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Modern Humanism

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Unbelief is, in truth, the sin of sins, odious to God and odious to the Christian. "Let us ever bear in mind that every one who denies the inspiration of Scripture is *eo ipso* a critic of Scripture, and one who criticizes Scripture — which, as God's Word, will not be criticized but *believed* — comes under the fearful judgment of God described in Matt. 11:25." "The same faith and obedience that is due to God is due to Scripture in all that it says. He who rejects or even only criticizes Scripture insults the Majesty of God. He is committing a *crimen laesae majestatis divinae*." (Pieper, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 280, 371.)

All objections to the divine inspiration and the inerrancy of Scripture are unworthy of a Christian.

TH. ENGELDER

(To be continued)

Modern Humanism¹⁾

"Humanism," in the words of Walter Lippmann, "to replace the conception of man as the subject of a heavenly King takes as its dominant pattern the progress of the individual from helpless infancy to self-governing maturity."²⁾ Modern Humanism has been labeled as scientific or literary or philosophic humanism and more recently as Religious Humanism. Humanism parades under the name of religion and claims to be "a cult or belief calling itself religious but substituting faith in man for faith in God." C. F. Potter, an exponent of so-called Religious Humanism, defines it as "faith in the supreme value and self-perfectibility of human personality." In the words of Prof. E. E. Aubrey the Religious Humanists endeavor to emancipate "religion from a theism which obstructs the full exercise of man's courage and initiative for human improvement."³⁾ According to Prof. J. Auer a humanist does not necessarily deny the existence of God, but he will insist that a true religious experience is possible without the belief in God in the theistic sense.⁴⁾ Humanism is the rankest kind of rationalism. In the final analysis there is little practical difference

1) The material in this article is essentially the same as that presented in a series of lectures on "Modern Isms" at pastors' institutes in 1940.

2) Webster's *New International Dictionary*.

3) Aubrey, *Present Theological Tendencies*, 1936, pp. 167, 174n.

4) *Humanism States Its Case*, 1933, pp. 79, 80, quoted in Dakin, *Man the Measure, an Essay on Humanism as a Religion*, 1939, p. 20. Incidentally the title of Dakin's book is significant, for the motto of all humanists is: Man is the measure and standard of all truth. Dakin offers an exhaustive study and a keen analysis of every significant phase of Humanism.

between humanism and naturalism. It is true that exponents of humanism like Norman Foerster claim that humanism is a vigorous protest against naturalism. They say that humanism does not begin with nature but with man, that humanism grants to man as an autonomous being the right to seek those things which in his opinion constitute a normal, rich, exalted, beautiful life, whereas naturalism views man merely as an automaton caught in the clutches of the inexorable laws of nature. But, after all, there is little difference between modern Scientific Naturalism and Religious Humanism; the one is an apotheosis of nature; the other, of human nature.⁵⁾ Dr. H. S. Coffin, in his commencement address at Union Theological Seminary in 1929, warned against humanism because it "makes 'God' simply a name for the ethical ideal evolved by mankind and attempts to draw its moral standards from a study of human behavior."⁶⁾ Humanism regards theistic religion as the most active menace to civilization and considers its anthropocentric philosophy as the only hope of the world.

Humanism reached the peak of its popularity about 1930. Since then the high-class magazines have discussed it increasingly less. The only school of humanists which endeavored to effect some sort of an organization are the Religious Humanists.⁷⁾ The majority of Religious Humanists are Unitarians. It seems that this movement resembles Unitarianism not only in its tenets but also in its sterility. L. Mercier, professor of philosophy at Harvard, said recently that humanism is dying. In 1933 more than 30 men, professors of sociology and philosophy, Unitarian ministers, authors, ethical culturists, and others published *A Humanist Manifesto*.⁸⁾ This manifesto did not create the stir which its authors anticipated.

5) Norman Foerster, *Humanism and Religion*; *Forum*, Sept. 1929, p. 150. See also *Lutheran Church Quarterly*, Jan. 1939, p. 55 ff. J. W. Krutch, *The Paradox of Humanism*. *The Atlantic Monthly*, Dec. 1927, p. 756 ff.

6) *Forum*, Sept. 1929, p. 146.

