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Christianity and Culture: Recovering Christian
Humanism in the 21st Century 12:00 pm
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Is Pre-Christian Humanism Just Christian Humanism?

It is crucial for Christians to grasp Pre-Christian Humanism, Christian Humanism, and their relationship and disparities. With that in mind, here are a few questions one can ask themselves. What is Pre-Christian Humanism? What is Christian Humanism today? Where do they conflict? Where do they intersect in unity? How can Christian Humanism "pre-date" Christianity? To understand Christian Humanism today, one must answer these questions and more.

What is Christian Humanism in general? Christian Humanism is the message of Christianity that emphasizes Christ coming unto the world and God's continual care and love for us. Christian Humanism focuses on the affirmation of human life and culture while being derived from the Bible and the Christian Faith. One should not get Christian Humanism confused with secular humanism–a religion itself–which focuses on the scientific exploration of explaining everything in human terms. Secular humanism even goes as far as explaining the supernatural and denying God. Christian Humanism has changed slightly on how it is practiced or thought about throughout time, but one thing stays true; God's continual care and love for us.

What is Pre-Christian Humanism? Pre-Christian Humanism is, as it implies, Christian Humanism before Christ came and died on the cross. For the sake of simplification, Pre-Christian Humanism will be called Biblical Humanism from now on. Biblical Humanism had no focus on the New Testament, since it ended after the death of Christ and the meeting at Pentecost in Acts. The primary resources for Biblical Humanists were the Hebrew Scriptures, or

the Old Testament. *The Case For Christian Humanism* breaks Biblical Humanism into groups called motifs, which is a distinct or dominant idea that is built upon throughout the text. Here is the list: Created In God's Image, Liberation, Community, Prophecy: Judgment and Hope, Affirmation of the Future, and The Quest for Wisdom (*Franklin and Shaw, 1991, 51-61)*.

These motifs are very helpful when trying to understand Biblical Humanism. Since they did not have the promise of salvation through Christ, the Jews needed to offer sacrifices to God for their sins. They did still know that God loved and cared for them by his acts. This is displayed in many points throughout the Old Testament, like when God liberated Israel from the Egyptians, or from the Babylons. Biblical Humanism was built on these motifs, and they affected Christian Humanism in many ways, including the shaping of Christian faith and beliefs.

Now that one knows what Biblical Humanism is, what then is Christian Humanism? To grasp the concept of Christian Humanism, one must look back to the Medieval era when it emerged in the Christian life. One of the first authors who wrote on this was Augustine in his *City of God*. In this book Augustine paints two pictures, the first he called The City of Man and the second perfect city he called The City of God. One key idea is that man is imperfect, sinful–fallen from Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden–and ever-changing. Man has built an imperfect city where man chases after earthly possessions and power. The City of God is perfect, holy, and sinless, and Christians aspire to be there, but can never reach it without God's intervention. When Jesus died on the cross, he gave us a pathway through him to enter into God's presence. Like it says in John 14:6, "Jesus said to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Augustine's *City of God* is a great tool to help understand Christian Humanism, but it is not the only writing. During the Medieval era, with the rise of the monastery and church schools,

education became more common. As many things do, this led to problems. One of the major problems is that Medieval Christians Humanists studied pagan literature with the Bible and its teachings. This led to them adding pagan views to their theology, this become a problem when they tried "to make God seem human" (*Readings*, pg. 140 The Middle Ages). This is unlike the Biblical Humanists, who solely studied the Hebrew Scriptures and prophecies.

Now That it's clear what Biblical Humanism and Christian Humanism are, it is time to see where they differ and where they compare. First of all, both Biblical Humanism and Christian Humanism built most, if not all, of their theology on the Hebrew Scriptures. William Franklin and Joseph Shaw said that for Christian Humanists there are five implications on building their faith on the Jewish Bible (Hebrew Scriptures), the first being: "Christians thereby inherited a vigorous Jewish humanism." The second: "Christians and Jews became partners in offering the world a noble humanism made luminous by the power of divine grace." The third: "Christians have learned from the Jewish Scriptures that the Bible's message is about God. God's thoughts, words, and deeds." The fourth: "that ancient Israel understood God as one whose will is revealed to humanity through particular events in history." And the Fifth: "Christian use of the Old Testament is the prominence of the idea of a special, holy community in both Judaism and Christianity" (Franklin and Shaw, 1991, 48-49).

These five implications both hold Christianity and Judaism together in unison under God the father. And shows how the early Christians got their ideas or theological beliefs, they took them straight from God's word, as it is said in 2 Timothy 3:16 "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." Biblical humanists did not have Christ; they were still waiting for him to come and defeat the Romans. Christian Humanism knows and believes that Christ came, died, resurrected, and now

sits at the right hand of God. Jesus acts through the Holy Spirit, and through us to spread the

gospel and save his lost children. The fact that Biblical Humanists did not have Christ and that

Christian Humanists did is a momentous difference between Biblical and Christian Humanism.

All throughout the Old Testament, one can see the repeated emphasis on prayer, worship,

the search for wisdom, and God's continual care for them through his mercy and punishments.

Christian Humanism and Biblical Humanism both have an emphasis on prayer, worship, and the

search for wisdom. Worship looks a little different for Christians without a need for the temple

like the Biblical Humanists had. The search for wisdom changed from just asking God to also

looking in non-Scriptures. In other words, Christians searched for wisdom and knowledge not

only out of the Bible but also pagan literature. Today, Christian Humanists see God's mercy

through his promise of salvation even though no one is worthy; "As it is written: None is

righteous, no, not one;" (Romans 3:10). For the Biblical Humanists, things were a little different

as they only had the promise of Christs coming, and they had to constantly give offerings to God

for their sins.

Both Biblical and Christian Humanism had rules, but eventually these "rules" became a

source of power for those who made them up. Like for Biblical Humanists, the Pharisees took

God's 10 commandments and turned them into hundreds of rules saying what one can and can

not do. Same thing happened in the Medieval times with the Benedictine rule, and even today

with the church… Rules are good, but can be used for evil. There is a saying that Stan Lee wrote

in his Spider-Man Comics, "With great power comes great responsibility." (Marvel Studios,

Amazing Fantasy #15, pg. 35) Often these rules became a thing of great power and because of

man's sinful nature, were often used for evil.

In St. Benedict's book, *Rule of Benedict of Nursia,* Benedict writes out rules for the monks; they followed God's commandments, but added rules here and there to have some "control" over the monks. "We shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love. Never swerving from his instructions, then, but faithfully observing his teaching in the monastery until death, we shall through patience share in the sufferings of Christ" (St. Benedict, *Readings in Christian Humanism,* pg. 146). In just this small excerpt, one can see that the monks were to follow God's commandments until death in the monastery. Throughout the rest of Benedict's book, he lists many more rules or regulations that the monks were to follow. Another reason for all these rules is the Medieval thought. The Medieval's liked systems and therefore put everything they knew into them, this can explain their need for rules and regulations in the Church, and personal prayer.

Biblical and Christian Humanism are similar in many ways. They share the Old Testament and many theological beliefs about that. They share this idea of rules to keep man from sinning, but are often used for evil. They differ at the point of Christ and God's promise of salvation through Christ's death on the cross. They see the mercy of God differently, but this is due to Christ's coming and giving us the ultimate gift of mercy; Salvation. In conclusion, the Christian faith and their humanism is built upon Hebrew Scriptures and in return God's word, but also has its own "new" element that was gained by Christ's selfless act to save us.

Bibliography

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