

# **The Christian Educator in Confrontation with Humanism: Challenges and Responsibilities**

[Wisconsin Lutheran High School Teachers' Conference;  
Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; October 31, 1975]

*Theodore Hartwig*

## Preliminaries

Humanism through the ages  
Problems of definition  
Humanism's current popularity  
- the influence of events  
- the influence of ideas

Our Christian assignment

## Humanism: the present and the past

Aspects of contemporary humanism  
Humanist Manifestos  
Varieties of humanism  
Foundations of naturalistic humanism  
Humanism in educational psychology

## Humanism in history

Humanism in the Renaissance: aims, effects, achievements  
Humanism in the Middle Ages

## Man and human-ness in the Creation

Man in God's image  
Man's primeval lordship  
Man after the Fall

## Humanism's challenge to Christian life

A Christian approach  
Overt challenges  
Subtle challenges in Christian education  
- regarding knowledge  
- regarding the scientific method  
- regarding human nature

## Humanism in the service of Christians

- Luther and Melanchthon  
- a corrective to traditionalism and obscurantism  
- keeping the human factor in perspective

As one recent Christian historian stated it, the humanist spirit lies at the foundation of all modern conceptions and constitutes the leaven of all modern history.<sup>1</sup> This is a good estimate, and it applies just as well for the totalitarian as the democratic world. We also agree with the claim that humanism will never become obsolete.<sup>2</sup> It has been around a long time. It appeared as a specific ideal and methodology during the Renaissance of the thirteen and fourteen hundreds. The humanists of that time in turn, skipping over what they called a thousand years of Gothic

---

<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History* (Meridian Books, 1968), p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> Corliss Lamont, *The Philosophy of Humanism*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Ungar, 1965), p. 19.

barbarism, found the roots of their humanism among the Romans and Greeks in classical antiquity. Today's humanism claims to be directly descended from the Renaissance. But as usually happens in history, what began in the Renaissance as a fresh method or ideal was worked into a fully developed philosophical system as we meet it today. In our present century, however, voices have also been raised in behalf of a humanism that flourished during those Gothic centuries which separated the Renaissance from the ancient Romans and Greeks. A highly respected medieval historian recently suggested that the eleven and twelve hundreds were one of the greatest ages of humanism in the history of Europe, yes, perhaps the greatest of all.<sup>3</sup> But what of the centuries before Greece? No claims have yet been pushed forward that it all really began in ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia, though recently I came upon a Sumeriologist's exciting discovery of the word *namlulu* in a schoolboy's exercise tablet dating before 2,000 B.C., the word *namlulu* being the Sumerian equivalent for humanity in the sense of conduct and behavior fit for humans. We need not stop here. With the special insights given us through the Holy Scriptures, we have no difficulty finding words and expressions of humanism in the world of mankind which flourished before the Flood. Humanism has been around a long time and, by whatever name people wish to call it, humanism will never become obsolete. When present day humanists say this, they speak truly.

Before going farther, we should understand what we are talking about. Humanism is not identical with the terms humane and humanitarian. Two hundred years ago a humane person was someone of polite learning with a code of behavior that preserved his own dignity and that of others. Today the humane person and humane society deal in compassion. Humanitarianism is the compassion that gets busy with deeds of kindness for one's fellow man especially the derelict, the disadvantaged, and the downtrodden.

Humanism includes all of this, and more. In present day definition stated as broadly as we can, humanism is a concern for human interests; it proclaims the dignity of human nature and human life. Beyond this simple definition, divergences quickly surface. One humanist insists that humanism is impatient of definition, priding itself in the fact it is so alive, it cannot be forced into a straightjacket of limiting terms.<sup>4</sup> Though written fourteen years ago, this opinion continues to reflect a strong cross-section of humanist conviction today.<sup>5</sup>

Instead of trying to settle on a tentative definition at this point, we may help ourselves to uncover what humanism is by considering why it has attracted so much interest within recent years. Humanism represents an optimistic reaction to the grim ideas and events that have tumbled over one another in our tumultuous twentieth century.

Consider the world wars, their brutalizing effect on people, and the pessimism that followed in their wake, beginning in Europe, then spilling over to America - a pessimism that knocked to pieces the hopes and ideals of the previous nineteenth century. Consider the horrifying problems into which science and technology have plunged us. Each new power which man wins from nature threatens to give some people more power over other people. At the same time, each new power wrested from nature results in surrendering things to nature.<sup>6</sup> The debate over man and nature, over human society and technology, reached a new plateau in the 1960's in

---

<sup>3</sup> R. W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (New York: Harper, 1970), p.31.

<sup>4</sup> F. Auer and Julian Hartt, *Humanism Versus Theism* (Antioch Press: 1951), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> For the current views consult letters written in response to Humanist Manifesto II (See *infra*, p. 3). These letters began to be published in the 1973 November/December issue of *The Humanist*.

<sup>6</sup> C. S. Lewis develops these ideas in *The Abolition of Man*, 12<sup>th</sup> pr. (New York: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 71-83.

a series of popular articles and books<sup>7</sup> and the debate has not subsided. Technology is blamed for and technology is exonerated of the ills that beset us today.<sup>8</sup>

Another factor accounting for humanism's tide of popularity is the outward bankruptcy of the Christian faith. The great falling away predicted by Jesus grows, both in statistics of church membership and in faith's hold on the human heart. This is apparent to every observant eye and arouses the scorn of the world. As one cultured outsider aptly said one hundred years ago, "That Christianity has outlived its great epochs is as evident to me as two and two makes four."<sup>9</sup> This falling away sears the conscience of every trembling believer caught up in the benefits of modern culture, benefits that repeatedly confront us with new compromises with the world, so that knowing not where to go or what to do, one cries out, Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.

In our survey of thoughts and trends contributing to the present-day popularity of humanism, consider the revolts of the 1960's: young people protesting the Establishment whatever they thought it was; young people making their protests known as campus rebels, as flower children, as hippies - a mass movement of nihilism which, unchecked, suggested how wide the path and broad the way to the jungle. The resistance has not subsided. Perhaps it has become more violent, more esoteric, more irrational. In one current credo expressed in a kind of Satanic poetry,

Repression breeds resistance. As each day goes by, dark eyes grow darker with hate, strong muscles grow stronger with rage, and cold steel grows colder in the firm grip of a hand that loves the people.<sup>10</sup>

At longer range, we dare never forget the huge impact of Darwinism and of various other pseudo-scientific theories on man's mind. Since they make of the human being something a great deal less than man used to think, and since man has accepted these dehumanizing theories as truth, how can man rehabilitate himself; how can he accommodate himself to these theories without surrendering the dignity he insists man has? How can educators who build on dehumanizing theories pursue an educational program that will assure man of his "otherness," that will claim for man the unique place in the creation which he has disclaimed and yet wants, and which the Christian knows man does have rightfully as a gift? These predicaments account in large part for the popularity of humanism among thinking people, and especially among educators. Humanism represents man's response to the problems man brought on himself. Humanism becomes man's hope to discover, to assert, to affirm, and thus to make secure man's human-ness.

To meet the challenge of humanism today, our responsibility as Christians and as Christian educators is to know what it is by looking it squarely in the face. We must investigate beyond the quick summaries in secondary references and encyclopedias. That would be like looking at colors under artificial light. Our task is to hear out the humanists themselves and in the whole context of what they say. Christian integrity requires it, that we go to the sources and test things firsthand instead of relying solely on the judgment of others.

