

Preface To "Humanism"
Which was published as a collection of Sermons Circa 1927
Edited by Curtis Reese

Within the liberal churches of America there is a religious movement which has come to be known as Humanism. The ideology of this movement I attempted to sketch in "Humanism," issued last year. The present volume is a collection of sermons which have been used in the regular course of parish preaching. Each minister was asked to make his own selection. Consequently, the wide range and supplementary character of the subjects are purely accidental.

It is not my function to analyze or evaluate the sermons. Each minister has spoken his own mind in his own way, and is alone responsible for his utterance.

My aim is to introduce the Humanist point of view in a way that will assist in the proper interpretation of the sermons that follow.

Humanism has been used to designate certain thought movements which in varying degrees have centered attention on the study, the worth, and the enhancement of human life.

Sophist Humanism, in the fifth century B.C., turned attention from cosmological speculation to the study of man. Renaissance Humanism, beginning in the fourteenth century, flooded the dark ages with the light of classical learning, thus assisting mightily in transforming the medieval into the modern world. Encyclopedic Humanism, in the second half of the eighteenth century, fought error, fostered enlightenment, and magnified human desires and aspirations. In current history, philosophical Humanism puts human nature at the center of the knowledge process and defines values in terms of the relation of things to human living; scientific Humanism investigates cosmic behavior with view to using and controlling it for human ends; educational Humanism relates the power of knowledge to the needs of life; and religious Humanism grounds spirituality in human living, thus contrasting sharply with superhuman, supernatural, and absolutistic value-schemes.

Throughout its history Humanism has centered attention on the study, the worth, and the enhancement of human life.

NEGATIVELY STATED:

(1) Humanism is not Materialism. Materialism is the doctrine that "the happenings of nature are to be explained in terms of the locomotion of material." It is properly contrasted with Animism. It is mechanistic, not spiritistic. It belongs to the pre-electron period. While the mechanistic hypothesis of Materialism has served a useful purpose in scientific experimentation, it is now regarded by competent physicists as an inadequate hypothesis; and in the realm of psychology and sociology Materialism breaks down utterly. Humanism holds the organic, not the mechanistic or materialistic view of life.

(2) Humanism is not Positivism. Positivism as a religion is an artificial system which substitutes the "worship of Humanity" (past, present, and future) for the "worship of God,"—"the immortality of influence" for the "immortality of the soul," etc.

Humanism, on the other hand, holds that the "Humanity" of Positivism is an abstraction having no concrete counterpart in objective reality, and that most "influence," far from being immortal is highly transitory. To Humanism "worship" means the reverential attitude towards all that is wonderful in persons and throughout all of life; a wistful, hopeful, expectant attitude of mind; not abject homage to either "Humanity" or "God."

As to immortality, the Humanist shifts the emphasis from *longevity* to *quality*. But Humanism encourages research in the realm of the spirit. In his "Studies in., Humanism" Schiller devotes a chapter to the most sympathetic yet critical discussion of "Psychic Research."

(3) Humanism is not Rationalism. Historically, the rationalist belongs in the group with the intellectualist, idealist, absolutist, not with the realist, pragmatist, behaviorist, humanist. "Reason" is Rationalism's God, just as "Humanity" is Positivism's God. Humanism finds neither absolute "Reason" nor "reason" as a faculty of the mind. But it finds intelligence as a function of organisms in various stages of development. To Humanism, dependence on the "Reason" is as fallacious as dependence on the "Bible" or the "Pope." Humanism's dependence is on intelligence enriched by the experience of the years; but it knows that intelligence is not an infallible source of either knowledge or wise conduct. Rationalism is dogmatic; Humanism is experimental.

(4) Humanism is not Atheism. Atheism is properly used as a denial of God. It is not properly used as a *denial* of a personal transcendent God. It is not properly used to describe monistic and immanent views of God. If and when the Humanists deny the existence of a personal transcendent God, they are not Atheists any more than was Spinoza or Emerson. But, as a matter of fact, the Humanist attitude towards the idea of God is *not that of denial* at all; it is that of *inquiry*. The Humanist is questful; but if the quest be found fruitless he will still have his basic religion intact, viz., the human effort to live an abundant life.

.While the foregoing theories *as such* are not to be identified with Humanism *as such*, it should nevertheless be clearly understood that a Humanist might hold more or less tentatively anyone of these theories, just as he might so hold anyone of many theological theories. In its basic nature Humanism short circuits cosmological theories and lays supreme emphasis upon certain human attitudes which mayor may not be enhanced by cosmologies.

