

Religion and its Humanist Connections

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London Free Press Jan 21, 2006

The more conservative elements of right-wing evangelical religion have often been quick to condemn humanism. Sunday morning televangelists claim that humanism is threatening to Christianity, and unless the growth of humanism can be stopped it will endanger or even destroy Christianity.

The following are a few ideas that might help to set fundamentalist minds at ease: There are presently about 1000 registered members of the Humanist Association of Canada, a number representing approximately one Canadian out of every 33,000. In terms of percentages, only about .0003 % of all Canadians are registered Humanists members.

It may also relieve evangelical minds to take a closer look at the main principles that guide humanists:

1. *Humanism aims at the full development of every human being.*
2. *Humanists uphold the broadest application of democratic principles in all human relationships.*
3. *Humanists advocate the use of the scientific method as a guide to distinguish fact from fiction.*
4. *Humanists affirm the dignity of every person and the right of the individual to the maximum possible freedom compatible with the rights of others.*
5. *Humanists acknowledge human interdependence, the need for mutual respect, and the kinship of all humanity.*
6. *Humanists call for the continued improvement of society so that no one may be deprived of the basic necessities of life, and for institutions and conditions to provide every person with opportunities for developing their full potential.*
7. *Humanists support the development and extension of fundamental human freedoms, as expressed in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and supplemented by UN International Covenants comprising the United Nations Bill of Human Rights.*
8. *Humanists advocate peaceful resolution of conflicts between individual, groups, and nations.*
9. *The humanistic ethic encourages development of the positive potentialities in human*

nature and approves conduct based on a sense of responsibility to oneself and to all other persons.

10. A fundamental principle of humanism is the rejection of beliefs held in absence of verifiable evidence, such as beliefs based solely on dogma, revelation, mysticism or appeals to the supernatural.

11. Humanists affirm that individual and social problems can only be resolved by means of human reason, intelligent effort, and critical thinking joined with compassion and a spirit of empathy for all living things.

12. Humanists affirm that human beings are a part of nature, and that our survival is dependent upon a healthy planet which provides us and all other forms of life with a life-supporting environment.

While not all Christians will accept each of the Humanist principles stated above, there are many ideas upon which there can be common agreement. Humanists believe that there are many problems such as pollution, war, starvation, over-population, climate change, and improvement in health care. These are examples of human-made problems, which if they are to be solved at all, in the final analysis will need to be solved through human efforts regardless of our individual religious persuasions.

It may be helpful to remind ourselves that the historical humanistic ideas of compassion and caring that have pervaded Christianity throughout the centuries have their origins in early Greek philosophy. These same humanistic principles have helped to keep Christianity relevant, personal, and dynamic. A religion devoid of humanistic principles is not likely to flourish. The philosophy of Humanism extends early humanistic principles into the modern life of the twenty-first century.