ISSUES...

TEACHING THE WORD IN A HUMANISTIC SOCIETY

Articles

The Morality of Our Humanistic Society

by Ken Freerking

The Dilemma of the Christian in a Humanistic Society

by David P. Meyer

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by W. Theo. Janzow

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About Our Authors

The Rev. Ken Freerking is a pastor of
Campus Lutheran Church at the Univer-
sity of Missouri, Rolla.

All other articles were written by
members of the Concordia Seward faculty.

The editor's notes

The philosophy of humanism perme-
ates the value system of our society.
Many of its emphases have appeal for
Christians and atheists as well. Its con-
cern with human welfare has a ring of
authenticity and relevance which tend
to make it seem that the right
answers to all of man's needs. This
ISSUES identifies both humanism's
potential and its shortcomings.

The purpose is to provide material which
will help our readers see more clearly
which approaches may lead them to
teach and preach the Gospel message
more effectively to those whose lives, knowingly
or unwittingly, are being influenced by
humanism.

THE EDITOR

CIRCULATION POLICY—A copy of ISSUES is sent free to each church, school, and District Synodical office in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. In addition, bulk mailings are sent to high schools, colleges, and universities affiliated with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Individuals wishing personal copies may obtain them as follows: Single copy @ 75¢ each, Subscription @ $2.00 per year. Ten or more copies mailed to the same address @ 35¢ per copy.

SPEAKING OUT... Why do so many churches fail to reach the young? How can we become more fruitful in our outreach? MISTRUST OF THE YOUTHFUL... A fresh approach to the teaching of the Word of God is needed in our churches. Young people are not interested in the same things as preachers and adults. Christian Education needs a new approach to the young that will catch their attention and interest them. A new approach that is relevant to their lives and interests is necessary.

CHRISTIAN MANIFESTOS I AND II

This past fall newspapers across the country reported the signing of Humanist Manifesto II by 120 religious leaders, philosophers, writers, lawyers, social scientists, and scientists representing a movement that claims 3 million members internationally and 250,000 within the United States. The statement declared among other things:

1. No deity will save us; we must save ourselves.
2. We believe that traditional ethical or supernatural religions that place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience do a disservice to the human species.
3. Praises of immortality or fear of eternal damnation are both illogical and harmful, for they distract humans from pressing concerns, from self-actualization and from rectifying social injustices.

The precise 1972 document updates the more general statement of values of 1933, strengthening especially individual freedom and specific social action in fields including nuclear arms, population, racism, sexism, and pollution. It generally criticizes religious dogmatism and asserts that humans alone must solve their problems on earth.

Humanism as represented in this docu-
ment sees religion as the enemy and deter-
nent to the well-being of man. It finds the
organized church and especially the Chris-
tian denominations to be more harmful than helpful. Its logical creed is the golden rule.

And its core of confidence and freedom re-
pulsed to the natural instincts of us all to do
our own thing. Thus humanism exerts a
continuing great influence on society and the actions of men. It naturally causes some negative reaction from among the churches, enhanced by the sharpness of its language and attack.

Rather than mounting a counterattack, let me suggest that we do the church...
THE ALLEGORICAL ADVENTURES OF MILTON, JAN AND GRACE

It was twelve-thirty. In half an hour they would have to go back to work. These lunchtime conversations never became arguments, but Milton and Jan always took them seriously. So did Grace. It was standard procedure for them to deal with the issues of the day as carefully and completely as possible. Neither Milton nor Jan expected each other to concede or offer compromise. They simply saved the last five minutes of the lunch hour for Grace. As an older woman—no one really knew exactly how old—she seemed always to understand the issues in the debate and to have a solution that made so much sense it could not be disputed. But Grace was sensitive and polite enough not to intervene until Milton and Jan were ready. Perhaps she had inherited her gentile kindness from her father. She came from a good family. Her father was very well-educated, a perfect Renaissance man knowledgeable on any subject. Grace seemed to have inherited her father’s wisdom as well as his good manners.