---

<sup>7</sup> Among the best-known of these: J. Ellul's *The Technological Society* in 1964, L. Mumford's *Myth of the Machine* in 1967 and 1970, R. Dubos' *So Human an Animal* in 1968, C. Reich's *The Greening of America* in 1970, and T. Roszak's *When the Wasteland Ends* in 1972.

<sup>8</sup> See Samuel C. Florman, "In Praise of Technology" in *Harpers* (November: 1975), pp. 53-72.

<sup>9</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, as quoted in Karl Loewith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: Phoenix, 1949), p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> From the politics of the Symbionese Liberation Army, excerpted from the Minneapolis Tribune, September 21, 1975.

The problem with humanism is its shifting meaning. Not only is today's humanism explained in several ways, but the definitions for humanism have changed through the centuries. There is a Greek humanism and a medieval humanism. In the age when the term was born, there is a Renaissance humanism. Let us then examine humanism the best way such things are examined, and that is historically. We begin with our own times, allowing the humanists to speak for themselves. Then we shall look briefly at the kinds of humanism which preceded, in the Renaissance and Middle Ages. And we shall close this study by reviewing what God's Word says about man and his human-ness.

Any examination of modern humanism must take into account the Humanist Manifestos. The first of these appeared in 1933. It came out of Chicago in the form of fifteen short affirmations and was mainly the work of educators and Unitarian ministers. In 1973, Humanist Manifesto II appeared to moderate what it called the over-optimism of its predecessor.<sup>11</sup> As Manifesto II frankly admitted, a reappraisal became necessary because of the tragic evils that overwhelmed man since the time of the first statement. These evils included totalitarianism, wars, police states, espionage, racism and suppression of minorities: testimonies to the inhumanity of which humanity is still capable. Nevertheless, the authors of Manifesto II refused to lose faith. In their words, man must meet these times of uncertainty with affirmation and hopeful vision that is based on reason and the advancing knowledge of things, and man must also be ready to modify his affirmations and declarations with the changing times.<sup>12</sup> Thus the daughter Manifesto preserves the basic optimism of the parent.

While these two documents enjoy considerable prestige as a philosophical attempt to define humanism in a set of propositions, they represent only a cross-section of contemporary humanist thinking. They show us humanism as understood by an articulate group of humanists. It is a humanism thoroughly evolutionistic, anthropocentric, and this-worldly. Its major thesis, asserted in the face of what it denies, is the preciousness and dignity of the individual person. It is a humanism for which Corliss Lamont, one of Manifesto II's signers, suggests the name naturalistic.<sup>13</sup> As every honest humanist will admit, however, this is by no means the only kind of humanism in vogue today. Humanists say they dispense not humanism but *a* humanism. Thus humanistic thinking covers a wide continuum, from the anthropocentric to the theocentric or from naturalistic to Christian. And the one point on which all humanists might agree could be this: there is in the individual person a dignity, and there is something more – something which permits man to be creative. Man is something; he is not nothing.

Today's theocentric humanism resembles the humanism which fired man's mind before the scientific revolution and the rise of Darwinism. Theocentric humanism, whether it is Christian or not, begins with God and rightfully places God, instead of man, at the center of all meaning and existence. But when this humanism denies the deity of God's Son as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ; and when, as a natural sequel to such denial, the Trinitarian teaching is set aside, then the residue, a theistic humanism, easily turns into a merely religious humanism in the broadest sense of the word religion – religion understood as "actions, purposes, experiences significant to man."<sup>14</sup> Once this has happened, it is a short step to naturalistic humanism which renounces God. I am not theorizing. This is the history of what happened to Unitarians and Unitarian churches-whose clergy took a role in formulating Humanist Manifesto I.

---

<sup>11</sup> "A Humanist Manifesto" is printed in *The Humanist*, 1953, Number 2. "Humanist Manifesto II" appears in the September/October, 1973, issue of *The Humanist*.

<sup>12</sup> See Preface to Manifesto II.

<sup>13</sup> Lamont, p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> Humanist Manifesto I, Seventh Affirmation.

We shall return to theocentric and Christian humanism when we come to the Renaissance and the Middle Ages. Now we shall examine the humanism toward the other side of the continuum. Since this humanism is anthropocentric, I have organized what today's humanists say and affirm under a series of heads that begin with man: man and nature, man and the universe, man and God, man and reason, and so on. Since Nature is so prominent in their thinking, let us begin here. Of man and nature it is said:

Humanism ... reiterates that Nature ... has no purpose, no preferences, no prevision of the future, no awareness of the past, no consciousness or mind.... [Yet] humanism is an affirmative philosophy.... It says: This mighty and abundant Nature is our home; in it we live and move and have our being. This Nature produced the marvel of life and the race of man. [On the other hand] Nature shows no favoritism toward man.... Nature is no more interested in Homo sapiens than in ... any other form of life.<sup>15</sup>

And to explain the specifics in nature, the answer is given:

Things are simply constructed this way or behave this way. The speed of light is what it is; the law of gravity operates as it does; and the number of protons and electrons in each type of atom is what it is.<sup>16</sup>

Regarding the stuff whereof nature consists, this is said:

The underlying and continuing foundation of the universe is ... matter in its multiple or changing moods.... Call it matter, energy, substance, events, electricity or what you will [it] exists antecedent to ... the human mind ... or any other conceivable mind.<sup>17</sup>

Matter is self-existent, self-active, self-developing, self-enduring. It is a thing of the most tremendous dynamism, complexity, versatility and potentiality.... Moreover, science has found that matter-energy is absolutely indestructible and eternal.<sup>18</sup>

[In sum] humanism believes that nature ... constitutes the sum total of reality, that matter-energy and not mind is the foundation stuff of the universe and that supernatural entities simply do not exist.<sup>19</sup>

Thus Matter-Energy, as the only self-existent thing, replaces God. Of man and God it is said:

If there were no problems that demanded solutions, it is not likely that the idea of God would have emerged.... It is [also] noteworthy that due to the fact that [modern] man is better able to help himself, the number of things for which we implore divine assistance has been reduced to only a fraction of what it used to be.<sup>20</sup>

When the child asks "Who made God?" he is unwittingly interjecting a comment that is both logical and philosophical.... For if everything has a definite cause, then God, too, must have a cause and so on ad infinitum.... God as a first Cause simply constitutes a

---

<sup>15</sup> Lamont, pp. 144-146.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 122-123.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>20</sup> Auer, p. 20.

large-scale miracle.... It would seem more sensible to accept Aristotle's opinion that the universe is eternal.<sup>21</sup>

Of this universe and man's place in it, we read as follows:

It is understandable how thoughtful persons would come to suppose that man ... was the darling of the universe; and that behind the visible creation dwelt an omnipotent, benevolent, and personal God, an all-seeing Cosmic Companion.... [But] if there is a Supreme Being ruling over those billions of Milky Ways that roam through the unending corridors of the sky, he can hardly be the neighborly, fatherly, God of Christianity.... Logically, a supernatural Mind or Purpose behind everything must include all those never-ending galaxies that extend into the furthestmost regions of space and must cover all those untold billions of years in past and future that so stun the imagination.<sup>22</sup>

