

in the Gospels which give rise to the form-critical approach, it is also true that some explanation must be given of the phenomena in the history of the early church which have given rise to the Scandinavian approach.

c. A third point is that the approach defended by Perrin is bound to lead to a distorted, one-sided picture of the teaching of the earthly Jesus. To separate off the 'unusual' or 'unique' sayings in the Gospels and then to use these as the basis for further discrimination among the remainder by the principle of coherence is to produce a totally arbitrary and false picture of the teaching of Jesus. Further, in the words of F. F. Bruce, it 'involves the two utterly improbable assumptions: that there was no continuity between the post-resurrection faith of the Church and the ministry of Jesus and that the teaching of the rabbis never over-lapped at any point' ('History and the Gospel' in C. F. H. Henry [ed.], *Jesus of Nazareth: Saviour and Lord* [Tyndale Press, 1967], p. 92).

d. If the method advocated by Perrin can be shown to rest on untenable assumptions, it is right to adopt a different method which will be free from its defects. The better approach is surely that expressed, for example, by C. Colpe that not the genuineness but the inauthenticity of sayings ascribed to Jesus must be proved (*Theologisches Wörterbuch zum NT VIII*, p. 437). In other words the burden of proof still rests upon those who deny the reliability of the tradition. This is not an obscurantist principle; it gives full place to critical investigation of the Gospel material without submitting it to tests which are biased against it.

In our opinion the considerations which have been advanced here are sufficient to show that the case against the possibility of finding reliable history in the Gospels has not been made out. The advocates of radical scepticism have not established their position. It is now the task of conservative scholars to show that when the Gospels are analysed from a different point of view, the conclusions which emerge do greater justice to the material which is being examined.

Christian Religion and Humanist 'Faith'

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WEEK BY WEEK, the personal column of the *Observer* carries a variety of advertisements which remind us of the activities and growth of various organizations which may be called humanist. The British Humanist Association, the Rationalist Press Association, the National Secular Society, and others, are all seeking to extend their influence, particularly among the intellectual element of present-day society. In the universities, too, humanist associations are growing in numbers and strength; it was estimated that between 1965 and 1967 the number of university groups had

grown from nineteen to forty-one. The publications of humanist organizations remind us that amongst their adherents are some of the leading academics, writers, and politicians in the country (cf. the *Centenary Brochure* of the National Secular Society, 1866-1966, pp. 17-21).

The word 'humanism' is open to wide interpretation. Classical humanism is the name given to the European Renaissance, stimulated by the re-discovery of Greek literature and culture. Modern humanism, the roots of which can be traced to the middle of the nineteenth century, is the result of not dissimilar forces at work in the intellectual world. The vast new discoveries in science, the arts and antiquities, have led to an intellectual ferment in which religion, and in particular Christianity, seems almost impossible to accept. Humanism, however, may take various forms. It may be strongly atheistic, as is the National Secular Society, founded by that notorious Victorian, Charles Bradlaugh. Or it may be religious, as it appears in the writings of Julian Huxley

and Ronald Hepburn (discussed below). But whatever form it takes, it usually — by definition — rejects the Christian faith. There are many Christians who consider themselves to be humanists (e.g. the Archbishop of Canterbury, W. F. Albright, etc.); the British Humanist Association, however, would not accept them as humanists, according to their definition of the term. They consider that human considerations must be supreme and that speculations about God are profitless.

When we seek to discern the basic points of separation between a Christian and a humanist, there are some which appear as immediately obvious but are not at the heart of the matter. For instance, it may be said that a Christian is a man whose life is entirely submitted to the service of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. To the humanist, on the other hand, this is anathema. A quotation from Harold Blackman makes the point clear: 'Christ is the archetype of unqualified submission to God. It is impossible to follow Christ on any other terms, and the Humanist finds acceptance of these terms a violation of himself and his whole experience' (*Objections to Humanism* [Penguin ed., 1966], p. 18; see also Professor Moule's enlightening comments on this passage in *Faith, Fact, and Fantasy* [Fontana Books, 1966], p. 109). The Christian's view of himself and the world is entirely dominated by his relationship to Christ. The humanist's view is entirely dominated by his own experience, reason, and his relationship to his fellow-men. But this is a relatively superficial comparison, and it would be well to examine the premises and presuppositions of both the Christian and the humanist.

