Contemporary Humanism And The Moral Life

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CONTEMPORARY HUMANISM AND THE MORAL LIFE

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Prefatory Notes

Values Clarification: The Process (see P. 7)
    Choosing.........1) freely,
                    2) from alternatives, and
                    3) after thoughtful consideration on the consequences of each alternative

    Prizing.............4) cherishing, being happy with the choice,
                    5) willing to affirm the choice publicly

    Acting.............6) doing something with the choice
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Moral Development Stages (Kohlberg, see pp. 8-10)

Preconventional Level
    Stage 1: Punishment and obedience orientation
    Stage 2: "Pleasing others" orientation

Conventional Level

Stage 3: Peer group orientation
Stage 4: "Law and order" orientation

Postconventional Level
Stage 5: Social Contract orientation
Stage 6: Universal ethical principle orientation

CONTEMPORARY HUMANISM AND THE MORAL LIFE

Imagine seven of us being asked to serve on a panel advising a hospital regarding a decision on abortion. We are to rule on the relative merits of nine scenarios involving the request of a pregnant young woman. As members of this panel we are to make the following decisions: permit three cases of abortion, deny three, and table consideration of the other three to a later date. These are the nine:

1. The pregnant female possesses a blood disorder. This disorder, called embolism, takes the form of blood clotting. Her physician estimates that should she bear the child her chances of survival are 50-50.
2. The pregnant female, it is suspected, has been impregnated by an older brother. Inasmuch as the mother's family and neighbors are members of a fundamentalist Protestant sect, the child, if born, will be perceived as a symbol of sin and evil.
3. The pregnant female is married to an unemployed laborer. She has difficulty feeding, clothing, and providing for three children. In addition, she and her husband subscribe to the work ethic and view the need to accept charity as evidence of their worthlessness.
4. The pregnant female and her husband possess a chromosomal abnormality. The odds are *60-40* that a full-term pregnancy and birth will eventuate in a mongoloid child.
5. The pregnant female, the mother of two children, is a social leader in the community. She is an active member of such organizations as Community Chest, Zero Population Growth, and a women's liberation group called NOW. She argues that she has the personal right to use her body as she sees fit.
6. The pregnant female is married to a prominent local attorney who does not want another child. The pregnant female is already the mother of two adolescents. The parents seek an abortion, claiming that another child will make it impossible for them to provide the two adolescents the education they have already planned for them.
7. The pregnant female has been found guilty of manslaughter in the death of a former child.
8. The pregnant female, sixteen years old, was engaged in   petting with her boyfriend. They went further than they had intended and pregnancy resulted. The parents of the couple have refused to give their consent for marriage.
9. The pregnant female, a nineteen-year-old college student, was picked up and raped by three boys while hitchhiking to class (Castell, p.113).

So far the nine. These come from a book on values clarification. They have their basis in contemporary humanism. But before we explore that relationship, it is well at the outset to have a sense of the scope of the battle raging around the concept of humanism.

On October 24th of this past year Judge Thomas G. Hull of the U.S. District Court of Eastern Tennessee ruled against a public school district and in favor of fundamentalist parents: "The defendants [the Hawkins County Public Schools] are hereby enjoined from requiring the student-plaintiffs to read from the Holt Series." The ruling came as a surprise and a shock. After a series of recent

defeats on the creationism issue, fundamentalists had something to cheer about in their long-running battle against the incursions of secular humanism into American society and its public schools.

We can well sympathize with the fundamentalist parents in this case. Judge Hull noted the cumulative effect of the philosophy found objectionable by the parents:

> The problem with the Holt series as it relates to the plaintiffs' beliefs is one of degree. One story reinforces and builds upon the others throughout the individual texts and the series as a whole.

The Judge asserted the legitimacy of the parents' concern:

> Plaintiffs sincerely believe that the repetitive affirmations of these philosophical viewpoints is repulsive to the Christian faith—so repulsive that they must not allow their children to be exposed to the Holt series. This is their religious belief. They have drawn a line, "and it is not for us to say that the line [they] drew was an unreasonable one." (Hull, p.18).

On the other hand, charges of a grand conspiracy of humanism to undermine our institutions and to take over our country smack of the now-discredited McCarthyism of an earlier generation. The exaggeration and distortion undermines genuine concern and turns genuine Christian concern into a laughing stock. The reaction of M. Chester Notle, writing in *The American School Board Journal* reveals the lack of credibility aroused by the Religious Right:

> I was reading Tim LaHaye's book, The Battle of the Mind, in which he argues that 275,000 secular humanists have "conspired to control public debate in the United States" through such organizations as the public schools, colleges and universities, school boards associations, the National Organization for Women, the Supreme Court, and the Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller foundations. Because I am associated with some of those organizations, I was taken aback at the possibility that I might have become a secular humanist. I don't guess I was one, to tell the truth.

After discussing the distortions and innuendoes accompanying the attacks of the Moral Majority, Nolte tries to provide a proper perspective, but his outrage still shows through:

> To tell the truth, though, I don't consider "humanism" a dirty word, even when preceded by the dread modifier "secular." As a term of derision, it's the sort of thing I guess I can live with. I don't much mind being thought of as a fallible, hell-bent human who uses logic when he can and who occasionally falls back on fervent, prayerful hope for a miracle to see him through. If that's being a secular humanist, let it be. I'm content (Nolte, p.37).

Lately discussion about morality and education has become increasingly strident. On the right the Moral Majority has been directing verbal salvoes on humanism. On the left atheistic humanists have not hesitated to respond with their own verbal assaults. Some people have gotten caught in the crossfire, among them former senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, long a hero of conservatives. Somewhat surprisingly, he complained bitterly about what he suggests is the Moral Majority's incessant meddling in

American political life. Perhaps the greatest loser in the battle is clarity of understanding. As charges are met by counter-charges, one has the impression that more heat is being generated than is light.

