

DEALING WITH HUMANISM IN TODAY'S WORLD

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DEALING WITH HUMANISM IN TODAY'S WORLD

Dear Friends in Christ:

In pursuing the topic of contemporary humanism and how to deal with it, we are drawn inevitably to the foundations of Christian anthropology, that is, to the Scriptural view of man. Clarification on this article of faith should help bring clarity into our discussion of humanism as an alternate doctrine of man. Yet lest we imagine from the outset that such clarity will be easily attained, let us remember that debates over man's natures have constantly caused a great stir throughout the history of Christianity and in the annals of philosophy. We are not here concerned about superstructures; we are examining the bedrock of human concerns.

"Know thyself" the ancient sage counseled, indicating in his own way that man, not matter, was the chief problem of human existence. When the Pharisee Nicodemus wanted to get down to the basics of life, Jesus informed him simply that at bottom there were only two kinds of men, those born of flesh and those born of the Spirit. (Jn.3:6) During the Reformation struggle Luther ended his debate over the nature of man's will by admitting that his opponent, the humanist Erasmus, had grabbed the jugular and "attacked the real issues, the essence of the matter in dispute"¹ in the reform, namely, whether man's will was free or enslaved.

What is involved in this subject area then are the nagging questions of the range and limits of human potential and abilities, the problems of whether or not man controls his life and actions by his own free will, the speculations on the place of the environment in conditioning the growth of the human being. This fascination with man, man the doer, man the technician, the producer of plastics, the creator of systems, who extends the boundaries of the possible to the mastery of space and apparent control over his own conscious and subconscious—this fascination leads straight to the ageless questions: where does man's strength come from and where his responsibilities, what are his limitations and who sets his values? With this topic we have not intentionally opened a can of worms which had better remained closed. As educators, we realize that these are real questions, for we have proceeded to the foundations of education itself, the nature and training of the human being.

We cannot, however, deal with humanism until we know what humanism is all about. And it is my impression that most of us have only vague notions about the movement. For this reason we will begin by getting to know contemporary humanism on its own terms, and then seek to evaluate it from the perspective of the Scripture. So let us for the moment quietly enter the lecture halls of the humanists to take notes from its champions and proponents.

I. Contemporary humanism as it sees itself

For the uninitiated a trip into the precincts of the humanists' domain is as frustrating as it is mind-boggling. We come across as many varieties of modern humanism as there are Christian denominations. Liberal humanists vie with ethical humanists and religious humanists; while others claim to be naturalistic humanists, scientific humanists, and atheistic humanists, depending upon what aspect of the movement they wish to highlight. Then there are even Marxist humanists, behavioral humanists, like the educationist B. F. Skinner, and more. The humanist image varies so from person to person, from group to group, that we do best to describe it in general terms, realizing full well that someone somewhere will find objections and different emphases.

For our purpose let us allow a young man from rural Kansas give his homespun testimonial on how he fell in love with man:

My movement into Humanism was a gradual one, not the consequence of a rebellion. Born and reared in a religiously fundamentalist community in western Kansas, I very early felt the inconsistencies of its approach to ordering my life The Faith demanded by traditional religion seemed a blind one rooted in nothing that a searching intelligence could respect. More and more I perceived that man himself had to be the focus of concern. Either man would save himself, or he would not be saved. He had altered his environment, had made his own problems,

¹ All Footnote documentation was missing in the library copy.

created his great moments, and all these were his own responsibility. His pressing problems had to be solved by man, or they would not be solved. It is only through a knowledge of man, his strengths and weaknesses, his capacities and potentialities, his ability to challenge the best that is within him, that we can hope for a better world. This is my philosophy, and it is in this sense that I am a Humanist for I think that this point of view is central to Humanism.²

