

HUMANISM: ITS APPLICATION TO RELIGION,
LITERATURE, AND SOCIAL REFORM

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HUMANISM: ITS APPLICATION TO RELIGION,
LITERATURE, AND SOCIAL REFORM

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the North
Texas State Teachers College in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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August, 1943

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

The problem with which this thesis is centrally concerned is the relationship of humanism -- or what the writers have called humanism -- to religious doctrines, to literary criticism, and to social reform.

Method of Collecting Data

The material for this study was accumulated, digested, and concentrated through extensive research of available reading matter in the field of the humanistic philosophy.

Sources of the data were varied. For the background study, several basic philosophic textbooks, historical accounts in books and magazines, essays, poems, and several other types of literary selections were examined. In the light of the facts presented by the background study, analyses were made of the studies and opinions of well-known writers who may well be considered as critics.

Method of Procedure

The method of procedure was simple and direct. The first chapter gives the purpose of the study, the source

of data, the method of procedure, and the reasons for making such a study.

Convinced that many meanings which are currently applied to the term are not worthy to bear it, the second chapter is devoted to an examination of the principles of humanism as defined by philosophers, critics, and educational leaders. The third chapter presents a discussion of the term "humanism" with a limiting adjective, "Christian" humanism. The weight of Biblical religion in its relation to human values, and a brief account of the history of the church are included in this discussion. Also presented in this chapter is a treatment of instrumentalism and mysticism. The fourth chapter contains a critical view of traits of the humanistic philosophy that have been uncovered in the works of two well-known American writers, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Robert Frost. The fifth chapter shows humanism as a pioneer in the field of social reform. This application of the philosophic concepts seems genuinely important in our world of turmoil when we hope the dawn of peace is not far away. The final chapter of this thesis is an attempt to present a summary of the most important facts and ideas that are included in this study. The significance of these conceptions and the light they cast on religion, literature, and social reform are included in the discussion. Finally, an attempt is made to assess the

worth of humanism when it is regarded as an agency for advancing, continually and endlessly, an approximate realization of the intellectual progress which man hopes to make for himself and for his fellow men on this earth.)

Purpose of Study

It is the purpose of this study to make an examination of critical comment on humanistic philosophy, and, thereby, get a response that will answer some of the questions which arise in the minds of those who are made conscious of intellectual wonder or curiosity within themselves. The motive of this study is to collect material which will afford assistance to those who find themselves filled with the "bafflement and despair" that is so vividly depicted by Walter Lippman.¹ In a word, it is an attempt to gain knowledge simply for the sake of knowledge.

¹Walter Lippmann, A Preface to Morals, p. 137.

CHAPTER II

HUMANISM DEFINED: AN EXAMINATION OF ITS PRINCIPLES

Most men have come to depend upon definitions or dogmas, old and new. They live in the interpretations of meanings, for it is only through comprehension and agreement of definitions that man can understand his fellow men, and thereby set up standards which will produce a fuller, richer life among men.

Since definitions are essential to our way of life, the first task necessary (in acquiring an understanding of a given subject is to delve into the specific limitations that are set up by well-known authorities. An attempt has been made to narrow down the definitions of humanism so that they include the philosophic concept only as it applies to religious thought, literature, and social reform.

The first and best-known source of finding word meanings in English is Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language. This reference defines humanism as a name which is given to a phase of the intellectual movement that characterizes the transition from the medieval to the modern period, that is, the Renaissance Period. During

this period in history the concept found an ideal system of culture because man was ready for a return to a study of the classical poets and philosophers. This attitude of mind, as it may rightly be called, is a system of thought which concentrates specially upon human interests and the mind of man rather than upon the external world of nature or upon religious ideals.¹

One of the simplest and most-quoted definitions of humanism is that which is given by Walter Lippmann. He states that humanism signified the intention of men to concern themselves with the discovery of a good life on this planet by the use of human faculties.²

As far back as the fifteenth century, when humanism was beginning to take roots in Europe, Pico della Mirandola, in his famous "Oration on the Dignity of Man," represented God as addressing man in the following words: "Thou shalt have power to rise unto the higher, or divine, according to the sentence of this intellect."³ This signifies the individual personal autonomy of man as man.

Since history reveals that humanists are by no means new on the face of the earth, there may be some puzzlement

¹Webster's New International Dictionary, p. 1212.

²Lippmann, op. cit., p. 140.

³Cassius Jackson Keyser, Humanism and Science, p. 44, quoting Pico della Mirandola's "Oration on the Dignity of Man."

and wonder as to why the term humanism is considered modern. This may be explained by recognizing the group of thinkers who like to call themselves "new humanists." The adjective "new" seems contradictory, for, as everyone knows, there were many eminent humanists twenty-five or thirty centuries ago, such as Confucius and Plato; however, the so-called "new humanists" prescribe a remedy that is set forth in a series of set, strict doctrines. It is a kind of dogma which Norman Foerster calls "the strict doctrinal sense."⁴ According to Keyser, the official definer of this strict kind of dogma is Irving Babbitt, for he seems to be at the center of the new humanistic movement. In looking for a definition, Keyser says the one statement Babbitt makes which comes nearest to defining the doctrine is: "Humanists are those who, in any age, aim at proportionateness through a cultivation of the law of measure."⁵ This definition, which is typical of all of Babbitt's works, is only a scattered bit of description which is made up of hazy verbal abstractions that cannot seriously be regarded as defining anything that even remotely resembles a "strict" doctrine.⁶ Of course, it is realized that there are many great ideas, such as love and justice, that cannot be

⁴Norman Foerster, "Humanism," Saturday Review of Literature, VI (January, 1930), 687.

⁵Keyser, op. cit., p. 8.

⁶Irving Babbitt, "Experience and Dogma," Saturday Review of Literature, VII (November, 1930), 287.

accurately defined, but when one sets himself up as an authority of a "strict doctrine," he certainly ought not to pretend or to fancy that he is defining. Most of his scattered bits of evidence are negative, and their aim is to tell what the doctrine is not and what the doctrine must not be confused with. The most revealing of the positive bits of evidence is that this ideal conception can work in harmony with religion, yet his final appeal is to intuition. The basis of the pattern he attempts to imitate is not the divinity of man but "the something in man's nature that sets him apart as man from other animals."⁷

Keyser declares that the word "humanism" was originally adopted by the ~~above-mentioned~~ philosopher, Irving Babbitt. *why* This writer states that Babbitt attempts to define a general theory of right education, and according to him (Babbitt), *say* humanism means, first of all, the formation of self in accordance with the best that has been known and thought in the world. This demands a right attitude of mind toward either those sides of life which tend to set in motion the overpowering currents of sentiment or the other sides which encourage the intellectual aristocrat to curse the age.⁸ In a word, there must be a disciplined selection of human values.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Keyser, op. cit., p. 7.

It is interesting to note the array of human interests, points of view, cults, activities, personalities, aspirations, enthusiasms, and dreams that Babbitt excludes outright from those items he puts in the humanistic category. Keyser seems quite justified in describing the new strict humanism as "a very porcupine hunched up against our familiar world."⁹

In the light of these considerations, it seems evident that the new, strict doctrine of Babbitt and his followers is too narrow, too weak, too dogmatic, and too lacking in catholicity to bear worthily the old, historically great name of humanism as defined by most genuine philosophic thinkers who have been and will continue to be famous after the name Babbitt is completely forgotten.

Even more grotesque than the definition given by Babbitt is that portrayed by Leon Samson. According to Keyser, it professes to base itself upon a certain body of facts that pertain to the natural instincts and passions of man as man. His interpretation of Samson's goal is found in the following excerpt:

*Bobby
Humanism
is what* . . . a single world embracing community of human beings having no work, no war, no books, no government, no law, no justice, no poets, no policemen, no art, no religion, no families, no races, no classes, no states, no civilization, because mankind will have advanced to a stage where all such things would be but hindering superfluities. Their occupation consists of conversation, honest, sincere, original, beautiful, musical, infinitely varied -- and endless.¹⁰

⁹Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 34-35.

This wild dream, no doubt, is the result of a flaming imagination that has completely discarded all laws of sound thinking. This ideal, but ridiculous, concept is bordering on a super-communistic and super-Utopianistic stage.

Though humanism has been improperly defined by many weak, relatively puny thinkers, it has also been dealt with by many strong, outstanding leaders in every field of thought. It seems only natural that a term as wide, powerful, and lasting as humanism would attract the attention of both biased and unbiased men and women who are interested in making intellectual progress; therefore an attempt to include all kinds of definitions and not overlook even the psuedo-humanists has been set as a goal.

The gospel of real humanism might be expressed as a call to man to study and develop his own personality; therefore, the chief concern of the humanist is to release the pent-up reservoirs of human energy, to explore the uncharted territory of the mind, thereby raising to its highest efficiency the entire personality of the individual.¹¹

If genuine humanists were to make a creed, the first article would probably be, "I believe in Man," for this philosophic concept is a complete faith in the supreme value and self-perfectability of the human personality. In other words, it is the conviction that personality is the explanation

¹¹Ibid., p. 23.

of the universe, that man himself is the highest manifestation of personality, and that the powers resident in the individual and in society are sufficient to insure progress toward an ideal society of ideal persons. Humanists hold that the ideal society is to be achieved on this earth, if anywhere. If man fails in acquiring an ideal society on this earth, at least to a degree, how can he expect to attain perfection after death, when he knows absolutely nothing about it?

The intention of men who are perfectly natural to concern themselves with the building of a good life upon the planet where they actually live, and to do this by the application of native powers that are within themselves is, as already indicated, an old idea that originated many centuries ago. Such an idea accords perfectly with the humanism which began to emerge again in the fourteenth century, after a lapse of more than a thousand years; this includes the period which been rightly called the Dark Ages. The concept sprang into full life in the fifteenth century and was an essential, dynamic, part of the Renaissance which began in Italy and later in other European countries.¹²

It was in this time of the great re-birth of learning that the word "humanism" was truly coined. Here the real,

¹²Ibid., p. 42.

the accepted definition of humanism can be found, for during this period of history, man manifested a spirit that revealed full recovery of a very precious and very powerful human sense that:

. . . humans are, as humans, naturally endowed with the dignity of autonomous beings; potentially qualified by native inheritance to judge, individually and independently, for themselves, in all the great matters of human concern, and, by the exercise of their own faculties to order and fashion their lives worthily.¹³

The dreamer who enjoys building intellectual Utopias can find much satisfaction in the field of humanism, for this philosophic scope takes in the limitless desires and dreams of human well-being. All this is assumed as a matter of fact and as a matter of common conviction. Perhaps modern humanism might be classed as the origin and the support of the fairest of all dreams. Now, more than ever, this philosophy is coming into view because civilized thinkers are dreaming of world unity, world solidarity, and world cooperation in the achieving of a good life on this planet for all mankind. Humanism, then, might be regarded as an agency for advancing continually and endlessly an approximate realization of that dream. It tends toward genuine ideals that cannot be considered goals because they can never be reached, but, better yet, toward perfection that can incessantly be pursued.

TRUE HUMANISM

¹³Ibid., p. 43.

It is interesting to notice and carefully analyze the soil from which humanism has grown. Its development and growth are a direct result of human interests and capacities that are common to all mankind. This close examination of growth and development is important, for no cultural agency can be effective toward realizing the dream of universal cooperation among the peoples of the world unless the so-called agency gets its growth and strength from traits that are characteristically human to all individuals. Today, more than in any other period of history, it is quite evident that the existing cultural agencies are sadly in need of drastic treatment, for these agencies conspicuously fail to qualify human individuals to represent the great dignity and power of man in life and in work.

The inspiration of humanism may be described as the twin visions of an ideal developed human personality and an ideal commonwealth that is made up of such persons.¹⁴

In a magazine article a writer defines humanism as a "bastard theory of a mechanized world based on supposed facts."¹⁵ This definition is mentioned because it is one of the many narrow viewpoints of the twentieth century. Biased opinions of earlier writers are mentioned in this

¹⁴Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁵"Humanists and Inhumanists," Saturday Review of Literature, VI (January, 1930), 629.

chapter, so the one-sided views of modern writers will also be mentioned.