For our part, we might like to sit this one out. For one reason, humanism comes in several different stripes and colors, depending on who is doing the defining; therefore, we might have a good deal of difficulty knowing for sure what is being discussed and who the real enemy is. For another reason, we may be confident that the only morality worth knowing is that which our Lord has been pleased to reveal to us in the Scriptures, and that, we feel, we know. That may be true, but as Christians—and particularly as Christians who are also pastors and educators—we cannot afford to sit this one out. Some kinds of humanism are nearly as dangerous as the Moral Majority claims. Those influences have been building for a long time in our country—not suddenly in a grand conspiracy as some on the Moral Right suggest. As the religious fibers in our social structure have been gradually dissolving, and as materialism has come to afflict our own culture as much as the Soviets', it was perhaps inevitable that something like secular humanism should gradually make its presence felt in moral training.

We cannot hold ourselves aloof from that humanistic world, as much as we might try. Indeed, the media, which we demand for our own selves, make it less possible now than formerly. Newspapers and magazines penetrate our homes. The TV waves leap any ivy-covered monastery walls which we might like to erect. We are not of the world, of course, but we are inevitable in it. If we are to defend ourselves from the unwholesome and downright evil influences around us, we had better know the enemy well. And then confront and fight him!

Accordingly, the first part of this presentation will address kinds of humanism which confront the Christian leader as he attempts to lead a Christian life for himself and as he tries to guide others in that same manner of living.

I.

One of the better summaries of secular humanism appeared in the periodical *Religious Humanism* more than a decade ago. In the words of that periodical:

A contemporary statement of Humanism requires five assertions.

The first such assertion is the centrality of man. The principal concern is man—his relations with himself, with nature, with other persons and with the universe . . . . Religion is both man-centered and man-created . . . . Therefore the Humanist asserts that god has outworn his usefulness, if ever indeed he had one, and might as well be forgotten except as preserved in ancient and colorful mythology.

The second assertion of Humanism is the reliance on reason. Man is an animal, but he is distinguished from other animals by his capacity to think and to create. The Humanist, however, is not one to be carried away by the rational nature of man . . . . Man's acts are motivated by both thinking and feeling.

The third assertion of Humanism *is* the essential goodness of man. The emphasis here is on the word essential. I do not mean that man is inherently good, but that he is essentially good. In fact, man is

inherently both good and evil. But he has the capacity to determine what he shall do in any particular set of circumstances. I contend that he is inclined to do good. The determination of the good is situational; that is, what is "good" depends wholly on the facts of the particular situation . . . . The implication of this position for religion is that man is not condemned by original sin. Rather he is free to do right or wrong, but he is inclined to do right.

The fourth assertion of the Humanist is his ethical and social concern . . . . Man lives in a social order, and definite advantages accrue to him from social living, if one wants to look at it from a purely selfish point of view.

The fifth assertion which Humanism makes is faith in man. Humanism does not believe man has achieved perfection, but that he has the capacity to improve his condition. We want to speed up the progress. The question is, how? (Green, p.111)

To the Christian, this is nothing short of blasphemous. Regarding the first point, the centrality of man, not man but God and His grace are the center of the Christian's life. As to reliance on reason, the Christian knows that natural reason is flawed since the fall and thus, though still a blessing, it is a misleading guide. In asserting the essential goodness of man, humanism again simply ignores our flawed and fallen state. When it comes to ethics for the humanist, we must say that eventually his ethics goes back to basic selfishness focusing either on himself or on his group. Finally, regarding faith in man rather than God, the Christian knows that any ethical progress of man is belied by the present state of our society and the terrible wars we have seen in our own time; non-godly man is no better off now than was Plato or Socrates more than two thousand years ago.

These beliefs, of course, have immense implications for approaches to moral training. The conclusions, however, vary significantly from one humanist to another. Humanist author Morris Storrer has summarized what he calls a "few of the major viewpoints." Though brief, these are packed with meaning:

1. Morality is a matter of self-realization. Fulfillment of potential is of the essence, and the happiness that attends it. Aliveness is the principal virtue . . . .

2. Survival morality. Life is a struggle, and it's everyone for himself or herself. You owe nothing to others in the last analysis and everything to number one.

3. The morality of expedience. Morality is whatever works. Live by the customary rules ordinarily. In unusual situations, do what promises best results for yourself and others closely affected. . . .

4. The "greatest happiness" theory. The right course is the one that promises the greatest preponderance of pleasure over pain in the present circumstances for all the persons affected.

5. The "right conditioning" theory. People do what they are determined to do by genetic endowment and conditioning. Free choice is an illusion. The important thing is to groove children for orderly and constructive lives.

6. "Cultural relativism." Morality depends on the customary practices of the people in the particular culture in question. There's no basis for saying that one culture is morally superior to another.

7. The morality of love. Morality is about concern to know people in their inwardness, care . . . , respect. . ., and responsiveness to their needs.
8. The morality of sentiment. Morality for you depends on how you feel about things. There is no truth in ethics, no reality against which moral judgments can be tested.
9. The morality of justice. Guide yourself by the principle which you think would be good for the guidance of all in situations like the present . . . (Storrer, p.181)

We will shortly look at three of these in greater detail. The three are self-realization, right conditioning, and justice. We do not have the time to review all to the extent advisable. Those who espouse these various standards for morality cannot agree among themselves and often do not seem to understand each other. Suffice it to say that we are reminded of the Tower of Babel. But this much they do have in common: they have no time for what God might say, because they are not ready to admit His existence. And even if some do, they suggest that what God might say doesn't really make much difference anyway. Out of this confusion of tongues, however, do come some major trends which are affecting ethical standards in our country. All of them have strong ties to psychology.