"The Declaration of Independence says we’re all equal. Are you going to say Thomas Jefferson was wrong?" Jan knew that politics was Milton’s weak point. The subject made him emotional. But he sensed the trap in her question and blocked the opening she was trying to make.

"I’m not talking about political equality. It’s a moral issue. Philosophical. The nature of man, the essence of human, like in Plato. Are we all the same underneath, in our basic nature, or are some people better than others?"

Now it was Jan’s turn to be cautious. Milton had studied philosophy. She had majored in physical education with a minor in history, so she concentrated on finishing her lunch instead of responding. Besides, they both knew Grace had been listening. For the moment, the trio was satisfied to sit quietly on the hill above the factory. They watched the shadows move slowly as the sun began going down from noon toward the inevitable evening.

**Humanists are formidable opponents for religious people or churchmen. With few exceptions, they have refused to organize and establish a body of doctrine that is distinctly humanist. Since they do not meet in convention, they offer no resolutions for debate. They operate freely without the discipline of bylaws. It must be said to their credit that because they do not publish a newsletter they also do not solicit funds for their cause. At the same time, however, they have failed to provide their opponents with an acronym or name for themselves which might be used for construction of puns and sneers. Humanists mingle freely and anonymously with anyone else who happens to share the luncheon table with them.

There is a greater frustration for churchmen who oppose humanists. Humanists are nice. They are gentlemen and gentlewomen except for a slyly minority among them who prefer controversial remarks to dressing politely and holding down a genuinely American job. Because they are nice, humanists do not openly mock at churchmen. Usually they do nothing worse than suggest the churchmen incline to dogma, ritual, and the trappings of metaphysics. However, neither do they seem bothered by our warnings that God will get them at the end.

How then shall we oppose humanists? We must oppose them, of course, because they are not us. But how shall we do it? We hold no property in common with humanists, so we cannot threaten them. Since they are not officially organized we have no recourse to courts of law. Since they do not believe in us we do not even exist. reality cannot demand that they forewarn themselves.

Only the traditional weapons are left. We can continue to rebuke them for infiltrating our ranks disguised as churchmen. We can note—and duly inform God—and brethren in humanist etiquette—which occur when a revolution of their faiths fail to produce democracy. We can deal swiftly and thoroughly with any churchmen who commit humanism. And we can warn our daughters of the基本 nature of humanists.

At the same time we must steadfastly maintain our moral superiority over humanists. We need not swallow in confession that we once were as depraved as they are now. That was a long time ago. We can simply assume, confessions are taken care of in our minds or sin. Instead we ought to continue emphasizing the present nature we enjoy. By virtue of right thought, started by miracle which no longer seems necessary, we have developed into better people than humanists. More than decent and correct in attributes, we are correct and decent in our very nature. As evidence thereof we need only point to our preoccupation with other matters than religion. Therefore, because our roots are more pure, we can be assured that our fruits are better than their fruits.

As Grace looked at her watch, Milton and Jan began to pick up the picnic things and fold the blanket. The figures in the parking lot below the hill were beginning to move toward the factory and the afternoon.

"Is it true that some people are better than others? Inside, basically," Milton asked. Because of the time he addressed his question directly to Grace.

"Yes," Milton and Jan had come to expect Grace to be direct. They no longer doubted that she was correct whenever she spoke. So there was no need to use many words. Still, Milton felt they had time to press the point.

"How about humanists and churchmen?

"No difference there."

"There is no innocent work because there are no innocent people, underneath it all, that is. Take everything else away and everyone’s the same. No one in his nature is better than anyone."

"That’s terrible," Jan managed to whisper.

"Not when you think about it," said Grace. She looked at her watch and the three of them began to move down the hill toward the factory.

