humanist studies" [Schulz, 61]. With that four-person editorial committee, it is understandable that there would be so many Unitarian ministers (professional relationships) and Meadville alumni (educational relationships).

The Manifesto first appeared in *The New Humanist*, at the time owned and published by Wilson and Buschman, with Bragg associate editor. The magazine's office was at the same address as the Western Unitarian Conference on Dearborn Street in Chicago [Wilson, 21].

The Manifesto did not transform the world into a new approach to religion. Schulz explains why:

> Religious humanism, as revealed in the Manifesto, was an intellectually sophisticated religion that was bound to appeal only to a limited segment of the population—specifically, the well-educated—even under the most auspicious of circumstances, for at least three reasons. First, the substance of the faith was intellectually demanding, and few people had the philosophical equipment or acquaintance to absorb it. In addition, humanism was a faith being promoted primarily by the intellectual class in a highly cerebral, nonemotive fashion and therefore stimulated the kind of anti-intellectualism inherent in American culture.…Finally, without a referent to the transcendent, the Humanist Manifesto offered little comfort in time of crisis and required instead a highly philosophical understanding of suffering. [Schulz, 83]

However, it was received better in Unitarian circles, and the God that Meadville defended back in 1920 became much less relevant to most Unitarians, even the theists. Bumbaugh writes:

> While the echoes of the humanist-theist controversy would be heard well into the middle of the century, so strong was the humanist influence in the movement that the very basis of theism was shifted. Increasingly among Unitarian theists, the term God came to be used as a convenient symbol for that power beyond human control in which human existence is rooted—in some cases, little more than a poetic personification of the Universe itself, and often used in ways quite compatible with all but the most rigid interpretations of humanism. Ultimately, Unitarian Christians found it necessary to organize a group with the Association, the Unitarian Christian Fellowship, to sustain a Christian witness within Unitarianism [Bumbaugh, 139].

Schulz makes an interesting point about Unitarianism's acceptance of humanism. A liberal religion, Unitarianism was welcoming to those searching for a religious approach that would be authentic to them. "Most humanists had little reason to desert Unitarianism," Schulz notes. He states that Unitarianism "practiced with regard to humanism what church historian Martin Marty has indicated Christian churches have traditionally done with regard to all doubt: That is, it extended its boundaries enough to absorb the new stirrings and make a secessionist move unnecessary or at least unsuccessful" [Schulz, 84-85].

Though intended to be a statement for a general audience, a document advocating a "new" way of approaching religion (new is in quotes because humanism as a philosophy goes back at least to the Enlightenment), the Humanist Manifesto is important to Unitarian Universalist history as a defining document of Unitarianism in the early twentieth century. At least half of the signers, including the drafter, three of the four editors, and all five of those who were consulted on the draft, were Unitarians—most of them ministers. While humanism is not quite as prominent today in Unitarian Universalist circles, perhaps because the recognition of religious pluralism has made room for pagans, Buddhists, and those of a more traditional theism (so perceived by this researcher despite the 1998 study that Schulz cites indicating that close to half of Unitarian Universalists are humanists), humanists are still members of churches, and Unitarian Universalists have some influence in such larger humanist circles as the American Humanist Association. But for much of the twentieth century, Unitarianism and humanism were near synonyms. Schulz reports on how synonymous, and why Unitarian Universalism is welcoming to humanists:

> Unitarian Universalism, the faith community in which the vast majority of religious humanists are found today [2002], has, in particular, been deeply affected by the religious humanist strain, diverse as the theological perspectives may be within the Unitarian Universalist family. Foremost, religious humanism made it possible for those with radically nontraditional views of religion to find in Unitarian Universalism a

> comfortable religious home. Religious humanism was unapologetically *religious*.…The Humanist Manifesto of 1933…was consciously designed to encapsulate a religious faith, [note omitted] not just a philosophy of life, and for all its religious failings, it represented a heartfelt attempt to amalgamate intellectual integrity with religious humanism.
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> But religious humanism is not just a matter of historical curiosity, at least as far as Unitarian Universalism is concerned. After all, 46 percent of Unitarian Universalists reported in 1998 that they regarded themselves as theologically humanist—more than twice the number who identified with the second most common perspective, nature-centered spirituality, and far more than the 13 percent who called themselves theists or the 9.5 percent who described themselves as Christians [note omitted] [xiii-xiv].