In answer to this strong but colorful definition, Henry S. Canby attempts to point out words and phrases which indicate that this definition is one of the best examples of certain prejudices existing today. Canby thinks that such a definition is the natural result of a reaction against naturalism and is indicative of a realization that humanism is rapidly moving into a more prominent position, which is beginning to squeeze out the existence of naturalism.

The movement toward humanism is naturally attended by a controversy that is already beginning to show more prejudice than scholarship and a keener desire to score upon the opponent than to help the bystander in his muddled thinking. Canby points out that in the first place, prejudice results from a failure to distinguish between the "humanist school" and the individuals who belong to that school. In the second place, wholesome descriptions are, in themselves, "prejudiced caricatures rather than scholarly portraits," unless a great deal of evidence accompanies them. The real point of defining this, or any other term, is not whom a given humanist is like or unlike; what matters is why he is akin to this or that particular person. To know his beliefs, his habits of mind, his acts of faith and of life is essential in looking into any term with a

clear, unbiased attitude.¹⁶

In discussing his views of the term, Thomas Mann defines humanism in a religious light. He calls it an attitude or a spiritual constitution, for "it is a human mood having as its object justice, freedom, knowledge, tolerance, mildness, and serenity; also doubt -- not for its own sake but as a seeking after truth, a loving care for it, standing higher than any arrogance of truth-owners."¹⁷ Mann asserts that such an attitude is humanistic because it is the spiritual attitude; that is, "it is borne up by pride over the spirit of man and directed toward that which distinguishes man from the rest of creation. It brings him much sorrow but also the highest joy."¹⁸

Another is the interpretation of humanistic doctrines which states these concepts in the following manner:

By a free will which is at once selective (and not casually determined) and a mechanism of ethical control, man is enabled to select his mode of life. There is a profound dualism between man and nature. Man, to be human, must live by values which are higher than anything deducible from nature. Man has glimpses of a higher reality behind the flux and flow of nature. On the basis of these glimpses he is enabled to formulate a code of values which is opposed to nature and therefore human to guide him in living.¹⁹

¹⁶H. S. Canby, "Post Mortem," Saturday Review of Literature, VI (June, 1930), 1121.

¹⁷Thomas Mann, "Letters and the Arts," Living Age, CCCLI (September, 1936), 68.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁹C. Hartley Grattan, "What is This Humanism?" Scribner's Magazine, LXXXVII (August, 1930), 424.

Unfortunately this is another quotation that immediately can be characterized as a psuedo-definition, for the writer sets himself up as a critic and attempts to show the weaknesses of a concept with which he is unfamiliar. The joke of the matter is that it is quite unnecessary and foolish to "formulate a code of values which is opposed to nature." Any thinking person can readily see the fallacy of such an idea. What Grattan fails to realize is that although humanistic values are derived from past formulations, they are not values set up only for a primitive society. With some moderation and adjustments, the basic concepts of this school of thought can be applied to the most vital and complex problems of modern living in the twentieth century.

Humanistic values, as has already been stated, were derived from ideas, or perhaps ideals, of higher reality. In the eyes of the humanist, it is the apprehension of the real that gives man his knowledge. In John Dewey's latest and most important book, The Quest for Certainty, he devotes part of his discussion to this philosophic doctrine.

Dewey points out that the idea of an antecedent reality was first developed by the Greeks and later was adopted into Christianity by means of identifying the universal with God. It is the idea which was common to all variations upon the doctrine that behind this changing world there is

a pre-existent perfect scheme. Man progressed in knowledge just in so far as he understood this so-called perfect scheme.

John Dewey discards this worn-out notion of knowledge and evaluates a theory from the methods of experiments used in scientific research. He believes that the outcome of the directed activity is the means of building a new situation in which objects are differently related to one another. He concludes that in this relation of one object to another there are bound to be consequences. These consequences of directed operations form the objects that have a property which all men seek, the "known."²⁰

As a result of the many definitions of the term, Keyser states that humanism's meaning is too vast and manifold to be neatly and precisely encased in a definition. His theory is that the term derives its existence, its character, and its power from the living sense in men. He feels that men as human beings are endowed with individual and personal autonomy. In his opinion, humanism is a realization of sense, that is, that men are potentially qualified to judge, independently, and for themselves, in all the great matters of human concern, and that they may hope to achieve a good life on earth by the use of their human faculties.²¹

²⁰John Dewey, The Quest for Certainty, pp. 32-33.

²¹Keyser, op. cit., p. x.

The term "humanism," when it is understood in accordance with its historical significance and its philosophical implications, is a great name; in fact, it is considered one of the greatest names in English speech. Let it be emphasized that in finding the meaning of humanism it has been frankly recognized that the radical difference between definition and description maintains that humanism's meaning is too vast and manifold to be neatly and precisely enclosed in a definition; however, it is held that humanism, though not strictly definable, can be described not completely, of course, for no term's meaning can yield a complete description, but well enough for the purposes of identification, recognition, and communication between the writer and his readers.

When it is realized that personal autonomy is absolutely essential to the dignity of man, the true character and power of humanism will be realized, and it will flourish everywhere. The spreading of this idea became one of the leading activities of the great humanists who lived in the Renaissance Period.

In trying to grasp the full meaning of humanism in the light of a retrospective glance, the Revival of Learning seems important, for humanism helped to produce such an era. In this period men were striving to get away from the

tyrannies of church and state, to get away from the indoctrinated fears of supernatural elements, and to replace them by laws of nature and logic. In other words, there were strong motivating forces and factors which guided men toward humanistic thinking.

With this in mind, it seems only logical to believe that the present turn-over in our modern world may be leading to an even greater interest in humanism, for man's problems are quite similar to those of the Renaissance Period.

CHAPTER III

HUMANISM AND CHRISTIANITY

There was a time in history when religion made a great deal of expansion which has never been equaled, and in spite of the changes that come with modern developments and improvements, it remains one of the strongest motivating factors in the world. Because of a recognition of its power, a discussion of the relation of humanism and Christianity is considered to be an issue of first importance.

As seen in previous discussions, the term "humanism" has so many definitions that without a limiting adjective or without a context which suggests and implies a definition, it is nearly meaningless. "Christian humanism," as expounded by Jacques Maritain, a famous American theologian, is subject to no such ambiguity. Maritain expresses a concept that is similar to that of most authorities when he makes quite clear that because man is such a being as he is, his needs cannot be satisfied with the things of earth. He says man's potentialities and his limitations alike demand a vital relation with the divine source of truth and power in setting up any ideal goal. The ideal goal of

civilization requires not only the development of powerful technical equipment and of a firm and rational politico-social organization as fundamentals in human communities, but also a strong, heroic philosophy of life and the quickening ferment of evangelical inspiration.¹ Here religion and philosophy are welded together. As a result of these two great demands that are placed on a progressive civilization, it is essentially pressing that a chapter be devoted to the relation of the two powerful demands -- humanism and Christianity.

It is realized that the complete attainment of a strong philosophy and of a theological inspiration is bordering the Utopian stage, for it would mean the total abolition of misery and servitude, and it implies a perfect system of justice. A rational thinker can readily see that this ideal situation is beyond the boundaries of expectation, but at least there is ground for hope of a steady approach to it. Most thinkers have enough of the dreamer in their make-up to strive toward nothing less than perfection, for they agree that what aim, if not perfection, should anyone bother to aim at?

This is a wholesome ideal of attainment, and it contains a great deal of comfort, but before much comfort can be derived from it, there must always be a realization that

¹Jacques Maritain, "Christian Humanism: Life with Meaning and Direction," Fortune, XXV (April, 1942), 106.

theologians state that man is a child of God, and that this is not a mere formula of conventional piety but is a regulative principle of human affairs. Man must both discipline and extend his own desires and must govern his relations with other men by the operation of this basic fact about man.² A written account of the strongest and most influential guidance for man is found in the scriptures.

The scriptures are the record of a movement which proceeded with a double aim, "that of the seizure of increasingly moral conceptions of God for the sake of the better moralization of human life, and that of the grasp of ideas or morality for man for the sake of the moralization of the idea of God."³

There are numerous passages which point out the growing recognition of human values that have been set up to improve human standards. For example, the Bible tells us that the coming of Israel to Canaan, where milk and honey flowed, is like a country-man's moving into the city. There were, figuratively speaking, more calories in this rich diet than the children of Israel were accustomed to, and naturally they tended to wax fat. This brings to mind the recent period of plenty which our country experienced.

²Ibid., p. 107.

³Francis John McConnell, Humanism and Christianity, p. 3.

The New Deal's setting up a destructive system to rid the country of surplus commodities brings out the lack of religious and governmental progress that has been evidenced in human values. In a word, the fuller material life into which Israel came should have brought with it a hazard of those moral qualities of the twentieth century which suggest a type of lean and strenuous moral fervor.

In this Biblical account, Elijah appears to start the long warfare against a religion which deifies the animal impulses in man. This was brought about through the steady degradation of human character and the disregard for human rights. Whenever a moral prophet appears in Israel, he always speaks as one who is attempting to test the life of the time by a human ideal which has back of it a sanction of the Lord.⁴

Hurrying on to a little later period, the story of Jeremiah is found to be very interesting from a philosophic viewpoint. It seems that Jeremiah was badly treated by his patriotic contemporaries, but probably not as badly as he would be treated if he were alive at the present time. Today he would be fortunate to escape being stood against a wall and shot.⁵

In glancing at the pages of Job, which it seems should

⁴"Exodus," 13:5, Holy Bible.

⁵"Jeremiah," 25:1-38, Holy Bible.

be characterized as purely literary, there is a theme which engages human reflection. It is wuote a significant theory, now that all thoughts are on the present-day catastrophe, for it deals with the undeserved suffering of innocent man at the hands of God. The outstanding feature of this book is the assumption that Job, as a human being, is important enough in his own human right and on his own human account, to force the Almighty God not merely to listen to a human complaint but also to make a reply. The assumption in Job that God has something which must be explained to men and that men can call God to a reckoning, is one of the mightiest revelations of Israel's hold on the worth of man.⁶

The last and most important Biblical reference which it is necessary to include in this discussion is that of Christ's coming to earth in the form of man.⁷ It would be futile to attempt the task of adequately stating the significance of Jesus for the human ideal. Suffice it to say that, according to history, the church has always acted upon a sound instinct when insisting upon the full humanity of our Lord; that humanity is conceived of as a channel through which the deepest truth about God can be poured upon men. Theologians who are somewhat interested in philosophic

⁶"Job," chaps. 3-7, Holy Bible.

⁷"St. Matthew," 2:1-23, Holy Bible.

reasoning seem to agree that the power of the Incarnation lies in the belief that it is a utilization of human nature and human existence for the essential revelation of the Divine. The Apostle's Creed, a prayer that is memorized by members of many religious beliefs, seeks to establish the humanity of Christ.⁸ The formers of the Creed have striven to give lasting expression to the facts that Christ was born, that he did suffer, and that he did die -- three experiences which no human being can escape. In a word, they move divine life into human life, and attempt to weld them together.

The peculiarity of Christianity is found in its emphasis on ethical obligation and on the ideal which it takes as the goal of moral effect -- that ideal being human life at its highest and best. This life is conceived of as revealed, suggested, or perhaps implied in Christ. The question, then, as to what is humanly highest and best becomes an excellent standard by which the church is able to judge its course of action at any given period.⁹

Since it is agreed by most theological and secular authorities that the purpose of religion is to set up ideals which will raise the standards of living, the logical

⁸"The Creed," The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., p. 348.