7) The Humanist Press Association, 700 Oakwood Blvd., Chicago, was organized by a number of Unitarian ministers and professors of philosophy. According to newspaper reports of recent meetings the objective of this group at present is to popularize Religious Humanism.

8) "The time has come for wide-spread recognition of the radical changes in religious beliefs throughout the modern world. The time is past for mere revision of traditional attitudes. Science and economic change have disrupted the old beliefs. Religions the world over are under the necessity of coming to terms with new conditions created by a vastly increased knowledge and experience. In every field of human activity the vital movement is now in the direction of a candid and explicit humanism. In order that Religious Humanism may be better understood, we, the undersigned, desire to make certain affirmations which, we believe, the facts of our contemporary life demonstrate.

"Today man's larger understanding of the universe, his scientific achievements, and his deeper appreciation of brotherhood have created

a situation which requires a new statement of the means and purposes of religion. Such a vital, fearless, and frank religion capable of furnishing adequate social goals and personal satisfactions may appear to many people as a complete break with the past. While this age does owe a vast debt to the traditional religions, it is none the less obvious that any religion that can hope to be a synthesizing and dynamic force for today must be shaped for the needs of the present age. To establish such a religion is a major necessity of the present. It is a responsibility which rests upon this generation. We therefore affirm the following:

"1. Religious Humanists regard the universe as self-existing, not created.

"2. Humanism believes that man is a part of nature and that he has emerged as the result of a continuous process.

"3. Holding an organic view of life, humanists find that the traditional dualism of mind and body must be rejected.

"4. Man's religious culture and civilization, as clearly depicted by anthropology and history, are the product of a gradual development due to his interaction with his natural environment and social heritage. The individual of a particular culture is molded by that culture.

"5. The nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values. Humanism insists that the way to determine the existence and value of all realities is by intelligent inquiry and by the assessment of their relation to human needs. Religion must formulate its hopes and plans in the light of the scientific spirit and method.

"6. The time has passed for theism, deism, modernism, and the several varieties of 'new thought.'

"7. Religion consists of those actions, purposes, and experiences which are humanly significant. Nothing human is alien to the religious. It includes labor, art, science, philosophy, love, friendship, recreation—all that is expressive of intelligently satisfying human living. The distinction between the sacred and the secular can no longer be maintained.

"8. Religious Humanism considers the complete realization of human personality to be the end of man's life and seeks its development and fulfillment in the here and now. This explains the humanist's social passion.

"9. In place of the old attitudes involved in worship and prayer the humanist finds his religious emotions expressed in a heightened sense of personal life and in a cooperative effort to promote social well-being.

"10. It follows that there will be no uniquely religious emotions and attitudes of the kind hitherto associated with belief in the supernatural.

"11. Man will learn to face the crises of life in terms of his knowledge of their naturalness and probability. Reasonable and manly attitudes will be fostered by education. Humanism will take the path of social and mental hygiene and discourage sentimental and unreal hopes and wishful thinking.

"12. Believing that religion must work increasingly for joy in living, Religious Humanists aim to foster the creative in man and to encourage achievements that add to the satisfactions of life.

"13. Religious Humanism maintains that all associations and institutions exist for the fulfillment of human life. The intelligent evaluation, transformation, control, and direction of such associations and institutions with a view to the enhancement of human life is the purpose and program of humanism. Certainly religious institutions, their ritualistic forms, ecclesiastical methods, and communal activities must be reconstituted in order to function effectively in the modern world.

"14. The humanists are firmly convinced that existing acquisitive and profit-motivated society is inadequate and that a radical change in methods, controls, and motives must be instituted. A socialized and cooperative economic order must be established for the equitable dis-

Modern humanism must not be confused with the Humanism of an Erasmus, Petrarch, Colet. Rather, it is more closely related to such ethnic religions as Confucianism and Buddhism. Irving Babbitt, the outstanding literary humanist, turned to Primitive Buddhism, or Hinayana, as is evident from a posthumous essay published in 1936, *The Dhammapada*.⁹⁾ Modern humanism resembles Greek sophism, which endeavored to produce individual goodness through cooperative human endeavor. Humanism is very closely related to Modernism, in fact, the two have frequently been identified. Theoretically Modernism professes to be theistic and opposed to the materialistic implications and non-theistic (i. e., atheistic) preachments of humanism. In reality, however, the chasm between the two is not very deep nor very wide, and a number of Modernists have conveniently transferred to the other side. The Modernist D. C. Macintosh speaks of the humanists as "Christian mutilés"; W. A. Brown says that the "Christian" shares with the humanist the conviction that man is fully competent to become what he ought to be; and Shailer Mathews sees little in the message of humanism which differs from the social gospel of the Modernist, except that the humanist substitutes human capacity for God.¹⁰⁾