CHRISTIAN PREMISES

At the risk of oversimplification, these may be summarized by two words, revelation and faith. By revelation, we refer to the premise of the Christian faith that God has revealed Himself to man. The Christian faith is not to be understood as man's age-long search for God. Rather it claims to be a religion based on God's Self-revelation in the Person of Jesus Christ. Thus the philosophical arguments for God's existence are not of primary importance for the Christian. It is acknowledged that revelation, and its acceptance, is something which is outside the realm of philosophy for proof or disproof. Philosophy may only pronounce on the likelihood or otherwise of revelation.

The second premise is faith, and for

the terms of our discussion this means man's positive response to God's revelation. Faith is an act by which man deliberately steps beyond the realm in which reason is supreme; that is not to say that it is irrational, but that it goes beyond reason. If revelation and faith could be completely established in terms of reason then they would cease to be revelation and faith. Reason can only pronounce on their 'reasonableness'.

HUMANIST PREMISES

The key to the whole humanist position is reason. The supremacy of reason is a current theme of the stated viewpoints of humanists. Consider the following quotations from the literature and brochures of the organizations mentioned above: '(We aim) . . . to promote the mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason . . .' (Rationalist Press Association); 'Secularism affirms that this life is the only one of which we have any knowledge . . .' (British Humanist Association). We shall return to reason later, but it is central to the humanist position. Even the 'religious humanists' take as a starting-point the view that Christianity is unreasonable, and must therefore be rejected.

Closely connected with the supremacy of reason is a type of scientific world-view. This is expressed by writers such as Huxley and Russell, and again appears on the humanist brochures, as for example: '. . . We accept the provisional, progressive, scientific picture of man and the universe . . .' (British Humanist Association). It should be emphasized that the Christian does not deny the use of reason or of a scientific world-view. The point of difference is that the humanist elevates these two things in exclusion, and concludes from that basis that they negate even the possibility of revelation and its consequent response of faith.

RATIONALISM A FAITH?

With this background in mind, we may look a little more closely at the question of reason. A problem arises from our study: 'Is rationalism an unacknowledged faith?' A well-known essay of Bertrand Russell will pinpoint what this question is trying to get at. In the essay 'Why I am not a Christian' (which is now the title of a collection of Russell's essays [Simon and Schuster edition, New York, 1964]), Russell takes almost half of the essay in refuting the traditional philosophical arguments in favour of God's existence. The inconclusive nature of these argu-

ments (and many Christians would agree with Russell on this point) are a part of his reason for not being a Christian. Russell's argument is weak, of course, for these philosophical positions were in no way connected with the early church, have never been a part of the faith of Protestantism, and were only a dogma in the Roman Church since the time of Aquinas. This, however, is not the point of criticism; it is rather one of method. What Russell *failed* to do in his essay was to examine the traditional arguments which are advanced to show that God does *not* exist. If he had done so, it seems most probable that he would have come to the same conclusion, namely that those arguments also are inconclusive. Now we come to the point of criticism; it is that if we start from philosophy, we can only come to a position of agnosticism and say 'I do not know if God exists or not.' But Russell concludes on this basis that he cannot believe in God. He is taking as big a step of 'faith' in an opposite direction, as is the Christian who comes to believe in God through revelation.

We should expect, then, that the rational humanist would always be an *agnostic*, because *atheism* seems to be as irrational as *theism*. In Russell, and many others, there seems to be considerable ambiguity on this point. In the essay just quoted, he concludes that he does not believe in God, which — as an affirmative statement — is atheistic by implication. But elsewhere he expresses an agnostic view: 'The Christian God may exist; so may the gods of Olympus . . .' (*op. cit.*, p. 50, 'What I Believe'). A similar ambiguity appears on the statement of the 'Humanist Point of View' (from the brochure *Humanism and the British Humanist Association*, p. 2). It begins by stating: 'We do not know what the ultimate purpose of life is . . .', a statement which is by implication agnostic. But the statement also says: 'This world is all we have and can provide all we need', a statement which — by its affirmative nature — is atheistic. This point may seem to be irrelevant, but it is not. Many Christians would be far more tolerant with humanists if they were clear and frank that their position was *agnostic*. But a large amount of the attack of humanism on the Christian faith, and on such things as Christian broadcasting and education, is based on *atheistic* implications. And yet atheism, if our argument is correct, is as much a step of faith as Christianity. The difference is that the Christian readily ac-

knowledges that his position depends on revelation and faith, and is beyond rational proof. But the humanist suggests that his is the only rational and realistic position, and he attacks the Christian at the very point of faith.

HUMANIST RECONSTRUCTIONS

We have discussed the points of difference between humanism and Christianity. In this last section, we may examine briefly humanist reconstructions; that is, what they offer in place of religion for man's understanding of life and the world. This can be done under two general headings; firstly, there are atheistic/agnostic reconstructions, and secondly religious reconstructions. It must be remembered though that there is a great diversity of opinion within humanism, and that this is just an attempt to delineate the main trends.

