

# **CHRISTIANITY AND HUMANISM**

by

**Bert Thompson, Ph.D.**

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## INTRODUCTION

“Absolute truth belongs only to one class of humans—the class of absolute fools.” These are the piercing words of Ashley Montagu, the famous evolutionist/humanist of Princeton University (1981, p. 4-C). Dr. Montagu wanted to make it clear that, at best, truth is relative—and anyone who states differently is to be categorized as a fool. Others have joined Dr. Montagu in this kind of thinking. Sir Julian Huxley, for instance, said: “We must now be prepared to abandon the god hypothesis and its corollaries like divine revelation or unchanging truths, and to change over from a supernatural to a naturalistic view of human destiny” (1965, p. 101).

Why do men make such statements? The answer, it seems, lies in an ever-increasing attitude of “supreme self-sufficiency”—a burning desire to “cut themselves loose from the apron strings of God” as it were. George Gaylord Simpson, the famous paleontologist of Harvard, wrote:

Man stands alone in the universe, a unique product of a long, unconscious, impersonal, material process with unique understanding and potentialities. These he owes to no one but himself, and it is to himself that he is responsible. He is not the creature of uncontrollable and undeterminable forces, but is his own master. He can and must decide and manage his own destiny (1953, p. 155).

Richard Leakey echoed those same sentiments.

Unquestionably mankind **is** special, and in many ways, too.... There is now a critical need for a deep awareness that, no matter how special we are as an animal, we are still part of the greater balance of nature.... During that relatively brief span evolutionary pressures forged a brain capable of profound understanding of matters animate and inanimate: the fruits of intellectual and technological endeavour in this latter quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century give us just an inkling of what the human mind can achieve. The potential is enormous, almost infinite. **We can, if we so choose, do virtually anything** (1977, p. 256; first emp. in orig.; latter emp. added).

But is that the only (or even the major) reason for this “debunking of God” in favor of a purely human vantage point? No. It is not just that man is convinced he can make it on his own, although that in itself would be bad enough. Rather, it is the attitude of which the apostle Paul spoke in Romans 1:28 as he discussed those who “refused to have God in their knowledge.” It has to do with those who have “exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather

than the Creator” (Romans 1:25). It is a **willful** determination on the part of man **not** to have God in his mind or in his life, and instead to replace Him with something—anything—non-divine and non-supernatural. It is a concerted effort to escape any ultimate responsibility, and instead to find a way to allow each person to “do his own thing.” In an article titled “Confessions of a Professed Atheist,” Aldous Huxley addressed this very point.

I had motives for not wanting the world to have meaning; consequently, assumed it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption.... The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics; he is also concerned to prove there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do.... For myself, as no doubt for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation from a certain political and economic system and liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom (1966, 3:19).

Statements like these show the absolute determination of some to live without God, no matter what the cost. It is difficult not to be reminded of the kind of people of whom Paul spoke in Ephesians 2:11-13 who found themselves in the position of “having no hope, and without God in the world.” Such thinking is the warped product of what has been called “the void of humanism” (see Stearsman, 1981, 25[12]:490-491).

### **THE TENETS OF HUMANISM**

There is nothing left to the imagination when it comes to the tenets of humanism. This system of thought has been so well-defined and so oft’ discussed that it is an easy matter to understand its goals, aims, objectives, and teachings. In 1933, and again forty years later in 1973, humanists set forth their credo in *Humanist Manifesto I* and *Humanist Manifesto II*. Humanism is not just a system of thought that stresses the importance of humankind. Rather, humanism is a subtle, disarming, and sophisticated way of saying “atheism.” The *Humanist Manifesto II* makes that clear: “As nontheists, we begin with humans, not God, nature, not deity. ...humans are responsible for what we are or will become. No deity will save us; we must save ourselves” (1973, p. 16).

The *Humanist Manifesto I* is composed of fifteen theses covering such areas as ethics, religion, man’s origin and destiny, etc. It was signed by such men as R. Lester Mondale, brother of former United States Vice-President Walter Mondale, and American educator John Dewey, among others.

