

Glorified or Humanized?

“The God of all grace, who has called you unto His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, in your suffering [experiencing earthly distresses] Himself mend you, establish, strengthen, put a foundation under you. To Him be the might [authoritative power] forever” (I Peter 5:10-11) (Author’s translation).

Never before in human history has there been such a focus on “humanism” and its consequent humanitarianism. On the face of it, that seems admirable. But what is the nature of the humanism and the humanitarianism? Where does the church stand in this stream? And what is the impact on the individual believer? Secular humanism is a general term applied to the philosophical view of the human race that assumes mankind to be in a steady evolution upward. That is, that the genus *homo sapiens*—the human animal—is constantly improving physically and mentally, as well as in moral/ethical sensitivities. Beginning with the completely unscientific and circular argument that the universe could not have been created by God since there is no God, it is then assumed that the universe and its inhabitants evolved in a spontaneous process, and, by means of natural selection (survival of the fittest), has steadily been improving human faculties to a degree that far exceeds our genetic ancestors.

In this view, the traits of moral and ethical sensitivities have developed along with physical capacities. It is, of course, obvious that such traits would not have been resident within the atom—the basic building block—and therefore would have had to have been acquired in one way or another. At the point of socialization, however, the scientific community undergoes a shift in premises from “survival of the fittest” to “survival of the weakest”—that is, that the strong ought to help the weak survive. Whence comes such moral obligation out of an amoral beginning, is not ever made clear. Ethical behavior or the “moral ought” has replaced survival as the ultimate goal of the genus *homo sapiens*. It is obviously important to the scientific community. Having brought man from raw matter to a high degree of functional existence, he must now deliver him from being classified as “animal.” How he is supposed to have come to a state where he is consciously concerned about being classified as “animal” is never made clear. It is alleged that we have acquired ethical behavior as a means of survival, although the current state of universal conflict does not seem to bear out that thesis. A million years (according to the anthropologist) after the emergence of *homo erectus* (the upright human creature) conflict and greed are more universal than morality and selflessness. The famous “war to end wars” (World War I) only spawned an incessant series of other conflicts and we now stand on the threshold of nuclear annihilation of the entire race.

The Biblical version of a divine creator and a fallen creature—a rather rational explanation for the present state of the race—is totally shunned by the academic community in favor of a completely irrational evolutionary view, simply because they know (they have not as yet explained how) that God does not exist. “We have gotten along nicely without Him thus far; we will make our own way in the future, thank you very much.” In their view, given time and cultivation, there is no limit to what humans can become. Of course, time is the

great “cop out.” For every new enigma, just add another billion years. Are humans still plagued with greed and conflict? Another million years or so will resolve the problem.

In the view of the secular humanist, all personality traits can be developed by innate human capacities or by human therapies and prescriptions. Behavior modification is the watchword. If one is greedy and selfish, one must learn not to be greedy and selfish. If one is indifferent to the welfare of others, one must simply learn to care. The ultimate goal is a better world and a better life in it. And, in the view of the secular humanist, the capacity for behavior modification is resident within the human. “You can be anything you want to be.” It is never explained why that is not in itself a selfish motive.

Unfortunately, the religious community at large has bought the humanistic package. One should have a good life on earth, with heaven thrown in (incidentally). “You can have anything you want, if you only have faith.” Faith turns out to be a sort of mental positivism—a cultivated confidence that God is going to do whatever one asks. In this view, the only limitation is oneself—lack of faith, or lack of performance. The rationale for this is that “God wants you to have a happy life. Others are happy, why not you? God wants you to be successful. Be the best that you can for Jesus.” And what is the motivation for that? “You owe Him, after all He’s done for you.” In this view, salvation becomes the threshold of humanism—getting saved gives one the motivation and potential for a successful life on the earth—“If you are saved, you ought to be successful.” But, successful in whose eyes? In the Christian humanist view, salvation becomes the footing upon which you are now privileged to build your own successful life. If you cultivate your confidence in Christ well enough and perform well enough you can be a successful Christian. If you do not cultivate your confidence and service, you will not have a good life on the earth, and you will face the judgment of God in the hereafter (provided, of course, that you make it).

