

Humanism vs. Protestant Reformed Teachers: No R & R

YEAR:

2003

VOLUME/YEAR:

79/2003

SERIES:

Humanism vs. Protestant Reformed Teachers: No R&R

Series:

Humanism vs. Protestant Reformed Teachers: No R&R

AUTHOR:

Dykstra Russell J

ISSUE:

Issue: 16, 5/15/2003

ARTICLE TYPE:

That They May Teach Them to Their Children

Scripture References

Book:

Romans

Chapter:

1

Prof. Dykstra is professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

Christian teachers are always dealing with ideas. Which is to say, they are always evaluating ideas. This evaluation may take place in the esoteric realm of the philosophy of education. On the other hand, it occurs continually in the concrete methods of instruction: How to teach reading, or math, or spelling, or a particular lesson in history. Teachers are called upon to evaluate textbooks from time to time. They examine resource material, and preview films. Good teachers desire the right information, the best methods, the most effective way of teaching.

Teachers become a filter for much of the information that covenant children receive. Christian teachers filter out much that would damage the souls of the young believers. And what cannot be removed is put into the proper biblical perspective. In this sin-cursed culture, teachers must deal with the anti-Christian, the immoral, and the heretical in a manner appropriate to the age of the students. I dare say that Protestant Reformed teachers are well aware of these evils, and are ready for the hard task.

A more difficult struggle in school is filtering out ungodly influences. Influences, both good and bad, come from many sources. They arise out of one's own upbringing. Teachers are influenced by their colleagues and administrators. The lives and attitudes of parents as well as those of every student who walks into the classroom exert influence on teachers. Not only people, but things can influence, as, for example, the news media, as well as textbooks and other resource material. It is good for all Christians to recognize the fact that many forms of pressure can and do affect the thinking and attitudes of believers, including Christian school teachers. These articles will examine a pernicious and evil influence in our world, namely, humanism. This is not only timely, it is important. Humanism is the battle of the ages, for it sets up man as the standard instead of God and His law. It worships the creature rather than the Creator.

Humanism is pernicious exactly because it does not identify itself, but it permeates other ideas in society. Not infrequently humanism is the hidden foundation of a social movement or a philosophy. And it is deadly, being the rankest form of idolatry—the worship of man. What carbon monoxide is to the body, humanism can be to the soul—a silent and unnoticed killer.

It is a timely topic in that we live in the end of the ages, in which the root of this evil is grown up and producing its ugliest, and most potent fruit.

It is the burden of this article that Protestant Reformed teachers have a calling to combat this godless influence, this man-centered philosophy. Teachers must understand that it is exactly the devil's goal to make them to be conscious and deliberate providers of this deadly poison. Failing that, his desire is to slip it into the teachers' instruction unawares, and thus into the students' daily portion.

The battle is constant; the foe relentless. Hence the title of the article.

In this short series of articles we will first explain what humanism is. Next, we must be made aware of how the evil attacks Christian teachers and schools, and specifically Protestant Reformed teachers and schools. And finally, we must be cognizant of the arsenal of weapons at the disposal of the Christian school teacher, and be trained to use them.

What Is Humanism?

Humanism is defined in various ways, specifically as a historical movement, as a philosophical movement, a literary movement, a sociological movement, and even a religious movement. However, the essence of humanism is this: The belief that man is the measure of all things.

Humanism's origins are of ancient and venerated stock. As a philosophy it is deeply imbedded in Greek thought. The philosopher Protagoras (born almost 500 years before Christ) made this the cornerstone of his philosophy, namely, man is the standard of all, including truth.

Even though Protagoras did not win over the other Greek philosophers of his day, steeped in idolatry as they were, to his explicit glorying in man, the notion never completely died out. The whole of the Greek culture was man-centered. Protagoras was revived in the fourteenth century Renaissance in Europe and has been promoted by philosophers ever since, and that, with a vengeance in the last century.