Essentially there is little difference between the views of the various humanists. They are usually divided into two schools, the Columbia group, under the leadership of John Dewey, and the Chicago school, under E. S. Ames. The division offered by Elias Andrews adapts itself to our purposes, and we shall follow it because it presents a rather comprehensive view of the aims of humanism.¹¹⁾

1. *Philosophic Humanism* is based on the philosophy of John Dewey and F. C. Schiller, that knowing and doing go hand in hand. There can therefore be no rigid tenets about any truth; in fact, the only certain thing in life is constant change. All intellectual and moral values are dependent entirely upon what men do. There are no eternal standards, for the good is never the same. All

tribution of the means of life. The goal of humanism is a free and universal society in which people voluntarily and intelligently cooperate for the common good. Humanists demand a shared life in a shared world.

"15. Humanism will (a) affirm life rather than deny it; (b) seek to elicit the possibilities of life, not flee from it; and (c) endeavor to establish the conditions of a satisfactory life for all, not merely for the few."

Included in the list of signers are: John Dewey, E. A. Haydon, E. H. Barnes, Maynard Shipley, H. Randall, Jr., R. W. Sellars, J. J. Weinstein.

9) T. S. Eliot, in Baillie and Martin, *Revelation*, p. 16 ff.

10) The references are to *Humanism, Another Battle Line*, edited by Wm. P. King and containing essays by ten well-known Modernists.

11) Elias Andrews, *Modern Humanism and Christian Theism*, 1939, Grand Rapids.

moral values arise out of action, out of the constant intercourse among men. So-called religion is only the idealizing of the present social and moral standards. "Religion, then, for Dewey cuts itself off altogether from any relationship to a supernatural world and finds in human life and experience the ground for everything that is worthy; in short, Pragmatism and Positivism unite to produce antitheistic humanism."¹²⁾ The gist of Dewey's humanism is: By a cooperative human endeavor, without any supernatural intervention, man and society will ultimately reach perfection.¹³⁾ Man's conduct is the standard of morality.

2. *Scientific Humanism* takes the position that through science man will control the forces of nature which "primitive man" feared and which he deified. Man has increasingly gained control of the universe through inventions which reduce, as it were, space and time, which enable man to lower the death-rate, etc. Science will ultimately enable man to dismiss the concept of the supernatural entirely from his vocabulary and to place the salvation of the individual and the race entirely into man's own hands. As man controls the physical world, so he also alone will determine the cultural and moral standards.

"As a frank naturalist physical systems are for me ultimate, and I have seen no reason to postulate an extraphysical *nisus*. Nature is for me intrinsically dynamic."¹⁴⁾

"Men and women must realize that the future is in their hands, that they have the power to acquire and apply knowledge so as to control disease, prevent children from being born to misery through defective heredity, regulate population and, in a word, help to control the way in which civilization and the human species is to evolve."¹⁵⁾

Scientific Humanism, however, is compelled to lament with Elmer More: "If only we were sure of attaining happiness on the human level!" Fatalism and pessimism are the inevitable goals to which this kind of humanism will lead. Witness Bertrand Russell:

"That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental allocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system; and that the whole temple of man's achievement

12) Andrews, l. c., p. 70.

13) John Dewey, *The Common Faith*, pp. 26, 32, 56 f.

14) Personal statement of R. W. Sellars in *Contemporary American Philosophy*, 1930, II, p. 277.