POSITIVELY STATED:

1. Humanism is the conviction that human life is of supreme worth; and consequently must be treated as an end, not as a means. This is the basal article of the faith of Humanism. So jealous is the Humanist of human worth that he insists on regarding it as

inherent and not derived from a super world of any sort. Human worth is as native to human life as are finely equipped organisms, delicately balanced impulses, and spiritual urges. In fact, human worth is constituted of these and needs no extraneous addition to make it valid. The Humanist insists that human worth is intrinsic to human nature; and that its derivation is of an evolutionary character and is one with organic derivation.

There is nothing new in the corollary of human worth, namely that man must be treated as an end, and not as a means. The classic expression of this point of view is in the philosophy of Kant, and Felix Adler has incorporated it in his Ethical Philosophy. But Humanism affirms this view with great passion because of its emphasis on the essentially human constituents of human worth.

From this basic conviction several significant consequences follow:

(1) Man is not to be treated as a means to the glory of God. The Westminster catechism said, "The chief end of man is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." This is typical of orthodox theologies. The glory of God is primary; man is secondary. The result is that today in most religious circles man is thought of as only an instrument in the hands of God. The "event" likewise is said to be in the hands of God.

Traditional theologies of all sorts, the new as well as the old theism make of man's worthwhile qualities a reflection of a pattern kept forever on some eternal mount, or a concrete expression of the universal, or a billow upon an everlasting sea. Only by this eternal, or universal, or billowy relation is man worthwhile. Humanism, on the other hand, holds to man's native and essential worth even though, as is likely the case, the eternals and the universals and the everlasting seas be found to be only the vaporous products of a natively worthwhile imagination. (The worth of the imagination being in the process of imagining, not in the product of the process.)

(2) Man is not to be treated as a means to cosmic ends. Whatever purposes, if any, the cosmos is working out, man is not to be regarded as a means for their realization. If the cosmos moves toward some far off divine event, it is to be hoped that man's self-realization, man's expansion, man's enrichment and ennoblement will contribute somewhat to that event. But since man cannot or at least does not know what that event is, or what ends the cosmos favors he cannot and should not order his ways for the attainment of any ends other than human development. To fix attention on cosmic ends is to weaken one's grasp on the human situation.

(3) Man is not to be treated as a means to a moral order. Morals grow out of human situations and are binding in virtue of their human meaning. Morals are means to human ends, not ends in themselves. Moral law, like natural law, is a descriptive term, not an objective entity. The sense of ought, the feeling of responsibility, and the like, are products and instruments of the emotional life of man, not authorities to be imposed upon man. Humanism takes evolution seriously and finds in creative synthesis an explanation of moral and spiritual matters as well as of physical and biological matters.

(4) Man is not to be treated as a means to a world order. Economic, political, and social matters are means to the ends of human life, not human life means to their ends. Here Humanism touches vitally the whole social system. Governments, mechanism of production and distribution, arrangements for economic exchange, all social and economic and political arrangements whatsoever are to be tested by their contribution to human life and are to stand or fall by the verdict. Every element of the social, political, and economic order must be constantly re-examined, and altered, or obliterated on the basis of its ministry to human needs.

Nothing in the realm of business or industry or the state is to be regarded as sacred save as it gives itself to the development of human life.

(5) Moreover, a man is not to be treated as a means to *any other man*. Mutuality no doubt plays its part, but mutuality is itself a means to personal values. No man may use any other man for his own selfish purposes. Eliciting the best that is in others is no doubt mutually helpful, but each is to act towards the other so as to enhance personal quality, neither being merely a means to the other. The good of each must become the concern of all. This is a hard saying, but it is the heart of any gospel that hopes to save mankind. I point you not to an easy way but to a hard way.

Human life is of supreme importance and consequently must be treated as an end, not as a means.

2. Humanism is the effort to understand human experience by means of human inquiry. The numerous explanations of human experience fall under some one of perhaps four general designations: Revelation, Intuition, Speculation, and Investigation.

(1) Strange enough most races and practically all religions, baffled by the mysterious meanderings of life, have regarded revelations of one sort or another as the only possible way of understanding human experience. Oracles, institutions, priests, books, great souls like Jesus, have been regarded as sources of divine revelation. But modern minded people no longer take seriously the claims of supernatural revelations. So the non-humanistic explanations of human experience are passing away.

(2) However intuition may be regarded, whatever validity may accompany its insight, whatever may be the ground of its functioning, whatever reality it may lay hold upon, it is the human spirit that intuits. All the elements of intuition are human elements. Its insights are to be trusted only when based upon human experience and checked by the verified findings of human science.

(3) It is likewise with speculation, which is a functioning of the mind of man. Speculation is trustworthy only when premised upon facts blasted from the quarry of reality by the power of human investigation. Speculation must rest upon a foundation of fact else its structure is but the plaything of a day. All theologies and philosophies are the products of human speculation, and are to be evaluated as such. Theologies and philosophies are subordinate to human life, not human life subordinate to them.