Humanism,. however, never loads the dice by reading the actualization of its ideals into ... a Divine Mind that understands the future. The universe does not care whether good or evil, or any other human value, prevails. Yet man can be proud that in the whole vast cosmos he is one of the highest forms of being. Confronted with the measuring rod of value, the immensities of time and space shrink mightily when compared with a single human mind.<sup>23</sup>

Thus humanism wants all things from the viewpoint of man. Of man and man it is said:

Humanism maintains that not God's opinions but our opinions regarding our life are of supreme importance to us.... Our human judgment is the last court of appeal in all matters touching human life.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, regarding law and ethics,

The Humanist refuses to accept any Ten Commandments or other ethical principles as immutable and universal laws never to be challenged or questioned. He bows down to no alleged Supreme moral authority whether past or present.<sup>25</sup>

Ethical laws and systems are relative to the ... particular culture of which they are a part.... [They] become out-of-date as conditions change and time marches on.... The advance of science and invention has affected ethical philosophy to an immense degree. Modern medicine, for instance, has demonstrated that many undesirable human traits which used to be ascribed to original sin or bad character are actually attributable to glandular insufficiencies or deep-seated emotional frustrations.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, there is also a recognition of sin. Of man and sin it is said:

---

<sup>21</sup> Lamont, p. 123.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 116, 119.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>24</sup> Auer, p. 36.

<sup>25</sup> Lamont, p. 235.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

Humanism is not looking for a sinless world. A saint is but a potential sinner with imagination, and a world shorn of humor and imagination is not an inviting place in which to live.<sup>27</sup>

And for another expression on sin:

The Humanist view that Nature is indifferent to human aims ... by-passes the so-called “problem of evil.” For them [humanists] there is no evil except in relation to human life striving, and aims.... Most evils are man-made; all evils must be man-solved. There is ... no more problem as to why evil should exist than as to why good should exist.... The traditional Christian attitude toward evil is, from the Humanist stand point, itself an evil.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore all things depend on human reason. Of man and his reason the humanist declares:

Man’s own reason and efforts are man’s best and, indeed, only hope and ... man’s refusal to recognize this point is one of the chief causes of his failure throughout history. The Christian West has been confused and corrupted for almost 2,000 years by the idea so succinctly expressed by St. Augustine:

“Cursed is everyone who places his hope in man.”<sup>29</sup>

If we should believe with Calvin [and Luther as well] that human reason is bound to lead to error in matters of religion, there would be little use in starting any inquiry.<sup>30</sup>

Thus reason, applied to science, is man’s one great hope. Of man and science it is said:

Humanism believes that the greatest need of our age is the application, insofar as this is possible, of science to all human problems, [particularly in the application of the scientific method to man’s personal affairs.] The most important scientific task of this generation [is the] more adequate development of the social sciences.<sup>31</sup>

[Yet] reason and the scientific method are not in themselves enough to achieve a Humanist world.... Science can lead to a veritable hell on earth. Only in the service of generous and humane ends does it fulfill its highest possibilities. For the Humanist, intellect and emotion, head and heart, must function together.<sup>32</sup>

True, science cannot give absolute certainty, but it has provided us a high degree of probability which is the most any human can have.<sup>33</sup>

This is the most man can hope for, but it is more than enough. Of man and the present, the humanist asserts:

---

<sup>27</sup> Auer, p. 23.

<sup>28</sup> Lamont, pp. 147-148.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>30</sup> Auer, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Lamont, pp. 210-211.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 225-226.

<sup>33</sup> Auer, p. 7.

Humanism urges men to accept freely and joyously the great boon of life and to realize that life in its own right and for its own sake can be as beautiful and splendid as any dream of immortality.<sup>34</sup>

As for the future, whatever problems are in store for him, man has the potential to overcome all. At his most optimistic, the humanist speculates:

Now that scientists have succeeded in unlocking the tremendous energies of the atom, it does not seem impossible that they will eventually gain such control over the sources of heat and energy that even the ... cooling off of the sun will not prove to be a death warrant. If the sun starts to become either too hot or too cold for the continuation of terrestrial life, one possible solution will be to utilize nuclear power to speed up or slow down the earth's rotation around the sun so that our planet goes into a smaller or larger orbit respectively, taking it nearer to or further from the sun.... Assumed in this bold thrust of the imagination is man's eventual capability of emigrating to other planets.<sup>35</sup>

What we have heard up to this point are the basic assumptions of naturalistic humanism. From these assumptions humanism branches out into particular professional philosophies. The Marxists accept naturalistic affirmations but remain suspicious of individual freedom. Marxism places the group above the individual: socialist organization of the entire society for the sake of every man and socialist discipline of every man for the sake of society. The Marxist system does not distinguish between the behavior of humans and the laws of physics and chemistry. It is deterministic humanism which strives for excellence in every activity, scientific, athletic, and cultural.

Existential humanism in its atheistic form declares itself disinterested whether a supernatural power exists. This is no problem because existentialists will not make it a problem. They will rather affirm that man becomes man and reaches heroic stature when he accepts the tragedy of fate.

Pragmatic humanism teaches that man creates a meaningful world simply by being active. Aesthetic humanism stresses the importance of art, religious art no less than profane art, as a means whereby man finds himself and the meaning of life.

In educational psychology, the behaviorist gives credit to environmental stimuli for making a person what he is, for giving him knowledge and determining his attitudes in life. "Give me the specifications and I'll give you the man" is how the eminent behaviorist, B. F. Skinner, expresses the matter through the hero of his book *Walden Two*. According to the behaviorist theory, man being controlled by factors outside of himself is not truly free and cannot really become committed to anything. According to Skinner, the humanist is a person concerned for mankind because of the environment to which he is exposed.<sup>36</sup>

Opposed to behaviorism is the psychology of Carl Rogers, to which the name phenomenology is given. Rogers speaks of man's values as being shaped from an interior experience instead of an outside authority such as the environment or a divine law written into the human heart. According to Rogers, man discovers what he is and wants from within himself. Man is responsible for what he chooses to be. Rogers stresses the human qualities of man rather than any qualities which man is said to share with animals and machines. Rogers stresses the freedom man has, and he defines freedom as the recognition by a person that he is an "emerging

---

<sup>34</sup> Lamont, p. 227.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 111-112.

<sup>36</sup> B. F. Skinner, "Humanism and Behaviorism" in *The Humanist* (July/August: 1972), pp. 18-20.



process,” not “a static end product.” In a statement fundamental to the humanist position Rogers says:

I believe that when the human being is inwardly free to choose whatever he deeply values, he tends to value those objects, experiences, and goals which make for his own survival, growth, and development, and for the survival and development of others. I hypothesize that it is characteristic of the human organism to prefer such actualizing and socialized goals when he is exposed to a growth-promoting climate.<sup>37</sup>

In this dialogue between educational psychologists we have a modern version of old debates between freedom and determinism or freedom and unfreedom or freedom and servitude which, under widely varying particulars, separated the Stoics from the Epicureans, the medieval Nominalists from the Realists, and, more remotely, Erasmus from Luther. Yet, both psychologies fit under the wide umbrella of humanism, with behaviorism more down the Marxistic alley.