The candid confession we have just heard, however, was not entirely homespun. When Lester Kirkendall speaks, he is reflecting a faith a long time in formation. Modern humanism traces its roots to the rise of the scientific method in Europe three hundred years ago. Enamored by the possibilities and results of man's reason in opening new vistas in life through the method of investigation and verification, some practitioners of science and other intellectuals began to concentrate on the scientific method itself as a religion. Ridding themselves of the shackles of church dogma at a time when European nations were tearing one another to bits in religious wars, many based their hope for future life on the calculated efforts of man's scientific reason. They had faith that the detached, open-minded approach to each and every problem under investigation and the questioning, curious spirit which sought "power in knowledge" (Bacon) would by and by bring the answers to man's perplexities. The French revolution capped this first phase in the quest, as again men slaughtered one another, this time to achieve the utopia of emancipation. "Man," the French skeptic Diderot wrote with fervor, "is the single place from which we must begin and to which we must refer everything."³

In America the free-thought movement arose from colonial contacts with the European heritage, particularly from the ideas of the deists: But over here in the wide-open frontier the emancipation of man's mind was seen to have political and social consequences unrealized in the confines of European tradition. Freethinking became a popular movement and "free" and "thought" became common words for politicians and pedagogues alike. In an organized way, the Unitarian church early provided the vehicle to transmit the humanist message. Rev. John Dietrich explains: "Unitarianism offered opportunity for the enunciation of Humanism by virtue of its underlying spirit of spiritual freedom But this is not the important thing. The real reason why Unitarianism was the natural soil for the growth of Humanism is the fact that Unitarianism was a revolt against Orthodox Christianity in the interest of the worth and dignity of human nature and the interest of human life."⁴

What Unitarianism fostered, the industrial revolution on the American scene furthered. According to a humanist historian, the technological revolution in America accelerated the demand to "emancipate men's minds from ancient taboos, superstitions and dogmas" by "creating a demand for better-educated artisans."⁵ The educational movement culminated on our soil in the 1930s in the thinking of John Dewey and the production of the Humanist Manifesto (I). Although the 20th century humanist writers still paid lip-service to the theistic vehicle that preceded, the Humanist Manifesto snipped all previous ties with belief in God and laid the basis for the modern form of humanism. "The time has come," the document begins,

for widespread recognition of the radical changes in religious beliefs throughout the modern world. The time is past for mere revision of traditional attitudes. Science and economic change have disputed the old beliefs

There is a great danger of a final, and we believe fatal, identification of the word religion with doctrines and methods which have lost their significance and which are powerless to solve the problem of human living in the Twentieth Century

Today men's larger understanding of the universe, his scientific achievements, and his deeper appreciation of brotherhood, have created a situation which requires a new statement of the means and purposes of religion.⁶

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The new statement did indeed outline the creeds and goals of an orthodox humanism, which consequently gave rise to new methods and programs in education. What then is humanism's faith and what are its goals? The basic belief of humanism is that man is autonomous. The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy defines humanism as "any philosophy which recognizes the value or dignity of man and makes him the measure of all things."⁷ To the humanist this autonomy means three things. First of all, in contrast to the animal world human beings can reflect on themselves. As one man abstractly put it, "embers of the human race are conscious of their natural end and are, therefore, in a position to judge means as contributory or noncontributory to this end."⁸ In simple terms, this means, although man, a pig, or an acorn all have a natural end, man differs from the pig or acorn by being able to think about his end and then to devise methods of self-preservation. He has the capacity for free thought. Thinking man shows he is autonomous, secondly, by taking responsibility for his actions. In the words of one humanist, "man is becoming aware that he is living on a little planet on which he as evolved step by step, biologically and culturally, and that he must stand on his own two feet and solve the various problems which confront him and make his life precarious."⁹ As such, humanism regards itself as an ethical doctrine. "This notion of human responsibility," H. Blackham says, "is the nuclear idea in the definition of Humanism Man is his own rule and his own end. Human life, is in human hands. The strategy for living is 'adopt and adapt', not 'obey' and 'conform'."¹⁰

