

THE RELIGIOUS FACE OF HUMANISM

Robert L. Waggoner¹

As the saying goes, if a bird looks like a duck, quacks like a duck, waddles like a duck, and swims like a duck, then it must be a duck. Likewise, if modern humanism claims to be a religion, has characteristics of a religion, acts like a religion, and also has been declared, legally, to be a religion, then it must be a religion, notwithstanding denials now coming from some humanists who previously said that humanism is a religion.² There is too much evidence to refute such claims.

Humanism Claims To Be A Religion

That the signers of *Humanist Manifesto I* believed humanism to be a religion is evident by language used within that document. They thought that the circumstances of their world had created a situation “which requires a new statement of the means and purposes of religion.”³ They believed that “to establish such a religion is a major necessity of the present.”⁴ They declared “In order that religious humanism may be better understood we, the undersigned, desire to make certain affirmations which we believe the facts of our contemporary life demonstrate.”⁵

Humanist Manifesto I affirmed fifteen principles. Eight of these use language which requires recognition that humanism is a religion.⁶ The last paragraph of that document begins with the words, “So stands the theses of religions humanism.”⁷

Forty years later, Paul Kurtz declared in the preface to *Humanist Manifestos I and II* that “Humanism is a philosophical, religious, and moral point of view as old as human civilization itself”.⁸ He also stated that “[i]n 1933 a group of thirty-four liberal humanists in the United States defined and enunciated the philosophical and religious principles that seemed to them fundamental. They drafted *Humanist Manifesto I* . . . It was concerned with expressing a general religious and philosophical outlook . . .”⁹

He then noted that *Humanist Manifesto II* also addressed itself to the problems of religion¹⁰ The first two of seventeen statements of belief in *Humanist Manifesto II* are discussed under the category of religion. Although the language of religious humanism is not used in the

¹Copyright © Robert L. Waggoner, 1988, Revised, 2000. Permission is granted to reproduce and distribute this material for non-commercial and educational purposes, if unaltered and if copyright and author's name is given. All other rights reserved.

²For example, Paul Kurtz, “The New Inquisition In The Schools,” *Free Inquiry*. Winter, 1986/87, 5.

³Paul Kurtz, ed. *Humanist Manifestos I and II*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books. 1973, 8.

⁴Same as above.

⁵Same source, 7.

⁶These are numbered First, Fifth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, Twelfth, and Thirteenth.

⁷Same source, 10.

⁸Same source, 3. Opening statement in Preface.

⁹Same source, 3.

¹⁰Same as above.

second manifesto as extensively as in the first, there can be no doubt that the beliefs of the second document may also be categorized as religious humanism.¹¹

Moreover, the *Bylaws of the American Humanist Association*, declares that “[t]he American Humanist Association was incorporated under the not for profit act of the State of Illinois as a non-profit organization, as certified by the Articles of Incorporation dated 13 February, 1943, which Articles were amended 20 March, 1968, to reflect that the Association has a legal status as a religious organization.”¹²

Humanism Has Characteristics Of A Religion

Humanism not only claims to be a religion, it also has religious characteristics. Among these are faith assumptions, attempts to answer basic and ultimate religious concerns, creedal statements, development out of a religious tradition, and demonstrations of missionary zeal.¹³

The faith assumptions of humanism are numerous. Humanists cannot prove that God does not exist, or that he does not intervene in human events. They assume that mankind has no spiritual nature, that humans are self-existing, and that all things evolve. They assume that no absolute moral values exist, that ethics is autonomous, and that humanity is not accountable to God after this life. Humanism assumes that there is no sin, and therefore that there is no need for eternal salvation. Humanism assumes that there is no life after death, and that there is no heaven or hell. All these are faith assumptions.

Like all other religions, humanism seeks to answer basic and ultimate questions regarding reality. To the question, “Who am I?” humanists answer that “man is a part of nature and that he has emerged as the result of a continuous process.”¹⁴ To the question, “Where did I come from?” they respond that “the human species is an emergence from natural evolutionary forces.”¹⁵ To the question, “Why am I here?” humanism declares, “The ultimate goal should be the fulfillment of the potential for growth in each human personality - not for the favored few, but for all of humankind”¹⁶ “. . . commitment to all humankind is the highest commitment of which we are capable; it transcends the narrow allegiances of church, state, party class, or race in moving toward a wider vision of human potentiality.”¹⁷ To the question, “Where am I going?” humanists answer, “[r]eligious humanism considers the complete realization of human

¹¹For a good evaluation and comparison of basic humanists writings, I recommend Norman L. Geisler. *Is Man The Measure: An Evaluation Of Contemporary Humanism*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House. 1983, especially chapter 9, “Secular Humanism,” 111-122.

¹²*Bylaws Of The American Humanist Association*, enacted 1971; revised 1977; amended 1978, 1980. Update compilation, July, 1981 by the subcommittee on American Humanist Association Bylaws: Harvey Lebrum, Ward Tabler, Howard Consalves, “Historical Note,” 1.

