

Schlax, Silas
Christianity and Culture: Recovering Christian
Humanism in the 21st Century 12:00 pm
Dr. Scott Postma, Instructor
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Christian Humanism is Our Heritage

Christian Humanism and its role in the Universal Church, cathedral and monastery schools, and the culture at large vastly affected both the Medieval and Renaissance periods. This essay will make the following three arguments. First, without Christian Humanism, the Medieval and Renaissance periods would not have had any effect on culture and could have negatively affected both past and current cultures. Second, without a doubt, Christian Humanism had a positive impact on the Medieval and Renaissance periods, but there were some ideas and practices that arose that negatively affected the culture at large. Third, Christian Humanism is not something only practiced in church or school, but in a Christian's everyday life, those who live a truly godly life are not only good Christians but also good Christian Humanists.

What was Christian Humanism in the Medieval period? The Medieval period followed the fall of Rome and lasted till about 1300 A.D. The Medieval period had many influential authors, one of the first being St. Augustine and his *City of God*. Because of Augustine and others, Christian Humanism and Christianity became dominant in the culture, forming two ideas: monasticism (400-1100 A.D.) and scholasticism (1100-1300 A.D.). "Monasticism was a way of life which focused on the monastery, a simple, self-contained community of people devoted to a life of work and worship" (Franklin and Shaw, 2009, 136). This idea was further developed by St. Benedict when he created the "rules" for monasticism, which is known as the Benedictine Rule. Scholasticism is the use of logic and rhetoric to "produce intellectual order" (Franklin and Shaw, 2009, 139) and brought about the study of logic or "dialectic." The shift from monasticism

to scholasticism was significant in “restoring the dignity of the human being because it became an integral part of religious life to study what it meant to be human” (Franklin and Shaw, 2009, 140). During the Medieval age, there were only two places to attend school. One was monastic schools in monasteries run by the abbot. Students were taught to follow the Benedictine rule and live life as a monk. The other were cathedral schools overseen by the local bishop and were very similar to monastic schools, but until the “tenth century did cathedral schools equal the best of monastic schools” (Franklin and Shaw, 2009, 139). This rise in education eventually brought about scholasticism and separated secular studies from biblical ones.

What was Christian Humanism in the Renaissance period? The Renaissance directly followed the Medieval period and lasted till about 1600 A.D. The Renaissance is like the Medieval period, but one main difference is that Christian Humanism became less dominant in culture as ideas of human importance and existence quickly took over. “This Renaissance consciousness or awareness of the dawning of a new age had about it both positive and negative aspects, and both have made the Renaissance and its significance a topic of vigorous controversy ever since” (Franklin and Shaw, 2009, 224). This new “awareness” caused Christian Humanism to be pushed aside for these new “revolutionary ideas” to take its place. One of these “both positive and negative aspects” (Franklin and Shaw, pg 224), were the building of a new age or culture,, “Renaissance thinkers who perceived themselves as creating a new age felt a sense of excitement and exhilaration” (Franklin and Shaw, 2009, 224). They were “excited” to be creating this new culture “with stylistic values markedly different, often at odds with, the scholastic culture of the Middle Ages (Another name for the Medieval period)” (Franklin and Shaw, 2009, 224). This new culture would eventually aid the Industrial Revolution in making these new ideas

of individualism, capitalism, rationalism, and naturalism by the “rebirth” of classical antiquity and art.

Why is Christian Humanism so crucial in the Medieval and Renaissance periods? The main reason is that the Medieval and Renaissance periods without Christian humanism could have negatively affected humanity in schools. Monastic and cathedral schools were places where much medieval culture was rooted, along with their ideas. Later, when logic, rhetoric, and art became prominent during the scholasticism era, the seed was placed for the Renaissance period with a newfound love of art and order. In its 300-year period, the Renaissance paved the way for the rest of history, both positively and negatively. It affected it positively in the areas of the universal church, education from a Christian view, and the emphasis on human nature to become better humans. While negative with the start of ideas such as individualism, rationalism, and materialism, which sprouted from studying the Bible and secular writings separately and the rebirth of classical antiquity, this would eventually dehumanize culture at large during the Industrial Revolution. During both the Medieval and Renaissance periods, Christian humanists wrote books and letters that were later used to deepen Christian Humanism in the culture. So without Christian Humanism influencing these eras, history would have been different and quit, possibly for the worse.

What were the positive and negative effects of Christian Humanism in these periods? Both the Medieval and Renaissance periods were heavily influenced by Christian Humanism, both positively and harmfully. However, humans are fallen creatures; given time, they will turn away from the truth and into their own “self-truth.” For instance, the Medieval and the Renaissance studied secular writings and the Bible apart from each other, leading to ideas such as “to make God seem human” (Franklin and Shaw, 2009, 140). Another thing, the Renaissance

did was to make Christian Humanism no longer dominate in culture, replacing it with art, logic, and a desire to know about human existence and become better humans and Christians. This fact was not the negative part, but it led to later ideas during the Industrial Revolution, such as individualism, science as the sole authority, and the degradation of human morals. That said, without Christian Humanism in these times, things would have been worse. Whether it had been replaced by paganism or secularism, culture would have been a pile of debris caused by temporary pleasure or contentment, which led to the degradation of human morals, and the corruption of the next generation's minds with false doctrines and ideas. Christian Humanism's focus is on the affirmation of human life and culture, while being derived from the Bible and the Christian Faith.

Is Christian Humanism limited to culture? While it is true Christian Humanism has an enormous impact and value in the culture, it also has significance in a Christian's personal life. In his letter *Handbook of a Militant Christian*, Erasmus says there are six general rules to living a virtuous Christian Life. The first rule is to "place great reliance on the Scripture" (Franklin and Shaw, pg. 271). Second, "we act upon these promises without delay and hesitation" (Franklin and Shaw, pg. 272). Third, "fear is one of the real obstacles to the pursuit of virtue" (Franklin and Shaw, pg. 274). Fourth, "Make Christ the only goal in your life" (Franklin and Shaw, pg. 276). Fifth, "turning away from visible things, which are for the most part either imperfect or of themselves indifferent, you seek the invisible" (Franklin and Shaw, pg. 280). Sixth, "If we be holy, we must go to the sole archetype of godliness, Christ Himself" (Franklin and Shaw, pg. 289). These six rules must be present in a virtuous Christian life both inwardly and outwardly, in private and in public, and in day and night. Without these, a Christian becomes "lazy" in their faith and is more susceptible to temptation. Instead, one must take time to become like Christ,

show it through their works and share the gospel with unbelievers. As it says in Matthew 5:16, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” To be a good Christian, one does not only practice Christian Humanism in public but also in private, and not only in private but also in public, one must “Make Christ the only goal in your life” (Franklin and Shaw, pg. 276).

Christian Humanism has had its ups and downs, but without it, our culture would be worse than it is now. Christian Humanism has influenced the culture for thousands of years; no matter how much secularists want to deny it, our heritage is built on Christian Humanism and Christianity itself. The past makes the present, and the present will create the future. One cannot change the past but can help create the future. So then, humankind must make a future with a new sense of “awareness” for Christ and his salvation, not for individualism and a pointless existence. This challenge can, in fact, be done by “recovering” Christian Humanism and putting it once again as the dominant idea in culture. In conclusion, the Medieval and Renaissance periods were tremendously impacted by Christian Humanism and its role in cathedral and monastery schools, the Universal Church, and culture at large.