This open-ended and unstructured self-rule leaves no room for control from the outside. And that, in the third place, is what autonomous man means when he claims that God as a working hypothesis is obsolete. Roy Wood Sellars explains: "The Humanist argues that the traditional Christian outlook has been undercut and rendered obsolete by the growth of knowledge about man and his world,"¹¹ Therefore there is no longer a need for a divine crutch, "since the universe . . . is completely self-operating according to natural law, with no need for a God or gods to keep it functioning. The cosmos, unbounded in space and infinite in time, consists fundamentally of a constantly changing system of matter and energy, and is neutral in regard to man's well-being and values."¹²

In view of the fact that autonomous man is alone responsible to himself for his actions, the second major tenet of the humanist creed proclaims faith in the human potential for good. As one man said, "Humanists believe that the only bases for morality are human experience and human needs."¹³ On this account all set standards of morality must be rejected. In the words of another humanist, "The basic assumption of the new morality is the conviction that the good life is achieved when we realize the human potential This means that we ought to reject all those creeds and dogmas which impede human fulfillment or impose external authoritarian rule upon human beings." With this explanation we are not at all surprised to find the Ten Commandments declared to be "immoral insofar as they. . . suppress vital inclinations."¹⁴

The doctrines of man's autonomy and the human potential for good form the basis for humanists to express their goals in life in terms of self. They seek to achieve the good life by self-expression, self-actualization and a positive affirmation of values. They are concerned, as one said, "with the implementation of a secular or open society, where individuals are free to express their views with minimal hindrance, in the public interest, publicly or privately, in limited or mass circulation media."¹⁵ This permissive attitude is expressly founded on the premise "that man can live a good life this side of the grave, . . . that man has potentially the intelligence, good will and co-operative skills to survive on this planet, to explore space and

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to provide an opportunity for growth, adventure, meaning and fulfillment for all men, (and) that, however short may be man's days, beauty and joy may fill them."¹⁶

A lot of talk and pious platitudes? Indeed not: For humanists maintain these goals can be achieved in everyday life by supporting a liberal program of free expression. The following recommendations from humanist writers will illustrate the point.

Humanism promotes aesthetics: It "supports the widest possible development of the arts and the awareness of beauty, so that the aesthetic experience may become a pervasive reality in the life of man."

Humanism promotes ecology: "The humanist energetically backs the widespread efforts for conservation, the extension of park areas and the protection of wild life."

Humanism promotes internationalism: "For the actualization of human happiness and freedom everywhere on earth, Humanism advocates the establishment of international peace, democracy and a high standard of living throughout the world. Humanists, in their concern for the welfare of all nations, peoples, and races, adopt (the) aphorism, 'Our country is the world; our countrymen are all mankind.' . . . Humanism is international in spirit and in scope."¹⁷

Humanism promotes free sexual expression: "In the controversial realm of sex relations, . . . the Humanist regards sexual emotions and their fulfillment as healthy, beautiful and nature's wonderful way of making possible the continued reproduction of the human race." Furthermore: "Some people are heterosexual, some homosexual. So long as harmful social consequences, notably venereal disease and unwanted children, are avoided and personal integrity and respect for others is sustained, it is of little ethical consequence what an individual's sexual behavior might be." Furthermore: "Euthanasia, abortion, family planning and suicide are other matters that should be left to the individual conscience."¹⁸

One writer sums it all up by saying: "Thus Humanism calls man to a human programme. The main features of this programme are familiar: international security, aid, conservation, population control, development and direction of technology, education for autonomy and an open society. Such a formidable global programme is liable to leave the ordinary Humanist, who is trying to make a living, slightly defeatist or cynical. Here is Humanist faith, a reasonable faith in intelligent action. The character of the programme is such that its call comes home to everyone's possibilities to respond."¹⁹

The response did come. Despite the positive image of :man and his unlimited potential for good which humanism wished to project, twentieth century life did not prove to be a bowl of cherries. The liberal attitudes and self-confidence in man's potential for good were shaken by a series of global events that challenged the rational and scientific humanist orthodoxy. The canopy cloud of the atomic bomb and the real possibility of human extinction spread over mankind and forced him to weigh the consequences of scientific advances. Wars indeed had brought prosperity to some and new technology gave promise of a better life. But there was an undercurrent of dissatisfaction with man using man for his own advancement. Children began to feel the hypocrisy of prosperity without love and reacted to the impersonal forms of life that modern technology had fostered. The business community sensed the coldness that had entered human relationships, as businessmen worked for quotas and sales rather than really being concerned for the customer. The business world looked to the educators and educators learned from the business community and both felt the social pressures of race relations and the plight of the underprivileged. There proved to be a loneliness in self-sufficiency.