*Humanist Manifesto II* contains seventeen theses grouped under five major headings: Religion, Ethics, Individual, Democratic Society, and World Community. It was signed by a number of influential people from almost every walk of life, including, among others, Linus Pauling, Issac Asimov, Francis Crick, Julian Huxley, Anthony Flew, Corliss Lamont, and Kai Nielsen. In the preface, the proponents stated: “As in 1933, humanist still believe that traditional theism, especially faith in the prayer-healing God, assumed to love and care for persons,...is an unproved and outmoded faith” (1973, p. 13).

Humanists have “taken aim” at God, religion, the supernatural, and the Gospel message, and intend to “shoot to kill.” Consider, for example, this statement from Kai Nielsen, humanist philosopher and former editor of *The Humanist* magazine.

In cultures such as ours, religion is very often an alien form of life to intellectuals. Living as we do in a post-enlightenment era, it is difficult for us to take religion seriously. The very concept seems fantastic to us...that people in our age can believe that they have had a personal encounter with God, that they could believe that they have experienced conversion through a “mystical experience of God,” so that they are born again in the Holy Spirit, is something that attests to human irrationality and a lack of sense of reality (1977, p. 46).

The message is clear. Those people who accept God, His Son, His Word, and His salvation are “out of touch with reality,” “irrational,” and “unreasonable.” There is no misunderstanding humanism, what it teaches, or what it hopes to accomplish. The *Humanist Manifesto II* is quite specific on a number of important points. Consider, for example, the humanists’ comments on religion.

We believe, however, that traditional or dogmatic or authoritarian religions that place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience do a disservice to the human species. Any account of nature should pass the tests of scientific evidence; in our judgment, the dogmas and myths of traditional religions do not do so.... We find insufficient evidence for belief in the existence of a supernatural; it is either meaningless or irrelevant to the question of the survival and fulfillment of the human race.... Promises of salvation or fear of eternal damnation are both illusory and harmful. They distract humans from present concerns, from self-actualization, and from rectifying social injustices. Modern science discredits such historic concepts as the “ghost in the machine” and the “separable soul.” Rather, science affirms that the human species is an emergence from natural evolutionary forces. As far as we know, the total personality is a function of the biological organism transacting in a social and cultural context. There is no credible evidence that life survives the death of the body (1973, pp. 15-17).

Consider also these comments on the subject of ethics.

...we affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is **autonomous** and **situational**, needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human needs and interest. To deny this distorts the whole basis of life. Human life has meaning because we create and

develop our futures. Happiness and the creative realization of human needs and desires, individually and in shared enjoyment, are continuous themes of humanism. We strive for the good life, here and now. The goal is to pursue life's enrichment despite debasing forces.... **Reason and intelligence** are the most effective instruments that humankind possesses. There is no substitute: neither faith nor passion suffices in itself. The controlled use of scientific methods, which have transformed the natural and social sciences since the Renaissance, must be extended further in the solution of human problems (1973, pp. 17-18; emp. in orig.).

Lastly, consider these comments on "sexual freedom."

In the area of sexuality, we believe that intolerant attitudes, often cultivated by orthodox religions and puritanical cultures, unduly repress sexual conduct. The right to birth control, abortion, and divorce should be recognized. While we do not approve of exploitive, denigrating forms of sexual expression, neither do we wish to prohibit, by law or social sanction, sexual behavior between consenting adults. The many varieties of sexual exploration should not in themselves be considered "evil." Without countenancing mindless permissiveness or unbridled promiscuity, a civilized society should be a **tolerant** one. Short of harming others or compelling them to do likewise, individuals should be permitted to express their sexual proclivities and pursue their lifestyles as they desire. We wish to cultivate the development of a responsible attitude toward sexuality, in which humans are not exploited as sexual objects and in which intimacy, sensitivity, respect and honesty in interpersonal relations are encouraged. Moral education for children and adults is an important way of developing awareness and sexual maturity (1973, pp. 18-19; emp. in orig.).

These, in summary, are the tenets of humanism. Promises of salvation are "illusory and harmful," ethics is "situational," and sexual activity between "consenting adults" is acceptable no matter who or what is involved. Sounds like "vice is nice" propaganda, doesn't it? Abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, and even what some call the "last taboo"—incest—are acceptable according to humanism. As one author put it: "While humanity did not arise from the beasts, Humanism certainly stoops to their level" (Jones, 1981, 98[20]:309).