¹³For further discussion of the religious nature of humanism, read John Eidsmoe. *The Christian Legal Advisor*, Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1984, chapter 12, “Humanism as an Establishment of Religion,” 179-199, and Homer Duncan, “The Religion of Secular Humanism and The Public Schools,” 2425-34th St., Lubbock, TX 79411-1689, 1983, Part I, “Secular Humanism Is A Religion,” 5-37.

¹⁴*Humanist Manifesto I*, Second.

¹⁵*Humanist Manifesto II*, Second.

¹⁶*Humanist Manifesto II*, Preface.

¹⁷*Humanist Manifesto II*, In closing.

personality to be the end of mans life and seeks its development and fulfillment in the here and now.”¹⁸ To the question, “How do I get there?” they respond . . . “[b]elieving that religion must work increasingly for joy in human living, religious humanists aim to foster the creative in man and to encourage achievements that add to the satisfaction of life.”¹⁹

Humanism Acts Like A Religion

Humanism not only claims to be a religion and it not only has all the characteristics of religion, but it also acts consistent with its claims and characteristics. A publication of the American Humanist Association states that “[t]he American Humanist Association is a non-profit organization, funded in the early 1940s to provide an alternative religious philosophy . . .”²⁰ “The association seeks people interested in becoming certified Humanist Leaders, Counselors, or ordained Ministers.”²¹ “A Humanist Counselor, AHA, is the legal equivalent of minister, priest, rabbi . . . Humanist counselors, AHA, may act as chaplains on campuses and in prisons, hospitals, and other institutions where the presence of a non-traditional or non-theistic minister is often a need.”²² “To extend its principles and operate educationally, the Association publishes books, magazines, and pamphlets; engages lecturers; selects, trains and accredits Humanist Counselors as its ordained ministry of the movement. . . .”²³

One of the goals of the American Humanist Association is to place a humanist counselor in every public school in America.²⁴ If successful, humanist counselors will then be able to give guidance freely, according to principles of humanism, to children of Christian parents, in public schools, without Christian parents ever being aware of it.

Humanism Is A Legally Declared Religion

Humanism has also been declared, legally, to be a religion. In the traditional Christian sense, religion has to do with God-centeredness. Atheism, being opposed to God, is man-centered and therefore, until recently, has not been considered as a religion. However, “[b]eginning in the 1940s, Christian theism came under increasing attack. The federal courts began to broaden and diversify the definition of *religion* until by the end of the 1960s the judicial definition of religion was altered from *sustenance of belief* (belief in and obligation owed to the Creator) to the *impact* of the belief on the *life* of the person expressing and holding it. . . . The basis of truth was shifting from Christian theism’s emphasis on God-centeredness to humanism’s emphasis on man-centeredness.”²⁵

¹⁸*Humanist Manifesto I*, Eighth.

¹⁹*Humanist Manifesto II*, Twelfth.

²⁰As quoted by Lottie Beth Hobbs, “Humanists Ministers and Counselors,” *Pro-Family Forum Alert*, Ft. Worth, TX: September, 1984, 3.

²¹Same as above.

²²Same as above.

²³*Bylaws Of The American Humanist Association*, “Preamble,” 2.

²⁴Lottie Beth Hobbs. Same as above.

²⁵John W. Whitehead, *The Second American Revolution*, Elgin, IL: David C. Cook publishers, 1982, 104.

The courts' alteration of the definition of religion resulted in religion finally being defined as ultimate concern.²⁶ That is, whatever is of ultimate concern to an individual is his religion. This, in turn, led to the courts' definition of humanism as religion. In the landmark case of *Torcasco v. Watkins*, the U.S. Supreme Court said, "[a]mong religions in this country which do not teach what would generally be considered a belief in the existence of God are Buddhism, Taoism, Ethical Culture, Secular Humanism and others . . ." ²⁷ Other court decisions have also declared that humanism is a religion.²⁸

The denial, by modern humanists, that humanism is a religion may be because humanists have begun to realize that if humanism is generally considered to be a religion, then it, like Christianity, is also subject to the First Amendment's prohibition of the establishment of religion, and therefore may not be taught in the nation's public schools.

As Religion, Humanism Worships Humanity

Christians are rightly concerned that humanism be recognized as a religion, and that as a religion humanism is currently being taught in public schools. However, the primary concern of Christians regarding humanism is not whether it is labeled as a religion. Rather, it is because of what humanism is. Humanism is a form of self-worship. It is anti-Christian. And it is anti-family.

Although the term humanism has only recently become popularized, the concepts of humanism have existed as long as mankind. Eve was the first Humanist. She wanted to become like God by eating the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:5-6). Those who started to build the Tower of Babel wanted to make a great name for themselves. Their intent was to build a tower with its top in the heavens (Genesis 11:4-7). This was probably an assertion of their independence from God.

Throughout history, people have often considered themselves gods. Tyre was destroyed because its heart was proud and it said, "I am God" (Ezekiel 28:2). The paramount worship of mankind throughout human history has been that of self-worship.²⁹

Modern humanism differs from Renaissance humanism. Renaissance humanists were students of the humanities. In reading ancient non-Christian documents of humanity, humanists absorbed many pagan assumptions regarding the nature of humanity. Subsequently they began rejecting Christian perspectives. Humanism gradually changed from being primarily a study of the humanities to become the worship of humanity.

