

Humanism: A Few Words of Introduction: Its Origin – Some Definitions – Its Creed – Our Reactions

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The title of this presentation, as listed in your program, reads, “Religious Paper, Influence of Humanism.” After working on this paper, I felt a more apt title might be in place. We offer the following title: **Humanism: A Few Words of Introduction: Its Origin – Some Definitions – Its Creed – Our Reactions.**

We begin our presentation with a few words of introduction. In your folders you have a picture entitled “Shadows in the Snow”. It is a picture taken by a Chinese photographer. Take out that picture and spend a few moments studying the same. In it we would have you see Jesus.

The Holy Scriptures tell us of some Greeks who came to Phillip saying, “Sir, we would see Jesus.” (John 12:21). Today we would have you see Jesus in the picture. Who has seen Him? The most of you have seen this picture before and should not have difficulty in discerning Him. When we think of the students whom we have in our schools, we would have them see Jesus as their Savior and, Having seen Him, that they would grow in grace and in their knowledge of Him as the One who has redeemed them.

In real life seeing Jesus is not always readily accomplished. Obstacles arise which hinder us and our children from seeing Jesus, from believing in Him as the only way to eternal life. It is imperative they see Jesus for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby salvation is possible. "Salvation is found in no one else." (Acts 4:12).

In pursuing the goal of seeing Jesus, we and our children contend with powerful forces which would keep us and them from seeing Jesus. Those forces are none other than the "unholy three": the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. They all have but one goal, that of keeping us and our children from seeing Jesus.

As we contend with these forces of evil, let us not forget Christ's goal, particularly for our children. We are reminded of the lovely account in Scripture of some people bringing their children to Jesus so that he might bless them. Do you recall Christ's invitation? It reads, "Let the little children come unto Me and do not hinder them for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Luke 18:16) They are to see Jesus. Nor would we overlook Jesus' words to Peter as a representative of the Church, "Feed my Lambs." (John 21:12), nor Jesus' great mission command to the disciples, "Go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:19,20) As we indicated a moment ago, we face definite obstacles in pursuing our goal of having our children see Jesus. We called you attention to the "unholy three" – the devil, the world and man's sinful nature, chief of whom of course is that wily old devil, Satan. Satan would employ every trick of his trade to keep our children from seeing Jesus.

The most recent, and yet not so recent, trap in his arsenal of deception is what in educational circles is known as secular humanism, spelled with a capital "H". At first glance it seems to be a great sounding term at least so a local newspaper thought. The very word "human" in Humanism suggests something noble, something lofty. That sets us off guard. To be human – why, isn't that what life is all about? Or how about the term "humanitarian"? If "human" doesn't satisfy, "humanitarian" certainly should.

On closer examination "Humanism" isn't all that great though it may and does have vigorous defenders. We label it as a tool of Satan in the hands of certain leaders in the church, particularly the Unitarians, in the hands of educational leaders, and among leaders in modern society who would dethrone God and place man on God's throne instead.

The present century has been proclaimed to be the Humanist Century. Though Humanism has been spooking around this world since man's fall in the Garden of Eden, it perhaps never enjoyed the popularity it enjoys today. An article appearing in the St. Paul Dispatch on September 24, 1982 bears evidence of Humanism's presence in our society. The former superintendent of schools in South St. Paul in an article entitled, "Secular Humanism in the School" wrote the following:

A growing number of educators recognize and accept secular Humanism as a religion. Increasingly, school boards and administrators are being made aware that there is a significant number (and it is snowballing) of citizens out there, and particularly parents, who believe similarly. There is growing concern that this religion is being included regularly in school programs, but differently than prescribed for including all other religions. Until school board members and educators recognize secular humanism as a religion, until they become aware and knowledgeable of its tenets, and until they are able to identify these tenets in teaching materials and instruction and deal with them as a religion, the schools will continue to indoctrinate most of the young people with another faith, another set of beliefs and attitudes.