Psychology in the latter part of the twentieth century is dominated by three major movements. The first of these is the Freudian or neo-Freudian. Freud, the Viennese Jew, was responsible for attuning American moral standards to what he called man's basic drives, with survival drives such as sex and hunger being paramount. The impact has been devastating on sexual standards. Morally, man is seen to be merely a prisoner of his drives. Since he cannot rationally subdue them, the best he can do is try to understand them, accept them, and alter them somewhat. Be careful about calling attention to sin, we are urged, because in censuring people for their sexual actions we run the risk of making them sick with guilt and crippling their personalities. Freudianism was a blow to sound sexual standards, and, as a result, the increasing sexual permissiveness in our land can be traced in part to psychology. Other than such permissiveness his theories do not directly involve teaching for moral standards. Regarding interpersonal relations, however, transactional analysis owes much to Freud. But that is beyond the scope of this presentation.

More significant as an attempt to create a system for teaching morality is the theory of behaviorism. This has it source in Pavlov and more recently owes much to B. F. Skinner. Involved is the stimulus-response theory, also known as conditioning. In moral training, this has been reflected in behavior modification. More on that shortly.

Perhaps the most significant of the psychological schools presently is that called "third force." It is third after Freudian and behavioral. This third force is most closely identified with the term *humanism*, and actually has been given the title "humanistic psychology." This is using the term *humanism* in a narrower sense.

Centrally important in this approach are such existentialist philosophers as the French atheist Sartre, who coined the phrase, "Morality is a humanism." Among psychologists Abraham Maslow with his actualization theories and Carl Rogers with his non-judgmental approach to counseling are two other key figures.

The views of Abraham Maslow provide insight regarding how humanistic psychology impacts on ethical training. He suggests that morality is really a process of "self-actualization." According to him, a child or an adult has internal resources which can be

developed naturally, involving also moral attributes. The child merely needs to unfolded like the flowering of a rose from a bud. Indoctrination is unnecessary and even harmful. Let the good that is in the person develop on its own. Maslow contends that "ultimately the search for identity is, in essence, the search for one's own intrinsic, authentic values" (Maslow, p.177). He suggests that on this basis man can develop a scientific ethics and a natural value system. He goes on to say that this developing system of natural values is "a court of ultimate appeal for the determination of good and bad, of right and wrong" (Maslow, p.4). In effect, Maslow is saying that we really don't need any revelation of right and wrong; we need no Bible. Indeed, we need no God! Man is good, man is free, man tends toward moral perfection.

On this basis the humanist constructs his own moral standards. The role of the teacher is to get out of the way as much as possible. In the words of Maslow, "No self-respecting humanist would deliberately set out to 'teach' morality formally and systematically" (Maslow, p.167). What the teacher will do is to present situational alternatives which the student is to think of critically and responsibly. Without tipping his hand, the teacher will pose such questions as "How do I know whether marijuana is really harmful to me or not?" "Should Bill and I live together before marriage so that we can know whether we are compatible?" (Simon, p.13)

The process for carrying out such moral development is called *values clarification.* According to its proponents, values clarification seeks to help young people answer perplexing questions to life and aid them build their own value system. They grant that parents and educators in times past have used elements of this system, but they claim that this new approach is "more systematic" and is "widely applicable." Louis Rath, one of the leaders of the movement, relies on John Dewey's problem-solving methodology. Rath also suggests that he is not interested in "the content" of morality, but rather in the process: the teacher's focus is on how people come to hold certain beliefs and establish certain behavior patterns (Simon, p.18-19). The nine scenarios regarding the young pregnant woman is an exercise in values clarification.

In his analysis Rath points to seven sub-processes as people develop moral standards. First, choosing one's beliefs and behaviors consists initially in noting the alternatives, then in considering the consequences involved, and finally in making one's free choice. The second is the prizing of one's beliefs and behaviors, involving cherishing and publicly affirming what one cherishes. Third and last, acting must follow, which involves the act itself and then consistently repeating it (Hersch, p.77).

At the heart of values clarification is the insistence that people choose among alternatives in developing moral standards. Christian leaders must be disturbed by the claim of advocates that young people must be given free choice in establishing values. Typically, teachers are given a series of stock questions which they are to ask people in probing values. Most of these questions are helpful and innocent. But those associated with "choosing freely" are destructive of past influences in arriving at moral conclusions. Consider these questions:

> Where do you suppose you first got that idea?
> How long have you felt that way?
> What would people say if you weren't to do what you
> > say you must do? (Hersch, p.82)

An implication is involved with these questions. Students are subtly led to sense that they did not choose freely and that now is a good time to do it their own way. In this manner these questions undermine respect for authority. It reminds us of the devil's question to Eve in the garden: Yea hath God said?

The knowledgeable Christian leader will also disagree emphatically with the claim that values clarification as has been described is only a method without content. By placing all moral preferences on the same plane, values clarification suggests moral relativity. It suggests that we all have it in ourselves to develop our own choices. Here the evils of secular humanism are to be seen in strongest terms. Man finally is the judge of all things. The Bible, the church and the parents are placed on the same level as are the students' peers and the students' own half-formed ideals. The leader must take a non-judgmental approach to the views of those participating in the exercise. On this basis, Ghandi and Luther and Hitler and the Marquis de Sade and the Apostle Paul and the Ayatollah Khomeini all have equal time and are granted equal credibility. One observer of values clarification has correctly noted that its impact on a person's moral standards are devastating. He suggests that such an approach will lead us to one of four conclusions: 1) tolerance to all vices, or 2) create my own set of values and try to enforce them on others with all my might, or 3) throw off all moral standards and follow my base impulses, or 4) go along with the crowd as the path of least resistance (Lockwood, p.47.)