Occasionally, humanists will label their friends and enemies. For example, H. J. Blackham, director of the British Humanist Association, writes that he venerates Voltaire and abhors St. Francis. He stands with Freud against Kierkegaard, with Montaigne against Luther, and he is at home in Athens rather than Sparta or Jerusalem.<sup>38</sup>

On the list of Blackham’s enemies are Christian spokesmen who misrepresent or denounce humanism; and to the question whether Christianity does not have all that humanism has plus something more which alone makes sense of human life Blackham responds:

This claim is the real arrogance.... Humanism is not Christianity minus the faith.... Humanism starts with a world in which Christian faith is hardly possible.... There cannot be a conjunction of two inconsistent ways of thinking and living. If I were to accept the faith and hope of a Christian, my humanism would not be crowned, it would be confounded. True, there are a few empirical Christians who believe only the symbolical truths of the Christian doctrines, and these might be called Christian humanists.<sup>39</sup>

As we look over the list of humanist expressions just surveyed, a few preliminary observations come to mind:

- (1) We see Western man joining the comrades behind the iron curtain in a bond of atheistic fellowship.
- (2) We see democratic man making common cause with totalitarian friends in debunking traditional values.
- (3) We see the flight to a philosophy of “Whatever is, is” as a cover for every contingency.
- (4) We see an utter inability to comprehend that God cannot be found on man’s conditions, for such a god ceases to be God.
- (5) We see scattered here and there among heaps of refuse, a little glimmer of truth: some genuine observation, some valid insight, regarding man’s dignity and potentiality.

---

<sup>37</sup> See “Citation of Carl Ransom Rogers” for Humanist of the Year Award and Rogers’ “Freedom and Commitment” in *The Humanist* (Number Two: 1964), pp. 36-39.

<sup>38</sup> H. J. Blackham, *Humanism* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 153-154.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194-195.

When we leave modern times and look back to the Renaissance, we meet a humanism with which we may feel more comfortable. Humanism began in the Renaissance as the conscious effort of educated men—government secretaries, teachers, men of letters in general—to turn away from preoccupation with spiritual matters. Renaissance men saw this preoccupation as the legacy of the centuries just before their time – a shackling legacy which kept man from being himself and reaching his potential. This attitude may arouse our suspicion, mainly because we are separated by 600 years from what Renaissance men were struggling with. By and large, they were not opposed to spiritual matters. Most of them acknowledged God. Some were Christian humanists, some less than Christian, and some anti-Christian. The preoccupation with spiritual matters from which they wished to break free – think of it as hedged about by a ponderous church organization and hemmed in by a rigid methodology for learning. It is in the nature of things that such conditions when they are around a long time have a deadening effect on human thinking and activity. The systems that dominated men’s minds and lives, however lofty their goals, caused people to lose sight of the whole dimension of humanity; the systems stunted the free play of creative energy. The main mass of medieval literature is dreary reading. It is repetitious. It abounds in superstition and heresy. It glorifies unwholesome asceticism. It reflects an appalling ignorance of historical time and historical distance.

When the men of the Renaissance rediscovered their antique heritage, the classical literature read and copied by the churchmen of the Middle Ages for a thousand years; when Renaissance men listened to classical literature with ears and looked at classical literature with eyes not conditioned by the traditional system and the traditional methodology; when they noted the inner beauty of its language and form; when they found in its content fresh insights and lofty thoughts about the nature of man and the world around man, they behaved like converts in any age. They wrote off the Middle Ages as alien territory. They fled to Greek and Roman antiquity as a golden age that was far away and which it must be their lifework to restore.

How medieval and Renaissance attitudes toward classical culture differed from each other has been brilliantly described by the German art historian, Erwin Panofsky. As he explains, the Roman and Greek gods illustrated in early medieval manuscripts still have a classical appearance, but the illustrations are slavish copies rather than free agents. They are confined as an insect in a piece of amber. These early artists or illuminators salvaged the concepts but only by way of quotation. They could not and did not wish to activate them. Then, as time passed, the classical figures in medieval art lost their antique appearance and came to resemble contemporary types. Venus appears as a young lady smelling a rose; Jupiter as a wealthy gentleman with gloves in hand or even as a monk with cross and chalice; Mercury as a bishop, scholar, or musician. The Middle Ages were free of nostalgia for the past. Antiquity, like an old automobile, was still around, still alive. The Middle Ages left antiquity unburied and alternately galvanized and exorcised its corpse. The Renaissance stood weeping at its grave and tried to resurrect its soul.<sup>40</sup>

The teachers and scholars engaged in this revival of classical culture were called *umanista* to distinguish them from teachers of the traditional subjects: logic, medicine, theology, and law; and the old Latin term, *studia humanitatis*, came back into vogue as the name for the classical subjects. These humanities were intended to educate, and they included grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and philosophy as learned from the ancient writers. Humanism was first and foremost an educational discipline. Humanism produced, first in Italy and later in northern Europe, a professional breed of humanists and then, following the usual route, it produced a philosophy of life.

---

<sup>40</sup> See *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York: Harper, 1960), pp. 105, 113.

There is no need to make a study of the foremost Renaissance humanists: Petrarch, the father of humanism, who died in 1374; Lorenzo Valla, the most expert of the Italians, who died in 1457; Thomas More, the English humanist turned statesman, who died in 1535; his friend, the Dutch Erasmus, called Prince of the Humanists, who died in 1536; and our own Philip Melancthon, teacher of Germany, who died in 1560.

Our interests are rather directed toward humanistic achievement during the Renaissance. How did it serve for man's better understanding of himself and his God? How did it serve for shaping or mis-shaping man's attitude toward himself? How did it serve for firing man's imagination and creativity?

It is commonly known what the humanists contributed regarding the original languages of the Bible, and how they served as a handmaid to the Reformation. Through their efforts better texts of the Greek New Testament and the Hebrew Old Testament became available for teachers, preachers, translators, interpreters, and scholars. Through their work the science of philology was born; text criticism in the good sense of the word became possible; Bible interpretation was enriched by a better understanding of grammar, of etymology, of history. Bible interpretation was enriched by the recovery of a historical perspective, the concern for historicity, the appreciation for historical distance, things which had gone under a cloud of unknowing in the Middle Ages. All this belongs to the major results of humanist activity. What happened for space with optical perspective, happened for time with historical perspective. The interests of the humanists and the artists coincided with each other.

How these activities affected humanist outlooks on God and man varied with individuals. It was like any university education today. When the tool was properly employed, when the philosophy was properly hedged in, humanism enlarged horizons in a good way. It allowed direct access to antique thought: the Greeks and Romans could be read in their own language and setting. Humanism served for more independent and expert study of the Scriptures and thus freed minds from layers of encrusted theological thinking to find fresh insights in the Scriptures about the nature of man, man's limits and man's capabilities. Thus humanism could serve to heighten man's sense of his own dignity and that of his fellowmen. Man, though a sinner, remains the crown of God's creation; he is a creature apart from all the rest of God's works; he was endowed with a freedom to think and to act, a freedom admittedly ruptured and lost on account of sin. Freedom's substance was gone but its shadow, its recollection, was still there.

