

What is Secular Humanism?

The ideal of secular humanism is mankind itself as a part of uncreated, eternal nature; its goal is man's self-remediation without reference to or help from God.

Secular humanism grew out of the 18th century Enlightenment and 19th century freethinking. Some Christians might be surprised to learn that they actually share some commitments with secular humanists. Many Christians and proponents of secular humanism share a commitment to reason, free inquiry, the separation of church and state, the ideal of freedom, and moral education; however, they differ in many areas.

Secular humanists base their morality and ideas about justice on critical intelligence unaided by Scripture, which Christians rely on for knowledge concerning right and wrong, good and evil. And although secular humanists and Christians develop and use science and technology, for Christians these tools are to be used in the service of man to the glory of God, whereas secular humanists view these things as instruments meant to serve human ends without reference to God. In their inquiries concerning the origins of life, secular humanists do not admit that God created man from the dust of the earth, having first created the earth and all living creatures on it from nothing. For secular humanists, nature is an eternal, self-perpetuating force.

Secular humanists may be surprised to learn that many Christians share with them an attitude of religious scepticism and are committed to the use of critical reason in education. Following the pattern of the noble Bereans, Christian humanists read and listen to instruction, but we examine all things in the light of the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). We do not simply accept every declaration or mental perception that enters our minds, but test all ideas and "knowledge" against the absolute standard of the word of God in order to obey Christ our Lord (see 2 Corinthians 10:5; 1 Timothy 6:20). Christian humanists understand that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ (Col. 2:3) and seek to grow in full knowledge of every good thing for Christ's service (Phil. 1:9; 4:6; cf. Col. 1:9). Unlike secular humanists who reject the notion of revealed truth, we adhere to the word of God, which is the standard against which we measure or test the quality of all things. These brief comments do not fully elucidate Christian humanism, but they add life and relevance to the clinical definition given in lexicons (e.g., Webster's Third New International Dictionary, which defines Christian Humanism as "a philosophy advocating the self-fulfillment of man within the framework of Christian principles").

Before we consider a Christian response to secular humanism, we must study the term humanism itself. Humanism generally calls to mind the rebirth or revival of ancient learning and culture that took place during the Renaissance. During this time, "humanists" developed rigorous modes of scholarship based on Greek and Roman models and attempted to build a new Latin style (in literary and plastic arts) and political institutions based on them. However, long before the Renaissance "Christian humanism" thrived in the works and

thought of Augustine, Aquinas, Erasmus, and others. Some even see in Plato, a pagan philosopher, a type of thinking that is compatible with Christian teaching. While Plato offers much that is profitable, his assumptions and conclusions were certainly not biblical. Plato, like Nietzsche, believed in “eternal recurrence” (reincarnation); he (and the Greeks generally) paid lip service to their gods, but for them man was the measure of all things. Contemporary expressions of secular humanism reject both the nominal Christian elements of its precursors and essential biblical truths, such as the fact that human beings bear the image of their Creator, the God revealed in the Bible and in the earthly life and ministry of the Lord Jesus, the Christ.

During the scientific revolution, the investigations and discoveries of broadly trained scientists who can be considered humanists (men like Copernicus and Galileo) challenged Roman Catholic dogma. Rome rejected the findings of the new empirical sciences and issued contradictory pronouncements on matters lying outside the domain of faith. The Vatican held that since God created the heavenly bodies, these must reflect the “perfection” of their Creator; therefore, it rejected the astronomers’ discoveries that the orbits of the planets are elliptical and not spherical, as previously held, and that the sun has “spots” or colder, darker areas. These empirically verifiable facts and the men and women who discovered them did not contradict biblical teachings.

The real rejection of biblically revealed truth and toward naturalistic humanism, occurred during the Enlightenment, which spanned the 18th and 19th centuries. This took root throughout Europe, blossoming especially in Germany. The rejection of authority and biblical truth led to a publicly proclaimed secular form of humanism.

Numerous pantheists, atheists, agnostics, rationalists, and sceptics pursued various intellectual projects, not accountable to revealed truth. These academics sought rational solutions to the human dilemma, based on their own ‘good’ ideas.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, contemporary academics and secular humanists build on the ground laid before when they promote exclusively “rational” approaches to social and ethical issues. For example, moral issues such as freedom of choice in sexual relationships, reproduction, and voluntary euthanasia are all based on human reasoning devoid of the restraints of Biblical values. Secular humanists reject the possibility of divine intervention in human history; at best, they view the Bible as “holy history.”

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