Another man-centered approach to morality has received increasing attention over the past dozen years. This is the moral development theory, championed by Lawrence Kohlberg, who in turn was influenced by Jean Piaget. Kohlberg claims that people develop moral standards in stages, one stage at a time. The six stages he identifies are combined into three levels called the preconventional, the conventional, and the postconventional. The preconventional level lasts through the preteens. Authority figures are centrally important at this level, including both parents and teachers. In stage 1, lasting through about age seven, the key motivational factor is the avoidance of punishment. The second stage, lasting through about age ten, is one in which moral action is prompted by verbal approval or a desire for reward. On the conventional level the significance of authority figures lessens, and the group becomes central. As for stage 3, role stereotype reigns supreme from about age ten through adult. A person adopts the role—including moral role—which he thinks his peers expect. After that in stage 4 the concept of law and order is of ultimate importance. At this stage people avoid stealing because it is unlawful; to undermine law is to undermine the stabilizing influence of society. Kohlberg places the Ten Commandments at this stage (Smith, pp.26-27).

Kohlberg also claims that most people never mature beyond the conventional level of morality, with only about one in five moving on to the postconventional level. In the fifth stage, what is moral is determined on the basis of overriding rights in a social contract. Our Constitution's Bill of Rights provides an example. At this stage people may wrestle with such dilemmas as the rights of the individual over against the needs of society and government. Finally, a few go on to the sixth stage, that of universal principles. Here there are ideals which are comprehensive and consistent. Such a universal ideal, says Kohlberg, is the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Those operating at this moral level may well consider it their moral obligation to disobey "conventional" morality in order to live at this higher moral plane. Socrates, for example, decided to take poison rather than conform to the will of his fellow Athenians. Thoreau went to prison rather than support what he considered the unjust Mexican War. Martin Luther King Jr. suffered imprisonment rather than obey segregationist laws (Smith, pp.26-27).

The theory insists that people must move through moral stages one at a time. Kohlberg also claims that the stages are universally valid from one culture to another. Accordingly it is the duty of the teacher to help the student move to the next higher stage of moral thinking. If the teacher believes that the pre-adolescent can move from mere peer-group morality (stage 3) to the general rights morality (stage 5) and skip the law-and-order morality (stage 4), that teacher is mistaken. Indeed, a student may not be sufficiently mature even to move to the next level. The dilemma involved in this situation is illustrated in the following example:

Suppose a person wants to steal some medicine to help his sick mother; he cannot afford it and the pharmacy will not give him credit. A preconventional person would consider this act as to whether he would be punished and whether people would disapprove. A conventional person would judge it as to whether or not it is the "right" thing, and he would weigh the rightness of helping his mother against the wrongness of stealing. The postconventional person would consider whether or not he would earn the respect of others and of himself, and would judge this against his standards of honesty and of helping others.

Suppose a person is in the conventional [level], and that you are trying to help him handle a problem. Suppose this problem involves something he or someone else has done, as in the case of stealing the medicine. He may have come to the conclusion that he did the wrong thing, because stealing is just not done, no matter what the reason. Then you would want to bring him out of this conventional stage and into a postconventional stage—at least you might want to try.

Kohlberg's theory implies that this would be a waste of your time in most cases, because chances are he would not be ready to pass or mature into the next stage, and there would not be anything you *could do* yourself, for or with him, that would get him to the stage. A more likely strategy, then, *would* be to work within the conventional level, and try to bring him around to seeing that what he did was the "right" thing, in terms of the way most people act (Smith, p.27).

As Christian leaders, of course, we need a much sounder justification than the fact that most other people are doing it.

It has been noted that there are multiple reasons for doing things and that these reasons may involve several stages at the same time. Again, take the example of theft:

Most of us refrain from stealing from a shop. Naturally, since the reader is a sensitive and intelligent person, this is because he has worked out that the consequences are harmful to the shopkeeper, and if his example were followed, to society in general [stage 5]. But it is also because he would go to prison if he were caught [stage 1]; and also because authority is against it [stage 4]; and also because he would be ashamed of himself if his friends knew [stage 3], and also because he feels it just wouldn't be right [stage 6]. And so on (Hall and David, p.103).

No one can accuse Kohlberg of crass relativity in morals, a charge that can be leveled against values clarification. The basis for a standard is present. In fact, there are several of them, and they accumulate as a person moves through the stages, with new ones

becoming more important and old ones less. For the preconventional level it is what authority figures say. For the conventional level it is what our friends say or what the law says. For the postconventional level it is basic rights or basic general principles.

There are difficulties employing Kohlberg's approach even though many are fascinated with it today. For one thing it is cumbersome in the group setting of a classroom. But more important as far as Christians are concerned, the entire system by implication goes back to man. It involves authority figures who are human, peers who are human, laws which are made by humans, and general rights and principles which are developed by humans.

Moving on to the influence of behavioral psychology, its application in behavior modification has immense influence. Ten years ago Vance Packard estimated that up to twenty percent of the classrooms on the eastern seaboard are using it (Packard, pp.31-33).

The human being perceived by the behavioral psychologist is quite different from the free, autonomous human being presented by psychological humanists. Man here is a thing to be manipulated, shaped, created. People are neither good nor bad, but become either good or bad depending upon how they are shaped.

Attempting to apply rigorous scientific procedures to human behavior, behaviorists refuse to go beyond what can be actually observed. Hence, they are concerned with the surface of people, their observable behavior, not what is inside them. Don't bother with such intangibles as self-concepts and motivation, we are told. Never mind why a person steals, just that it happens; get rid of the happening. The focus is on the symptoms, not on the disease itself. Indeed, the behaviorist claims that the symptoms are the disease. Get rid of the symptoms and there is no disease.