Humanism could also, and it did, turn man into wrong directions toward which man the sinner is naturally inclined whether he is a humanist or not. Many humanists preferred to speak of human ignorance instead of human sin. They preferred to think of Christianity as a way of life instead of a faith-in-Christ life. Humanism spurred people to unhealthy self-assertion, to the lust for fame. At the root of it all, humanists gave man more credit in spiritual matters than he deserved. This fact lay at the heart of Luther's distrust of Erasmus. "The more I read our Erasmus," Luther once wrote, "the more I lose my respect for him. I am afraid he doesn't give Christ and God's grace their full due. He always puts more stress on what man does than what God does."<sup>41</sup>

Humanism's service toward firing man's imagination and creativity is a story often told. The masterpieces of Renaissance art, science, and literature seem quite unlikely if humanism had not gone before to break minds free from false views of man, from slavish reliance on past human authority, and, as Professor Klatt used to say, from turning the same old bale of straw over and over again. From the Renaissance emerged Leonardo who drew the structure of the human body according to what he observed with his own eye rather than what ancient authorities said he would see. From the Renaissance emerged a new painting that depicted nature and

---

<sup>41</sup> Copied at Melancthon's house in Wittenberg, n.s.

people as they appear, and that often captured these appearances in a deeper dimension. From the Renaissance came scholars, scientists, and artists in many fields, some Christians, some skeptics, some scoffers whose work, fired by the spirit of humanism, has in one manner or another enriched or enlarged man's experience of man. It is work that Christians can test and prove to help them understand the beauty or meaning of life.

What a piece of work is man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving, how express and admirable in action, how like an angel in apprehension, how like a God: the beauty of the world; the paragon of animals; and yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust?<sup>42</sup>

The words are Shakespeare's and they serve as a poetic signature of much Renaissance humanism. They form a companion piece to words spoken by another dramatic poet, the best signature I know of for the Greek humanism so admired in the Renaissance. The poet is Sophocles.

Many the wonders, but nothing walks stranger than man. He crosses the sea in the winter's storm, making his path through the roaring waves. He wears away the earth as the plows go up and down from year to year and his mules turn up the soil. Language, and thought like the wind, and the feelings that make the town, he has taught himself, and shelter against the cold, refuge from rain. He can always help himself. There is only death that he cannot find an escape from.<sup>43</sup>

The question is not whether we Christians subscribe to all which these poets and artists have done. With a discerning eye and a questioning mind, we read them for what they can teach us about the beauty of the world or the meaning of life, and we bring all things into the context of our Christian faith. I see a sunset. I gaze on an Alpine meadow. I look into the secrets of a living cell. I study the structure of an atom. I listen to a violin concerto. I sip a glass of sherry. And I praise and thank God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Despite Renaissance man's views about the Middle Ages, humanism does not suddenly vanish if we look back into the medieval centuries before. It has been suggested that the eleven and twelve hundreds are one of the greatest, if not the greatest ages of humanism in the history of Europe. This opinion is ably defended by R. W. Southern of Oxford University, the most sensitive commentator on medieval thought I know of. I have summarized his views in what follows.

Before the 1100's people had a sense for the littleness and sinfulness of man. Man was an abject being except when dressed in symbolic garments and holding in his hands the relics of those who already belonged to the Kingdom of Glory. Then a new trend began to assert itself, mainly, that knowing oneself is the key to knowing God. There was a growing sense for the dignity of man and the dignity of nature. Though man is a fallen creature, he is the noblest of God's creatures and retains a nobility in his fallen state. He has been given instruments to develop what is in him and he should use them. With these instruments he can also find the order that exists in the world around him. To give one instance of how this view worked itself into practical application: the ordeal by which guilt or innocence was decided, though a superstitious relic from the pagan past, had been sanctified by the church. But in the 1100's, the new replaced the old, the ordeal was discarded in favor of rules of evidence and the use of juries.

---

<sup>42</sup> Hamlet II, 2, lines 304 ff.

<sup>43</sup> Antigone, lines 332 ff.

Southern closes his analysis of medieval humanism with an interesting comparison. The humanism of the eleven and twelve hundreds hoped to achieve universal order on earth. When this faded, the nostalgic vision of an ancient utopia revealed in classical literature remained a chief support of humane values. Southern called the humanism of the Middle Ages progressive. This progressive humanism, he continues, was replaced by a new humanism that retreated into the past and sought inspiration in literature rather than theology and science. And this brings us around full circle to Renaissance humanism.<sup>44</sup>

When we turn from man's word about humanism to God's Word about man and man's human-ness, a number of familiar facts are worthy of review. Man was made by a divine Creator and endowed with special gifts. He was made a personal being in the likeness of God's Son. He received the gift of self-awareness and self-expression, the gift to know God, to love God, and to obey His commands as a perfectly natural activity like breathing. Man received the gift of being truly free, to do good by determining it instead of being compelled to do it. This belonged to man's human-ness, and yet more. He was given lordship over the earth, not as an immediate reality but as a long-range potentiality; a real goal whose end has always remained beyond reach, and that too is a blessing. God ordained man's lordship over the earth as a challenge for man, that man would not, as is the case with all other creation, exist in a fixed life routine—the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow—but would grow, develop, progress, apply his God-given talents in every direction imaginable for the satisfaction of his whole being. He would find, imagine, invent, create, and thereby come to a better understanding of himself, of this world; and, most important, man would come to an always larger appreciation for the wisdom and love of his Creator God. Man was made lord over the earth and all it contains, not to rape it but to enjoy it, discover it, use it, dress it and keep it.

The nature of this lordship is further unfolded in God's act of bringing animals and birds to Adam for him to name them. Name giving became another exercise of the authority conferred on man. In this case, the authority permitted Adam to determine the relationship of animals and birds toward man's life. Naming the creatures was a kind of creative activity. And Adam was able to fulfill the God-given assignment because of the gifts within him: the intuition, the innate ability to grasp the situation and understand it. All these gifts were terribly ruined in the Fall. The divine image was lost. God's commands became a burdensome duty instead of a delight, and God appeared as an enemy. In spiritual matters man gropes in blindness, and with his own reason and strength he goes only astray. Yet he has not lost his human-ness and the dignity that goes with it. In its own restricted sphere, man's reason remains a precious gift. His lordship on earth, though limping, persists. He masters the wonders of nature, he harnesses nature by discovering it and understanding it. He brings his imagination into play; he creates in his chosen field, as a scientist, an artist, a writer, a statesman, and so on. He gives names to things and deals with them in his mind, whether he sees them or not.<sup>45</sup> Man can do all these things by God's ordaining and under God's providence.

Despite his sinfulness man remains the crown of God's creation. This is his dignity. Though he cannot help himself in the ultimate issues of life, though God must do it all, man, unlike a stick or stone, is an object in whom God's converting power can take effect. Man is the object of God's special love. God's Son became man to save man's man-ness. In God's sight man has more value than many sparrows. Thus man's continuing humanity, also under sin, remains in focus only under God and under God's Son by whom all things were made and by whom all things hold together. Christians do not discredit human nature as if it is nothing and

---

<sup>44</sup> Southern, pp. 31-60 *passim*.

<sup>45</sup> How science wins mastery over nature through a process of discovering is shown in J. Bronowski, *Science and Human Values* (New York: Harper, 1965), pp. 10, 31-32.

can do nothing. But Christians will not have faith in human nature. That is the great heresy of our times. When modern humanists put their trust in man as an evolutionary “end product,” and when they affirm how all things began, they are reverting to the paganism of their ancestors. Sophisticated paganism found the source of all things in an impersonal force. Some called it Necessity. Some called it Chaos, and some called it Void. Socrates was wrongfully ridiculed by the comic poet Aristophanes for teaching Cosmic Whirl as the origin of the universe. Today’s naturalistic humanists call it Matter-Energy. They substitute an impersonal process for God. Matter-Energy is the cause of this marvelous universe, this orderly world, this talented humanity, this human being not created in the image of God but privately arrogating the divine honor to himself.