JAMES NELLEEN

THE MORALITY OF OUR HUMANISTIC SOCIETY

BY KEN FREKKING

The following article will be concerned with tracing some of the roots of this humanistic society, particularly as they relate to morality and ethics. These roots include a growing anti-supernaturalism, relativism, rationalism, empiricism, and materialism. The article will conclude with a brief survey of manifestations of materialism in contemporary society.
The rational-empirical approach, according to its advocates, is superior in every way to both romanticism and dogmatism. As over against the romantic and the dogmatic, we are told, the rational-empirical approach tries to build on all the facts both pleasant and unpleasant in the endeavor to plumb life's meaning by seeing it whole and as it actually is. Unlike the dogmatic, the empirical- rational approach does not fall into infallible principle, but "leaves the burden of reason to follow any scent of Truth." Furthermore, the empirical-rational approach "has no illusions about finding an absolutely final answer." That answer is not reached for it is the view known that exactness is possible only in such sciences as mathematics and formal logic. Yet, confident that he can move in the direction of truth, he takes the means the Greeks found in their ongoing skepticism and an overconfident optimism or dogmatism.

This "no illusions about absolutes" provides the background for relativism, one of the foundation stones of contemporary morality. The concept of relativism has peculiar power for our time. This is illustrated by the extraordinary degree to which Einstein's theory of relativity captured the popular imagination when it was first published. Few understood the physical theory, but many people had an intuitive feeling for its significance. The Twentieth century was ripe for understanding it.

The acceleration of historical change, which Alvin Toffler documents so well in his Future Shock, plus the disintegration of the family, thus provides an occasion of learning about the ideas and morals of the present generation. Thus, the social sciences, the general thesis of which is that the ideas and morals and institutions of any historical epoch are a function of the socio-historical situation in which that epoch has appeared, is a valid one. Sociology and anthropology provide a storehouse of information to back up the "gospel of relativism." In anthropology a person learns about the strange customs of the tribe, and so on. The triple companies are the place where one is able to understand a society's morality. What is done in the form of study is for research and for learning about society's morality.

In view of these difficulties the ethical relativists suggest with the Greek sophist Protagoras that "man is the measure of all things." One opinion is as good as the next, and everybody has to establish its own ethical standards which will then be true for him and nobody else. In other words, right is what I think is right, and wrong is what I think is wrong. There are as many "ethics" as there are people, and there is no way of judging objectively which of these systems is more right than any other. The best we can do is to make a statement in which it is not the value judgment of people is actually doing. This, then, becomes some measure or standard of what is right in a given locality. Our nation's obsessions laws operate with this basic presupposition: whether the "behavior is moral." This approach is extremely popular in our time and has the advantage of being considered both scholarly and objective. It is held by all those who claim that they are trying to reconcile the "absolutist" and "relativist" endorses the "comprehensive" case. Pareto in his work Mind and Society says, "The term 'ought' does not correspond to any concrete reality.

In fact, it should be said that not all anthropologists and sociologists are happy with the extremes of relativism. Some of them are now in quest of the universals which exist, towards a better of contradictory customs. Already enough research has been tabulated to reveal that some attitudes are almost worldwide. Claude Levi-Strauss, the French structuralist, gathered thousands of strange cultures and demonstrated that beyond their great diversity were even greater similarities. At the deepest level, believes Levi-Strauss, there is an invariable pattern ingrained in the human mind. The relativist's principle has not changed since primitive times. To humans and others who believe that man and society are perfectible, Levi-Strauss extends small comfort. "Humanism has failed," he believes. "It has lent itself to excusing and justifying all kinds of horrors. It has misunderstood man. It has tried to cut him off from all other manifestations of nature."