COMMUNITY

When writing this article, I pondered what a student involvement might be today that would be similar to the "second generation of religious humanists" at Meadville in the 1920s. Though only three students of that generation, Wilson, Bragg, and Swift, were signers of the Manifesto, more Meadville students were part of the religious humanist movement, including Buschman, Hobart, MacKinnon, and Welke. Is there a religious cause that Meadville Lombard students might rally around today? In Unitarian Universalist circles, a prominent issue only a few years old, still generating some talk, is the use of a language of reverence. However, rather than students, it was Meadville Lombard faculty and other religious professionals who contributed to that discussion with the 2004 publication by Meadville Lombard Press of *A Language of Reverence*. Circumstances and the world have changed. Students no longer have the close quarters of a scholarly support system like that of a primarily on-campus residential, canon-curriculum seminary. The fellowshipping process is different today as well, more complex, with some of the school orientation diverted to the requirements of ministerial certification: psychological testing, internships, and fieldwork. These days, initiative for a religious movement within Unitarian Universalism is more likely to arise from blogs and Internet connections than from collegial interests and student-to-student coordination.

One theme I read in Unitarian Universalist blogs, a theme related to language of reverence, is that of Christians reasserting their presence and perhaps feeling as if Unitarian Universalist plurality has gone so far as to relegate them to minor consideration (as if Bumbaugh's observation of the pervasiveness of humanism and the resultant struggle of Christians inside Unitarianism was a new phenomenon in the last decades of the twentieth century continuing to today). However, like the developers of the Humanist Manifesto, many of whom had been students at the same school (if not all at the same time), connections are still made that continue after graduation, and the Meadville Lombard kinship is an ongoing tie, to be renewed, students are told, annually at the Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly, at meetings of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, and in other institutional and association settings.

Are those days of faculty-student collegiality, exploring new ways of being religious, establishing common bonds in seminary, gone for good? Of course not. But

friendship, partnership, and intimacy in a more diverse student body have a different character in the twenty-first century than the early twentieth.

Community continues. It is possible that a minister's blog, as compared to an intellectual magazine published by ministers, could be the medium to publish a statement about religion by Unitarian ministers and others who agree with a liberal religious—even radical—stand. A cogent, creed-like (but not creedal) public statement about religious views could easily gain traction and have influence on the wider world. The challenge is to articulate a theology that appeals to, at least, inquisitive people who would be receptive to such an idea.

The Humanist Manifesto has been revised twice (so far) since 1933. Other manifestos have also been put forward, with prominent signatories, but none so far have had the impact of the original Humanist Manifesto. It might not take a harmonic convergence of communal interests for a future declaration of a new way of being religious to spark the interest of the public, but it will take community—even if not Chicago-based and connected to a seminary—to bring it into being.

APPENDIX

SIGNERS OF THE HUMANIST MANIFESTO OF 1933

Full name is given when known, followed by description of the signer as listed in the Manifesto's *New Humanist* publication. Meadville details (through 1944) and other biographical information are added. The signer's contribution to the Manifesto is in parentheses.