We come now to practical matters: the challenges and responsibilities which humanism sets before us. Since humanism presents many faces, how shall it be judged? It depends on the definitions. Shall we leave the field to the definitions of the articulate modernists? or shall we shout with a small voice into the storm that humanism cannot exist without the Gospel? or shall we be eclectic, by highlighting the little patches of God-praising sunlight that filter through the otherwise heavy curtain by man-praising underbrush? Our problem is broadly similar to what confronted the old Fathers of the church in dealing with classical culture. They acknowledged the value of this learning, but they also feared its sinister influence on Christian minds and hearts. So they tried to resolve their problems with the device of allegory. For Jerome, the most humanistically inclined of the Latin Fathers, pagan learning was like the captive woman in the law of Moses. She drew Jerome to herself by her charms, and it was permissible for him to take her because the law of Moses allowed Israelites to marry outsiders captured in war. Augustine used allegory. For him, pagan learning was comparable to the spoil of the Egyptians, the jewels of silver and the jewels of gold which the Israelites were told to ask of the Egyptians and take with them out of Egypt. If God granted the Israelites the right to despoil the Egyptians, then it was allowable for Christians to take whatever jewels of silver and gold could be salvaged from classical learning. The last of the Latin Fathers, the Roman bishop Gregory the Great found his allegory in the Biblical fact that the Israelites had to go down to the Philistines for their plowshares, axes, and sickles to be sharpened. Similarly, Christians sharpened their learning in the literature of the classics.

We have no use for such ingenious arguments. And we have no taste for resolving our question of what to do with humanism by setting up one man’s definition against another man’s definition to judge who is right. Such an approach, with its processes of tearing apart and sorting and analyzing, degenerates into intellectual exercise: whichever side presents its case more forcefully or musters the better evidence carries off the palms. This is the way of much science, and of a pseudo-science operating under the name of theology. It studies its subject piecemeal, coldly dissects and combines, to separate the tares from the wheat in the shortest time and with minimal effort.

Our task is to take the longer route, the kind of route at which I tried to make just a start in this paper. That route invites us to study humanism historically, in its setting and from all sides, to do with humanism as we should do with the human being around whom all humanism turns. For the right understanding of man and his mind, life must be our teacher. We must look at the whole man in what he says, thinks, and does. We must relive the great works produced by the human spirit. We must relive these works in appreciation of the spirit which accomplished them regardless of what their nature may be. This is the only way to get at things, to get at the human being and what he thinks, to get at humanism. Then, having seen humanism in its whole perspective, we can begin to bring our Christian responsibility into play. From a free and

unfettered spirit under Christ, we may prove and sift and sort out, choosing what is good and putting away what is base, ugly, and false.

Such is the path recommended by Professor J. P. Koehler, former teacher at our seminary. He discusses these matters at length in a paper on the topic of faith and Christian life which has given me much guidance in preparing this assignment especially in the last sections.<sup>46</sup>

We may feel quite secure from today's popular humanism that openly rejects God's existence and the Gospel of Christ. Yet we cannot lose sight of the fact that when Christ is not also proclaimed in our daily personal and profession routine by the confession of our lips and the example of our lives, then our stance against godless humanism loses real substance. For Christian faith, love, and obedience are not proclaimed, nor learned, nor defended, nor glorified with abstract formulas. The Gospel of salvation in Christ must be seen in action, in free, spontaneous testimony from lips and lives.

We have also seen that the honor of Christ is obscured when Christian beliefs are discussed in terms of theism and morality, and so on. When the doctrine of God supersedes the doctrine of Christ, the road is a short one to removing God from religion and putting man in God's place.

Today's popular humanism poses greater dangers for the unsuspecting Christian. I would like to point out several of these dangers in the context of our calling as Christian educators.

As one of the dangers, I would propose the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. From a humanistic point of view, knowledge is valid of itself and should be acquired for man's self-fulfillment. From a Christian viewpoint, knowledge has no validity apart from God and His Word. Without Christ we cannot really "know" anything. Without Christ knowledge cannot achieve for man what God made him to be. All of us pursue knowledge for the pleasure it can bring. We may become so wrapped up in what we are doing, we grow oblivious to everything else. This happens both in teaching and in learning. And we needn't be concerned over this. It is natural to become excited over things that interest us—mathematics, science, literature, art, and the like—to become excited without directly and consciously relating all things to God and His Word. This is human. But this cannot become a steady and standard pattern with Christian teachers and learners. There is a higher principle, a higher truth, a higher responsibility overarching all things. We find it in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ by Whom all things hold together, the planets in their solar system together with the electrons and protons in the atom; and we must let this truth penetrate our teaching in all subjects, not merely by remote inference but by direct, natural, spontaneous testimony from the heart. We must do this if we will be Christian educators. It's a challenge with which we need to struggle constantly.

As another subtle danger associated with today's popular humanism I would propose the preoccupation with man's present and future at the expense of a concern for and knowledge about man's past. The symptoms are apparent in the mounting emphasis on the social sciences at both elementary and secondary levels. In the history of the social sciences and at their heart lurks a humanistic idea about the primacy of the scientific method for humanizing man. Since it brought man so far in mastering the world of nature, it promises similar conquests in the world of man. The social sciences represent the scientific method applied to the study of man for the purpose of overcoming the problems of human society. Better the social sciences with their scientific collection and organization of statistics about human behavior in various circumstances

---

<sup>46</sup> The title of this article is "Faith, the Quintessence of Christian Life on Earth." It first appeared in the *Theological Quarterly* (*Quartalschrift*) of 1927 and ran through several subsequent issues. The article was translated for publication in *Faith-Life*, where it appears in a series of installments that began in August/September, 1948, and closed in July, 1955. The thoughts in the preceding paragraph of this paper were largely drawn from the March, 1955, installment, page 11a. Subsequent references to Professor Koehler's article will be identified under the letters *F-L*.

and societies – better these social sciences with their issue-oriented approach than the tedious learning of dates, of facts, of specific places, events, and people required in traditional history courses.

The social sciences have grown from humanistic thought, from a religious trust in the scientific method. What are the inferences for us Christians? Not to discard the social sciences out of hand. They are tools to which Christians can also reach for gaining specialized knowledge about human life. Such knowledge can enrich the teaching of history in the same manner that history teaching is enriched by a knowledge of the natural sciences, of literature, and the arts. The social sciences have an auxiliary value for Christian teachers, but we should keep a sharp eye on the curricula and textbooks in our Christian schools that the social sciences do not curtail or win priority over the history courses, or that the history courses are not turned into social sciences. History is not a science. In history as in the Gospel we look at human life in the round: we learn to know man as he is from man as he was; we discover that man cannot be put into a test tube or weighed on a scale. In history we are confronted with the uniqueness of man; we meet sin and divine grace, and, hidden behind the events of history, we sense the presence of Almighty God who will reveal Himself to man as He really is, not through history but by His Son Jesus Christ.