⁹McConnell, op. cit., p. 11.

question which ensues is, what specific ideals does Christianity have, or what is it attempting to set up? In answer to this question there appears to be one outstanding ideal for enlarging human character -- to hold the natural forces of this universe so easily, and yet so effectively, in hand that they do not thrust themselves into consciousness for a larger place than they deserve. "The world has a way of taking deep revenge on him who seeks to ignore the natural forces of the world altogether."¹⁰ It is admitted that the danger in the withdrawal from the world is in losing sight of healthy mindedness. This is often a result of conditioning oneself to the deeper spiritual insights. It seems that most leaders of theology advise their followers to become introverts and crawl into a little shell in order to avoid the evils that exist in the world; however, Francis J. McConnell says:

. . . The duty of the Church has always been to encourage the broadening contemplation in which the various aspects of life arrange themselves around that center which we know as the Spirit of Christ. The test of Christianity is in the Christian. In one fashion or another the Church has always found a way to hold that race and fine human qualities must somehow root in the Divine.¹¹

In contrast to this statement it is with firm logic that Irving Babbitt says he believes that modern persons

¹⁰Ibid., p. 13.

¹¹Ibid., p. 26.

should learn to be human again before trying to be saints.¹²

To understand the growth and influence of Christianity, it is necessary to glance through the pages of history and to evaluate the purpose of religion. There is little question that it would be quite possible to rewrite the history of the Christian religion, beginning with the origin of its basal conceptions among the Jews and continuing to the present hour. The constant aim of all religious or philosophic teachings has always been the development of human life toward the highest and best. Proof of this fact is found often in the scriptures; therefore, references to particular Biblical stories should cast more meaning on the subject.

From the beginning of history the church has taken various attitudes toward creating human life at its highest and best. Each attitude seems to have been backed at the time by a sound human instinct, preserving the highest moral and spiritual interests of mankind. A few of these outstanding attitudes will be analyzed and evaluated.

There have been times when the church adhered to and preached the duty of men to take the world about them just as they find it and make of it the best possible use. Human beings live in this world, and living itself means adaptation and adjustment. Men must find some scheme of practical

¹²Babbitt, op. cit., p. 287.

conduct, and they must find some method of intellectual adjustment which will make it possible for them to understand, to a certain extent, the goodness of life. The church's function is to help human beings in making adjustments, for men often feel that instincts or impulses have, at least to a certain degree, a right of way. Of course, some of them must be accepted, but those with higher values need not yield to them continuously.

Throughout all the ages of history it is admitted that the church has made the sorriest messes of things and the worst exhibitions of herself when she has tried to use the world's weapons against the world. This, in itself, has added many followers to the trend toward humanistic thinking, for it has helped man to wake up and realize the need and importance of searching for his own answer to the question of reality rather than accepting the assurance of dogma handed him by religious leaders. "The only way a man can become as effective as the devil in fighting with fire is to attain to a devilish skill in such methods and by that time the humanity of the fire-user is considerably singed."¹³ In answer to this idea, William Jennings Bryan said: "I don't believe I'd try to fight the devil with fire if I were you. In the first place, the devil knows more about fire than you do, and in the next place it costs him less for

¹³McConnell, op. cit., p. 18.

fuel."¹⁴ This might be applied to the conflict between humanism and religion.

If the world must be fought, and Christian leaders seem to agree that it must, the leaders of the fight should be careful in selecting only Christian methods of carrying on the struggle. These methods are "the unflinching proclamation in prophetic speech of the Christian ideal, the attempt to train minds to quick discernment of moral truth, the effort to persuade men to follow the best."¹⁵ The weapons of the world can seldom be used effectively except in the world's spirit, and that spirit as a general rule does not point toward all ideals which can be characterized by the name of Christian. A feeling of morality completely evaporates when marks of coarseness, especially those made by the church, enter in.

Another illogical attitude of the church is that of withdrawal from the world altogether. This is the lazy dreamer's way out. It is an attempt to avoid making legitimate use of the world on the one hand or conquering the world by the militancy of the church on the other hand. Such a dreamer is anxious to establish a society which, while in the world, is not of the world. There is no

¹⁴Ibid., author quoting a speech he heard William Jennings Bryan deliver.

¹⁵Ibid.

doubt that this type of thinker is seeking a good life for its own sake and on its own account; therefore there is little or no disturbance caused by the followers of such an attitude. Of course, it is admitted that there is a danger in the withdrawal from the world, for healthy-mindedness is soon lost. Most of the problems described as moral are central concerns and call for a great deal of healthy-mindedness; therefore, in religion, as in education, it is necessary to attempt to create the conditions in which intellectual activities take place and develop.

The church has always insisted that there must be seasons of withdrawal from the world for purposes of concentrated worship. In searching out the reason for this insistent attitude, an effort to conceive of this attitude in fundamentally human terms is made. In other words, does the worship make the worshiper in any direction or degree a stronger or finer human being? Probably the best answer is to admit that the genuine test of Christianity is the Christian. For the most part, the church has continued its demand for withdrawal from the world, but it realizes that those who withdraw from the world must come back again to reality and must face real evils and temptations. If the man who withdraws for a time from the world is better able to overcome temptation as a result of that withdrawal, then, by all means, he should make a practice of doing it when the occasion demands.

Throughout the centuries there has been some question as to the ethical value of worship. Indeed, it is true that paganism is worshipful enough. It is also admitted that the world is richer because of spirits which are sensitive to gods, beauty, or anything else, but this kind of worship is not the contemplation of any high spiritual attributes which make the worshiper a better or finer human being.¹⁶

As a last topic which reveals the attitude of the church, a glimpse at the spirit of Christianity's attempts to convert human beings is taken. The spirit of missionary zeal reveals that the church has not always been animated by the highest goal in her attempt to extend her borders. It is admitted that at times there has been more appreciation of the need of extending the borders of the church as an institution than of lifting men to a higher life. When the preacher pronounces that souls have been re-born, he implies that these persons have entered into a world of larger life. In one fashion or another the church has devised methods and means for holding to its claim that the rare and fine human qualities must somehow, somewhere, take root in the Lord. It is interesting to study the lengths to which the church goes to save goodness, wherever it is

¹⁶"Christian Humanism," Christian Century, LIX (April 15, 1942), 486-487.

found, for the kingdom of heaven. Even when the church insists upon sharp lines of division between the saved and the unsaved, she usually finds a way of claiming that all the good men, whether saved or unsaved, are citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

In glancing through the more modern pages of history, it is discovered that there is an existing opinion that recognizes humanistic attitudes which are influenced by theology and the social gospel of the nineteen-twenties as largely the product of earlier social forces. It is believed that there was swiftness with which the appeal of humanism has been undermined during the past few years. Furthermore it is thought that a new supernaturalism developed to replace it.

In view of these facts, Davidson states that the religious humanism of the decade from 1926 to 1936 could, in the latter year, be seen as an expression, primarily, of the over-optimistic mood in a period of prosperity. The new richness and meaningfulness of life which democracy and industrialism provided were probably responsible for destroying the appeal of an "other worldly" religion. People, as a whole, began to find a possible realization of the kingdom of God on earth. Under less favorable social conditions the church would have been forced to foresee this so-called kingdom in heaven or someplace that is a great distance from this planet.

As a result of this awakened realization, an ensuing interpretation of the kingdom of heaven followed. The kingdom of God found concrete meaning in world peace and a certain amount of social security. The goals were actually set by Woodrow Wilson with his "League of Nations" and by Franklin D. Roosevelt with his "New Deal." There was evidently no place for the supernatural element, and, as might be expected, the humanists felt that the sooner this fact was recognized, the better for all concerned.

Following this period of employment for all came an economic crisis which soon revealed the inadequacy of this type of religion, and an attempt was made to mark humanism as a pre-depression article. "The social structure upon which humanism's appeal really depended has collapsed, and it retains for the present age primarily a historical event."¹⁷

It is evident that the author of the above quotation could not foresee even a glimpse of the humanistic world in which man is living today, and the great plans for a future filled with even more humanism. Davidson's analysis of the essential relationship between theological thinking and its social setting from the end of World War I to the beginning of World War II does not provide any criterion for determining

¹⁷Robert F. Davidson, "Preface to Theology," Christian Century, LIII (December 16, 1936), 1685.

the relationship of concepts before or after the particular period about which he writes. It is a biased attempt to present a "Preface to Theology." The only valid conclusions made in this survey of the early part of the twentieth century can be summed up in one sentence:

No theological system, whether rationalistic or empirical, humanistic or supernatural, can lay claim to validity if it is unmindful of the social forces at work in producing its appeal.¹⁸

In opposition to these views, another writer treats the twentieth-century relationship of humanism to religion as being quite important. Though he does not approve of the relationship, he recognizes and frankly admits that its strength is growing. He describes humanism as a new religion for a new day to which all the old forms of piety, prayer, and belief must give way. It is further interpreted as a demand made by thirty-four contemporary editors, educators, and ministers who are advocating work for the common good and let the supernatural go. The humanism which the thirty-four editors and other leaders offer is explained in the following quotations:

Religious humanists regard the universe as self-existing and not created.

Religion must formulate its hopes and plans in the light of the scientific spirit and method.

The distinction between the sacred and the secular can no longer be maintained.

Religious humanism considers the complete realization of human personality to be the end of a man's life,

¹⁸Ibid., p. 1686.

and seeks its development and fulfillment in the here and now.

In place of the old attitudes involved in worship and prayer, the humanist finds his religious emotions expressed in a heightened sense of personal life and in a cooperative effort to promote social well-being.

There will be no uniquely religious emotions and attitudes of the kind hitherto associated with belief in the supernatural. Man will learn to face the crisis of life in terms of his knowledge of their naturalness and probability. Reasonable and manly attitudes will be fostered by education and supported custom.

We assume that humanism will take the path of social and mental hygiene, and discourage sentimental and unreal hopes and wishful thinking.

The goal of humanism is a free and universal society in which people voluntarily and intelligently cooperate for the common good.

The time has come for wide-spread recognition of the radical changes in religious thoughts throughout the modern world. Science and economic change have disrupted the old beliefs.

Religions the world over are under the necessity of coming to terms with new conditions created by a vastly increased knowledge and experience.¹⁹

As the past has proved, humanism allies itself naturally with dogmatic religion; so if dogmatic religious leaders believe that their doctrines have a future, humanism most probably has also. If dogmatic religion should continue to lapse, or wholly fail to exert a vital control over men's minds, religion will begin losing ground and humanism will begin gaining. The final effort has been going on for centuries.

So long as the modern critical spirit continues to dominate men's thinking, so long will a critical

¹⁹"For a New Religion," Literary Digest, CXV (May 20, 1933), 20.

humanism be justified in seeking to reveal what is really central and normal and permanent in human existence, what principles of conduct are necessary to effect a community rather than a social chaos, what kinds of knowledge and types of beauty are most congruent with human nature, what elements enter into a richly diversified, a finely shaped, and an exalted life.²⁰

Probably the greatest and most significant controversy which arises between clergymen and humanists is the concept that deals with the existence of God. Charles Clayton Morrison discusses this topic by centering his comments on Max Carl Otto. Otto, a professor in the University of Wisconsin, says that there is no God. He states this opinion by "candidly declaring that men and women have nowhere else to turn for help but to themselves and to each other. He further states that if men and women will turn to themselves and to each other they may discover resources of mind and heart that will enable them to transform their individual and common life into something joyous, beautiful, and worthy."²¹ It is Morrison's opinion that the professor gave up his faith without regret or despair, for he felt that the concept of the non-existence of God brought a sense of relief to Otto. In his opinion, a great burden was lifted off the man's spirit, and "he can now do things

²⁰Norman Foerster, "Humanism and Religion," Forum, LXXXII (September, 1929), 150.

²¹Charles Clayton Morrison, "The Sufficiency of Man," Christian Century, XLIX (September 14, 1932), 1105.

that an existent God would not let him do."²² By this bald and ridiculous statement, the author places himself in the category of overly-pious critics who are ever-ready to pounce on subject matter in any field without regard to acquiring a deep insight into the matter.

Let it be emphasized that the denial of the validity of any particular concept of God is, and probably always will be, subject to much interpretation and criticism. The many discussions, both pro and con, afford further evidence that there is a close relationship of humanism and religion, and followers of one, or both, schools of thought fear there may be a turn of events which might cause the weaker concept to yield ground to the stronger, or else completely to disappear. The supreme test of humanism or religion comes when they are put to the pragmatic test. If the doctrine which advocates the supreme values of life that yield themselves up to pride, self-will, and self-sufficiency is the victor in the test, humanism will be victorious; but if, on the other hand, the doctrines which lead to unquestionable humility, reverence, and obedience, religion will be the stronger of the two concepts.