Much of the thought that is now considered by social scientists looking for norms beneath the bewildering surface of customs and attitudes. In any case, news of this more recent trend to look for universals has scarcely begun to spread. It seems to be a decline of the man on the street. There relativism is still kind and God. It is one cause of the lawlessness of our times and of the Machiavellian nature of our politics. At least one Warrenian has attempted to solve the relativistic problems of our society's "technologists" has become an extreme within the so-called new morality or "situation ethics." The New Morality

Joseph Fletcher, popularizer of the new morality and author of Situation Ethics, openly acknowledges his debt to relativism. "Perhaps the most pervasive culture trait of the scientific era is that relativism is the relativism with which everything is seen and understood. We have become fully and irresponsibly 'contingent,' not only about our particular ideas, but about the things we do, as well. We have come to think about goodness itself (moral value). The situationist avoids words like 'never' and 'perfect' and 'always and complete'. He avoids the phrase, as he avoids 'absolutely.' The self-concentration involved in the statement is obvious. In the name of openness-mindedness we are dogmatically informed that there are no absolutes! John A. T. Robinson, Fletcher's transatlantic partner in the promotion of the new morality, elaborates on the open point of view. "The moral precepts of Jesus," he assures us, "are not intended to be understood legallyistically, as prescribing what all Christians must do, whatever the circumstances. The new morality is intended to be adaptable to universal right and others universally wrong. They are not laying down what all a man himself to answer the question: Do they illustrate what of love may at any moment require of anyone? Social Humanitarianism

While the abandonment of moral absolutes led to situation ethics and the new morality, the abandonment of the supernatural led to a rational science of morality and social humanism. One of the basic tenets of rationalism was that nature contained an order of natural moral law, to be discovered and followed like any other natural laws. This principle is just as changed as the principles of political and moral wrong. Of justice and injustice, were incorporated in the scheme of reason and science, and it was generally held that the science of ethics as independent of
The mellioristic intervention of the humanist has as its goal the happiness of mankind, individually and collectively. In modern times this collective happiness most often takes the form of utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is the revolt in modern times of the principle of which ancient Cynicism and Epicureanism practiced the role of life. Champion of utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham and Jeremy Bentham is the only one among the ancients who had the merit of having known the true source of morality.

The supreme rule of life for utilitarianism is neither the short-term nor the long-term pleasure of any individual, but rather the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. If the Cynican formula is the pleasure of the moment, and the Epicurean the pleasure of the present, the utilitarian is the maximal summation of all the pleasures of all. It is altruistic with a vengeance, proposing a scheme of action which secures for all men the greatest preponderance of pleasure over pain. Whatever promotes the greatest possible happiness of the greatest possible number of human beings is morally good, and what does not is not.

In its less altruistic form, the search for happiness becomes a very self-centered and personal matter. Both ancient and modern hedonists bear this out strongly, that is, solely concerned with their own personal pleasure. For some this pleasure must be immediate. "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." For others, the "long run" happiness is what counts most. Epicurus represents this kind of hedonism. He counted the cost and played his cards accordingly, but always with his own welfare in mind.

The search for happiness has been a part of our society since the beginnings of the American republic. The Declaration of Independence proudly announces that the pursuit of happiness is one of man's inalienable rights. What has happened, however, is that this pursuit of happiness has become increasingly frenzied. The expectations of happiness as a goal to be achieved in one's own life have been steadily rising since the coming of the Industrial Revolution, and with the other pressures of modern life, progress, and individualism. Utilitarianism has assumed the inevitability of the process of social evolution and the ultimate attainment through social progress of a society characterized by harmonious adjustments among individuals, by efficiency of members in performing their social roles, and by social survival. Sociology was to assist in the achievement of these ideal social conditions by developing and applying scientific knowledge about social organization and social evolution.

The other process is moral—one, the victory of a moral ideal of marriage as a union of deep congeniality, an ideal which naturally raises very high all levels of expectation. This is the expression of an individual and in the Borgia of the future and of a stubborn conviction that happiness, in the fullest sense of the word, is not only possible but is one's inalienable right. Behind this optimism lies a technology that assures us that all things are possible, including the achievement of happiness. The technology of our mechanized world is leading our generation more and more to believe in a dogma which Helmut Thielsch describes as the doctrine that "everything can be made" (Machbarkeit aller Dinge), that ultimately there is nothing that man cannot do.