As ancient and respected as Protagoras is to the humanists, he is not the source. The root is found in our first parents, Adam and Eve. Accepting the lie of Satan, Eve evaluated the forbidden fruit not according to God's standard of truth, but by hers. She judged that it would improve her

lot, and thus it was a fruit desired to make her wise. She would have her freedom, and Adam readily joined her. Out of this man-centered root of sin would develop all the evils of humanism.

Modern humanism spawned in the Renaissance. Fourteenth century thinkers longed to escape the suffocating restrictions of the Church of Rome. In order to accomplish this, they separated philosophy from religion. This enabled the scholars to philosophize as they pleased while insisting that they remained faithful to the church theologically. Faith teaches this; philosophy something else. We can accept both. This is a significant and fatal move. It is based on the proposition that man could come to truth by means of his own thinking. This is rationalism and is clearly man-centered.

Turning from God, the Renaissance thinkers gloried shamelessly in man. They exalted in freedom for promotion of the autonomy of man. Man has the ability to form his world, to change it, and to better it, they averred. Pico della Mirandola, a fifteenth century writer, is representative of these humanists who virtually deify man. In his Oration on the Dignity of Man, he attributes these words to God:

I have given to you, Adam, neither a predestinated place nor a particular aspect nor any special prerogatives in order that you may take and possess these through your own decision and choice. The limitations on the nature of other creatures are contained within my prescribed laws. You shall determine your own nature without constraint from any barrier, by means of the freedom to whose power I have entrusted you. I have placed you at the center of the world so that from that point you might see better what is in the world. I have made you neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal so that, like a free and sovereign artificer, you might mold and fashion yourself into that form you yourself shall have chosen.

In addition, these Renaissance humanists held to a form of naturalism that placed all the emphasis on man as a part of the earthly creation. Though they emphasized the soul of man in connection with freedom, they were concerned almost exclusively with man's activity in this world. The dominant question was not: What is man's relation to God? Rather it was, How does man fit into the creation? For many, pleasure was the sole good for man and the sole end of human activities. It is not surprising, then, that the Renaissance humanists restored to honor the Greek philosopher Epicurus, who identified pleasure as the highest and only good.

That the Renaissance would be man-centered is in harmony with the fact that it was a return to antiquity and to the ancient writers. That meant a special emphasis on the pagan Greek philosophers, including Protagoras.

As for religion, although the Renaissance men rejected asceticism and theology, they saw some value in religion. The fundamental function of religion, for them, was to support a man in his work, particularly in his civic work. They preached tolerance of various religions. That flowed out of their conviction that all religious beliefs of man have an essential unity. Religious peace is, therefore, the right goal and attainable.

These ideals of the Renaissance continued to develop through the centuries, but usually with a lip service to a God who was above and beyond the creation. That is, until Darwin and his theory of evolution. In the mind of the humanists, evolutionism gave a legitimate explanation for the existence of all things, and had the desirable result of eliminating any need for God.

The theory of evolution is probably the single greatest factor in the explosive growth of humanism in the last century and a half, and its pervasive influence today. Prior to Darwin, rank humanism was held in check by this reluctance of most to deny God openly. Now ungodly men can develop their humanistic philosophies unabashedly.

The humanism that abounds today can be summarized under five points. First, man is the standard. He is autonomous, free to set and to seek his own goals. He both may and can frame his own world. This foundational position of the humanist varies somewhat from one humanist to another based on the particular emphasis of each. Some emphasize the individual—his choices, his individual happiness. This amounts to an astounding selfishness, with the bold claim that it is virtuous to seek oneself and to love only those who serve that self interest. Others emphasize the community of man. The goal of man ought to be the common good. Good is then defined as that which serves the welfare of the race.

These views of man have a profound effect on ethics. Man is the standard of what is good or evil. There is no established standard of right or wrong. Ethics are situational.