In the light of the foregoing discussion, a question becomes important. Is humanism a religion? Careful examination of studies made by religious leaders and philosophers

²²Ibid., p. 1106.

has pointed out that the answer is a strong, emphatic no. It is admitted that humanism is capable of attracting the worldly, as opposed to the "other-worldly," because, just as in the case of religion, it offers a system of order and happiness. As an alternative to the ideal of the religious man, humanism offers the ideal of the civilized man.

Since the concepts and evaluations of prayer are becoming more and more important in this modern world, it seems timely and significant that a humanistic interpretation of prayer should be included in this chapter.

Everybody must agree that the idea of prayer is rapidly changing today. Many are insisting that the idea of prayer is rapidly going out of the picture of life. Certainly it is agreed that the old idea of prayer has gone. The old idea of calling on some remote deity in the heavens to give attention to our personal troubles in exchange for praising and adoring him is an idea that modern man has little or no use for. Obviously, this is not the real meaning of prayer, for prayer is a part of the best of the life of man.²³

To define prayer from a psychological, humanistic point of view rather than from the theological angle, three facts will be mentioned. In the first place, prayer is the

²³John Haynes Holmes, "A Humanistic Interpretation of Prayer," Christian Century, XLVI (October, 1929), 1275.

deliberate formulation in our minds of a given idea of something that man wants or thinks he needs. It is human nature to attempt to reach for something that is beyond reach; therefore prayer is "the conscious, deliberate fixation of our inner attention upon the needs and aspirations of our lives."²⁴

Secondly, prayer is the conscious, deliberate direction of life forces to get what the man offering the prayer wants. Modern psychologists say that thinking hard and long enough for what you want causes you to live constantly in the atmosphere and yearning of that desire, and that means the first step toward its actual attainment has been taken. Perhaps Emerson was thinking even more deeply than it appeared on the surface when he said that man should be very careful about what he prays for.

This is not the whole story. There is a third thing to be said about prayer. Since man realizes that he is just a little center of energy in a world which is an infinite center of energy, he struggles on the low levels of his life until he reaches up and out to capture some of the infinite forces of the universe.

This definition of prayer is purely humanistic because from beginning to end it is an experience within man's own

²⁴Ibid.

self. It is a human, natural process to attain ends beyond man's own reach. "Our prayers are the expression of our lives, and their answer the achievement of our lives. Why bother with theology, or the traditions of theology in an experience like this?"²⁵

This quotation seems to contradict the thoughts expressed in most prayers, for they still consist of the theological language. It is Holmes' opinion that this is sheer laziness, for modern creatures do not take the time or effort to write prayers or hymns which are expressive of this age. A few well-known English and American poets have attempted this task, but they have have not been successful enough to inspire many followers.

Since it is agreed that prayer is a power of man, it seems that he should develop and guide that power to practical objects rather than simply waste it upon thin air. In some form or other, and in some future time, prayer may be alleged as being necessary to man's highest culture.

Today there is a widely current belief that any attempt to guide the motives and procedures of human affairs by means of a recognition of the spiritual nature of man involves a return to medievalism. Leaders from all religious beliefs have joined their voices in laudation of the "age of faith," when society was integrated around a spiritual

²⁵Ibid., p. 1276.

ideal. In that particular age, "there was a disparagement of the secular humanism which, even though it had many bad consequences of heartless capitalism and materialism, is supposed to have been spurred on by the Renaissance and the Reformation."²⁶

"Medieval civilization, whose historical ideal was the Holy Empire, constituted a 'sacral' Christian civilization."²⁷ In this civilization temporal things, philosophical and scientific reason, and the state were organs or instruments of spiritual things, of religious faith, and of the church. In the course of the following centuries temporal things seemed to gain a position of autonomy. This, as shown in the development of great religious and political governments, is a normal process. The misfortune has been that this normal process, instead of being a process of distinction for a better form of union, progressively severed earthly civilization from evangelical inspiration.

The image of man which reigned over medieval Christendom depended upon St. Paul and St. Augustine.²⁸ This is good in so far as their conception of man recognizes his relation to God and his need of divine grace. It is bad in so far as "it is accompanied by an Augustinian image of the Church as an institution whose reeling oligarchy is divinely commissioned to wield the instruments of human power

²⁶Maritain, op. cit., p. 107.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

to control the minds, bodies, and estates of men."²⁹ Such a concept has been carried down through the ages and still exists in many churches of today.

It seems that this image of man which disintegrated from the time of the Renaissance and the Reformation is rather unfortunate, but it, too, is a normal result. Since man has been drilled for thousands of years, and is still being drilled in the idea that he could not enjoy the benefits of being a child of God except as the sacred authority gave him permission and furnished him the means for getting the enjoyment, it does not seem strange when a human thinker revolts and backs from this body of sacred officials in defense of his own manhood. Of course, this means that he is tempted to break from God as well as from the holy leaders. The church had always taught him that he could not be a child of God except on its set terms, and many historical incidents prove that those terms had become both intolerable and incredible. Man was resentful and disgusted with the tyranny of his pious masters; so the humanity found in the concept of humanism crept in and unveiled the pretenses of the ruling lords, both spiritual and temporal, and it began to take over, to a larger extent, the thinking people. Soon they were struggling and succeeding to take over their own affairs.

²⁹Ibid.

The law for man (which is very closely connected with religion) is discussed from a humanistic point of view by Paul Elmer More. He is quite interested in the distinction between good and evil. In his opinion, the Puritan conscience is a direct personal heritage, and the meaning of his work may be summed up as an effort to maintain the conscious while abandoning the gloomy religious philosophy with which Calvinism has associated it. He begins with a study of Hindu thought, emphasizing as his chief discovery, that the mandate of conscience resides in man, and it is even the essence of his being. Then there follows an earnest investigation of Platonism reflected in what are probably the best of More's books. Here the author restates those protests against a civilization based upon surrender to impulses or upon mastery of purely material forces. This resembles closely Babbitt's teachings.³⁰

It is doubtful that the church could have survived if it had not been for her bringing all activities to the test of human results. In the periods of history which put a black mark by the church. She saved herself from complete wreck by making human adjustments in human situations. Everyone interested in Christianity, whether he adheres to humanism or not, must admit that the Christian ideal is the ideal of a good life, and that most men who are supporting

³⁰O. W. Firkins, "Notes on Babbitt and More; Reply," New Republic, LXII (April, 1930), 247.

the beliefs and institutions of Christianity are doing so because of their recognition that Christianity judges itself by what happens to the men who come under its influence. They realize that they are human beings living in a human world.

There has always been a great deal of wonder and many peculiar notions as to the line between the saved and the unsaved souls. The terms "saved" and "unsaved" are peculiar to the clergy in trying to keep man on the straight and narrow path that is viewed through the eyes of the church. There arises the question of how the humanly good but unsaved man will be dealt with after death. Most theologians agree that in such cases the decision rests in the hands of God. Their explanation is that such people are not awake enough to accept Christ intellectually, but they have accepted him in the spirit. Such an evasive explanation pleases theologians, for it maintains their teachings about the saving power of faith. At least, such an explanation proves that Christianity has to make place for genuine human worth. A good man is good under any classification, and the goodness must be reckoned with.

The church must make human adjustments in human situations. Christianity judges itself by what happens to the men who walk in the light of Christian influence; that is set up as a guide or a means of evaluating religion's

powerful influence in attempting to create higher standards of living. It must influence the men being considered as human beings and must always take into consideration the fact that these human beings are living in a human world.³¹

No discussion of Christianity would be complete without a brief but comprehensive study of instrumentalism, as instrumentalism always creeps into Christianity when the church or the body of institutional creeds and rituals is thought of as practical means of spreading the Christian doctrine. Naturally it will creep into the church when it is present in all other fields. Any student of educational trends in this country since the beginning of the present century will notice the predominance of what may be called tool-studies. Everything about man which has been invented to use toward attaining a certain goal is instrumentalism. The one-hundred-per-cent patriotism which is now being called for everywhere in the United States and in most other countries is obviously a tool used toward an end, winning the war as speedily and thoroughly as possible.

In searching for the truth and beauty which seem most valid in themselves, there is always a human reference present. Of course, it is admitted that truth is truth, but in every search for truth there is naturally the selective interest of the truth-seeker. Back of our search

³¹McConnell, op. cit., p. 30.

for knowledge is the human mind itself, picking out of the world of knowledge or of theory what it needs for its own glorification. Such forms of knowledge in religion are often called spiritual food; it is admitted that these forms of spiritual food are instrumental as ministering to the needs of the life hungry intellectually, morally, or spiritually.

It may be said that the church is the body of institutional creeds, rituals, and practical methods of spreading Christianity. Of course, the only way of judging all these is by looking at the effectiveness or the ineffectiveness with which they minister to the lives of the persons composing the church.

The first outstanding fact that dominates the scene of Christendom is the much-divided state of the church. In its organizational aspects the church can and must be looked upon as an instrument which is used as a means to an end. The question immediately arises as to whether the community of persons who are collectively thought of as the Body of Christ is better ministered to by separate denominations or by a unified organization. McConnell thinks division is good, and he defends this attitude by saying that such division "works out to the full, the different phases of Christian development."³²

³²Ibid., p. 89.

McConnell sums up his opinions by saying: "We may say all we please about comprehensiveness and inclusiveness of Christian views, but Christians are human, and human nature runs to specialization."³³ It has been proved time and time again in the affairs of government, the church, or anything else that too much specialization brings on discord and completely shatters the good qualities. This statement seems to contradict, to tear down any justification for denominationalism that might have been set up by McConnell.

Formulations of belief, too, must be approached from the basis of instrumentalism. It is admitted that a creed usually is shaped with a predominantly practical intent in view. For that reason creeds are looked upon as symbols or signs of truth which nobody can express.

The last theme which will be discussed from an instrumentalist's viewpoint is the sacraments. There is a great deal of strenuous debate on this subject, as will be shown in the following chapter, when the life of Emerson is discussed. The sacrament of the wafer and the wine which is supposed to represent the true body and blood of Christ is nothing more nor less than an instrument to bring the individual closer to the feeling of divinity and sacredness. This symbol of the sacrifice of the cross, this miraculous changing of the bread and wine into the real Christ, is

³³Ibid., p. 39.

good as a Christian instrument if it tends to deepen man's belief in God and if this belief makes him a stronger and a better individual.

Perhaps the one church which has developed more instrumental power of worship than any other is the Roman Catholic. No one can enter this church, where knees are on the floor, eyes are on the altar, and heart is in heaven, without having a thrill of awe and devotion. It might be said that the entire technique of Roman Catholic worship is consciously or unconsciously fashioned as a means to an end. This is pure and simple instrumentalism used to a great deal of advantage.

No matter how sacred and holy an instrument may seem to be in itself, the fact remains that any instrument is still an instrument and must be judged by what it does. The one big purpose of Christianity, from a humanistic point of view, is fullness and fineness of human life.

The last and most muddled phase of Christianity which is considered necessary to include in this chapter is mysticism. If such a word could be defined, it might be termed a form of knowledge which attempts to explain, without any proof or evidence, that which is unknown. Christian humanism is an attempt to form a path for Christian knowledge. The advocates of mysticism say that man is supposed to contemplate the mystic vision on its own account. They

mean that if man will thus seek the vision, happy results in ourselves will follow. Theologians say the theme of mysticism enlarges the human vigor and refines the human qualities.³⁴

The exercises to which the mystics in other days used to give themselves aimed at a control of attention. If they arose out of an earnest desire to understand God, they were of importance as a means of leading to the swift insights which did much to enforce and renew sound Christian knowledge. It would be comforting to assume that such theories are not existing today, but such an assumption is quite false.