The result? A revisionism set in among humanists in the 1960s and 1970s which was less doctrinaire and more personal. The second wave of contemporary humanism turned inward. It turned its attention from scientific reason to intuitive reason, from the intellectual status based on the scientific method to the emotive responses of man's inner being. It had less self-confidence in man's technical and rational achievements and more concern about the responsibilities for the work of his hands. To the new breed, humanism, like happiness, was a warm puppy.

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This sympathetic view followed and fostered the present-day emphasis on the affective rather than the cognitive in life and education (which is educationese for the difference between warmhearted feelings and mere head-knowledge). The new and revisionist form of humanism was actually a cover for existentialism, which viewed life in terms of living and action rather than in the static terms of being.

This existential effect filtered down by demand to the philosophies and methods of the American educational scene. Today we are experiencing the results in the classrooms and curricula of the American schools, in educational psychology, in the re-education of the American people through seminars and adult education courses, human relations components in business and industry training sessions, and especially in concerns for the exceptional child. It is this phase of contemporary humanism which, I sense, gave impetus to requesting this study.

While we must not imagine that the earlier orthodox humanism has died out today, as the attempt to update Humanist Manifesto I by composing Humanist Manifesto II indicates, it is increasingly evident that the revisionist phase of humanism has had a latitudinarian effect on the movement. It has broadened and washed out the understanding of the term 'humanism' to such an extent that it is difficult in today's world to distinguish humanism from being humane, humanitarian, personal and concerned about others. In many people's minds only a misanthrope, despiser of humanity, would not qualify as such a humanist. Even the attacks on belief in God have greatly diminished into a non-polemical indifference or even a reluctant acceptance of religious values and ideals that coincide with humanist outlooks. 'Humanistic' has become a word that gives something the added luster of the human touch.

Let me illustrate. While I was writing this section of the essay, I looked through three books on my desk, one for tiny tots, one for the upper grades, and one for the exceptional children. Listen to the titles: "Humanics, a Publication for Helpers of Young Children", "Humanizing the Classroom: Models of Teaching in Affective Education" and "Humanistic Teaching for Exceptional Children."²⁰

The introductory remarks in the last named book indicate how broad the use of the term 'humanistic' has become. The editor writes: "At every stage from infant to 'young adult,' special education is about a person. This article of faith (sic!) permeates the volume: Once we understand the children as human beings, we will empathize with their condition, listen to them, and be better able to be useful helpers."²¹

Likewise the editor of the book on "Humanizing the Classroom" testifies how new the approaches are in this book published in 1976. "Affective education is still in its infancy," he affirms, and then adds, "Other teaching approaches are being developed and the overall direction of humanistic education is still being defined."²² A run down the list of classroom models will give an idea of the methods presented: Self-concept models, such as values clarification and role-playing; group therapy models, such as sensitivity training, transactional analysis (TA) and human relations training; and finally consciousness expansion techniques, such as meditation, synectics and psychosynthesis.

It goes beyond the scope of our efforts to reflect on any or all of these methods. But one of them has come in for social criticism from Christian groups because of its popularity and reference to morality. We will therefore single out 'Values Clarification' for comment. According to its fountainhead, Sidney Simon, and his associates, the values clarification approach helps young people to examine-critical questions as: Should I wear clothes that I like or that my parents want me to wear? Should I smoke marijuana just because my friends do? Other relevant areas have to do with politics, religion, sex, family, literature, money, aging, death, war and peace, and rules.