Conditioning is the key to moral development for the behaviorist. In so doing he is attempting to obtain the proper stimulus for the desired response. B. F. Skinner, the giant figure among recent behaviorists, has gone far beyond Pavlov's salivating dog and works with what he calls *operant* conditioning, that is, conditioning which utilizes a reward or punishment to obtain the desired behavior pattern. This is the "carrot or stick" approach. The emphasis is on the carrot as behaviorists urge that we accentuate the positive, while not entirely eliminating the negative. It is commonly acknowledged that this approach is effective for surface behavior, and for the behaviorist that is all he is interested in.

The role of the leader is more challenging in behaviorism than in the free-and-easy-going approaches of humanistic psychology. Never mind the establishment of rapport or providing a pleasant surrounding for self-actualization. Rather, a person becomes what others in the environment cause him or her to become, and careful attention must be given to the process. This involves programming and reinforcement. Programming is the strategy for inculcating content. Each lesson is to have its own distinctive behavioral objectives in content learning. As the plan is carried out, careful attention must be given to reinforcement—a word of praise here and pat on the back there. Very occasionally a reprimand, too, is in order. The various carefully prescribed strategies go under such terms as *token reinforcement, contracting, programmed instruction, shaping, punishment, cognitive desensitization, modeling, stimulus control, and extinction.*

The reinforcement strategy will operate both for individual training and in group classroom management. In point of fact, behaviorists claim that the approach has universal application. A person's preferences and prejudices, view of self and society, values and morality, ideals and goals—all these can be learned or unlearned through conditioning, or so it is claimed.

An example is in place. Notice how behavior modification is applied in a situation in which extinction is called for. In this case the undesirable behavior to be terminated is tattling. Extinction strategy involves the removal of the reinforcer which maintains the undesirable behavior. The reinforcer in this case is the attention the teacher has been giving the child every time the child tattles. The example:

> Eight-year-old Robin was driving his third-grade teacher, Ms. Fly, up a wall. Robin was constantly tattling on every child who committed the slightest transgression within his purview.
>
> Ms. Fly was unwittingly reinforcing Robin's behavior by responding and attending to him when he tattled on others.
>
> After her twenty-second trip up the wall, she planned an intervention program employing extinction to decrease Robin's behavior. She would ignore all his tattling. Each time Robin approached her to tattle on a classmate, *Ms. Fly* did one of the following:
> --Intervened before Robin has an opportunity to tattle, and focused his attention on another topic, picture, book, and so on.
> --Turned her back on him and attended to another child who was performing appropriately.
> --Turned her back on him and walked away without any sign of recognition.-
> During the initial phase of the behavior change process, Robin's tattling increased for a brief period of time. As the program continued, the behavior decreased and was extinguished. (Walker and Shea, p.19)

In all of this there is something dehumanizing about behaviorism, something manipulative. Man becomes merely an object to be shaped. He becomes the plastic man, as is asserted by Vance Packard in his book, *The People Shapers.*

Just listen to the mechanical approach as described by a behaviorist:

1. Identify a behavior as being undesirable. Specify the deviant behavior in simple, descriptive language.
2. Identify the reinforcers that maintain the deviant behavior.
3. Systematically cut off the reinforcers that maintain the undesirable behavior.
4. Teach new, desirable behavior that will work for the person, obtain similar results, or new, equally valuable results. Follow instances of the new behavior with reinforcers. (Ackermann, p.86)

This sounds like a mechanic working on his automobile. Such control over the lives of others suggests the pictures we see in the anti-utopian novels such as George Orwell's 1984 and Aldous Huxley's Brave New World.

Indeed, behaviorists themselves realize the danger of human manipulation. One behaviorist admits the difficulties and raises the following disturbing questions:

"Who shall determine whose behavior is to be modified?"

"Who will legitimize and monitor the interventions being utilized to modify behavior?"

"To what ends will the interventions be applied?" (Walker and Shea, pp.85-86)

It is well at this point to stand back, take an overview of these three major approaches to morality, and observe some commonalties. All in all, we see in modern secular humanism the use of utterly inadequate tools aiming at impossible goals. That is true regardless of which brand of humanism may be the basis for attempts to establish a system of morality. With the humanist psychologist it is man merely glorifying himself, and with the behaviorists it is man manipulating himself. Through it all surfaces the irony that both brands of humanism are dehumanizing. Seeking to glorify man, these degrade him. Both suggest that man is the product of his own evolution, thus linking man with the animal and presenting him as the hairless ape. That is a good deal less than what the Scriptures say about man, the jewel of creation, made in the image of God.

But we need to do more than merely note the irony that humanism makes humans less human. There are dire consequences for morality. Secular humanists of all varieties are oblivious to that. While they admit to man the possession of reason, in contrast to animals, they nonetheless ignore conscience, which testifies to the law of God written in the heart. Both reason and conscience, though darkened in the fall, are still present, providing something of a guide for moral conduct. With that darkened guide, levels of civic righteousness are still possible. But the morality of the secular humanist knocks the props away.

To be fair, we must not accuse secular humanists of being immoral people. Many lead exemplary lives. But they do advocate principles which tear away at moral standards, the results of which are all too evident in our society. Human beings are thus dragged down to the level of the animal. Accordingly, the consequences of humanistic approaches to morality must be dehumanizing as well.

Examples abound in much of secular sex education. Gone is the Scriptural ideal of the family, the life-long union of man and wife, with the sexual act the sign and seal of that relationship. Gone, too, is the impact of conscience—that darkened but still viable guide available also to the non-Christian. Perhaps the most familiar example of the consequences for sex education is SIECUS—the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States. Approaches presented in its materials are more animalistic than human. The bottom line is sex without the necessary moral framework. Along with that, of course, has come the sexual revolution and the open promiscuity which abounds in our country. This, in turn, aids and abets the flood of pornography engulfing our nation. Human beings have become more animal than human (Chambers, *passim*).