One school of mysticism states that the aim of religious endeavor should be the absorption of the finite person in the infinite.³⁵ If true Christianity seeks the quickening of consciousness rather than a sinking into a state of unconsciousness, then mysticism is not a goal nor a good element to add to the already muddled theological concepts. It seems that the only absorption of the finite self by the infinite would be the obliteration of the finite altogether. Perhaps it would be a vast help if some of the modern priests and preachers who delight in dwelling on the theory of the absorption of the finite into the infinite would labor more earnestly to understand what they are preaching about.

³⁴Ibid., p. 96.

³⁵Ibid., p. 97.

Another rather current teaching reveals that the mystic vision is the supreme good on its own account, that man is to seek to see God, and that without regard to the question as to the effect of the vision upon us. In pondering through the accounts by mystics of their own vision, it is found that they make much of the raptures or ecstasies into which the vision transports them. The breathing becomes short or seems to be suspended altogether. The soul seems to be lifted completely out of the body and carried somewhere above the earth. There is an excess of delightful climaxes which almost turn into the painful.

In connection with these vivid accounts given by mystics, a dramatic experience related by a close relative may throw some light on the subject. Upon being "saved" the second time (the first "saving," which was only a sprinkling, was not sufficient to satisfy her spiritual needs), this woman declared that she beheld a vision of angels completely encircling her. The angels were clothed in long, flowing, white gowns and the light which beamed forth from their smiles told her that she had found much favor in the sight of the Lord.

According to the psychological and philosophical accounts of mysticism, one cannot help surmising that if the vision were not accompanied by a great deal of emotional quickening, the seer might fancy that she had not truly

beheld the vision. Perhaps such a play on emotions is necessary in developing special sensitiveness for the apprehension of Christian truth; however, it seems only logical to assume that the emphasis this woman places upon unusual spiritual salvation is questionable as leading to one-sidedness. Her mystic power is obviously not built upon a broad basis of general religious activity.

It is admitted that there are immense differences in the abilities of individuals to master religious conceptions, but even with those who seem almost to leap from one conception to the next higher, it must be that the quick alertness comes out of the willed attention to the Christian ideal.

Mysticism, in the humanist's eye, is good if it adds something to the enlargement of human life. Gandhi, the well-known Indian faster, shows in his life a spirit of undying reverence for a country, a religion, a people, that have been set on such a high plane that mysticism is surely a part of it. If the cultivation of mystic states leaves Gandhi or anyone else more of a man than he was before, then the cultivation of mysticism meets the demands of humanism.

To conclude the discussion of mysticism, it might be said that any true vision of God or anyone else, mystic or otherwise, must be learned in the human way. It is said

that Jesus made the test for entrance into his kingdom a willingness to do the will of God. This brings the test down within the reach of every human being. Perhaps the clearest and best vision of a mystic path which leads to God's throne is individual and social obedience which will develop better individuals on this planet.

In summing up the relationship of humanism and Christianity, emphasis should be placed on the fact that theologians do not like to relate the subjects under consideration; in fact, they draw one school of thought as far from the other as possible. There is a reason for that. Church leaders explain it by saying that the humanist's ethics are pre-Christian, and his metaphysics do not extend beyond man himself. The theologians say he seeks the nature and the end of man in man's products, and that is why he is called a humanist. As the result of his search he finds that man by nature is rational and that man's end is living morally with his fellow creatures. Man's rational nature, therefore, must be trained properly and appealed to if he is to live morally. Religious leaders insist that man is a combination mystico-intellectual individual; therefore, Christianity expounds the concept that man's end is supernatural and his sanctions for his ethical conduct might be called divine. Humanism, on the other hand, says that the sanctions for man's ethical conduct are man-

made instruments invented for an end. For the Christian, morality is a means to a rational end, and for the humanist, morality is the end of rational living. Both schools of thought try to raise the standard of living while man is on this earth.

CHAPTER IV

TRAITS OF HUMANISM IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

There is a danger of reading a doctrine into literature or extracting one from any great work. To introduce this discussion, let it be admitted that going to any author's works and looking for humanistic principles is quite stupid, but to return from that work with a clear apprehension of the writer, his attitudes, and his characteristic emotions is to have read to some advantage.

Any writer in this field is well aware of the weight of responsibility that is placed on those who dare to enter the critical aspects of literature. Immediately the critic is exposing himself to review and reproach; however, if those who set themselves up as the authority of criticism will accept the references included in this chapter, which have been taken from reputable, actual critics, there will be no controversy over the attitudes and ideas expressed in this discussion. It is with this thought in mind that material which reveals humanism in literature has been carefully selected.

The application of humanism to literature is included in this study because it is the source of many current controversies. Such a conflict of opinion furnishes an opportunity of observing American criticism in a state of genuine agitation. This, in itself, is easily recognized as being good and to some advantage, for it brings forward many great thinkers who otherwise would probably not concern themselves with offering any "thorough ventilation of a major topic of the times."¹

Those interested in philosophy are continually tampering with the interpretation of literature; they seldom are content to let it mind its own business, so to speak, and they too rarely understand very much about the field into which they are delving. This discussion will prove to be no exception.

Philosophy and literature go together hand in hand, for it seems that all the learning in the world would not enable a man to understand literature if he had not both a sense of art and a sense of life.

. . . Without a sense of art man would never be able to understand how a work of literature came to be, and without a sense of life, he would only partly understand what it was about.²

¹Gorham B. Munson, "Literary Economy," Saturday Review of Literature, VII (August 9, 1930), 42.

²Mary M. Colum, "Literature, Ethics, and the Knights of Good Sense," Scribner's Magazine, LXXXVII (June, 1930), 602.

Since it is agreed by most critics that the evaluation of literature depends upon the author's values of life, it is obvious that an attempt to seek out the literary writers' codes of life must be made at the outset of the study.

According to Mary Colum, life is governed by two codes of spiritual values. The first code which is mentioned is the ethical one, and the second code sets up values by which man is able to see and grasp an appreciation of those things that enrich and intensify life and human relations. Perhaps one of the greatest tragedies of life is that these two sets of values are so frequently in conflict with each other.³

It seems that no philosopher or not religious teacher has ever been able to bring his ideas of man together into one harmonious concept. Every attempt has been a failure. This is clearly pointed out in the preceding chapter, therefore the task of bringing the two groups of thinkers together falls on the pens of literary writers. It is a gigantic undertaking for literary men or anyone else, for it can lead the way to experiences which will broaden and enrich man's life, or it can lead into a channel of thought that brings on further conflict which will completely disrupt and destroy the work of both the philosopher and the theologian.

³Ibid., p. 603.

In order to make a thorough study of a given concept that is revealed in literature, it is necessary to narrow down the material which is available; therefore, this discussion is centered around two American writers who have been chosen as the best examples of revealing humanistic thought in literature. Most critics agree that Ralph Waldo Emerson and Robert Frost are the two purest classics in this nation.

Before introducing a discussion of these American literary men and their works, it seems best to scan through the pages of history and find the concept or issue which acted as a guide for the writers who are to be considered. It is only through the light of historical background that present-day men and ideas can be evaluated.

History reveals that civilization is constantly making many errors in the direction it takes when groping toward the light. This was particularly true in the period of the Renaissance, a time when discovery of the magnitude of the universe seemed to dwarf the stature of man. The outstanding question that existed in the minds of men at that time was: "Are not the laws governing this immeasurable network of energies superior to any constitution that the human being might propose for himself?"⁴

⁴G. B. Munson, "Robert Frost and the Humanistic Temper," Bookman, LXXI (July, 1930), 419.

Man's answer to that question was in the affirmative, and he arrived at two consequent points of view. One of these views was the utilitarian humanitarianism which was led by Bacon; the other view was that of sentimental humanism as expanded by Rousseau.⁵ In other words, civilization developed into the stage where it decided to seek either dominance of nature or the complete surrender to nature. Both were obviously mistaken choices, for the reason that, as Emerson says, "one is the law of things, and another is the law of men."⁶

Emerson was a great man whose chief limitation as thinker and writer may be said to be this:

. . . While he very much desired to be wholly unacademic, he shared the essentially non-dramatic view of life that was characteristic of the Academic Era.⁷

A more familiar name for that interesting phase of human history in which Emerson lived is the Romantic Era. This period was at one time filled with both the academic and the romantic elements, and so, to a certain extent, is Ralph Waldo Emerson.

When G. R. Elliott visited Emerson's library recently, he found a copy of prose selections which were written by

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature Addresses and Lectures, p. 3.

⁷Lawrence Thompson, Fire and Ice, p. 6.

John Milton. The discovery of this book is mentioned because it contains an original copy of a poem written by Emerson. This poem is important in that it reveals something of the mind and art of Emerson when he was nearing fifty years of age. The selection, which is entitled "Grace," bears much consideration, for it was one of Emerson's favorites.

How much, preventing God,
 how much I owe
 To the defenses thou hast
 round me set,
 Example, custom, fear,
 occasion slow, --
 These scorned bondmen
 were my parapet.
 I dare not peep over this parapet
 To gauge with glance the
 roaring gulf below,
 The depths of sin to which I
 had descended,
 Had not these me against
 myself defended.⁸

To this poem Emerson added several lines which were never published. They declare that "the deferences" which the poet has just acknowledged to God, that is, "example, custom, fear, occasion slow," --

Were props to my tottering
 conscience,
 Hedges to my soul from Satan's
 creeping feet.⁹

In all probability these lines were composed when

⁸Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Grace," Essays and Poems of Emerson, p. 511.

⁹G. R. Elliott, Humanism and Imagination, p. 149.

Emerson was recollecting a number of experiences which he had had during his early, crucial years. After reading his biography,¹⁰ it seems only logical to conclude that perhaps such thoughts came to him after the break with his church in Boston. The break was made because of Emerson's objections to the use of tangible elements in the communion service of the church. As a result of this trouble, Emerson left the United States, and his attitude at this time seems to be best reflected in the following passages, quoted by Elliott. Emerson wrote these passages after his departure from this country:

Don't trust man, great God, with more power than he has, until he has learned to use that a little better. What a hell we should make of the world if we could do what we would! . . .

But there is a capacity of virtue in us, and there is a capacity of vice to make your blood creep.

. . . Is not then all objective theology a discipline, an aid, to the immature intellect until it is equal to the truth, and can poise itself? Yet God forbid that I should one moment lose sight of his real eternal Being, of my own dependence, my nothingness, whilst yet I dare hail the present deity at my heart. . . .¹¹

Such passages are quoted because they are an indication of the kind of harmonious, yet conflicting, ideas that were going on in Emerson's mind during the perplexed years

¹⁰This biographical sketch was found in Emerson, Nature Addresses and Lectures, pp. xi-xlii.

¹¹Elliott, op. cit., pp. 151-152, quoting from Emerson's Journals.

preceding and following the difference he had with his church. In academic literary terms this might be called the battle between tradition and the new romantic individualism in which the era was engaged; however, Emerson, with his conflicting ideas, was very introspective, and he was anxious that both the old and the new ideas should have their effect upon him. To be sure that he was broad-minded in this period, which he recognized as one of complete transition, he seemed to open his mind first on one side and then on the other; therefore, he was never able to bring the two powerful opposites together and weld them into one strong philosophy. His journals are made up of many contradictory statements which he put side by side to weigh; he had hopes that at some time and in some way these ideas could be reconciled in the "soul."

That situation is the answer to the search for reasons concerning Emerson's interest in "Grace." It also accounts for the fact that conflict or opinions casts a shadow on Emerson's poetry. The poem, "Grace," including the two unpublished lines, is a condensed version of one side of the two-fold mood that constantly swayed Emerson during his years of transition. The words "example" and "fear," which he added to "Grace," bear much weight, for they reveal the author's introspective tendencies in moments in which he considered himself impatient and unfair to "the scorned bondmen."