The values clarification approach intends to help the youth examine these areas, clarify the value issues involved, and develop their own value systems with regard to the issues. The approach does not attempt to impose a certain set of values, but allows the student to clarify his own position. How is this done? Values are clarified through the use of seven subprocesses:

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1. Choosing freely. If an individual is coerced to adopt a particular value, there is little likelihood that he will consciously integrate that value into his value structure.
2. Choosing from alternatives. This is closely related to the first subprocess. Making a number of alternatives available to the individual increases the probability that the individual can choose freely.
3. Choosing after considering the consequences. Valuing is a thoughtful process in which the individual attempts consciously to predict what will happen if he chooses a particular value. Choosing impulsively will not lead to an intelligent value system.
4. Prizing and cherishing. According to Simon . . . , we should respect our values and consider them an integral aspect of our existence.
5. Affirming. If we have chosen our values freely after considering the consequences, then we should be willing to affirm these values publicly. We should not be ashamed of our values but should be willing to share them when the occasion arises.
6. Acting upon our choices. The values we hold should be apparent from our actions. In fact, the way we spend our time should reflect the values we cherish.
7. Repeating. If we act on our values we should do so in a consistent and repetitive pattern. If our actions are inconsistent with our values, then we should examine more closely the relationship between our values and actions.²³

In all this, the important matter for Simon is, humanistically speaking, not what you choose, but that you have chosen for yourself, freely and without any external authority. That, after all, is pure humanist dogma. There are no right answers, especially in the area of moral judgment, only what is right for you. There is no authority beyond self. As Simon says, “The old thou shalt note simply are not relevant.”²⁴

With that dictum we stop our note-taking. The final bell has rung: And we are ready to leave the halls of the humanists, a little more knowledgeable about the movement, but even more anxious to get together to discuss what we have heard and evaluate it from the perspective of Christian faith

I. Contemporary humanism from Scripture’s perspective

What are your impressions? How shall we come to grips with what we have learned from the lecture halls of the humanists? Off hand reactions among us will undoubtedly be mixed, from outright opposition to ambivalent feelings to a clearer discernment of how to deal with the problems involved. We certainly can sense how humanists are striving for many a noble goal. Who among us would be against international peace and brotherhood, concern for the exceptional child, a park system, a warm puppy, working to improve human relations, or cultivating the visual and practical arts? Does not the Apostle Paul remind those of the household of faith, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”? (Phil. 4:8)

At the same time, undergirding the entire world view of the humanists is a different orientation from Christian faith. The foundations differ. The humanist wants to live as man without God (even if there should happen to be one). For him life’s situations and predicament are his responsibilities and his alone. He must answer to himself and take the consequences for his actions. Any suggestion of an outside influence or external guide other than the inviolability of the sovereign self destroys for him the independence of the individual and

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disturbs his natural rights. Led to its logical conclusion, this game must end in an unvarnished nihilism, a position which denies any objective or real ground of truth or moral principles. And nihilism's natural result is anarchy or terrorism.

But surely humanists are concerned about others. Whether following reason or intuition, the head or the heart, humanists have faith that the individual can call upon an inner reserve of goodness in relating to others or adjusting to any of life's situations. Man is a responsible creature, they say. He can think. Reason will dictate an intelligent course of action. Upon reflection, each person will adopt or adapt his opinions before he acts. Faced with the options, he will most likely choose the good way to do things. And such are the things that proverbs are made of (and also TV shows!): crime doesn't pay; honesty is the best policy; do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Is there any warrant for such an optimistic and positive view of man's potential in a world where the realities of war, crime, abuse, murder, rape, theft, etc. crowd in upon us each day from the news media and tell a different tale? Yes, in a sense we must agree. For even though man, the noblest creature of all, fell from God's grace, he did not in the process lose his reason or free will with regard to things below him. Natural man retains a sort of free will to act upon his deliberations; and conscience informs him of his responsibility to act in a moral manner (Rom. 2:14f). Without reason to guide him, natural man would lose the basis for ordering his life in society and have no rule to secure peace and tranquility among people. For God himself instituted mankind's right to establish order by using reason to govern in matters of good and evil (Rom. 13). To the extent that he is able to call on will and mind and heart to adjust to life's circumstances in a proper way, natural man is able to achieve an external respectability.