Many people simply are not aware that humanism advocates such things. Furthermore, many are not aware that humanism has its own systems of cosmology, soteriology, ethics, and even eschatology—all of which stand in direct opposition to the Bible. What, then, should be the Christian's response to such teachings?

### **CHRISTIANITY AND HUMANISM**

It is important to understand that a Christian cannot be a humanist. There are those who claim to be "Christian humanists" or "religious humanists." But humanism and Christianity are not compatible. Paul Kurtz, former editor of *The Humanist*, addressed the subject of "Christian humanism" when he observed: "Humanism cannot in any fair sense of the word apply to one who still believes in God

as the source and Creator of the universe. Christian Humanism would be possible only for those who are willing to admit that they are atheistic Humanists. It surely does not apply to God-intoxicated believers” (1973, p. 177). Humanist writer Corliss Lamont even went so far as to state: “Passing to the New Testament, we see plainly that its theology, taken literally, is totally alien to the Humanist viewpoint” (1977, p. 50).

Humanism and Christianity are mutually exclusive, diametrically opposed systems. Humanism states that matter is eternal, that there is no God, that man and his environment are the result of evolutionary forces, that ethics is situational, that no one can possess absolute truth, that there is no life after death, that views of salvation are illusory and harmful, that man is the most important thing in the Universe, that man has no soul, that there is no heaven or hell, and so on.

Christianity, on the other hand, teaches the exact opposite of these things. The Bible speaks often of an eternal God, man’s immortal soul, heaven, hell, a promised and planned salvation, the absolute nature of Truth, morals based on an objective standard, etc. Humanists have failed to comprehend one of the greatest of all truths—that the “fear of the Lord” is both “the beginning of knowledge” and “the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). True wisdom is in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30). He alone is the way, the Truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father but by Him (John 14:6). It is His Truth that will make us free (John 8:32) and protect us from the “philosophy and vain deceit after the tradition of men” that is able to destroy us (Colossians 2:8).

It is the Christian system that places man in his proper place in the Universe—as a specially created being (Genesis 1:26-27) made a little lower than the angels (Psalm 8:4-5). Man is not “up from the slime” as humanism advocates, but instead is “down from heaven.” In addition, Christianity correctly teaches that ethics is not situational, but instead always must be based on God’s Word since in that Word we find “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). Far from being situational, the ethical system of the Bible is governed by revelation provided by the Creator. Prohibitions against many of the things that humanism advocates (divorce, homosexuality, extra-marital and pre-

marital sexual activity, etc.) are frequent in the divinely inspired text (1 Corinthians 6:9-19; Romans 1:26-32; Matthew 5:27; Matthew 19:9; Genesis 2:24; etc.).

The wisdom that man values so highly, God often sets at nought (1 Corinthians 3:19-21; 2:6; 1:19-21). The Bible urges us to pray often (1 Thessalonians 5:17), with the assurance that we will be heard by our God (Matthew 7:7-8). Humanism denies these things. The Bible warns us against “friendship with the world which is enmity with God” (James 4:4) and promises us instead the “abundant life” (John 10:10) through Christ. Jesus Himself promised eternal life to those who were faithful to God (John 17:3; Matthew 10:32-33; John 14:1-3,23-24).

### CONCLUSION

Why do we find the world in the state it is today? Tim LaHaye, in his book, *The Battle for the Mind*, suggested: “Our present society is in a state of moral decay, not because the majority of Americans love degeneracy, but because the influence of humanism has been greater on our culture than the influence of the church” (1980, p. 189). Christ said:

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under a bushel, but on a stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house. even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:13-16).

God’s people are to uphold that which is right and oppose that which is wrong. In so doing, we set an example for all around us to see. We must oppose humanism because its teachings are contrary to the teachings of God’s Word. We must come to understand, and help others to understand, the folly of human “wisdom” such as is found in humanism.

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and discernment of the discerning will I bring to naught. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of the world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God’s good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe (1 Corinthians 1:19-21).

Human wisdom leads away from God if it is not founded on, guarded by, and subject to biblical revelation. Human wisdom is at war with God (Romans 8:7) and is foolishness as far as He is concerned (1 Corinthians 3:19-20). Christians must reject humanism, and help others to do the same.

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