As another danger connected with today's popular humanism I would propose the unwholesome tolerance of human nature. We Christians, too, shall come behind no humanist or humanitarian in respecting the dignity of man and showing patience and kindness to our fellowman. We shall be weak with those who are weak. But we shall not make light of sin. We shall not condone it or pass it off as ignorance or maladjustment. God is a holy God, and He calls on us to be like Him also in our attitude toward sin. He has given us the means to recognize sin, and He requires that it be dealt with. I may be called to deal with sin in a subject I am teaching. As a teacher of the humanities, for example, I am constantly challenged with this responsibility. We may be looking at a film, or reading a novel, or hearing a play, or reviewing a historical action or person, or contemplating a piece of art. We become so engrossed in our subject that we identify ourselves with the human ideas it powerfully presents to our mind and our emotions. We forget to back off and consider our subject from a distance, to ponder the basic rightness or wrongness or ambiguity of what is before us. And so we become enmeshed in humanism. But as a Christian educator I have a special responsibility toward the students I teach. I do not leave it to them to form whatever value judgments they please. My responsibility is to guide them in all truth, and such guidance includes a great deal more than authoritative *ex cathedra* pronouncements from above so easy for a teacher to do. Guidance is achieved through discovery mediated by judicious questioning. Guidance is achieved in the manner that a skilled shepherd handles his sheep. It is a high art of which every Christian educator must remain a full-time student. It is a skill marvelously exhibited in our Master Teacher Jesus.

This guidance applies not only in the academic education of those whom we teach but also in respect to their personal lives. We fulfill our responsibility to guide by the word we speak, by the example of a Christian life, by disciplinary measures, and, overarching all things, by an attitude of love. To neglect the responsibility is to play into the hands of today's popular humanism which knows nothing of the wages of sin nor of the absolutely unavoidable either-or in human life. Today's humanism trusts that man will always find a way of accommodation, to choose the good without having to reject the evil. Today's humanism knows nothing of sin, of repentance, of forgiveness. These great issues of life cannot be known apart from God's Word and from childlike trust in that Word.

I have singled out three general areas where the danger of humanism can insinuate itself into our work as Christian educators. Other areas of concern will occur to you. And we should



not forget the dangers which apply in a wider context – to Christian life at large. It would take us too far afield to examine these dangers now, but they are terribly real and deserve serious pondering. I will suggest just a few examples of humanism's pernicious influence in this wider context. Consider the attitudes regarding this present life as the only life. Consider the attitudes toward every kind of pain, suffering, and the cross in this life as an unmitigated evil. Consider the attitudes about man's temporal future on earth, that life on earth has got to become better and better and better.

But let us leave the dangers and look to the other side of the ledger. Does humanism have any positive value for the Christian? I will begin answering this question by looking to the relationship between Luther and Melanchthon. Luther was no humanist. He did not stand weeping at the grave of the Apostolic Age as Panofsky says the humanists did at the grave of classical antiquity. As a scholar, Luther had little interest in relating Christianity to the surrounding culture of the world. Similarly, the Copernican Theory failed to impress him because he thought it unimportant. Luther's concern was with sin, and Luther's achievement as a scholar was to make God's Word clear and strong.<sup>47</sup>

Yet Luther appreciated the service of humanism as he found it especially in Melanchthon. Professor Koehler offers some fascinating insights into these two men.

Melanchthon, the associate of Luther, was a sincere believing Christian, but he had not been led into the understanding of the righteousness of God through severe pangs of conscience like Luther, but rather through association with his colleague and by his teachings. Humanly speaking, he would hardly have severed with the Roman Church excepting in the wake of his teacher colleague.... Had Melanchthon been of Luther's makeup exactly, the two probably could not have cooperated very well.... Luther was creative, Melanchthon was talented. The latter was held in high esteem by Luther because he himself did not have that talent. This talent was not only recognized by others, but because Melanchthon was more closely related to them in type of personality, he was actually given the higher evaluation even during Luther's lifetime.

Melanchthon's natural makeup, reinforced by his humanistic training, was designed for the formal disciplines. He was not gifted with what we call intuition. (But he] possessed ... an excellent gift of understanding and observation, ... a native appreciation of beauty, a fine taste, and a fortunate memory ... and these gifts Melanchthon placed in the service of the Gospel.... His presentations were clothed in fitting terminology without undue display of learning; he continually revised both form and thought everywhere exercising his native sense of beauty.... Melanchthon is the man who served Luther with the necessary detail work. It worked out this way; for what Luther saw as a great and comprehensive picture Melanchthon would supply the work needed for adequate linguistic and factual presentation.... Thus God placed Melanchthon alongside Luther so that he could supplement him in the spiritual chaos which ruled the world when, at the end of the Middle Ages, the absolutism of popery was doomed to collapse.<sup>48</sup>

Luther was a herald, Melanchthon a pedagogue; Luther, the artist - Melanchthon, the talent; Luther did creative work, Melanchthon rendered yeoman's service. So we see in the life of Melanchthon that on the one hand he follows his teacher willingly wherever the latter takes the lead with the great thoughts which determine the new direction; on the other hand, in the detailed work and in the outward determination of form .... he doggedly sticks to his point even in the face of possible sharp clashes .... Melanchthon's manner seeks to control the hearer, while Luther waits upon the goodness of God to guide the hearts of men.... In his deep distress of conscience Luther strained his highly gifted spirit to be utmost in quest of peace; but his spirit

---

<sup>47</sup> E. Harris Harbison, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of the Reformation* (New York: Scribner's, 1956), pp. 134-135.

<sup>48</sup> *F-L* (April: 1955), pp. 14-16, *passim*.

failed him and left him on the brink of despair. Then he found peace through the Holy Spirit by faith in the righteousness of God.... His faith enabled him to penetrate this matter with far-seeing eyes and to grasp it with a mighty grip. Melanchthon did not possess this equipment of Luther, but through study rather than conflict became a pupil of Luther. And that too was accomplished by the Holy Spirit.... Many other humanists became believers; nevertheless, they largely failed in varying degree to attain to this understanding: that reason cannot accomplish everything one would like to entrust to it.

[After Luther's death] the demand to prove everything logically began. This was the case among [those] ... who wanted to be special Luther scholars. Unhampered exegesis such as Luther did was no longer practical. In its place many scholars believed they were following Luther by making exaggerated statements. And the Philippists [followers of Melanchthon], too, did not understand Melanchthon's cautious manner but answered their opponents in the same ... impatient tone. They [also] placed too high an evaluation on their ability to prove things.... Thus the unity of the spirits disappeared still more, aggravated by an unintelligent sharpening of the contrasts, whereby love became still colder. That then cannot be offset with any amount of intellectual strength, above all not by disputation.... Nevertheless, ... under the influence of the most important of Melanchthon's pupils, Martin Chemnitz, the thoughts of the opposition were successfully dealt with by means of quiet, careful work and weighing of the facts on the basis of Scriptures. That, too, came about through the Holy Spirit. But thereby

Melanchthon's working method received general recognition. In the course of human life this is natural, and the Holy Spirit uses also this method in His service.<sup>49</sup>

So much from Koehler. I have quoted at greater length than absolutely necessary for two reasons. The first, to help us gain a more knowledgeable appreciation for the large service of humanism in the history of our Lutheran Church; and second, to put on record for the present generation various related insights into human life and church history as furnished by a gifted teacher of our Wisconsin Synod.