Augustine acknowledged the same when he attempted to deal with the Pelagian humanists of his day. "We concede," he wrote, "that all men have a free will, for all have a natural, innate understanding and reason... (But) it is only in the outward acts of this life that they have freedom to choose good or evil. By good I mean what they are capable of by nature: . . . whether to build a house, take a wife, engage in a trade, or do whatever else may be good or profitable." But Augustine also hastened to indicate the flip-side of man's ability, stating "Man by his own choice can also undertake evil."²⁵

In similar fashion the Lutherans at the Diet of Augsburg (1530) clarified their stance concerning man's natural potential to do good. In an article on Free Will (AC-Apol XVIII,4) they confessed:

We are not denying freedom to the human will. The human will has freedom to choose among the works and things which reason by itself can grasp. To some extent it can achieve civil righteousness or the righteousness of works. It can talk about God and express its worship of him in outward works. It can obey rulers and parents. Externally, it can choose to keep the hands from murder, adultery, or theft. Since human nature still has reason and judgment about the things that the senses can grasp, it also retains a choice in these things, as well as the liberty and ability to achieve civil righteousness. The righteousness which the carnal nature—that is, the reason—can achieve on its own without the Holy Spirit, Scripture calls the righteousness of the flesh.²⁶

Viewed from the perspective of creation and the fall, therefore, we must acknowledge the place of free will and reason in the life of natural man. God exercises the rule of his left hand, the secular rule for the good of society, through the frail instruments of natural reason and man's conscience. Although the humanist himself may be enamored with these endowments and in the pride of self-sufficiency fails to recognize their source, we must remember that man's potential for good is the only way left open for him to live with himself and others. Apart from the Christian faith and the grace of God, he knows no other way of life than to live by the knowledge of good and evil. (Gen. 3)

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Public education in the United States is constitutionally built on this natural theology of humanism. The way is barred by law for teaching revealed religion as truth in all but private or parochial schools. For this reason teachers in public education achieve their aims best when they use methods to produce a civic righteousness. Christian citizens can support and have supported such efforts which bring about order, tranquillity, the cultivation of useful arts, help for the needy and the like. These are God's temporal blessings achieved in and through the fallen creation. But where such efforts pass the bounds of God's Law, Christian folk can and will also refuse to support immoral actions or practices. For in such matters "we must obey God rather than man." (Acts 5:29)

It is this side of the ledger which causes us many a concern in contemporary life. Let me illustrate. Civil righteousness breaks down in a nation, for example, when advocates of free sexual expression affirm that apart from considering certain after-effects "it is of little consequence what an individual's sexual behavior might be." Moreover, if righteousness exalts a nation as the Nuremberg trials declared by its judgment on Nazi crimes, then also the case for inhumane termination of life through abortion ought to be reexamined at all levels of society. Liberty turns into permissiveness when there is no other court of appeal than the sovereign self of an individual. This transvaluation of values destroys all set standards. Children and adults are trained to do that which is right in their own eyes, to do their own thing. The result is a moral anarchy devoid of any objective value. Such chaos – and chaos is the lack of order – deserves the incisive criticism voiced by C.S. Lewis in his book on The Abolition of Man. He states

It is in Man's power to treat himself as a mere 'natural object' and his own judgements of value as raw material for scientific manipulation to alter at will. The objection to his doing so does not lie in the fact that his point of view (like one's first day in a dissecting room) is painful and shocking till we grow used to it. The pain and shock are at most a warning and a symptom. The real objection is that if man chooses to treat himself as raw material, raw material he will be: not raw material to be manipulated, as he fondly imagined, by himself, but by mere appetite, that is, mere Nature, in the person of his dehumanized Conditioners.

