

WHY CHRISTIANS AREN'T HUMAN (ists)

By Lorella Rouster

Christians aren't the only ones confused about the meaning of humanism. I've heard Christians argue over its meaning in an interchurch meeting; I've read articles by secular educators who were dismayed at charges by Christians that the public schools were indoctrinating children in humanism; and I've analyzed the intent of speakers of all shades of persuasion as they used the word in different ways.

Are humanitarians, who donate great sums of money or undertake large projects for the public good, humanists? Are Christians, who are concerned for people, humanists? Are we all, to some degree, humanists? Or does the term have a narrower meaning?

Words can be used in several ways, can mean different things to different groups of people and can simultaneously have conflicting definitions. It is this multiplicity of definitions, I'm sure, that has led to misunderstanding.

The Christian faith places great value on the individual, on humans. Should we, then, use the term humanist in reference to ourselves?

I have wondered about this since I examined literature from the American Humanist Association. They seem to equate humanism with a religion – a secular, godless one.

Perhaps the clearest picture of modern humanism is found in *The Humanist Manifestos I and II*. In 1933 a group of thirty-four liberal humanists signed the first manifesto, stating that every field of human activity is moving toward candid and explicit humanism. They declared that the universe is “self existing and not created,” that humanity has emerged as the result of a continuing process, and that modern science has made unacceptable any supernatural guarantees of human values.

In 1973, *The Humanist Manifesto II* appeared, and it is still collecting signatures. It admits the former document was too optimistic in its aspirations and hopes to define the movement better.

False Hope of Heaven?

The views of the signers toward Bible-believing Christians have not changed since 1973. Humanists believe that a traditional belief in God – especially faith in a prayer-hearing God who is assumed to love and care for people – is unproven and outmoded. They fear that the idea of salvation may be harmful, diverting people from present tasks with false hopes that there is a heaven.

These humanists say they find insufficient evidence for belief in the supernatural, and that such considerations are meaningless or irrelevant to the survival and fulfillment of the human race. They call themselves non-theists and identify their starting point as humanity and nature rather than God.

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These humanist leaders are very outspoken in denying the salvation Christ offers. Peter declared about Christ “There is salvation in no one else . . .” (Acts 4:12). *The Manifesto* preaches the opposite: “No deity will save us; we must save ourselves.”

The thinking, then, of the leaders of current humanist thought is clear. God, as we understand Him, has no place in their philosophy. Human beings are indeed the beginning, end and measure of all things. Humankind has usurped the throne of God.

As Old As Eve

I don’t mean to imply that this philosophy-religion began in 1933. It’s not a new way of thinking. Humanism is as old as Eve, thinking that her decisions were as valid as God’s; as old as Cain, pitting his method of worship against God’s ordained way; as old as the people of ancient Babel, proudly building their tower to the heavens.

The entire Bible may be seen as a struggle with the humanistic outlook, for humanism as described by its leaders is simply a continuation of humankind’s rebellion against God. It may appear wearing different faces; it may appear wearing different faces; it may couch itself in various terminologies; but whenever we humans choose our own way instead of God’s, humanism is at work. Today, humanistic values wearing many faces dominate our society, so that many evangelicals are speaking of our times as the post-Christian era.

Sidney Hook, in one of the essays in *The Humanist Alternative*, admits that some define humanism as simply philosophy that recognizes the value of dignity of human beings or takes human nature as its theme. He says that such definitions are too broad; he excludes from the humanist category anyone who believes in a church or a revelation from God.

True, there is a “Fellowship of Religious Humanists,” but it is dedicated to proving that spiritual inspiration is possible in an atheistic or nontheistic context. Members are not concerned with God, nor with truth, but only with a feeling of inspiration within the individual.

True, religious terminology is sometimes used by humanists. But “God” simply means a nonpersonal idea or force; it never represents the Christian God who sees and cares about people.