The above naturally leads to the second element of humanism, namely a denial of God as the sovereign, transcendent God revealed in the Bible. There are variations in the tenets of humanism, but all humanists share a belief in evolution which, as noted earlier, eliminates the need for God. This God is replaced by atheism, or, more accurately, a god of their own making, depending on the particular strain of humanism. They may kneel at the altar of science, or bow before the race of mankind. They may put their trust in government, or worship culture as the savior of man.

Often, the individual himself becomes the humanist's god. This is blatantly maintained by Ayn Rand, who writes, "And now I see the face of god, and I raise this god over the earth, the god whom men have sought since man came into being, this god who will grant them joy and peace and pride. This god, this one word: I" (For the New Intellectual, New York: Signet, 1961, p. 123).

A denial of God necessarily demands a rejection of miracles as recorded in Scripture. That would include, obviously, the incarnation and the resurrection of the Son of God, without which there is no Christian faith.

This denial of God is set forth plainly in the Humanist Manifesto II, in the first article of their beliefs: "No deity will save us; we must save ourselves."*

The third characteristic of modern humanism is its totally earth-centeredness. As humanists themselves express it, religion may inspire one to strive for high ideals, but "traditional dogmatic or authoritarian religions ... do a disservice to the human species" (Humanist Manifesto II, art. 2). The same article goes on to say that "promises of immortal salvation and fear of eternal damnation are both illusory and harmful." That, because "they distract from present concerns, from self-actualization, and from rectifying social injustices." Besides, "science can find no credible evidence that life survives the body."

Fourthly, the freedom of man remains a central pillar of humanism. This comes into focus in many spheres. For example, humanists insist on sexual liberty, and promote acceptance of all forms of sexual activity possible between adults, including homosexuality. This "freedom" includes also the "rights" of birth control, abortion, and divorce, all on demand.

This humanistic freedom lies behind much of what are called civil liberties, and among those liberties that humanists defend is euthanasia. Humanists seek an open and democratic society where the person is more important than laws. And they tout separation of church and state, by which they mean that the state and society must be free from any church dominance.

The fifth element found in most modern humanists is the desire for unity and peace. Humanists desire political unity, also among the nations. They labor tirelessly for the abolition of war. They are busy working together to solve the problems of resources as well as the unequal distribution of technology. They advocate better use of communication for the purpose of promoting worldwide unity and peace.

The believer can see immediately that humanism strikes at the very heart of the Christian faith. It is a denial of God, in order to remove God from the throne, shut Him out of His creation, and set up man as god. This is exactly the condemnation expressed in Romans 1 ^[1]. Man knows God, but denies Him, and worships the creature rather than the Creator.

Humanism is a rejection of the biblical doctrine that natural man is depraved. According to the humanist, man can improve his world. Man can even save himself. Thus, there is not only no room for Christ in his scheme, there is not even a need for Him.

Humanism is a rejection of all biblical standards of right and wrong. God's righteous law is negated. Man makes the standards.

It is a denial of heaven, hell, and life after death. Only the life on earth matters.

Obviously, the ultimate goal of humanism is the kingdom of the Antichrist. This is the kingdom of man, whose number is six hundred, threescore, and six. Humanism is man in the service of self, though really, he serves Satan. Humanism is the ultimate working out of the sin of Adam and Eve, and the lie of Satan, "Ye shall be as God."

How does this affect the Christian teacher, and how does it affect the classroom? To this we turn next time.

** In 1933 a group of thirty-four self-confessed humanists (including John Dewey) drew up a brief Humanist Manifesto consisting of fifteen articles. Forty years later, another manifesto was drawn up (hence the name, Humanist Manifesto II) about four times larger than the first. Both of these documents are readily available on the Internet. The latest, Humanist Manifesto 2000, is a 76-page book, available for purchase.*

Source URL: <http://standardbearer.rfpa.org/articles/humanism-vs-protestant-reformed-teachers-no-r-r>

Links:

[1] <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=9&search=Romans+1>