We have been trying . . . to have it both ways: to lay down our human prerogative and yet at the same time to retain it. It is impossible. Either we are rational spirit obliged to obey the absolute values of the Tao (that is, natural law), or else we are mere nature to be kneaded and cut into new shapes for the pleasures of masters who must, by hypothesis, have no motive but their own 'natural' impulses. Only (natural law) provides a common human law of action which can overarch rulers and ruled alike. A dogmatic belief in objective value is necessary to the very idea of a rule which is not tyranny or an obedience which is not slavery.²⁷

Lewis does not always express this thoughts in simple fashion, as anyone who has read his writing knows. But if we understand correctly, he is warning mankind that attempts to undermine the traditional values of natural law will actually bring an end to civil liberty. The humanist dream of absolute freedom is really a negation of freedom, since then man would have nothing to be free from or for. Let those who insist "the old thou shalt nots are no longer relevant" listen carefully to what the man says.

In dealing with contemporary humanism up to this point, we have only evaluated its ability to work for civil righteousness in the social order. And really this is the humanists' only concern. But another concern weighs on our hearts. We wish to deal with humanism, above all, in terms of life and death and eternity, because this concern reaches into the core of faith.

The real tragedy of humanism as a philosophy of life is that its advocates do not even begin to grasp the meaning of human impotency in spiritual matters. Paul told the Corinthians why this is so: "The natural man does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot

understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (I Cor. 2:14) As a matter of fact, most humanists do not wish to bother their heads about the supernatural and the afterlife and thus be distracted from the urgent problems here and now. No wonder ardent humanists are either indifferent or outright hostile to Christianity. In their book *Christians are too other-worldly*. Listening to talk about sin and salvation, repentance, and faith in Christ is repugnant to those who believe in the autonomy of man and his potential for good. So the cross remains an offence to human reason.

Yet the message of the cross is finally the best and only way that we can deal with humanism. Only through the Gospel message can the Spirit of God change the mind and heart of any man. Our weapon is spiritual, the preaching of the Word of God. It is a powerful weapon because it is able to topple foundations. A simple Christian armed with the Word of God is worth more in dealing with humanism than a thousand sophisticated arguments. As the writer to the Hebrews put it: “The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in God’s creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” (Heb. 4:12).

Accountability to God! Every man in his time must ponder the thought. Accountability before God is the message intended to stir the conscience of man. Luther made accountability before God his final appeal to the humanist Erasmus in their debate over the free or enslaved will. Pleading with his adversary to recognize God’s will and ways, Luther turned to him in all sincerity and wrote: “There is a life after this life, and all that is not punished and repaid here will be punished and repaid there; for this life is nothing more than a forerunner, or, rather, a beginning, of the life that is to come.”²⁸ Life took on its meaning for the Reformer from the perspective of the cross and eternity, and he wished to share this message with one and all. We can do no more.

III. Concluding comments on dealing with humanism

We have come a long way from the Humanists’ chambers to the doors of eternity. Our daily tasks are set between the two. Every day of our lives the religion of natural man contends with the truth of God in all spheres of life. In the broadest sense history portrays the struggle of Satan and God for the will of man. Formally this conflict presses down on Christian teachers by means of textbooks and classroom methodologies that continuously come our way and are urged upon us. We must make judgments concerning the use and suitability of both. How shall we deal with the effects of humanism in this regard?

It would be an error to mount a national anti-humanist crusade in the name of the church to purge textbooks and classrooms of humanist influence. We can openly analyze, criticize, and reject educational philosophies from our Christian viewpoint. We can preach, teach, explain, testify, and witness freely to God’s truth. But we cannot force faith, as little upon the individual as upon the nation. Our nation is not a theocracy. Christian faith, if forced, would be a new slavery, not freedom in Christ. At best Christian citizens can and should hold the nation to its commitment to the rule of natural law to effect a civil righteousness lest we end in the moral morass of nihilism. At this point in time that effort seems to be a major task in public education.