As a follower of European transcendentalism, and as the leader of this famous movement in America, it is evident that Emerson was attempting to develop a feeling of self-assurance. At the same time, his deep religious convictions led him to think that self-reliance was rather deficient in real poise and elevation; so he expressed a fear that the new movement might "fall into the depths of sin." This is shown in a passage taken from one of his journals. Here he states: "In the individual man, the understanding speaks much, the passions much, and the soul seldom."¹²

Emerson's double mood can be summed up clearly and concisely by bringing together several clauses from his contemporary journal: "How much, preventing God, how much I owe to the defenses thou hast round me set! . . . whilst yet I dare hail the present deity at my heart."¹³

There is no doubt that Emerson was a humanist in so far as he was self-reliant, but this reliance was considerably due to the influence of his ancestors. His works do not emphasize a great amount of self-trust. When his interest in the new individualism that the humanistic concept

¹²Ibid., p. 153, quoting from Emerson's Journals.

¹³Ibid., quoting from Emerson's Journals.

emphasizes, grew to its highest peak, he wrote several strong acknowledgments of what he owed to his forebears and to his upbringing. There are hints in his works that at times he even went so far as to think that he should do something more on behalf of Christ; however, his biography reveals that he never did get around to these tasks; neither did his follower, Walt Whitman, get around to the task of writing about the soul when he finished his discussion of the body. Both men led perfectly normal lives which were filled with materialistic interests in finding diversions that would bring happiness to overcome life's disappointments and realities.¹⁴

It seems necessary that Emerson's essay on self-reliance should be included in this chapter, as it reveals a great deal about the author's viewpoints. In this essay he urges that everyone be true to his own experiences, even though "Self-reliance" is untrue to the experiences of Emerson himself.¹⁵ This paradoxical attitude gives the essay power; it is a careless, yet curious, variation. Emerson urges writers to be original rather than conventional. The pages of his essay are filled with individualistic exaggerations which he derived from the current fad of his day,

¹⁴Emerson, Nature Addresses and Lectures, pp. xi-xlii.

¹⁵Emerson, "Self-reliance," Essays and English Traits, p. 63.

romanticism, and not from the central course of his own experience. This is exemplified when he states:

. . . No law can be sacred to me but that of my own nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my own constitution; the only wrong, what is against.¹⁶

Such expressions illustrate Emerson's contention that a man cannot write his best unless he is uttering his own deepest convictions. It is evident that the essay, "Self-reliance," is, as a whole, untrue of Emerson's deep convictions. There can be no real opposition between true self-trust and sound tradition, and the author realizes that that is one of his weaknesses.

In the middle of the essay the author tries to dissolve the egotistical feeling that goes hand in hand with self-reliance. He states:

. . . To talk of reliance is a poor external way of speaking. Speak rather of that which relies because it works and lives, . . . the self, on which a universal reliance may be grounded.¹⁷

Herein he admits his weakness, for he seems to realize that he is merely conforming to the romantic literary style of preaching doctrines that he could not practice. He is unable to carry out his doctrines because he never succeeds in sufficiently clearing his own mind as to the basic difference between the divine grace that is bestowed by God

¹⁶Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 75.

and the naturalistic self-reliance that is developed by man. Of course, it is realized that no human being can be blamed for not always going in for thorough logical systems of thinking, but at the same time a literary writer must weigh the facts about the matter in his own mind, and sooner or later he must get on one side of the fence or the other. In the light of this evidence, it seems that Emerson did not sufficiently clear his mind enough to be a real poet -- from the humanistic viewpoint -- unless one believes, with certain modern artists, that a fine art genius is one who is quite temperamental and never fully clears his mind on any subject. This seems to be a sign of insanity rather than of genius.

Further proof of Emerson's realization that he has a two-fold viewpoint is seen in parts of another of his essays, "The Poet." In this essay the author states:

. . . Theologians think it a pretty air-castle to talk of the spiritual meaning of a ship or a cloud, of a city or a contract, but they prefer to come again to the solid ground of historical evidence; and even the poets are contented with a civil and conformed manner of living, and to write poems from the fancy at a safe distance from their own experience. But the highest minds of the world have never ceases to explore the double meaning, or, shall I say, the quadruple, or the centuple, or much more manifold, meaning of every sensuous fact. . . .¹⁸

In discussing the spiritual meaning which theologians give to clouds, ships, and cities, Emerson never dares to

¹⁸Emerson, "The Poet," Essays, second series, p. 228.

mention the spiritual meaning which theologians give man, for here again his convictions withhold him from attempting to understand the divine grace which is given to man by his Creator. The famous writer feels free to ridicule churchmen to the extent that he refers to some of their spiritual meanings as nothing more than "pretty aircastles," but he never reaches the point that he feels steady and sure enough of his ideas and attitudes to delve into the supernatural element which has been endowed on human beings.

Again in this essay he admits that his viewpoints are rather hazy and vague, for he says:

. . . Since everything in nature answers to a moral power, if any phenomenon remains brute and dark, it is that the corresponding faculty in the observer is not yet active. No wonder, then, if these waters be so deep, that we hover over them with a religious regard.¹⁹

Man is a part of nature; therefore there is absolutely no need to try to understand the deep waters that hover about and engulf man, according to Emerson. This he considers explanation enough for attempting to stay in shallow waters.

Turning to Emerson's essay, "Experience," there is a single sentence which clearly expresses his willingness to submit to his religious convictions and to toss away his humanistic nature. "The miracle of life which will not be expounded, but will remain a miracle, introduces a new

¹⁹Ibid., p. 235.

element."²⁰ Since he yields to the conviction that life is, and always will be, a miracle, it seems useless to add the phrase, "introduces a new element." When he admits that a new element has or will be introduced, then he is also admitting there is a possibility that the "miracle" may be simplified and explained to such a level that even insignificant human beings might understand it.

In another instance Emerson feels that "every man is an impossibility until he is born, everything impossible until we see a success."²¹ Several sentences later he contradicts himself with the statement:

. . . All writing comes by the grace of God, and all doing and having. I would gladly be moral, and keep due metes and bounds, which I dearly love, and allow the most to the will of man, but I have set my heart on honesty in this chapter, and I can see nothing at last, in success or failure, than more or less of vital force supplied from the Eternal.²²

Again his confused thoughts on the grace of God are revealed. If he feels that everything is impossible, until success is attained, and if he is convinced that success or failure is a more or less vital force which is supplied by an inexplicable supernatural element, then it is evident that a mere human being should not put forth any effort to progress and to make his ideas become realities, for it seems probable that the great eye of fate would just wink

²⁰Emerson, "Experience," ibid., p. 270.

²¹ibid.

²²ibid.

at man's weak progressive ideas.

With this attitude toward success, Emerson feels that he has done his duty for the romantic readers who need a bit of strong guidance. He attempts to melt life into an expectation, an accepted fear, or, to be more specific, into a religion. It is interesting to note the undercurrent of humanism, the building up of a higher, better human race on this earth, which is constantly bubbling in his so-called spiritual nature of strict convictions. The inharmonious clash of the two elements is almost musical.

*In Conclusion
Emerson is
its complete
form*

Again in the essay, "Culture," Emerson rationalizes in regard to his lack of a clear viewpoint. Here the author states:

. . . Try the rough water as well as the smooth; rough water can teach lessons worth knowing. . . . Fear not a revolution which will constrain you to live five years in one. Don't be so tender at making an enemy now and then. . . . He who aims high must dread an easy home and popular manners.²³

His extreme fear of the results of the revolution existing in his mind causes him to give a little ground and to suggest that his followers occasionally take a little dip into the rough waters even though it might make an enemy or two. Emerson's greatest enemy and the person he feared most was not God or Satan; the person of whom he was most afraid was Ralph Waldo Emerson. It seems that fear of self is an outstanding trait in all humanity.

²³Emerson, "Culture," The Conduct of Life, p. 162.

In recalling Emerson's poems and essays which have been read from a humanistic viewpoint, attention is again focused on the poem, "Grace," which was discussed in the early part of the present chapter. This poem is emphasized again because it seems to be the best source of getting a direct, concise conclusion of the sage's philosophic viewpoints. "Grace" is typical of the writer's confused way of thinking, and for that reason it surpasses his other works. Although Emerson advocates a great deal of planning on the part of every individual, he is probably the most planless of all sages. That in itself produces a sort of mystical air about his works. In the words of Elliott:

. . . He is a kind of divine joker in the pack of the world's sages; for God, who is perfectly planful, did not wish the game of human wisdom to be too smoothly planned. So He created Emerson; He planned something, at least, of Emerson's planlessness.²⁴

The grave of Emerson is in the Concord cemetery. As the man lived, so his spirit is seen in that cemetery. In the midst of rows upon rows of the usual conventional and mostly ugly romantic ideas of tombstones, is a great unshaped granite rock with this inscription on it:

The willing Master lent his hand
To the great soul that o'er him planned.²⁵

Since it is admitted earlier in this chapter that most

²⁴Elliott, op. cit., p. 168.

²⁵Ibid., p. 167.

authorities agree that Emerson is one of the best writers America has produced, and in view of the content of the preceding paragraphs, it is necessary to explore the opinions of critics and determine their reasons for putting Emerson on such a high pedestal as "one of America's purest classics."

The greatest asset which critics find in him is the fact that Emerson himself keenly deplores his own deficiency of thought and form in both verse and prose, for he realizes that one of the requirements of a good piece of literature is that the writer must clear his mind on the subject which he is discussing. Although he is well aware of this requirement for good literature, Emerson never draws a sharp line between the ideal and the actual, between the existing divine doctrines of self-reliance and human actuality. He feels that if he should draw such a line, he would have no right to preach to the young American people whom he was urging to grow up. He does not seem to realize that people do not grow up by means of indiscriminate self-trust. That is a sure sign of immaturity, for there can be no self-trust without a clear line between right and wrong self-trust; however, Emerson is determined to help the people see a need for deep, mature thinking, and the emphasis on this need that characterizes his work shows his sincere purpose in writing and lecturing. Perhaps

his inability to get away from the set patterns of the romantic period and his lack of clear understanding of man's abilities compared with God's abilities are partial explanations of the fact that his writings require much thought and comprehension. Often it is because of a confusion or a fallacy in thought that man yearns for truth and understanding of himself. Perhaps the critics realize this, and for that reason look on Emerson as being one of America's best humanistic literary writers.

Turning from Emerson, the name of Robert Frost becomes prominent, for Frost is a strong, influential follower of the humanistic traits expounded by Ralph Waldo Emerson. At once it becomes evident that the ideas expressed by Emerson have had lasting effects on the viewpoints of Frost, and the latter writer has fewer inhibitions; therefore his writing is more easily understood.

In reading a biographical sketch of Frost, it is evident that, unlike Emerson, he had to depend upon self-education rather than parental help and guidance, and this self-education which brought on self-thinking has unconsciously proceeded along humanistic paths.²⁶

Although famous humanists, such as Babbitt and More, are never mentioned in Frost's lists of readings, the name of Emerson appears many, many times. It seems that he read

²⁶Sidney Cox, Robert Frost, pp. 12-13.

deeply into Emerson's works, and this has strongly influenced his way of thinking.

In writing about Frost, the ideas and opinions which will be expressed are based upon poetic facts which consist of feelings. The feelings that inspired his poetry seem to be, for the most part, humanistic, although Frost is, in all probability, not at all aware of his humanistic viewpoints; in fact, he may even be opposed to admitting that his mind runs in such channels.

Babbitt believes that poise is a peculiarly human virtue and that most of us have not attained or perhaps maintained that virtue. Poise to the philosopher, Babbitt, is an idea,²⁷ but to the poet, Frost, it is a picture, an emotion, or perhaps it is simply intuition that man is most man when he achieves a given amount of poise. This is shown in his poem, "The Armful."²⁸ In this selection the reader can easily see the symbolic terms which imply that man as man is engaged in the difficult feat of preserving a balance, of constantly trying new arrangements for coping with the unmanageable burdens of circumstance or nature.

Since the chief aim of writing is to uncover humanistic

²⁷Babbitt, op. cit., p. 287.

²⁸Robert Frost, Collected Poems of Robert Frost, p. 343.

concepts which are found in literature, it is quickly recognized that Frost is a humorous lover of distinctions and, above all, an upholder of the dignity of man. He realizes that in order to uphold the dignity of man it is necessary to search for the basic conviction about man. This is a sure sign of humanism. One critic reveals:

. . . Mr. Frost is a thinker. And his thinking, being about experience, and for the sake of knowing what to make of things and what to do, is never free from complexity and irony and whim. He doesn't stay on the plane of high seriousness. He keeps cutting transverse all planes.²⁹

By temperament Frost is quite conservative. His verses reveal a certain habitual disposition of mind which the philosopher can quite accurately call the humanistic temper. All Frost's works clearly show that it is not by theory but rather by practice that he can be classed as a truly great contemporary humanist.