Many factors in modern life encourage this optimism. There is the technical factor about which J. K. Galbraith writes in his book, The Affluent Society. He reminds us that throughout history the masses of people in all nations have been very poor; poverty was the all-pervasive fact of their life. In the last generations, however, in Western Europe and in North America, even the common people have begun to enjoy an unprecedented affluence. Again, there are political factors, notably the materialistic philosophy of communism with its utopian promise, as well as the socialist emphasis on the growing welfare state which presses for a more equal distribution of the world's wealth. Then there are social factors, such as advertising, where "hidden persuaders" deliberately confuse our needs with our wants and try to convince us not only that certain luxuries are desirable but that they are absolute necessities. With our wants constantly stimulated by high-powered advertising, we measure our success—and our happiness—by what we are able to buy. Most powerful of all is the psychological factor, the mingling of sheer credibility and convenience which drives us to "spend money we cannot afford to possess things we do not need in order to impress people we do not like." What effect the ecological crisis and energy shortages will have on this secular optimism remains to be seen. The "happiness" aspect of humanism may also come in for revision, not by design but by necessity. But for now the humanistic perspective seems to be so deeply entrenched in our life style that it is unlikely to disappear overnight. This is the society to which we are called to minister in these latter years of the 20th century.
Introduction
Corliss Lamont has defined humanism as a philosophy of joyous service for the greater good of all humanity in this natural world according to the methods of reason and democracy. Moreover, humanism will affirm man's worth and value, his responsibility, and his need to be free. To that extent humanism is a constitutive element in the Christian task of doing ethics in the world. In other respects the humanistic interpretation of life is the very antithesis of the Christian faith. So it is that Christianity is obliged to commend and reproach humanism. This constitutes the problematic dilemma in which the Christian finds himself in today's world.

A Christian Approach to Ethical Decisionmaking

Justification Is a Fact
Christian ethics begins with a statement about God. Humanism begins with a statement about man. Christian ethics begins with a dogmatic statement and ends with a dogmatic statement. Christian ethics begins with the doctrine of justification and ends with it while humanism would still be asking if a particular act was "right" or "wrong." While humanists and moralists debate the relative values of good pears, good cherries, and good pears and cherries, Christians ponder the paramount truth that only "a good tree brings forth good fruit." By our very approach to ethics, so humanism urges, Christianity thwarts any possibility of a genuine interest in man. Humanism has urged repeatedly that dogmatic and religious concern cannot coexist with concern for rectifying social injustice, defending human rights, and obviating social, economic, and political evils. For a Lutheran, Martin Luther himself provides a classic counter-example to humanism's claim. Luther's dogmatic interest, though enormous, did not stifle and cancel out his ethical, social, political and economic interest. It perpetuated them.

If one of the chief contributions of the Reformation and Luther was a recovery of the New Testament understanding of ethical decision-making, then we can do no better than to turn to Luther for instruction and guidance.

The Gospel Promotes Confidence
The Christian life not only begins with justification, but for Luther the end of man is not "perfection" but being the "justified" man, the man who lives before God and men, from beginning to end, totally out of the resources of the Gospel. Luther was concerned with motivation, the beginning of Christian decision-making, far more than he was with the consequences of an action. For Luther "good works do not make a good man but a good man produces good works" and the kingdom of God is not the man who lives by law but the man who lives in right relationship with God, a positive and constructive relationship through God's saving deed in Christ. A relationship founded on law destroys faith and love; consequently, it destroys well-doing altogether. A right relationship to God founded on grace brings freedom and well-doing. Luther described this well when he said:

When a man and a woman love and are pleased with each other, and thoroughly believe in their love, who teaches them how they are to behave, what they are to do, leave undone, say, not say, think? Confidence alone teaches them all this and more. They make no difference in works: they do the great, the long, the much, as gladly as the small, the short; the little, and that with joy, peaceful, confident hearts.

Moreover, Luther insisted that where doubt infested a human relationship (the relationship of God and man as well), the result was that well-doing became a chore and burden, and doubt and despair harassed the conscious mind of the doer. This fundamental insight of Luther into the nature of the Christian life under God in the world shook not only the doctrinal structure of the church but all political and social structures as well.