Must we then reject using textbooks and methods of humanist background in our Christian schools? Not necessarily. We have used texts and methods from secular sources for years in our curricula, learned from their learning, adapted them to our needs, and filled these vessels with the precious insights from God’s Word. The question of suitability is quite another question, as all textbook review committees in our schools know from experience. Judging the suitability of a text or its methods involves sanctified common sense on our part. Not all texts or methods are suitable nor would it be prudent to adopt them.

But let me for the moment single out the question of methods for special treatment, since many new methodologies are being promoted today in an effort to humanize the classroom. Remember the list of methods cited earlier? If not, let me interrupt by quoting from the blurb on the cover of the reference book mentioned before: “Humanizing the classroom integrates a number of teaching approaches in affective education in a

manner most useful to the teacher. With a considerable variety of affective techniques available—values clarification, synectics, confluent education, meditation, and psychosynthesis among them—the teacher needs a framework in which to organize these approaches.” What shall we say about these methods?

In respect to methods too, the Christian church in the past has learned from philosophers, psychologists and humanists new forms to present its lessons. Someone recently recalled how we have taken over the five formal steps of presenting a lesson from the German psychologist, Johann Friedrich Herbart, and have used them in the church to good advantage. Luther’s place in the history of education has been secured not merely by his theological reform. In the *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (1520), he also advised the princes on questions of educational reform in the schools. He threw the philosophy of Aristotle out of the curriculum for theology because the pagan philosopher did not understand life. Aristotle’s texts on *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *On the Soul*, and *Ethics* were dropped. But at the same time Luther granted that one could learn from Aristotle’s methods, “I would gladly grant the retention of Aristotle’s book on *Logic*, *Rhetoric*, and *Poetics*,” he advised, since one could adapt these forms for training the youth how to speak and preach.

Can we adapt any or all methods for our classrooms? The answer again lies in their suitability. Methods are created to reflect the philosophies they convey, and in some cases structures and philosophies are so intimately connected that the structure collapses if deprived of its base. But in many cases methods can be adapted to suit a Christian classroom. Take, for example, the methods of ‘values clarification’ cited previously. The method obviously comes from the philosophy of contemporary humanism. By applying the method of multiple choice to the question of values, Simon wishes to assist students to make responsible choices and to act upon them. To do so he must divest the student of any previous authorities, traditional or Biblical. After all, erasing the board of everything save the question mark is the essence of the scientific method, and Simon wishes to apply this method to social behavior.

Is the method acceptable? The method as given rejects the basic Christian faith that God has given us a set standard in His Word to guide us in our human behavior. We are not antinomians. In all situations of life we believe “it is necessary for the law of God constantly to light (our) way lest in (our) merely human devotion (we) undertake self-decreed and self-chosen acts of serving God.” (FC-Ep VI, 4), If we used Simon’s method in our classroom with his pre-suppositions, we would be undermining the very basis of morality which lies at the heart of Christian faith.

But the question still remains: could the form be adapted to suit the Christian classroom? As odd as adapting the heathen festival of the sun-god Ra for a celebration of Christ’s birth might seem, so unlikely the use of Simon’s method might seem, even if used in a Christian context. But let me suggest that the method has already been adapted in some religion classes when multiple choice reactions to behavioral situations are called for from a student in order to show that only one of these ways is God’s way. In and of itself, therefore, the method could possibly be used with necessary precaution, even as we present true and false doctrinal opinions and expect the student to choose what God says (as is done in the popular instruction manual, *What the Bible Says*). The caution, however, is that we use utmost discretion in presenting to children moral situations which feed the immature imagination with things they would never previously have dreamed of acting upon.

By this time you have correctly sensed that we have refrained from making more direct applications other than the examples we used. Instead we have used out time to concentrate on the basic principles involved in the tension between contemporary humanism’s creed and the Christian faith. We have followed this course in the belief that we can judge and make our application more soberly and clearly if, first of all, we become acquainted with contemporary humanism from its historic foundations and then test its philosophy and goals from a Scriptural perspective. To the extent that we have fulfilled these aims, we trust you have been edified.