Other results are to be seen in the supposed morality of killing the unborn, euthanasia, and even suicide, as man usurps his authority over God regarding life. Evidence accumulates that morality on all levels is declining. That should not surprise us. With no ultimate standard to support public morality, with no longer even a civic appeal to a collective conscience, there should be no wonder that we find ourselves in a moral wilderness.

In the context of our amoral and immoral times, Romans 1 is especially meaningful. There the Apostle Paul indicates what must be the result when God is supplanted and when man places himself in the position reserved for God. As did many in Paul's day,

so also now men are worshipping man more than the Creator. We see the consequences as God gives human beings over to their own reprobate desires. The sexual revolution, the destruction of the home, pornography both soft and hard, the drug crazed society, increasing suicide rates—all this is evidence of the moral wilderness suggested in Romans 1. So-called human advances have led to degeneration and decay.

I I

The moral decay so evident makes us want to applaud almost every attempt to reverse the current trend to degeneracy. There are those who have been mightily vocal in their efforts to do just that. In recent years these voices seem to have coalesced in the Moral Majority, a movement aligning itself with the conservative political wave of the eighties. It is refreshing to hear that there are those who do care, those who point to a high moral standard, both personally and for our society. Some of the results are heartening. In Mississippi the Moral Majority has been credited with causing the enforcement of statutes prohibiting pornography. Nationally the movement has influenced some sponsors to limit sex and violence on television (Moody, pp.1,16).

Does this mean that we are to emulate Jerry Falwell? Ought we join forces with him and commit ourselves to a campaign that is one-third religion, one-third politics and one-third show biz? Before we do, we should stand back and note the signs that conservative religion and conservative politics don't mix very well.

We would not want to be associated with the name-calling frequently employed by the "moral right." It is indeed true that secular humanism provides an insidious threat to America, but distorted reporting simply is not fair. Jerry Falwell has been quoted as insisting that "humanism with its emphasis on moral relativity and amorality challenges every principle on which America was founded." He has a point as far as it goes. But what he adds unfairly distorts: "It (humanism] advocates abortion-on-demand, recognition of homosexuals, free use of pornography, legalizing of prostitution and gambling, and free use of drugs, among other things" (Falwell, quoted in *L. A. Times*). Although the principles of relativity in humanism do suggest that one has the freedom to reach such conclusions, to say that humanism *advocates* them is something quite different and is grossly unfair.

Another failing of the New Religions Right is its sweeping condemnation of all things associated with the term humanism. When it castigates humanism, it frequently reveals it does not understand the many different uses of the term. The sweeping generalizations and high-level rhetoric by some associated with the Moral Majority twist, distort, and condemn where no condemnation is in order.

Part of the confusion is somewhat understandable, since the term humanism is used in a number of different senses. Even those who call themselves humanists are confused by the categories. Humanism in the narrow sense is that of Maslow and Rogers and their non-directive counseling and self-actualization theories. Behaviorists are quite opposed to them. Much ink has been spilled as the two groups have engaged in verbal blood letting. An example of the confusion occurred when behaviorist Skinner signed his name to the far-out document entitled *Humanist Manifesto 11*. That a behaviorist could sign a humanist document seemed shocking to some. But it is understandable when we realize that Skinner is a humanist in the broad sense, but not a humanist in the narrow sense.

Further compounding confusion is the frequently misapplied term *Christian humanism*, which may not be Christian at all. In an article in the liberal *Christian Century*, Robert Kysar advocates what he called a "Christian" humanism. He states that this humanism is "Christian . . . because the point of departure of its thought lies within the stream of Western Judeo-Christian culture." But one becomes suspicious when he notes that "Christian humanism is in sympathy with the so-called secularization of the modern world and affirms the freedom given man through science and technology." One becomes downright alarmed when he states that "orthodox Christian thought has always emphasized man's servitude to . . . God. . . . Christian humanism, however, holds that man must be freed from external authority and so allowed to become his true self" (Kysar, pp.706-08). How this author could dethrone God in the name of Christian humanism is incomprehensible. Such Christianity is flying under false colors. It is atheistic at heart and does not differ in essence from the man-centered religion of the secularists.

Nonetheless, there is a Christian humanism confessed today with which we can be quite sympathetic. W. Stanford Reid, writing in *Christianity Today*, insists that in the final analysis Christianity is the true humanism. He reminds us that because of God's creation, Christianity places man in a special position (Reid, pp.9-11). Man has been given a living soul, in contrast to the animals. He has also been provided a means to regain that wondrous position he once held. Through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ man is redeemed, bought back, made over to be one with God again. In that new relationship man through grace regains his special place in God's scheme of things.

To this point the term *humanism* has been used in a negative way. The fact that the term can be used in such a positive, biblical sense should make us careful that we do not condemn that which deserves praise rather than condemnation.

That also applies when the term *humanism* is used in the sense of being humane, or when it is used in connection with the humanities. The humanism of the humanities still has an honored place in a school's curriculum—including that of Wisconsin Synod schools. Those who have experienced the freshman composition course at DMLC within the past fifteen years were trained according to approaches provided in the *Rhetoric* of the classical humanist Aristotle.

By humanism some people sometimes do mean the humanities. We need to treasure the goals of that type of education. In an essay "Humanism through the Humanities" the Commission of the Humanities indicates that the key role for these studies in a school's curriculum is to mirror our own image and to ask the question: What does it mean to be human? In answering that question the humanities employ languages, literature, history and philosophy (Commission on the Humanities, "*Humanism*," pp.232-33). Parenthetically it should be added that if these studies are wrong, then the curriculum at Northwestern College should be reduced from four years to one. These subjects, in the words of the Commission, have "humanistic content" and employ "humanistic methods." The methods involve insight, perspective, critical understanding, discrimination, and creativity. They employ verbal, perceptual, and imaginative skills which are needed to understand human experience (Commission, pp.232-33). The Commission insists that the humanities "do not impose any single set of normative values, whether moral, social, or esthetic; rather as a record of the ideas that have guided men and women in the past, they give historical perspective." Regarding social education, the Commission insists that "humanities, by emphasizing our common humanity contribute especially to the social purpose of learning—to educate for civic

participation . . . . No conception of the humanities is complete if it omits humanism as a civic ideal" (Commission, *Humanities*, pp.11,30). As Christians who are also interested in civic righteousness, we would be hard pressed to disagree with those ideals.