There are those who would trace the origin of Humanism back to the Greeks. Others consider it a product of the Renaissance. Some would credit Confucius for its origin. I, myself, would date it back to that moment in the Garden of Eden when Eve literally made herself the measure of all things, looked upon the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil as a tree good for food, a tree pleasant to the eye, took fruit thereof and did eat and gave also unto her husband and he did eat. This man became a law unto himself. Humanism in its basic substance was born.

We identified the Humanism with which we are most commonly confronted as "Secular Humanism." There supposedly are many kinds of Humanism. The term is widely used with applicable adjectives to identify the different types. One reads of ethical Humanism, scientific Humanism, religious Humanism, naturalistic Humanism, Marxist Humanism, behavioral Humanism, and other types. The most recent type has been labeled Christian Humanism. I have taken that label from the title of a recent book by Augsburg Publishing House entitled *Readings in Christian Humanism*. (1982) It is the joint project of four colleges: St. Catherine of St. Paul; Luther College of Decorah, Iowa; St. John's University of Collegeville, Minnesota; and St. Olaf College of Northfield, all liberal arts institutions declaring themselves to be dedicated to the study of the humanities.

The preface to this book offers this introductory paragraph:

This book presents a selection of writing on Humanism from the perspective of Christian faith. Beginning with Plato, Aristotle and the Old Testament, as forerunners of the Christian tradition of Humanism, the readings range from early Christianity to modern times. Included are such important thinkers as Augustine, Francis of Assisi, Petrarch, Erasmus, Galileo, Reinhold Niebuhr, Dorothy Sayers and Martin Luther King Jr. Excerpts from the works of such influential persons show how Christians in different historical periods have addressed themselves to significant problems.

Another interesting quote reads: "Christian Humanism seeks an understanding of the whole range of human experience in the light of God's revelation to humanity in the person and

work of Jesus Christ." This and similar quotations sound very fine until one examines the selections given to justify calling Humanism Christian Humanism. You heard the names of some of the authors of selections included. I would refer to but one more. He is Friedrich Schleiermacher. His view of faith is in many respects identical to the religion of Humanism today with its emphasis of doing your own thing as long as you are convinced it's the right thing to do and it satisfies you. While one does not wish to judge, yet a perusal of the contributions of certain of the individuals listed makes one wonder about the nature of the term Christian in Christian Humanism.

Definitions are in place at the juncture. Protagoras, a fifth century BC philosopher, tired of the standard explanation that the pagan gods were responsible for man's behavior, discarded theology as the authority in human affairs and declared, "Man is the measure of all things." In that statement he gave the world the basic definition for Humanism as we know it today.

Webster's dictionary offers the following definition for Humanism: "A contemporary cult or belief calling itself religious and substituting faith in man for faith in God."

Sidney Hook in examining various definitions offered for Humanism offers his own. He writes, "If I had to propose a short, positive definition, I would say that a humanist today is one who relies on the arts of intelligence to defend, enlarge and enhance the areas of freedom in the world. Humanism is a concept of which a man espouses a sensitive regard for each man as his own end and for man responsible for man. Man is his own rule and his own end. Human life is in human hands. The strategy of living is to adapt and adopt and not to obey and conform."

Algernon Black defines Humanism as "that philosophy of life which calls men to shed dogmas and divisions of traditional religions, to reject revealed religion."

Marvin Zimmerman offers the following: "Humanists are individuals who repudiate the belief in a perfect, omnipotent and benevolent Creator who performs miracles, responds to prayer and proclaims a fundamental set of eternal moral principles. If there is a deity, he would either be a devil or insane."

Time magazine gives an interesting definition. "Now humanist means a believer in an ethical nonreligion, in which the Supreme Being is man and a prayer is a telephone conversation with no one at the other end." (*Time*, August 17, 1962, "The Supreme Being: Man")