As Christians and Lutheran educators, equipped with the armor of God to quench all the flaming arrows of the wicked one, we need not throw out humanism altogether. It may, as in the Renaissance, continue to serve us in positive ways. Some aspects of its methodology, for example, can serve as a wholesome corrective to traditionalism and obscurantism. The traditionalist is a person who in the style of the Middle Ages and with the sorry results of the Middle Ages, satisfies himself with solutions worked out by past human authorities. The obscurantist is the person who, out of insecurity or sloth, avoids getting to the bottom of things and becomes self-secure and highly authoritative in his incomplete knowledge. Here humanism as we meet it in the Renaissance blows with a fresh gust. Back to the sources, the humanists said. This way, though it requires more effort of us, has no substitute. The scientist pursues it with students in his laboratory and makes sure that observations are based on what is seen, not what someone said should be seen. Similarly in the humanities. We Christian educators have the responsibility of getting first-hand acquaintance with what we teach and keeping at our study, never satisfied that we have learned enough. We need to look at things as they are. We need to listen to *what* is said and examine it on the basis of its own merits instead of the human authority or human prestige of whoever said it. And when called on to speak with authority, we need to *know* whereof we speak instead of cocksurely shooting from the hip in matters that we have not honestly investigated through and through. As Christian educators we must guard against binding consciences where God's Word does not bind consciences. We should make sure that

---

<sup>49</sup> *F-L* (May: 1955), pp. 11-12, *passim*.

what we teach as divine truth is indeed a divine truth rather than a traditional human interpretation accepted as authoritative because it is traditional. We should guard against rejecting a scientific observation or an educational methodology that is not in conflict with God's Word but is thought to be so on the basis of a misuse or misunderstanding of God's Word. God's Word is truth, and with perfect clarity it teaches all things to make us wise to salvation. But in other contexts of life the Christian bound by God's Word can also profit from knowledge and methodology put forth by the world. With the shield of faith and sword of the Spirit, we may examine the world's wisdom for what it is and selectively use it or reject it.

Humanism may render further service by keeping the human factor before us. There is a human side to all things. When that perspective is lost, distortions easily occur. This is precisely what happened in the Middle Ages. Men's minds became so fixed on the supernatural, the unusual, the miraculous that the sane and sober knowledge of man's whole self went under a cloud; and one distortion opened the way to other distortions as were described earlier in this paper. In reminding us of the human factor—the whole range of man's abilities: what he can and cannot do—humanism, however, merely repeats what every well-informed Christian has learned from the Gospel when he comes to know that Gospel in a wider dimension. God revealed His Word to mankind through human beings, not machines. God issues His commands to people as human beings, not machines. And when God enrolls His people to teach and proclaim His Word, that Word comes alive in us as humans, not machines. This is the wholesome human factor in things of the spirit, and it is a factor that we should take into account in every walk of life and in every subject we teach.

There are humanists of all kinds in the world. There are the radical naturalists who exalt the dignity of man from the view that man stands at the apex of the evolutionary ladder. There are genuine Christian humanists who recognize the dignity of man because man is the object of God's creating, saving, and sanctifying love. The constant danger with humanism is to credit man with more than man is or deserves. That danger lurks in everything human; it is natural to my heart. But with spirits kept healthy by God's Word, the Christian may deal with humanism as with all things in life. He may use it carefully and knowledgeably that God may be glorified in every aspect of His mysterious, marvelous, stupendous creation for man.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. How can it be claimed that there is no genuine knowledge of things apart from the Gospel of Christ? Is such a claim presumptuous? ambiguous? genuine?
2. What is the wholesome Christian approach to humanism or any comparable idea or ideology proposed by the world? Shall Christian educators try to cast every secular act or thought into a clear-cut black-white category? Are there ambiguities or "gray" areas in life as far as the Christian is concerned?
3. Should Christian educators feel obliged to pronounce judgment on every kind of secular thought which they meet in literature, science, or the arts?
4. In recent years Christian educators have been cautioned against artificially "dragging religion into the classroom" wherever possible. Has the pendulum swung so far into this direction that a testimony to faith seems out of place in every course but religion? What are the responsibilities, and the challenges, of living faith-life naturally?
5. There is a human side to all things. How is this human factor best examined in the sciences? Through evaluation of the scientific method? Through evaluation of particular scientific theories or discoveries? Through a study of the history of a science?

6. To what degree, if any, is the social science approach replacing bona fide history in our elementary and secondary educational programs? How would Christian education be affected by a larger role assigned to the social sciences?
7. To what degree may Christian educators make use of the theories of behaviorism and other modern psychologies (phenomenology) in their educational methodology?
8. What is the difference between testifying to our Christian faith and moralizing? What is the difference between an honest presentation of subject matter and indoctrination?

### Bibliography

- Abbagnano, Nicola. "Humanism," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1967, Vol. 4, 69-72.
- Artz, Frederick B. *Renaissance Humanism*. Kent University Press: 1966.
- Auer, F., and Julian Hartt. *Humanism Versus Theism*. Antioch Press: 1951.
- Bernard, Harold, and Wesley Huckins. *Humanism in the Classroom*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1974.
- Berdyayev, Nicholas. *The Meaning of History*: Ch. 7 - "The Renaissance and Humanism"; Ch. 8 - "The Crisis of Humanism." Meridian Books: 1968.
- Blackham, H. J. *Humanism*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968.
- Bronowski, J. *Science and Human Values*. New York: Harper, 1965.
- Bush, Douglas. *The Renaissance and English Humanism*. London: Oxford, 1962.
- Clark, Gordon H. "The Trouble with Humanism," *Christianity Today*. May: 1967, 10-12.
- Cox, Harvey. *The Secular City*. New York: Macmillan, 1965.
- Hadas, Moses. *Humanism: The Greek Ideal and Its Survival*. New York: Harper, 1960.
- Harbison, E. Harris. *The Christian Scholar in the Age of the Reformation*. New York: Scribner's, 1956.
- Jaspers, Karl. *Existentialism and Humanism: 3 Essays*. New York: Russell Moore, 1952.
- Jones, Howard Mumford. *American Humanism: Its Meaning for World Survival*. New York: Harper, 1957.
- Koehler, John Philip. "Faith, the Quintessence of Christian Life on Earth," *Faith-Life*. August/September: 1948; October/November: 1948; December: 1948; January: 1949; September: 1949; August: 1954; September: 1954; November: 1954; March: 1955; April: 1955; May: 1955; June: 1955; July: 1955.
- Lamont, Corliss. *The Philosophy of Humanism*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed. New York: Ungar, 1949.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Abolition of Man or Reflections on Education*. New York: Macmillan, 1965.
- Maritain, Jacques'. *True Humanism*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1970.
- N. N. "A Humanist Manifesto," repr. in *The Humanist*. No. 2: 1953, 58-61.
- N. N. "Humanist Manifesto II," *The Humanist*. September/October: 1973, 4-9.
- N. N. "Worldwide Press Response to Humanist Manifesto II," *The Humanist*. November/December: 1973, 4-10.
- Ong, W. J. "Humanism," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967, Vol. V 11, 215-224.
- Poser, Ernest. "Citation of Carl Ransom Rogers for the Award as Humanist of the Year," *The Humanist*. No. 2: 1964,36.
- Rogers, Carl R. "Freedom and Commitment," *The Humanist*. No. 2: 1964, 37-40.
- Schaeffer, Francis. *Escape from Reason*. Downer's Grove, Illinois: 1968.
- Skinner, B. F. "Humanism and Behaviorism," *The Humanist*. July/August: 1972, 18-20,
- Southern, R. W. *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies*. New York: Harper, 1970.
- Walsh, Gerald G. *Medieval Humanism*. New York: Macmillan, 1942.