Therefore it is well that we do not see red every time we hear or see the word *humanism*, as some on the New Religious Right apparently would have us do.

Recently educators have been applying the term *humanistic* in contrast to *mechanistic*. They observe the problems of a mechanized society. They see these problems as a result of the increasing industrialization in society and resulting increased complexity in our lives. Accordingly, they perceive the need for humane values. In this sense they then regard themselves as humanistic.

Those of the Moral Right who claim that the nation's schools are overrun by a conspiracy of secular humanists are distorting and exaggerating the influence of secular humanism. It has been appropriately observed that, unlike the true secular humanists, ninety-five percent of teachers in America profess belief in some sort of a deity and that of the remaining five percent, only a minority are avowed secular humanists (Primack and Aspy, pp.224-26). Hence, the sweeping statements of the Moral Majority lack credibility.

Finally, there are indications that the efforts of the Moral Majority are counter-productive. According to its own literature it is trying to gather a "great volunteer army across America." In response, former Senator Barry Goldwater, though sympathetic to the moral aims of the Moral Majority, has lamented the "single issue" stance of the new Religious Right in opposing elected officials. As an example he has cited the opposition to the nomination of Justice Sandra O'Connor to the Supreme Court because of the supposed position she had taken on abortion. In actuality, her position on that question was distorted (Goldwater, S9505, S9681-82). Although conservative columnist William Buckley had taken issue with Goldwater on the advisability of injecting religion into politics, he also indicated irritation at the rhetorical style of the Moral Majority (Buckley).

Where does all this leave us who are called to roles of Christian leadership? In general, we will recognize that humanism is a term that twists and shifts. We almost need a set of definitions before we begin using that term.

But out of the chaos of concepts one point should be starkly clear. In contemporary secular humanism we see implications of an utterly inadequate, man-centered morality. When we are finished with our wanderings through the arid wastelands of behaviorism and psychological humanism and all the other man-centered *isms*, we feel good to be back home again. We are relieved to be working with the morality that God is only too happy to give us by virtue of His Son and by means of His Word.

As Christian leaders we know we have something much better than what the secularists are offering. When the psychological humanist points to the principle of human autonomy with its implied rebellion against God, and when the behaviorist touts a plastic man crafted through the influences of genetics and conditioning, Christian leaders much prefer to operate with the principles of God's revealed grace in our Lord Jesus Christ. When it comes to morality for the Christian, it is all summed up in the metaphor spoken by Christ: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit" (John 15:5).

In place of the shifting relativity to be found as the foundation of humanistic psychology, we have those rock-solid standards our Lord has given us. We have no need to clarify some vague feeling of morality that may be half-formed in us. We have access to that high and firm standard which our God has given us.

When it comes to the autonomy which the psychological humanist advocates, the Christian leader can gratefully respond that he has no desire to be autonomous. He wants to acknowledge the headship of his heavenly Father who is the ruler over all—that same heavenly Father who has blessed him with the Savior.

How wonderful, then, are all those Christian values in comparison to the wilderness of secular humanism—those wonderful old traditional Christian and Lutheran concepts which we may have been taking for granted:

Justification—Declared just, forgiven for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ without any merit or worthiness in us. Yes, justified by a loving God, rather than standing naked before the forces of an unfeeling universe.

Faith—The precious redemption made one's own for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, again without any merit or worthiness in us. A God, a loving God to trust and rely upon, rather than having to make our way on our own.

The Holy Christian Church—Not alone, but sharing that God, that Savior, that faith, that view of life, that hope of heaven.

And also back to that dear old law and gospel. Above all, the gospel with its reassuring nourishment. That gospel which makes us one with our Savior as a branch in Him, The Vine. And happy also with the law, which we need, and which indicates to us the direction to grow as branches in the Vine.

Then, too, we are blessed over and over again in the privilege to have that faith nourished day in and day out through the strengthening grace coming to us richly and freely in the gospel and sacraments. What a springboard for a life of morality! And what a privilege for us as Christian leaders, helping His people toward that moral life He wants for them all! What a night-and-day contrast with the agenda the secular humanists would suggest to us!

Oh, we do well to approach the task of moral training as Christian realists. Along with the new man in us and in our people, there is also a large measure of the old Adam. Thus it will be all throughout our training days, whether we are training the youth the Lord has entrusted to us or whether we are training ourselves. We nonetheless do strive to have our people and us become "thoroughly equipped for every good work," as Paul urges Timothy (II Tim.3:16). As Paul also reminds Titus, we seek to aid our people

to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:12-13).

In our training, too, we must always seek to frame moral decisions in the scope of Christian faith and love. To do anything less would be moralizing: the inculcation of desirable behavior without any relationship to Christ. In other words, we try to grow a branch which has been cut off from the Vine.

It is here especially that the Moral Majority goes astray. Our call as Christian leaders is to impart the full Christian morality of the Bible. This is the vine and branches morality. It is much more than facing up to an occasional issue such as sex education or abortion. It is the on-going, everyday life-in-Christ of the Christian as he or she experiences it day in and day out.