Humanism of our day is commonly found in the writing of psychologists. In today's society psychologists exercise a great deal of influence. While they do not offer us exact definitions for Humanism, they do espouse their viewpoints which gives us the flavor of Humanism. Herbert Bonner in his *Proactive Person* states the following, "Man is responsible for his own fate. Man is the captain of his own ship. He must have faith in his own abilities to master his own destiny." Carl Rogers in *The Fully Functioning Person* declares, "Man must trust in himself and rely on his own feelings of right and wrong. It rests with himself to choose. All that matters is 'Am I a living being in a way which satisfies me and truly expresses me.'" Rogers further states, "I believe the new man has characteristics which run strongly counter to the orthodoxies, dogmas, forms, and creeds of the major Western religions." He is cunning enough not to say man has characteristics which run counter to the Scriptures, but that is what his oblique statement means. Humanism espoused by Rogers opposed the Scriptures, both their God and their Christ. Abraham Maslow in his *Self-Actualizing Person* says, "Man's inner nature as far as we know it seems not to be intrinsically evil but neither neutral or positively good. Since this inner nature is good, it is best not to suppress it." He deplores that "for many generations we have bowed our neck to the yoke of the conviction of sin." Maslow views the child unique, a person of worth and value in its own right. When he characterizes it in that fashion, we recognize

the vital differences between his concept of the worth and value of a child and the worth and value of a child God has created and redeemed. If Maslow's portrayal of the child were correct, the child would need no authoritative instructor to tell it what it needs to know. All the child would need is a facilitator of learning to assist it in its self-education.

As one reviews what these psychologists propound, one must come away with the conclusion that humanist psychologists in general believe that a newborn is born basically "good", that he has tremendous growth and potential, and that he has a basic inner nature that is striving for actualization. They believe as one humanist put it that the best thing parents can do for a child is nothing. They should stay out of the child's way and let the child unfold and become. Parents must believe children will develop without parents on their own.

We could continue with other definitions, expositions, declared viewpoints and beliefs. Let us, however, move on and examine what we may view as the catechisms of Humanism as it reveals itself in our day and age. Those catechisms setting forth the basic creed of Humanism bear the titles *Humanist Manifesto I* and *Humanist Manifesto II*.

Humanist Manifesto I was developed by Roy Wood Sellars, professor of philosophy at the University of Michigan. He tells of how it came into being. "During the 1930's I was invited by a small group of people, teachers and ministers, to give a talk at the University of Chicago on the situation in religion. The outcome was that I was asked to formulate basic principles along humanistic lines. I called my formulation "A Humanist Manifesto." I sent it back and received suggestion, some of which I incorporated in the "Manifesto." It was then published with the signatures of many outstanding persons in the religious field and is now called an historical document."

The second document we would examine is called *Humanist Manifesto II*. It appeared in 1973. It speaks out on religion, ethics, the individual, democratic society, world community and humanity as a whole. Let us turn to these documents to learn about Humanism's creed firsthand.

An interesting summary of the Humanist Creed is found in the text *Society, State, and Schools: A Case for Structural and Confessional Pluralism* in its chapter "Confessional Pluralism and School Funding", pp. 117-119. It helps us sum up what we have heard in the Manifestos I and II.

"Summary of a Humanist Creed"

1. Humanism holds to an evolutionary explanation of both human rights and development.
 - a. Manifesto I, second thesis
 - b. Manifesto II, second thesis
2. Humanism believes that the scientific method is applicable to all areas of human concern, and is the only valid means of determining truth.
 - a. Manifesto I, fifth thesis
 - b. Manifesto II, Preface and first thesis
3. Humanism affirms cultural relativism, the belief that values are grounded only in a given culture and have no transcultural normativity.
 - a. Manifest I, fifth thesis
 - b. Manifesto II, third thesis
4. Humanism affirms an anthropocentric and naturalistic view of life.
 - a. Manifest I, eighth thesis, tenth thesis, fifteenth thesis

- b. Manifesto II, first thesis
- 5. Humanism affirms an ethic of individualism, one in which personal values take precedence over community standards of behavior.
 - a. Manifesto II, fifth thesis, sixth thesis, seventh thesis
- 6. Humanism affirms cultural determinism, the belief that values in a given society are largely determined by environmental circumstances.
 - a. Manifesto I, fourth thesis
- 7. Humanism believes in the innate goodness and perfectibility of the human species.
 - a. Manifesto I, fifteenth thesis
 - b. Manifesto II, Preface