Such is the humanistic vein of modern Christendom. “Bigger and better” seem to be the watchwords. It is really all a matter of self improvement through human effort and reaching out for success, even though by the word “success” the Church may apply its own standards. It all rests on the human capacity to meet certain criteria of success in this world. These criteria are outlined by the Church, and observed in outward signs of human behavior. It is never suggested that success with Christ may not always be viewed as success by the standards of others, Christian or non-Christian. In this view, success is achieved by the cultivation of confidence and correct mental attitudes. Positive attitudes are the key to success. Service is based on a calling, not from the Holy Spirit, but from the Church’s evaluation of the needs of the world, with obligation as the motivating force.

Secular humanism says, “You can do anything you want if you think positively and put forth the effort.” Christian humanism says, “Get saved first, and then you can do anything you want if you think positively (have faith) and put forth the effort.” Secular humanism says that the only thing that stands in the way of a good life is your own self-limitations. Christian humanism says that the only

thing that keeps you from having a good life is the self-limitation of inadequate faith and/or inadequate performance. Secular humanism calls for reaching out to achieve the utmost in human potential. Christian humanism calls for reaching out for the utmost in human potential through the cultivation of faith (feeling of confidence). The goal is the same.

The problem with Christian humanism is that Christ never promised that His followers would reach human potentials on the earthly plane. He never promised success on earth. He never promised a good life on earth. He never promised any kind of success as even the Church might count success. One might be a total failure in the eyes of the Church, and still be a success in the eyes of Christ. All Christ offered was uncertainty on earth in the flesh, but complete fulfillment in the spirit, in the ultimate glorification God intended for His people. The highest goals that humans can reach on the earth are still sandcastles, as compared to the ultimate glorification of the spirit. Paul said it to the Corinthians—*“When I was a child, I spake as a child, I thought as a child, I understood as a child, but when I became a man I put away childish things.”* He follows this by pointing out our condition on the earth as extremely limited, even as a child’s is limited. *“Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now we know in part, but then shall we know even as also we are known”* (I Corinthians 13:11,12). The ultimate end Paul had in mind was glorification—not humanization. It was to fulfill the divine purpose for him, and not to accomplish earthly success. It was not a matter of reaching the heights of human potential, which he saw as mere child’s play, but reaching the reality of glorification in God’s realm of the Spirit.

The earth is nothing but a gauntlet—a course run through the midst of one’s enemies, with buffeting and badgering. God’s purpose is not to eliminate the buffeting nor that we should feel good about it, but that we should make it through, still trusting in Him. It is not so much making it through grandly, but just making it through. The bruises will be felt, but the victory lies in staying the course.

The cry of the Christian humanist is “What has Christ done for you?” It ought to be “What is Christ doing in you?” Humanization has to do with success in the flesh; glorification has to do with success in the spirit. One may be in the meanest of circumstances and be totally successful in the eyes of Christ. Similarly, one may be in the most successful circumstances and be impoverished in the spirit. One may have the simplest of occupations and yet be assured of glorification in the spirit. Although the Bible is replete with statements regarding this simple truth, and few leaders would quarrel with it, yet when it comes down to the practical application, the focus still seems to be on performance and prosperity in this life—on successful service and satisfying circumstances as the indication of one’s faith. As a test of the validity of this statement one need only observe the difference with which the Church treats the successful (in their view) and the unsuccessful. “If you only trusted in Christ, He would solve all of your personality problems, resolve your social problems, and eliminate your financial problems.”

According to the text quoted above, the ultimate purpose of God’s creation is to

come to the fullness of His glory. Possessed by His Spirit, we become partakers of the divine nature and fitted for eternity with Him as partakers of His glory. For a brief period of time on the earth, even as with Christ Himself, we have had to know the frustration of the confining of such glorious energy in clay vessels. We are possessed with the energy of God, but for the present, that energy is confined in totally inadequate vessels—“this body of death,” as Paul calls it. *“But God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us”* (II Corinthians 4:6,7). The vessel must be of clay that the glory may be of God. So any efforts to measure our present condition with Christ, in terms of standards of human success, must be suspect, since the human mind has no capacity whatsoever to grasp the true implications of our glorification as God intends it. We are not seeking to be humanized—to fulfill human potential, but to be glorified—to fulfill divine intentions for His creatures.

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April 1988

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