In the field of aesthetics, some humanists assert a belief that beauty can be considered with reference to quantity and quality.

. . . In matter of quantity, or degree, there should be an adequate artistic sense of conscious selection, design, form, by means of which any art of human form-giving is differentiated from the turbid flux of nature.³⁰

Therefore, according to this statement, the major concern

²⁹Cox, op. cit., p. 38.

³⁰Thompson, op. cit., p. 10.

of the artist is to translate his impressions and his perceptions into statements. Frost does this by patterning after Emerson to the extent that he attempts to evaluate the kind of beauty in a given work of art by asking what truth or goodness is implied in this beauty; however, Frost considers that some of Emerson's dogmatic claims are entirely too rigid. In his works natural impressions and emotions are of equal importance with reason and ethical insight.

In the title poem from West-running Brook there is a trend of thought which expresses a sense or a realization of contraries. This instantly brings to mind the works of Emerson. Frost's realization of contraries is not far from the humanist's declaration that in man there is a certain amount of duality of consciousness; that is, there is a struggle existing between man's impulses to unify himself and his impulse to drift along leisurely with the so-called stream of life. Psychology teaches that it is human nature for man's inclinations to flow one way and his manliness to flow backward upon these inclinations; as a result, the undercurrent continues moving thoughts and producing results. The poetry of Robert Frost and other philosophic writers is, in all probability, the result of contraries.

With reference again to Frost's poem, "West-running

Brook," Gorham B. Munson makes this statement:

. . . Because most of the poetic rivulets run toward the east to empty into the great ocean of Romanticism, Robert Frost with his stream flowing westward is particularly appealing to one interested in Humanism.³¹

The critic went so far as to say, "The purest classical poet in America today is Robert Frost."³²

In reading the selections included in Frost's last volume, West-running Brook, reasons for Munson's opinion are evident. The following lines taken from the title poem are particularly interesting:

What does it think it's doing running west
When all the other country brooks flow east
To reach the ocean? It must be the brook
Can trust itself to go by contraries. . . .³³

This poem, which is chosen because it seems to be typical of all of Frost's poems, expresses a great deal of serious humor. The element of humor has been classed as one of the chief characteristics of classical writers. It is also the nature of a classicist to see things finite and to see things infinite, but not to confuse the two. Here again Frost meets the requirements of a classicist. A romantic writer, on the other hand, merges all things into the infinite; he sees all men as gods or perhaps he sees them at the other extreme.

³¹G. B. Munson, "Robert Frost and the Humanistic Temper," Bookman, LXXI (July, 1930), 419.

³²Robert Frost, West-running Brook, p. 35.

³³Ibid.

From these facts it might be concluded that the first sign of the classical, which at the present time seems to be the humanistic temper, is a recognition and a love of distinctions. By temperament the humanist wishes a clear-cut, not a confused, dim picture of a blurry world made up of blurry little individuals. By virtue of that wish and by the clarity of his distinctions, Frost, a pure classicist, is able to draw a line which is rather delicate, yet firm, between his conceptions of man and nature; or, if you please, his ideas concerning the existence and power of God. This line of distinction has been clearly and beautifully traced by Robert Frost. He has always, in the famous phrase of the much-quoted Renaissance humanism, a sense of the "dignity of man" maintaining a very prominent position in spite of the difficulties which nature places in the way. This admirable combination of ideals is characterized in most of Frost's writings. One of the best illustrations is found in the third and fourth stanzas of "Sand Dunes":

She may know cave and cape
But she does not know mankind
If by any change of shape,
She hopes to cut off mind.

Men left her ship to sink;
They can leave her a hut as well;
And be but more free to think
For the one more cast-off shell.³⁴

³⁴Ibid., p. 43.

In these stanzas Frost quietly but forcefully challenges the strength of nature as opposed to the strength of man.

Another of the most notable characteristics of Frost's works is his ability to portray the traits and necessities of common life, the habits of common speech, even the minds and hearts of common people, and, at the same time, to include a deep philosophic view of life which enables his readers to comprehend the greatness and the strength of this growing world. Along with these characteristics goes an utter disregard for conformity. In the words of a critic, "There was something earthly and imperfectly tamed about him."³⁵ That in itself produces great poetry, but when it is combined with the wrinkles that are made in deep penetrating thoughts concerning the value of man as man, a combination of a genuine poet and a genuine humanist results.

Because he conceives that by virtue of a human being's power of reason, man is something more than nature, Robert Frost reveals that he possesses the traits of a genuine expounder of humanism. At the same time, the poet believes that man is less than God and something more than just a drop of divinity which has been flattened out on this planet. This attitude is evident in many of his best-known poems. Such an attitude might be described in literary terms as one of realism blended with the softening

³⁵Cox, op. cit., p. 10.

quality of idealism, or respect for those things which are considered sacred in and out of this universe. Such an attitude is the goal of many writers who fall short of achieving it. This attitude is wholesome and inspiring to close readers of Frost's works, for this author decidedly remains a thinking man on this little planet; he knows what will bring him and his fellow men a great deal of contentment and a glimpse of happiness, but not once does he lose sight of his place and consequence of the fact that he is a part of this world and that he must make the most of himself while he can. In other words, he does not abase or debase himself. He earnestly endeavors to recognize facts, and he always omits the hazy touch of the mystical and the gaudy-colored touch of the theatrical.

Whether today's men and women like it or not, they are advancing into a much larger, more complex world. No longer can the dualistic personality thrive. The really important self is one who tries to weigh all the values of life and to understand their full significance. Such "selves" can best be seen in literature which is a combination of a philosophical and a theological viewpoint. The writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and of Robert Frost exemplify this rare combination. Should the inspiration which is given to the world by humanistic thinkers such as Emerson

and Frost, leave this world, it would be a great loss to the literary field; and, more than that, it would be a tremendous loss to a progressive, thinking civilization. These writers attempt to set forth all the qualities that go into making a strong, passionate living of life on this earth; and they do it successfully. Such writers can be called real humanists.

CHAPTER V

PIONEERS IN SOCIAL REFORM

Through every phase of action and thought relating to this gigantic project of making a successful war and then making a successful peace, runs one insistent question: What is man? It cannot be excluded from the consideration of labor policies, factory methods, forms of taxation, army and civilian morale, military tactics, governmental organizations, diplomatic procedures, relations with allied or enemy powers, or the terms of the peace which civilized man hopes will be made in the near future.

This seems important in this hour and in this place. In speaking of Humanism we speak of Europe's foundation, its spiritual conditions of life. That is why it seems to me necessary to speak of the alliance which, with masculine determination, the inherent goodness of all Humanism must conclude in order that Europe may live.¹

This strong demand for the application of humanism to Europe might be carried over to America and to all countries affected either directly or indirectly by the existing catastrophe.

A glimpse of the humanistic characteristics in the

¹Mann, op. cit., p. 68.

social reform found in the governments of the United States, Russia, and China will be discussed in this chapter. This includes all the allies who are fighting in the present conflict except England, and since England claims to have human standards which are very similar to those of the United States, it is felt that an examination of the social reform in the United States will sufficiently cover any problem England might have.

One of the important problems America faces today is that of the present status and the possible future of the arts, the sciences, and philosophy.

It is regretted that the conception and the practice of a liberal education in this country have been that of a trained acquaintance with the specifically human history of the race, as expressed in great documents of the past which are considered masterpieces of civilization.²

In a democratic country it is often necessary to defend a humane tradition, for man, being what he is, enjoys raising conflicts and voicing opinions if he is given the opportunity; no form of government provides more opportunity for such "enjoyment" than democracy.

It is admitted that the ideal of the humane tradition of culture has come into two kinds of disrepute.

²Irwin Edman, "Culture in a Democracy," Saturday Review of Literature, XII (June, 1935), 3.

. . . Culture has been identified with a leisure class dandyism, the preoccupation of the soft and the secure. It has found unconscious alliance with the reactionary in art and morals as well as politics and thought. Culture has come to mean a sterile lip service and a fashionable ritual of the accepted in literature and life.³

In answer to this statement one sentence seems sufficient. The synonym for an educated person is a cultivated person. This is a great tribute to the fact that absorption of the outstanding expressions of the past, in poetry, science, art, and music, is more than a matter of "acquired information about archaeological remains of generations long dead."⁴ The humane tradition of culture is alive because it is functional in the imaginations of live human beings. Now that life has become, in modern times, so external and mechanical, the wisdom and beauty enshrined in culture are needed as a refreshment and a release for the human spirit, or for the human emotions. The ideal of the humanities of the past has always been ultimately aimed at the enrichment and harmonization of individual life in order to reach its highest and best. "Democracy deeply and cultivation widely conceived are thus identified."⁵ Thus conceived, culture ceases to connote the byplay of a leisure class; it means the enrichment of life for all the members of a free society.

It must be recognized that the standards of mass

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 4.

culture in a society where amusements, like anything else, are chiefly business enterprises, hardly constitute a fair test of the tastes which a democracy might rise to. The values current in a commonwealth where the democratic spirit of cultural opportunities is still a hope rather than an achievement are not to be examined as an indication of what future tastes may be. The radio programs presented in the United States are an example of a slowly progressing taste in culture.

As a result of the existing conflict both within and without the United States, spokesmen of the human spirit are rising to prominent positions and are attempting to carry democracy to a higher level of culture.

In thinking of higher levels, every humanist today is interested in the probable shift of levels which will come in all countries, especially the democratic ones, at the termination of the present conflict. The best way to get an accurate estimate of what levels the future holds is to look back to the years of World War I. Before the outbreak of the struggle, the world was arrogant and self-satisfied. This seemed to be an attempt to pretend a feeling of confidence, for there was an uneasy sense of impending disaster.

. . . The old creeds, both religious and political, were largely in process of dissolution, but we did not realize the fact, and therefore did not look for new foundations.⁶

⁶John Buchan, "A Patriotism of Humanity," Vital Speeches, III (November, 1936), 70.

World War I, with its abysmal suffering and destruction, achieved one thing. It revealed man to himself. It revealed how thin the crust was between a complex civilization and primeval anarchy.

. . . If I were asked to name any one clear gain from the war -- and here I am speaking of our own people -- I would say that it was a new humility. We had our pride shattered, and without humility there can be no humanity.⁷

This quotation might well apply to the outcomes of attitudes that will come from World War II when the struggle has been terminated.

One of the greatest humanistic problems America is now faced with is how to meet the demands of labor. Seldom can a magazine or newspaper be picked up without coming upon protests of labor organizations which file objection to the laborer's being considered as a "hand." The least skilled of workers, the lowest-paid wage-earners maintain that they must be spoken of as men and women, and this claim passes as commonplace virtually everywhere, to be accepted without question, though there is indeed much violation of the claim in practice. This demand for more recognition and the timeliness with which the demand has been made are indicative of the progress the human race is making toward developing life to the highest and best.

The entire field of political endeavor in the United

⁷Ibid.

States shows the mark of the frontiersmen's spirit. The aim of lawmakers has been to deal with immediate urgent situations, without much consideration for law which is conceived of as an end in itself. The current call for one-hundred-per-cent patriotism does not by any means imply that we have established a cult of patriotism as such. In a democracy, constitutions, laws, and patriotism are tools pointing to something beyond the individual.⁸

In the political realm the existence of states is justified on the ground that such small units supply opportunity for testing out social methods which might not get a chance in a larger political organization. There is a possibility of experimenting with social measures in restricted localities before adapting them for wider areas. This is the democratic and the humanistic way of doing things.

Some authorities believe that measurement and publicity are the best weapons for social redemption. This is interpreted as meaning a precise estimate according to a standard, and the publication of the results; it is thinking in terms of statistical measurements. In other words, anything beyond this -- lobbying, propaganda, or political maneuvers -- may well be subjected to prophetic scrutiny.