The Humanist Alternative declares that we moderns now know that there is no special meaning to the universe, that people were not specially created. How did we gain this momentous knowledge? By “using the powerful critical tools of science and logical analysis.”

Humanism, as expressed by its leaders, is diametrically opposed to biblical Christianity. The two philosophies are as opposite, as uncompromisingly un-get-together-able as any two worlds of thought can be.

I Agree ...I Think

Yet it is interesting to note that humanism espouses some excellent subgoals, goals with which biblical Christians can agree. *The Humanist Manifesto II*, for example, states, “the preciousness and dignity of the individual person is a central humanist value.” When a Christian could not shout “Amen!” to that? Indeed, understanding that people are created in the image of God can do nothing but make us more aware of the preciousness and dignity of the individual. God made us free choosing agents. What greater dignity could we have? God sent his only Son to pay our debt toward God. What in humanist philosophy can show the preciousness of a human person like this unspeakable act?

But I wonder, on what basis can this sub-goal, the preciousness and dignity of the individual, be true from a humanist perspective? The second manifesto says that the total personality is simply the biological organism functioning in a cultural context. If the human being is simply, and if, as they say, neither we nor the universe have any special meaning, what possible significance can this rhetoric about the fulfillment, the preciousness and dignity of the individual have.

B.F. Skinner, a noted behaviorist who signed the second manifesto, says in his book *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* that the idea that people make choices and have freedom and dignity is “prescientific.” I detest Skinner’s philosophy, but I admire his honesty. He sees clearly that ideas such as the preciousness of the individual are absurd in the humanist context, unless we arbitrarily decide that we will consider individuals precious.

Dog-Eat-Dog World

Jack London, the brilliant but tormented novelist who ended his own life in 1916, portrays people as “driven” by their environment and heredity. He too sees people as the evolutionary results of biochemical processes. In his stories *Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, he seems to be saying that modern society is ruthless because of its evolutionary origin where the law of life was “eat or be eaten.” London was fairly consistent in his view of humanity and of nature, but he found his ideology too oppressive to live with.

The second manifesto also espouses goals and values such as an open and democratic society, an end to racial, sexual and other discrimination, economic well-being, peace, ecological responsibility and international cooperation. All these are goals that any intelligent person of any persuasion would support. They are not unique to humanists.

Yes, Christians can agree with humanists that these are worthy goals. But how may such goals be reached? The foundational philosophy upon which we build toward these ends must be secure, or else the edifice built on it will not survive. The trouble is that humanism offers no real, strong reason to achieve the goals its adherents have set up. Their highest goal, the only kind of “salvation”? They believe in, seems to be the survival of the human race. But one might ask, if people have no meaning and no purpose, if we are just biochemical accidents appearing briefly on the screen of an uncaring universe and then forever disappearing into oblivion, what value is there in the survival of the race? In that case, if someone triggered a nuclear holocaust and blew the earth to bits

tomorrow, it would end all human suffering and nothing would be lost. It's not hard to see why many humanists have joined the ranks of despair.

Reason to Live

On the other hand, the biblical position gives a much deeper and firmer meaning to the human personality. When I understand that God made me, that he planned for me and cares for me, I have reason to keep on living. Humanity has a reason to survive.

The individual who understands the biblical idea of personhood need not be tossed about by heredity and environment the way Jack London's characters are. It makes each individual responsible, and is the only strong and enduring basis for the human responsibility upon which all society is built.

Humanism is innately incapable of reaching its own goals. Only biblical Christianity can furnish a base adequate to sustain such striving. Francis Schaeffer speaks of "the biblical non-humanist position." This position is far more humane, it seems to me, than any of the sterile, impotent credos set forth by humanists. The humanist position is anything but human; indeed the word "human" has little meaning in their context. The biblical non-humanist position reaffirms the dignity, freedom, preciousness and personal nature of us all. Let us reject humanism, but let us hold fast to those biblical values that make us fully human and fully humane.