15) J. S. Huxley, *Religion without Revelation*, p. 371; quoted in Andrews, l. c., 87.

must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of the universe in ruins,—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair [??], can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built."¹⁶⁾

3. *Psychological Humanism* is based on behaviorism and psychoanalysis, claiming that all tendencies which determine behavior can be analyzed and that human behavior can be explained in terms of biological value. Freud considered the *libido* (a polite word for passion) the determining factor in man's behavior and claimed that all behavior was conditioned by a repression of the *libido* in early life. The Psychological humanist explains the father-child relation in religion, the theological terms of Father, Lord, King, etc., merely as projections to suit the needs of man. The Christian concepts of God are merely expressions of human instincts and inherent powers. Jung believes that, if the *libido*, the *élan vital*, the conative energy, is properly directed, man is able to reach illimitable heights. He says:

"If one honors God, the sun, or the fire, then one honors one's own vital force, the *libido*. . . . God is our longing, to which we pay divine honors. . . . The *libido* can enforce a standard of accomplishment that would be unattainable to conscious effort. . . . God is the *optimum* of psychological activity. . . . God is a psychological function of man."¹⁷⁾

4. *Literary Humanism* is predicated on the theory that good literature is the standard of man's behavior. Since the death of its two outstanding exponents, Irving Babbitt and Paul E. More, Literary Humanism is virtually a thing of the past. These humanists viewed man as possessed of a higher and lower nature, the former the controlling factor. By intuition, imaginative insight, by inner discipline, self-restraint (the veto power, *frein vital*, *Entsagung*), man can so emulate the great models of antiquity that he ultimately reaches individual happiness.¹⁸⁾ Babbitt's philosophy was orientated in Buddhism and his *frein vital* reminds one very forcibly of Oriental royal yoga.

5. *Religious Humanism* makes of religion a worship of the spirit of humanity. Man's spirit is the most exalted reality, and it alone is worthy of worship. The kingdom of God must make room for the kingdom of man. The only excuse for denominating this type of humanism as *religious* is that man, having been

16) *A Free Man's Worship*; Traveller's Library, p. 1295 f., quoted in Andrews, l. c., 92.

17) *Psychological Types*, p. 300; *Psychology of the Unconscious*, p. 38. Quoted by Dakin, l. c., 138, 142.

18) Phil. S. Richards, *Irving Babbitt, a New Humanism; The Nineteenth Century*, April, 1928, p. 433 ff.

placed into the center of the universe, is given the honor and glory which religion offers to the Supreme Being. A few samples from the writings of so-called Religious Humanists will show that they ascribe to man the ability to "build a city and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven," Gen. 11:4. Dr. John Dietrich, pastor emeritus of the Unitarian Society at Minneapolis and author of many published lectures on humanism, writes:

"Humanism considers human life an end in itself and teaches that everything in life should contribute to the glory of men rather than the glory of God.—There is no power outside of man himself that fashions individual character and human society. Humanism takes humanity and glorifies and idealizes it with the attributes of God."¹⁹⁾

Prof. A. E. Haydon, professor of history of religions at the University of Chicago, holds that we must renounce the escape mechanism of a kingdom of heaven and establish a rule of justice and goodness on earth. Though Utopias are outmoded, man must meet natural evil, such as disease, death, with science, and social or individual evil with adjustment of personal relations.²⁰⁾ Walter Lippmann:

"When men can no longer be theists, they must, if they are civilized, become humanists. It is to a morality of humanism that men must turn when the ancient order of things dissolves. When they find that they no longer believe seriously and deeply that they are governed from heaven, there is anarchy in their souls until by conscious effort they find ways of governing themselves."²¹⁾

E. S. Ames, of the philosophy department at the University of Chicago and minister in the Disciples Church:

"When once the natural history of religion in human experience is understood, religion might then consciously develop ideologies in place of social creeds, social values and ideals in place of supernatural commands, dramatic ceremonials in place of ordinances and sacraments, and reasonably planned social institutions instead of apocalyptic visions."²²⁾

The Unitarian C. W. Reese, who is president of the Humanist Press Association, is quoted by Edwin H. Wilson as saying:

"The theocratic view of the world is autocratic; the humanistic is democratic and holds that this is man's world and that it largely depends on man what the world order shall be like. The chief end of men is to promote man's welfare here and now."²³⁾

19) *My Idea of God*, p. 186 ff. Quoted in Andrews, l. c., p. 56.

20) Dakin, l. c., p. 154. See also Ivan Lee Holt's summary of Haydon Humanism in King, *Humanism*, l. c., p. 115.