(4) The investigation of facts, the holding tentatively of hypothesis drawn from the facts, the verification of findings, the revamping of theories, the endless threading of the maze of life, is the modern, the scientific, the humanistic way to the understanding of human experience.

In fact all the ways are human ways. Even the non-humanistic theory of supernatural revelation is itself the product of the human mind. Human inquiry is a highway cutting through every field of human experience.

So Humanism consciously depends upon human inquiry for its body of knowledge. And while the body of knowledge is as yet but small it is gradually and certainly growing. More has been added to human knowledge within a century by Humanistic science than the old ways added in sixty centuries. The struggle of Humanistic science with supernaturalistic superstition is an epic classical in quality. Gradually the battlements of the dark ages have been stormed, the old flags torn asunder, and the fortresses leveled. As the debris is gradually cleared away already may be seen ascending the white columns of the palace of understanding. Already the surrounding fields are cleared, revealing fertile soil from which may grow innumerable trees of knowledge. Practically all of the present arts and instrumentalities of civilization are of recent Humanistic origin.

It is a long journey from primitive mystery to modern knowledge, but the journey has been made by man. Other and yet greater journeys are to be made. The secrets of the heavens and of the earth are being ferreted from hidden depths. Organisms are open for investigation. Molecules, atoms, and electrons are subjects of inquiry and analysis. The realms of the metaphysical are tossed back and forth by human inquiry like balls by the deft fingers of stage magicians. And all this is made possible not by any kind of divine intervention but by human ingenuity. Humanism is the effort to understand human experience in its total setting by means of human investigation.

3. Humanism is the effort to enrich human experience to the utmost capacity of man and the utmost limits of the environing conditions.

(1) The primary concern of Humanism is human development. It embraces whatever facts or postulates, whatever values or hypothesis, whatever sensory experience or esthetic delight, whatever machinery or technique, may enhance human development. But Humanism believes that in the long swing of things the inner man is best served by respecting the objectivity of facts and values. Humanism is fully aware that human development is conditioned by the cosmic situation; but it holds that within certain limits human intelligence is regulative of cosmic situations for human ends. Somehow and to some extent the cosmic situation *conditions* but does not *regulate* human development. Somehow and to some extent human intelligence *regulates* but does not *condition* cosmic situations.

(2) Within the margin of human capacities and environing conditions Humanism aims at the fullest possible life for every person born into this world. The Humanist is keenly

conscious of the present human situation. Despite the geometrical progression of the physical sciences and the vast accumulation of knowledge in these fields the social sciences still move at the rate of arithmetical progression. This distresses the Humanist.

He feels that personal and social values should speed ahead. He takes seriously the present woeful condition of the spirit of man, and finds no compensation in unfolding cosmic purposes. He finds no cosmic compensation for the dead scattered on a thousand battlefields, none for the living dead in a million homes, none for the esthetically famished that multiply the world over. These burden him greatly; and the burden is made greater by a sense of human responsibility. Most of the ills that beset the human body, most of the terrors that frighten the human spirit, most of the plagues that lay barren the earth are amenable" to human control. And they have not been controlled chiefly because man, not understanding his own power, has fallen in slumber upon the bosom of the eternal. Every hair that is prematurely gray, every clod that falls too soon upon the casket of the dead, every unnecessary sorrow that darkens a human brow, weighs upon the conscience of the enlightened man.

The Humanist believes, however, that immense improvement is possible, that wholesale measures may rapidly redeem vast areas of the earth, and that human intelligence and technique are equal to the task.

(3) The Humanist does not want to wait for the slow processes of nature. He believes that man may speed up the processes of nature, that desired results may quickly follow the application of human intelligence to concrete problems, that a decade of intelligence may right the wrongs of centuries, that one generation motivated by good will and directed by intelligence could achieve results that would enrich countless generations yet to be born. The fortunes of the world are not in the lap of the gods, but in the hands of man.

Nor does the Humanist want to wait for the slow processes of nurture. Rather would he speed up nurture itself in the development of the young; and in the development of the elders, he would seek psychological new births. Men's patterns of action are not fixed irrevocably by past events. Causes, ideas, goals have regenerative power. Things yet to be are sometimes more potent than things that have been. The Humanist does not forget that the slow prodding processes are essential; but he believes that wholesale measures of reform and of creative will are feasible and imperative.

Let me close with a quotation from *Humanism*, which I believe sums up the matter: "Man is capable of achieving things heretofore thought utterly impossible. He is capable of so ordering human relations that life shall be preserved, not destroyed; that justice shall be established, not denied; that love shall be the rule, not the exception. It but remains for religion to place human responsibility at the heart of its gospel. When this is done, science and democracy and religion will have formed an alliance of wisdom, vision, and power. In this high concert of values, religion must be the servant and through service the master of all."

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