1. By atheistic/agnostic reconstructions, we are referring to the sort of position which was quoted above, 'this world is all we have and provides all we know'. If this understanding of life takes the form of militant atheism, then it is reprehensible and difficult to justify from any point of view. If it is the milder expression of agnosticism, then there are two attitudes possible, both of which should be adopted by the Christian. The first is to acknowledge frankly their truthfulness about life as they see it, and to be unqualified in admiration for their motive and desire for social reform, housing reform, *etc.* The second is to be quite clear that, from the Christian point of view, their position is inadequate and that, however sincere their searchings, the only full understanding of man and the world in which he finds himself can be through a personal encounter with our Lord Jesus Christ. There must be humility in the Christian approach — it should not be marked with that antagonism and malice which has been characteristic of so many Christian remarks about humanists in recent years.

2. The religious reconstructions of humanists are an enormous field of study and interest, and far too many to be dealt with adequately here. And further, any criticism must be tentative only, since the positions of religious humanists are still largely in the process of construction. This is particularly true, for instance, of the views of Professor Ronald Hepburn (*cf.* his excellent essay in *Objections to Humanism*, and also his contributions to *Religion and Humanism* [BBC London, 1964]). A detailed critique of his work would prob-

ably be premature.

It may be profitable, however, to look briefly at Julian Huxley's position which may be called evolutionary humanism (this is worked out in some detail in *The Humanist Frame* [Penguin Books, 1964]). Huxley starts off from the assumption that since the two world wars, there has been a complete breakdown in the traditional systems of religious belief. These are to be replaced by a new system of ideas which he calls evolutionary humanism. He says that 'the evolutionary vision is enabling us to discern, however incompletely, the lineaments of the new religion that we can be sure will arise to serve the needs of the coming era'. 'Religions are psycho-social organs concerned with the problems of human destiny' (*op. cit.*, pp. 91ff.). He then goes on to outline the three great activities of man, art, science and religion. In his treatment of religion, he outlines why Christianity (mainly Roman Catholicism) is unsatisfactory, and then says that 'what the world now needs is not merely a rationalist denial of the old, but a religious affirmation of something new' (p. 110). The raw materials from which the new religion is to be formed are religious experiences, for science has not abolished mystery. In the light of the new religion, the universe is seen as a unitary and evolutionary process. "'God" appears to be a semantic symbol denoting the power, not ourselves' (p. 114).

Some of the difficulties of this view are dealt with by Hepburn in *Objections to Humanism*. The first is the danger of personifying evolution, for although it is considered as a unified process, 'a single sweep', there are aspects of evolution

which do not support this picture at all. And secondly, following on from this criticism, the evolutionary humanist must admit that the so-called psychosocial stage of evolution is one of discontinuity, for man has become a moral agent, able to make his own decisions. And morality is a very different process from the earlier mechanisms of evolution, both in practice and in its results. And thirdly, there is a striking criticism inherent in such books as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, for there it is plain that the evolutionary process could lead to a very different end from the somewhat utopian one suggested by Julian Huxley.

The most serious criticism, however, of any humanist reconstruction is that it can be no more than *aspirational*. The Christian premise of revelation carries with it the implications of divine authority; we consider the content of revelation to be the truth of God. This is far from the case with humanist reconstructions. There is no final reason why any person should commit himself to a humanist aspirational reconstruction. The choice is on the same level as the choice between different ethical or philosophical positions. The 'pros and cons' may be weighed up, and a choice may be made. But the gates have been opened to what could become a flood-tide of pessimism.

These thoughts are offered in the hope that they may be of some value in the continuing humanist-Christian debate. But whatever our approach to the humanist problem may be, let it be one of love and humility. Ultimately the debate cannot be won by arguments alone!

Letter from Indonesia

The following extract is reproduced from a circular to their friends from two missionaries in Indonesia; we are grateful for the opportunity to use it here.

INDONESIA
April, 1968

Dear Friends,

I was wrong. I admit it. It was a fatal mistake to bring my files with me on holiday. Today I have just finished

thumbing through my pending file (the fat one) and managed to whittle down the number of letters that 'must' be answered to a mere fifty or so, and promptly decided to give up. If I don't, there won't be any holiday at all. . . . Perhaps a story would give you the feeling of the situation here.

Three thousand newly-baptized converts, twenty new churches scattered over a radius of twenty miles, two ministers and a missionary: it all looks rather hopeless! So what would you do if you