**Johannes Abraham Christoffel Fagginger Auer*, Parkman Professor of Church History and Theology, Harvard University; Professor of church History, Tufts College. Meadville B.D. 1906, D.D. 1932, Trustee 1923. (Consultant)
**Edwin Burdette Backus*, Unitarian Minister. Meadville B.D. 1912, D.D. 1940, Trustee 1919-22. (Consultant)
Harry Elmer Barnes, General Editorial Department, Scripps-Howard Newspapers. Meadville Trustee 1954-60.
**Leon Milton Birkhead*, The Liberal Center, Kansas City, Missouri. (Consultant)
**Raymond Bennett Bragg*, Secretary, Western Unitarian Conference. Meadville Graduate 1927, D.D. 1948, Trustee 1945-56. Associate Editor, and later Editor, of *The New Humanist*. (Editor)
Edwin Arthur Burtt, Professor of Philosophy, Sage School of Philosophy, Cornell University. (Revised first public draft)
**Ernest Caldecott*, Minister, First Unitarian Church, Los Angeles, California.
Anton J. Carlson, Professor of Philosophy, University of Chicago.
John Dewey, Columbia University.
**Albert Charles Dieffenbach*, Formerly Editor of *The Christian Register*. Meadville D.D. 1918, Religion Editor, *Boston Evening Transcript*. (Consultant)
**John Hassler Dietrich*, Minister, First Unitarian Society, Minneapolis. Meadville D.D. 1933. (Consultant)
Bernard Fantus, Professor of Therapeutics, College of Medicine, University of Illinois. Member of Third Unitarian Church, Chicago
William Floyd, Editor of *The Arbitrator*, New York City.
Frank H. Hankins, Professor of Economics and Sociology, Smith College.
Albert Eustace Haydon, Professor of History of Religions, University of Chicago. Federated Theological Faculty (comprising Meadville, Chicago Theological Seminary, Disciples Divinity House, and University of Chicago) Professor of Comparative Religion, 1944. (Editor)
Llewelyn Jones, Literary critic and author. Future editor of *The Christian Register*
Robert Morss Lovett, Editor, *The New Republic*; Professor of English, University of Chicago. Future editor of *The Christian Register*. At *The New Republic*, Lovett was a member of the editorial board, not top editor
**Harold Parsons Marley*, Minister, The Fellowship of Liberal Religion, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
**R. Lester Mondale*, Minister, Unitarian Church, Evanston, Illinois.
Charles Francis Potter, Leader and Founder, the First Humanist Society of New York, Inc. Former Unitarian minister

John Herman Randall, Jr. Department of Philosophy, Columbia University.
**Curtis Williford Reese*, Dean, Abraham Lincoln Center, Chicago. Meadville D.D. 1927, Trustee 1922-33, 1939-62 (Vice Chair 1949-52); former President, Lombard College 1928-29. (Editor)
Oliver L. Reiser, Associate Professor of Philosophy, University of Pittsburgh.
Clinton Lee Scott, Minister, Universalist Church, Peoria, Illinois.
Roy Wood Sellars, Professor of Philosophy, University of Michigan. (Drafter)
Maynard Shipley, President, The Science League of America.
**William Francis Swift*, Director, Boston Ethical Society. Meadville Graduate 1927, B.D. 1928
Vivian T. Thayer, Educational Director, Ethical Culture Schools.
**Eldred Cornelius Vanderlaan*, Leader of the Free Fellowship, Berkeley, California.
Joseph Walker, Attorney, Boston, Massachusetts.
Jacob J. Weinstein, Rabbi, Advisor to Jewish students, Columbia University.
**Frank Scott Corey Wicks*, All Souls Unitarian Church, Indianapolis. Meadville Graduate 1894, D.D. 1917 or '27, Trustee 1912-29
**David Rhys Williams*, Minister, Unitarian Church, Rochester, N.Y. Meadville D.D. 1941, Trustee 1972-78. Former Minister, Third Unitarian Church, Chicago
**Edwin Henry Wilson*, Managing Editor, *The New Humanist*, Chicago, Illinois. Minister, Third Unitarian Church, Chicago, Illinois. Meadville Graduate and B.D. 1926, D.D. 1949. (Editor)

Bold: Meadville (Graduate and B.D. are earned, D.D. is honorary)
Italic: Unitarian
Bold Italic: Meadville Unitarian
* Holder of Unitarian fellowship

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