²⁶For a more thorough discussion of legal changes to the definition of religion, read John W. Whitehead, *The Second American Revolution*, 104-108.

²⁷367 U.S. 488 (1961) footnote 11.

²⁸Among them are *Washington Ethical Society v. District of Columbia*, 101 U.S. Appellate D. C. 371, 249 F.2d 127 (1957); *Fellowship of Humanity V. County of Alameda*, 153 Cal. App. 2nd 673, 315 P. 2nd 394 (1957); *Jaffree v. Board of School comrs of Mobile County*, 554 F. Supp. 1104, 1129 n. 41 (1983); *Zorach v. Clauson*, 343 U.S. 306, 314 (1952).

²⁹Arnold Toynbee, "Reconsiderations," vol. 12 of *A Study of History*, New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961, 488 via Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols For Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation With American Society*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983, 40.

In the nineteenth century August Comte, a French philosopher, established a formal Religion of Humanity for the worship of all mankind - past, present, and future. "This religion had a catechism, sacraments, a sacred calendar, a priesthood, prayers and something imitative of the Trinity. It also had a social system of which Comte was the chief planner. The Religion of Humanity, as a visible institution, for a time had great vitality. Comteans formed positivist societies for the worship of great people, and their churches spread even to South Africa."³⁰

In the 1860s the formal designation of the Religion of Humanity was changed to humanism. Since then, the informal worship of humanity has continued to grow. In modern America humanism produces self-worship in many forms. Even our vocabulary emphasizes self. Self-esteem, self-actualization, self-realization, self-integration, self-determination, self-centeredness, self-experience, and similar expressions of the self are symptomatic of a very selfish society. Selfishness seeks hedonistic lifestyles through homosexuality, pornography, gambling, drug abuse, etc. It produces divorce and it is the primary motivation for abortion. In our society, this selfishness becomes a virtue. Many books are written and sold about the wisdom of looking out for number one. Selfishness is the logical result of a religion that promotes a person being his own god.

Although humanists generally do not designate humanity by titles of deity, their language ascribes to humanity the roles and attributes of God. Humanism implies that mankind is omnipotent, omniscient, sovereign (i.e., autonomous), and one's own savior. For humanists, mankind is the only lawgiver. Humanism must therefore reject any law or moral code such as the Bible, which is not derived from human wisdom.

Humanism Is Anti-Christian

As religion, humanism is anti-Christian. It not only rejects the relevancy of God, the deity of Jesus, the authority of the Bible, the sin of man, his need for salvation, and his eternal destiny, but it also rejects, by its insistence upon individual autonomy and self-worship, Christian teaching regarding self-denial and the bearing of one another's burdens. Whenever Christians live, as we do now, in a world whose values are predominantly those of humanism, then Christians must remember that Jesus emphasized self-denial, not self-esteem or self-worship (Mark 8:34-38; Matthew 16:24-28; Luke 9:23-27). Christians must also remember that Christianity is a religion which requires the bearing of one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2; Romans 5:1; Galatians 5:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:14).

Humanism Is Anti-Family

As religion, humanism is also anti-family. Humanism stresses individual human rights, individual autonomy, and the equality of all humankind. In humanism, the individual, not the family is the basic unit of society. The declarations of humanists are not so worded as to portray an anti-family bias, yet that is their logical and ultimate consequence. Notice that following typical humanists declarations, which, when viewed from the perspective of individual rights, seem positive, yet when viewed from the perspective of the family, are really negative.

³⁰Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols For Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation With American Society*, 41.

“Humanists believe that the right to birth control, abortion, and divorce should be recognized.”³¹ They say that “short of harming others or compelling them to do likewise, individuals should be permitted to express their sexual proclivities and pursue their life-styles as they desire.”³² They believe that “the individual must experience a full range of *civil liberties* in all societies. This includes a recognition of an individual’s right to die with dignity, euthanasia, and the right to suicide.”³³ “Humanists believe in maximum individual autonomy consonant with social responsibility . . . the possibilities of individual freedom of choice exist in human life and should be increased.”³⁴

Humanistic emphasis upon individual autonomy and rights, rather than responsibilities, plays havoc with the family. No longer is obedience, duty, fidelity, humility, or commitment and loyalty emphasized in our culture. “With monotonous regularity, the selfist literature sides with those values that encourage divorce, breaking up, dissolution of marital or family ties. All of this is done in the name of growth, autonomy, and ‘continuing the flux.’”³⁵

Conclusion:

The selfish man-centered nature of humanism with its anti-Christian and anti-family consequences is only a small part of the religion of humanism. Its religious nature is also manifested in other humanistic beliefs better recognized in allied philosophies of naturalism, materialism, statism, feminism, hedonism, and romanticism.

³¹*Humanist Manifesto II*, Sixth.

³²*Humanist Manifesto II*, Sixth.

³³*Humanist Manifesto II*, Seventh.

³⁴*Humanist Manifesto II*, Fifth.

³⁵Paul C. Vitz, *Psychology As Religion: The Cult of Self- Worship*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 1977. p. 83.