Christian Humanist Manifesto[1]

* A Christian Humanist Manifesto

In our time the word "humanism" has been claimed by those who explain human existence without any reference to God. We are unwilling to yield the term to those views that are least able of finding depth of meaning in the life of humankind.

We regret that Christians have rarely offered a clear alternative to secular humanism, and we seek now to set forth the salient points of what for centuries have been called "Christian" humanism. To this we stand committed.

* The Starting Point

The proper study of humankind is not humanity alone, but God and human together. The triune God--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit--is the Creator of the Universe and of each person within it. God, who is the ultimate meaning of the universe, is eternally self-existent, though the created order is not. By thus acknowledging God, the Christian view of reality embraces more than does that of the secular humanist.

* Who We Are

Human nature combines physical and spiritual, natural and supra-natural characteristics. To the physical and sexual, and social aspects of normal human life, in which we rejoice, must be added the understanding that human beings alone of all creation are made in God's own image.

We can, therefore, create, love, assert, reflect on our past and future, communicate with words, and distinguish good and evil. Even more fundamentally we can worship the One whose image we bear. This gives humans an intrinsic dignity beyond mere animals. Human beings can never be understood only as animals, however complex, for at heart they are religious beings.

* Value of Life

Because human beings, male and female, bear God's image, their life, which is his gift, claims our care and protection throughout, from the time of conception to the furthest point at which it can continue. Neither abortions of convenience nor euthanasia when social usefulness has passed can therefore be justified.

* Why We Exist

The meaning of human life is moral and spiritual: moral, in the performance of God's will, which is both just and loving; spiritual, in a fellowship with God and other persons. No human life, however prosperous, healthy, or devoted to others is complete when this moral and spiritual development is lacking.

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[1] This is a reprint of a manifesto published in Eternity Magazine, January 1982, p. 16-18. (It is also reprinted as an appendix to Thomas Howard and J.I. Packer's book, “Christianity: The True Humanism.” Both Howard and Packer were among the many consultants who helped determine its final shape and content.)

* The Human Task

From his creation, humans as male and female have been given stewardship over nature, commanded by God to develop a culture and nourish human life from the productive earth. Labor and leisure, science and art, family and state, belong to human life as God meant it to be. Yet the meaning of life is not found in these activities but in the God who enables them.

* Science and Art

God created and maintains pattern and consistency in the universe, making science and technology possible. Secular humanism, lacking this ultimate foundation for science, must posit the consistency of the universe as a mysterious "given." The form and materials of his creation also make art and beauty possible: human creativity thus echoes God's own.

* Truth and Error

Something of God's character and will may be known by all people, even if dimly and with confusion. An awareness of God and of moral standards is natural to humankind, and the urge to worship, though often misdirected, is indestructible.

God the Creator has clearly revealed his character and will in history, culminating in Jesus Christ. This revelation, in which God interpreted for us the whole of human life and met in principle the whole of human duty, is now permanently available in Holy Scripture; and no one who lacks knowledge of it knows enough for a fully human life.

Though we know only in part, God's revealed truth is absolute, not relative. Because truth can be known, error can be identified, and a path is thereby opened through the contemporary religious and philosophical confusion.

* Evil

Human life is blighted by the alienation from God introduced by human disobedience after human's creation. Moral evil, though universal throughout history, is therefore abnormal. Its root lies in human rebellion against God's Lordship and the rule of his law.

Ours has become a bent world: selfishness, violence, injustice, pride, self-destructiveness, and inhumanity everywhere pervade human life.

This evil may appear in individuals or institutions. It is manifest in governments, businesses, and families. The human will, rather than social conditions alone, however, is the decisive factor in evil. No explanation of human brutality that omits sinful choice is adequate.

* Providence

In the face of this pervasive evil, God maintains a governance of human affairs that sets limits to evil, prospers human life, and preserves his purpose in history. The end of history, like its beginning, is under the sovereign control of God.

* Human Restoration: Reconciled to God

To end our alienation from him and to restore human life to its original design and purpose, our Creator has acted in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a first-century Jew who was, in truth, the second person of the Trinity, God incarnate.

The appearance of Christ, therefore, is the most important event in all human history. By his sacrificial death, he paid the moral debt of those sinners who submit to his transforming reconciliation.

The loving service of God and man which Jesus taught and practiced perfectly is the model of true humanness.

* The Kingdom of God Begun

From the ministry of Christ sprang an international, multiracial community of forgiven sinners. They acknowledge a common calling to proclaim Jesus as King and to bring all human life under his sway. This community, the Church, despite failures, inconsistencies, and hypocrisies, has pioneered a many-sided humanitarianism.

The Christian movement has been the cultural matrix of the modern Western world. Christian fruit, however, cannot continue in society without Christian convictions.

* World Crisis

Current social and political problems are overwhelming: international tensions, crime, family breakdown, abuse of the powerless (including the unborn and the aged), scarcity of resources, nuclear threat, and more. Christian humanism offers, not a program to solve these problems, but a framework for their solution--truth linked to spiritual power.

* Pessimism, Optimism, Realism

Human life is nor perfectible and progress is not inevitable, but despair at the human prospect is no more justified than is naive optimism. Hope for humankind lies in the knowledge that Jesus Christ, the Lord of all things, will make all things new at his Second Coming. The Christian Humanist therefore avoids both the pessimism and the over-optimism of secular humanism.

The individual Christian, facing death, can likewise know that conscious friendship with God and other persons is forever. Death can destroy the body, but it does not destroy the person or meaning.

* Conclusion

In contrast to secular humanism, therefore, Christian humanism does not hesitate to speak of absolute truth, goodness, beauty, love, morality, the sanctity of life, duty, fidelity, hope, and immortality. These are not empty religious sentiments but the natural language of those who know even if partially, of their creation and redemption by a loving God.

“God has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”—Ecclesiastes 3:11