In the matter-of-fact realm of money-making, society

⁸McConnell, op. cit., p. 85.

has gone to heavy costs, both with and without the use of politics, to make possible the success of individuals. This is too heavy a cost to be subjected to the human wastage which much of modern industry involves. A community at all organized in the United States has some kind of road system, police system, common schools, organization of money and credit, and many, many phases of legal structure which are often just taken for granted. To touch any one of these means that at once there is an affect on the power of individuals everywhere throughout the system to make money. The very fact that human beings live together in communities gives money-makers, both honest and dishonest, their chances to fill their pockets; therefore, it becomes necessary to find some message bearing upon these social activities which touches the life of every man into whose hands money comes. Society has a right to insist that there are at least three parties concerned in every transaction involving business relationships; there are the two parties who are directly involved in the transaction, and the general social body of which the other two are a part. It is in the realm of the higher goods that the individual has the best chance to become most distinctively an individual by ministering to his fellow men.⁹

It is through the operation of forces which in their

⁹Ibid., p. 73.

condensed description seem to touch all alike that the individuals as such get a chance to be most distinctively individual. There is nothing in an ideal social situation or organization which prevents uniformity and separateness from developing hand in hand. In a successful marriage it is very true that as the years do by, the husband and wife attain to an increasingly common point of view, and they have common zeal in pursuit of certain ideals; but in that marriage the man becomes increasingly masculine, and the woman becomes increasingly feminine.¹⁰

Human character is most essential in a democracy. Character is best achieved in the knowledges and skills attained in wrestling against obstacles. All this talk about a bigger and finer social atmosphere will, if effective, tend to have the same moral results that soft, balmy, physical airs have often produced upon the inhabitants of tropical lands. It is the purpose of any society, particularly a democratic one, to strive for such betterment of general conditions as will give individuals at least a hope. The conditions brought on by the present war have caused man to pass on beyond the idea of institutions as ends in themselves which are to be served by individuals. The time has come in which man is beginning to see the significance

¹⁰Ibid.

of even the widest phases of social activity for the development of what may be called the intenser and higher individualism.¹¹

Since individualism is the keynote in a democracy, the problem of disciplining human values is important. Through discipline the individual averts decay and defeat from society. The social significance of an intellectual aristocracy gradually became the matter of greater importance to Irving Babbitt and his followers. He feels that the work to be done by the humanist is not so much the increase of learning as the repeated teaching of obedience to the law of human life. Whenever a civilization gives way to its instincts, or whenever the crowd is divorced from its best men, punishment inevitably follows. Society must therefore be induced to accept its curb that it places upon its enthusiasms and desires, regardless of how much pleasure is sacrificed.¹²

Several times during the nineteenth century there was a moral need for a recognition of the rights of labor. This is mentioned because this moral need is pressing today and will be a determining factor in winning the present war and the future peace. In the nineteenth century, just as today,

¹¹Ibid., p. 75.

¹²George N. Shuster, "High Lights of Humanism," Commonweal, IX (April, 1929), 674.

the needs for the recognition of the rights of labor became important after a long period of development and expansion. Besides the development in time, there was one in extension, for human thought in all fields had contributed to the state of hostility.

Some people have traced a very close connection between Darwinian metaphysics and the Marxian class struggle, usually by way of the optimism of Spencer.¹³ Spencer was a practical reactionary -- he was more consistent than Marx in admitting the Darwinian validity of liberal capitalism. Marx and Spencer agreed in their dream of a scientific heaven on earth which they thought would eventually be evolved. Spencer felt that Darwin had borrowed the germ of his idea from the same theory that liberalism had found so useful in explaining away any moral claims of the working class. When the opposition of socialism to liberalism showed some accidental resemblance to the church's opposition, the church automatically showed signs toward the elements of agreement.

Another complication in the cultural world of the time and one of intense interest to all was a philosophy which is more concrete today but was already very real in the late nineteenth century. Neo-paganism is essentially German.

¹³Lawrence Sullivan, "True Pioneer in Social Reform," Catholic World, CLIV (November, 1941), 166.

Of course, this philosophy had a strong effect on German nationalism.

Still another complication, neither socialist nor liberal, that claimed roots in the liberal tradition was expressed by the Victorians and the intuition-scanning optimism of the Huxley-Spencer stream of thought. All intermediate stages of confusion and hope can be included in humanism, a term borrowed from the much older philosophy that was itself in many ways the ground-source of liberalism. Humanism's use in government is more easily justified in an analysis of later developments.

The workers in the nineteenth century were opposed by a number of economists, by the socialists, and by non-radicals like Booth and Carlyle. Socialism today is most easily recognized as a form of communism or Stalinism; however, it exists in many nations other than Russia; and, in all probability, it will exist in most nations, including the United States, after World War II. England now has a form of government that is becoming closer and closer a type of socialism under an assumed name. Because many narrow, biased, false definitions of socialism have been given, the term has a black mark beside it, and the masses of people shun it. Furthermore, the masses of people are not intellectually awake and are too full of emotions to stop and think.

Those who like to know their own minds clearly are sure to enjoy the intelligent essential points of view as expressed by Julien Benda. This author states: "Communist humanism is essentially a totalitarian humanism, which plans to raise the human being in his entirety to a higher level."¹⁴ Whereas the ancient humanism honored the intellectual and moral sphere of man, which it isolated from the material sphere, communist humanism abolishes this distinction and attempts to get away from the concept of separating man from himself. It attempts to reconcile spirit and matter, mind and nature, the intellectual worker and the manual worker, and to glorify the human being in the wholeness of his activity.

Since statistics show that only one fifth of the people in the United States can be classed as intelligent, this nation must take steps to provide for the ninety-five per cent who cannot or do not think for themselves. The non-thinkers can best be shown the light of intellect by making them to realize that they are a part of this vast, complex thing called society. Economic transformation is one of the best means of raising man to a step in life which will make his standards and those of his fellow men a little higher.

¹⁴Julien Benda, "Humanism and Communism," Living Age, CCCXLVIII (June, 1935), 329.

Neo-paganism is too often thought of as being a Hitlerian innovation. After the first world war, there was a wave of pacifism which was a reaction to the hatred of the Hun, and in some ways this seemed to be a healthy reaction; however, the final result was an utter white-washing of the ambitions of Wilhelm and Bismarck; a suppression of the fact that the Jewish menace is a real thing. Regardless of how unwise or evil the Versailles treaty may have been, it does not explain away the political and social ambitions of Bismarck, which inspired the politically reasonable economic aims of the German empire. Hitler has re-affirmed, not invented, the racist theories which most of the world is opposing today. This historical constancy is important in the view of the neo-paganism which is too often taken: that it differs from socialism, humanism, and Christianity as a "non-Western" culture. Many modern writers speak of the war against Western culture, Christianity, and progress.¹⁵ This is an amazing white-washing of the humanism whose theories of human perfectability, rooted in the liberal tradition, made the concept of the German superman culturally inevitable. It seems that the economic and imperial history of a single nation, however bad and corrupt it may be, must not be an excuse for the very real, very well-organized plans of paganism.

¹⁵Sullivan, op. cit., p. 170.

America's action by, for, and of men is probably the most important in the world today, for many nations are closely observing the steps taken by this country and are attempting to follow suit. K. T. Mei, a Chinese writer, admits that because of the local and specific conditions and problems it has to deal with, the Chinese depend on many fundamental ideas and doctrines formulated in connection with the humanistic movement in America. The Chinese are so eager to keep up with rapidly-changing America and Europe that they are willing to sacrifice their cultural identity and independence and become at best imitation Americans and Europeans.

. . . It is amazing how the Chinese have within one generation turned from extreme conservatism to extreme radicalism. With the possible exception of Soviet Russia, China is the most untraditional country on the globe today. There is evidence on her part of neither the inclination nor the capability to coordinate what she conceives to be modern Western civilization with her own past.¹⁶

The Chinese people are hard-working, ready followers, but their lack of progress proves that they are not capable, intelligent leaders. The youth of China are ever eager to be disciples. Irving Babbitt is an American thinker who appeals to the Chinese a great deal because he has much in common with the long line of Chinese philosophical and literary dictators who compel reverence and loyalty through

¹⁶K. T. Mei, "Humanism and Modern China," Bookman, LXXIII (June, 1931), 368.

overwhelming personal force.¹⁷ Babbitt's philosophy has reinterpreted the West to China, for it expresses not just the spirit of the nineteenth century, but also the spirit of the entire history of the West.¹⁸ A wise solution of the problem of modern Western civilization would greatly facilitate a like solution of the problem of Chinese civilization.

Every man, woman, and child living today has been or will be affected by this, the most bloody and brutal of all struggles. World War II will spread its influence over several decades, perhaps a century or more that follows, for it represents the rebellion that always accompanies a period of transition. The big question existing now is: transition into what? It is hoped that this transition is not only into greater realism of the mechanistic world, but also into greater realms of intellectual standards which will bring about a fuller realization of man as man. This is another way of saying humanism.

Perhaps the best plan for nations to follow in this great task of social reform is to follow the advice of Thomas Mann, a philosopher who was forced to leave his native country, Germany, and seek refuge from the Nazis:

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 374.

. . . Strive toward an attitude, a spiritual constitution, a human mood having for its object justice, freedom, knowledge, tolerance, mildness, and a feeling of serenity; also doubt -- not for its own sake, but as a seeking after truth, a loving care for it, standing higher than any arrogance of truth-owners.¹⁹

¹⁹Mann, op. cit., p. 68.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It is held that a student of philosophy will gradually become aware of the fact that humanism is essentially one of the great philosophic concepts, for it influences those subjects which best serve to reveal the distinctive nature of common humanity and best serve for the guidance of human life and activities on this earth.

This discussion holds that every major concern among the intellectual concerns of man involves an interest, either directly or indirectly, in humanism. To understand the relation of past happenings in terms of the present and the future; to discover the reasons for change in the ever-flowing stream of the lives of individuals and society; to understand forms of reality in the midst of supernatural teachings of transformation; to know something of the baffling nature of infinity which essentially includes the dream and hope of immortality, that is, something eternal and everlasting which the future might hold: all these major concerns of man are major themes of humanism and have been dealt with. Perhaps the most important fact

gained from this writing and perhaps the keynote of this thesis is: humanism is an important source for the intellectual wonderer to turn to.

(What may come to enrich the life of man in the course of future ages, no one can know. Many shocking changes are in store for the human race when World War II terminates. We may be sure that there can be nothing better, now or any other time, than the intention of men to concern themselves with the discovery of a good life while they are on this planet by the use of human intelligence; that is nothing short of humanism.)

It is doubtful that the church, literature, or any form of government that has endured for a given period of time could have survived if it had not been for their bringing their activities to the test of human results. In every case, human adjustments must be made in human situations.

It might be concluded that the minds of men fall naturally into two types. There are those who love novel-
ties for their own sake and are always seeking after a new thing simply for the sake of the "newness." Then there are those of the other type who adhere to old things for their own sake and put tradition ahead of everything else. That represents two very different kinds of biased ideas. The

wise and balanced mind will, of course, like neither the old nor the new for its own sake, but will consider their essential value and be ever ready to accept standards and progress which will aid in raising man to his highest level.

In a world filled with scared, broken human bodies and human ideals, this recommendation is given. Why not work toward a humanistic internationalism? Such an internationalism could give to the world that which it constantly seeks -- security and freedom. The humanistic internationalism should be made of gentlemen who, without necessarily rising to the sublimities of religion, feel that they can at least unite on a platform of moderation, common sense, and common decency toward all. This "heaven on earth" can and should exist on this planet rather than in the minds of dreamers or in the sermons of theologians.

One who pursues humanism for its own sake is sustained by its charm. Having gained some knowledge of it, he craves yet more, and what has been gained at any stage equips him for further gain.

There is great joy in the search for knowledge that humanism brings about, and anyone who has felt the joy knows how sustaining and self-justifying it is. It is realized that man must diligently pursue this study, but if this were not true the required doctrines would not be in existence.

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