21) *A Preface to Morals*, p. 137 f.; quoted in Andrews, l. c., p. 74.

22) *Christianity and Scientific Thinking; Journal of Religion*, 1934, p. 11.

23) Quoted in Dakin, l. c., p. 153.

Religious Humanism is the acme of a this-worldly religion; for in the words of E. H. Wilson, to a reporter of the *Chicago Tribune* concerning the aims of the Humanist Press Association, humanists

"are not atheists. We have no quarrel with any religion. We are merely trying to infiltrate our belief of the supremacy of human personality into all religions. We see no conflict."

The Christian has no difficulty in cataloguing humanism with those systems which St. Paul condemns in Col. 2:8. Humanism, however, is so shallow that it is condemned also in the light of reason.

1. Humanism is not *scientific*. The premise of the humanists that the social, economic, cultural, and moral problems will be solved by science is unscientific. In his analysis of humanism Dakin correctly asserts that "in humanistic writings scientific cant plays roughly the same persuasive and corrupting role that commercial advertising does in ordinary life. The phrase 'scientifically approved' acts as an opiate."²⁴ The humanist's science is merely a preconceived, subjective opinion. There is no basis for the claim that man cannot be concerned about those things which are beyond the field of cause and effect. *Bona-fide* scientists are agreed that there are many spiritual and intangible values which cannot be investigated with laboratory tubes. The unscientific method of humanists becomes very patent in the claims which they base on psychology. First of all, psychology is not a science, and furthermore, the investigations of men like W. Schmidt in the field of anthropology show that evolution in the field of religion is disproved by the existence of fundamental monotheism in the earliest times.²⁵ As scientists humanists are self-contradictory; for on the one hand, they say that modern science has shown us that man and our planet are but a small and insignificant part of the universe, that "man is only a sick fly on the dizzy wheel of the cosmic universe" (H. L. Mencken) and "only a highly temporary episode on a most petty planet" (H. E. Barnes), and, on the other hand, humanists have all but deified man.²⁶

2. Humanism is *irrational*. It is not only unfair but an irrational method to direct their destructive attacks against the Church without having the least conception of the nature and

24) Dakin, l. c., p. 103.

25) See the review of Wilhelm Schmidt's two recent books, *Primitive Revelation and Culture-Historical Method of Ethnology*, in the *Cresset*, Jan. 1941, pp. 48-50. Cf. also Zwemer, *The Origin of Religion*. W. J. Blyton, *Where Humanism Breaks Down*; *The Hibbert Journal*, July, 1929, p. 620 ff.

26) Cf. *Introduction to Sociology*, Davis, Barnes, and others, Book I, chap. VII.

function of the Church. They draw a caricature of the Church and then ridicule the caricature; they set up a straw man in order to knock him down. Furthermore, humanists are irrational because they speak of their system as a religion without its having an object of worship. Or is humanism *autolatry*? If God is no more than the sum of perfected human attributes, then, of course, humanism worships human character as God. That probably explains the prayer spoken in Dr. Ames's church:

"O Thou Objectification of our highest ideals! O Thou Projection of our sublimated *libido*! O Thou Symbol of the highest social values! O Thou Personification, Idealization, and Glorification of the world, including humanity! O Thou Wish-Being! O Thou Substantiated Abstraction!"²⁷⁾

3. Humanism is immoral. If there is no God, no hereafter, if life is essentially *change*, then there can be no standard of morality nor an incentive leading toward morality. All moral standards are subject to constant change, since they are only subjective creations. Whether an action is right or wrong depends entirely on one's personal viewpoint. The whole immoral tenor to which humanism must inevitably lead is expressed in the frequently quoted words of Bertrand Russell:

"Outside human desires there is no moral standard. In the absence of children sexual relations are a purely private matter, which does not concern either the state or the neighbors."

Have humanists not read history? When the Roman philosophers instructed people to laugh at their idols, the morality soon disappeared and with it—the empire.

Humanism's best efforts can take man only into the "cosmic chill of godless space and time." J. W. Krutch, an advocate of humanism, is suspicious of his system and urges that somehow man should strive for absolute standards. And Paul More thought that humanism's chain was perfect, link by link; only at the end it seemed to be attached to—nothing.

F. E. MAYER

27) Quoted in King, *l. c.*, p. 62.