The Moral Majority can't provide that. Indeed, Jerry Falwell does not even claim to do that. Rather, he has insisted that the gospel and the Moral Majority are separate entities. He wears his "gospel hat" as he preaches on the Old Time Gospel Hour and as he

works with his Baptist church in Lynchburg, Virginia. Then he neatly removes it again and puts on his "civic hat" through his connection with the Moral Majority, claiming that his platform for the Moral Majority involves only several basic issues: "Prolife, protraditional family, promoral, . . . and . . . pro-American, which means strong national defense and the state of Israel (Falwell, "Interview").

With that he suggests that the two hats can be worn and not become confused. But he is wrong. He advocates a pro-Israel stance because he sees the Jews still as God's special people. He further suggests that his efforts at raising the moral tone of America could well be a prelude to the Rapture which will introduce the millennium on earth. No, we cannot feel free to join hands with Jerry Falwell. He mixes politics with false religious beliefs and vice versa. What comes from him is a new form of the old social gospel. Although it surely contains civic righteousness, it just as surely does not have the gospel nor the law as God would have it. Nor, as a consequence, does it have the full-fledged morality which is only possible through faith in Christ.

But we also need to react strongly to the attempts at building morality coming out of secular humanism. A common thread running through these approaches is a similar attempt to limit focus to a few key moral questions. These are then answered in an intellectual, rational way. Our basic approach as Christians is not through reason, but through faith. If the question has not already been directly answered in the Bible, the Christian will find his way on the basis of sound principles based on the Bible. The Christian young woman thinking about an abortion and noting the 60-40 chance of a mongoloid child will first consider faith. She will remember that she has a Lord who graciously guides her life and that of her husband. Then she will consider love—her love for that person whose life the Lord has now created.

But that still leaves us with a big question regarding methodology. Dare we make use of approaches coming out of man-centered philosophies? We need to know that there are dangers if we do. As we work with methods generated by these man-centered philosophies, we might also imbibe the philosophy along with the method. If freely choosing is an essential element to clarify values, then we will be tearing down the foundations of Christian morality. Similarly, role-playing may be quite innocent and may indeed help gain insights to problems. But by playing the devil's advocate we may end up imbibing the devil's own thinking—much to our harm. To do a good job of role playing the position of a Mormon may make our youth more than sympathetic to it; they could become susceptible to it.

Nonetheless, these methodologies can also be utilized with great potential benefit, as long as they are used with care and insight. The method of values clarification is basically a multiple-choice approach to evaluating situations containing moral dimensions. Instructors long have used multiple choice questions on religion exams. If we use genuine Scriptural principles as we judge options, we will not be guilty of moral relativity, the basic problem with values clarification. We will then be allowing Scripture to serve as the standard by which we pick and choose our way through life's knotty problems. It is well to note that values clarification frequently utilizes extreme situations, such as the abortion problem faced by the young woman. Some of these situations are quite rare, fortunately, and for that reason do not pose a typical dilemma. Furthermore, we do well not to fuel the imagination of immature minds. On the other hand, we could well pose situations which normally do confront our youth, such as temptation involving stealing, cheating, drugs, alcohol, and the like.

In a similar vein, Kohlberg's levels of moral development may prove a helpful aid. As Christian leaders we might well disagree with him that young people are incapable of deciding moral questions on the basis of universal standards. Our standards are those which are to be found in the gospel. Like the Apostle Paul on Areopagus, we can assert to Kohlberg and to others like him that those universal standards they are seeking have been found; they are present in the gospel of Christ. They are found in the principles for our very living and being: the branches grafted in the Vine. These are the revealed principles concerning faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; these are the principles of Christ-like agape love for our fellowman; and these are the principles of finding answers to many specific questions in that revelation He has given us. Long before they achieve adulthood, children can apply these principles in practical situations. Using moral insights from "Stage 6", we may ask our students such questions as these: Would you feel comfortable to have you Savior stand at your side as you steal answers from the student across the aisle? Do you want your Savior at your side as you buy five ounces of pot?

We can possibly gain some insights from Kohlberg's observations that answers to moral questions are influenced by certain factors at particular levels of development. If peer pressure becomes a key factor in preadolescence, we will keep peer pressure in mind as we counsel with preadolescents. Such sensitivity will aid us in helping them through difficult situations.

The same approach even holds true for behavioral approaches, even though we do not see our children as machines to be manipulated, as do the behaviorists. We will reject their "plastic man" approach to pupil development, but as we work with our youth, we can employ strategies and insights which behaviorists have defined with precision.

In summary, employment of these methods does lie in the area of adiaphora. Not that it doesn't make any difference whether we do or do not employ them. Rather, as in the case of meat offered to idols, the Scripture itself does not speak an overriding yes or no for all circumstances. Instead, we are to examine the case in terms of the circumstances and then apply the proper Scriptural principles. Thus we will not employ such methods in situations in which man-centered philosophy inevitably is taught through them. On the other hand, we risk dangers if we don't employ them as appropriate. Role-playing, for example, may enliven some drowsy heads in our classes and provide a real aid in the communication process. Lessons in Christian living profit from techniques which make situations come alive.

One technique in behavior modification is more than optional; it is mandatory: the role of the leader as model. Actually, the terminology is merely a recent name for a method as old as leadership. Jesus, the Master Leader, was and is the Master Model. What kind of models are we as we appear before our people? Do we provide examples which they will observe and emulate? Or do our lives say something which contradicts our words? We need to be the genuine people we are in Christ, those Vine-engrafted branches. We will then be models who of necessity reveal sound faith in the thousands of situations in which people observe their Christian leaders day after day.

As redeemed children of God we enjoy the privilege of membership in God's kingdom. As his called servants we are also given the high privilege of working with his people. Part of that work is training for Christian living. We are doubly blessed—both in our calling to grace and in our calling to work. In both roles God has given us the tools we need: the law and gospel with the Spirit

working through them. Difficult work it can be, however, as we seek to apply these tools properly. But what wonderful tools they are! They are the only adequate ones available for Christian leaders living in a secular society.

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