From what we have said about the origin and development of Humanism and in particular from what we have discovered about Humanism's creed, as set forth in Humanist Manifesto I and Humanist Manifesto II, essential elements of its true nature have emerged. Former Professor Gerlach of our Seminary at Mequon offers the following step by step picture. He begins his sketch by stating that in the beginning God was supreme and man was dependent. From a recognition of the absolute authority of God, he then lists a second step – "a *questioning* of the absolute authority of God"; the third step – "a *rejection* of the authority of God"; the fourth step – "a *questioning* of the existence of God"; the fifth step – "a *denial* of the existence of God"; the sixth step – "an *assertion* of the autonomy of man." Man emerges as supreme. God is dethroned and in the words of Henley's "Invictus" the humanist unashamedly declares, "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul."

As instructors in our Lutheran schools we must be aware that Humanism's influence reminds one of the tentacles of an octopus. Humanism with its soul-destroying doctrines of the rejection of the Holy Scriptures as authoritative in matters of life both temporal and eternal; with its rejection of God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier; with its dependence on evolution to explain the origin of all things; with its espousal of the scientific method as the only one true source of information for the solution of man's problems has fastened itself with a stranglehold on everything. Francis Schaeffer in his *Escape from Reason* states, "It has had its beginning in the philosophy of existentialism. It has spread by disciplines...philosophy, then art, then music, then general culture. Theology comes last." And indeed we have come the full circle.

As one examines Humanism's creed, as one analyzes its methodologies, as one learns how it is forcing its way into our classrooms in the textbooks we use and through the psychological principles with which it may influence our thinking to the detriment of ourselves and our students, as one notes its pervading influence in modern-day society, we must ask ourselves, "**How shall we as Christian educators deal with Humanism?**"

Various alternatives present themselves.

1. We can ignore the fact that Humanism exists and do nothing about it. Who would want that?
2. We can embrace Humanism with its dogmas, its methodologies, with its role in modern society and do everything to promote its well-being. But who would want to stoop to that?
3. We can reject absolutely everything about Humanism and institute witch hunts to ferret out its supposed presence lurking in every lesson we teach, aside from the Word of God itself. While this is a plausible alternative in view of the fact that Humanism is in its basic tenets an enemy of the Gospel, this would be a questionable approach.

4. We can inform ourselves about Humanism, its creed, its methodologies, its implications, and then, being equipped with the full armor of God, we may evaluate it and determine on the basis of such evaluation what to selectively use or reject.
5. Finally, the most effective manner in which to deal with Humanism is through the message of the Word. Therein we can ground ourselves in matters dealing with the origin of man and all things, man's nature, his destiny, the knowledge of God and His will for man. Therein we can fortify our faith through the Gospel message whereby the Holy Spirit creates faith, sanctifies us and keeps us in the true faith. Fully steeped in the Word, we can use that Word in our classrooms. Let us keep in mind, however, that when we teach God's Word, that very Word must be seen in our actions. When Christ is not proclaimed in our daily personal and professional routines by the confession of our lips as well as the example of our lives, then our stance against Humanism loses its substance. With a faith kept healthy by God's Word, in word and deed, the Christian teacher should be able to deal with Humanism as with all things in life, carefully and knowledgeably that God might be glorified. This is possible in our Christian schools.

And so I say, "Thank God for our Lutheran schools at all levels of education. They, too, have their problems; they, too, have their shortcomings; they, too, may experience failures. **But thank God with me that our Lutheran schools are still blessed oases in the educational wilderness of this world. They promote allegiance to the Lord our God. They make His word the very heart and soul of their educational program. They recognize in their students individuals endowed with immortal souls, individuals both sinners and saints, individuals whom God the Father has elected from eternity to spend eternity with Him.**

Finally, though an unbelieving world prefers to be placed on that pedestal which makes man the measure of all things and casts God and His Word aside, we Christians are on a pedestal of far greater worth – God's Word. We can boldly confess, "On Christ the solid Rock we stand." And thus seeing Jesus as he desires to be seen, we and our students can let our voices burst forth in brilliant praise, evermore saying, "Unto Him that loved us and has washed us from our sins in His own blood and made us king and priests unto God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion, forever and ever, Amen."