Luther's doctrine of justification was a clear refutation of the hierarchical apparatus of the penitential system. Luther's doctrine of justification erased the cleavage between "religious" life and "secular" life. For if the whole person was justified without his forsaking his occupation and daily work to become monastic, then the Christian's whole life, including his daily occupation, was justified.

While no Scholastic theologian in the Roman Catholic Church would have considered secular activities, e.g., being married, having a job and raising a family, as evil in themselves, such activities were better than morally neutral. For Luther such activities were "religious" because it was precisely within them that God in Christ summoned men to obedience to the Gospel. But in such activities God also confronts us with the demand of Law. Here the needed distinction between Law and Gospel in the Christian doctrine of vocation comes into play.

Thus the service and worship of the Gospel is to receive good things from God, while the worship of the Law is to offer and present our goods to God. We cannot offer anything to God unless we have first been reconciled and reborn. (Apology IV: 310)

The worship of the Gospel and the worship of the Law is expressed in Luther by his distinction between the kingdom of the left hand and the kingdom of the right hand, the kingdom of creation and the kingdom of grace. For Luther, in the kingdom of creation man is called to a life of service and in the kingdom of grace to a life of forgiveness, faith, and Godly living. Our being Christian is a gift of God from moment to moment. Speaking of this reality, Gustav Wingren in
Relating the Purposes of the Church to the Humanistic Society

Types of Humanism

The church ought to be bold in the expression of her life in the Gospel and humble in expression of her life in the Law. With boldness there should be a readiness to distance the humanistic mind. Before such a church begins, the church need be mindful that humanism expresses itself in a variety of ways:

1. Religious humanism either refuses to use the word “God” or substitutes a whole new meaning to the word “humanism” simple existence of God.

2. Theology defines humanism as the sum of human ideals or the personification of all human aspirations; and

3. Post-athleticism humanism assumes the affirmation of man rather than the denial of God.

There is a further complication, the fact that many Christians claim that Christianity is the ultimate and ideal form of humanism. While humanism would call for the elimination of man as we find him in the world, Christian Humanists, e.g., Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, Paul Lehmann, et al., would point the Church-event in which God condescended to take upon Himself man’s persistence, and by his resurrection to reconcile man unto Himself. Because mankind has been the object of God’s love in Christ, man has become a thing of inestimable value, and as might be expected, disinterest in and not the other half of human beings had been most energetic. Much of the effort has been to convince non-Christian humanists that Christianity cares about man.

Christianity and Natural Law

While Roman Catholicism has retained a high regard for the notion of natural law, Protestantism neglected it in favor of a weaker defense of a systematic treatment of natural law, but it did play a significant role in his understanding of Law and Gospel. For Luther all stations of life, ecclesiastical, domestic, economic, and political, embody in institutional form particular commandments. As such the stations are universal and are addressed to all men, Christian and non-Christian alike; and the extent to which men are aware of such particular commands is due to God’s revelation. Consequently, since men’s relationships were expressed through such orders, matters of jurisprudence, civic virtue, and public morality could be delegated necessarily to those with the expertise to administer such matters, leaving the church free to perform her function of preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments. This separation of the functions of church and state was not due to an Anabaptist fear of contamination by the secular order, but due to a recognition that God could preserve the fallen world from chaos, injustice, and anarchy through His will manifested in the orders. God’s Law revealed in nature was so lucid for Luther that he could judge what was moral and what was ceremonial law simply on the basis of the law of nature (the decalogue). For Luther, even the Church was not a new insight into law, the world already had that, but a message about God’s revelation in Jesus Christ.

Self Criticism of the Church, Nuestra Culpa

Boldly the church confesses her Gospel and her faith, but the church must humbly acknowledge her faults. While the church by conscience humanism has become her most severe critic. Today the church is ready to admit that the atheist may well pronounce God’s judgment on our sin, albeit unknowingly done. The church may admit the following (1) She has preached the Gospel at times in such a way as to exclude Christians from loving concern and forgiveness toward the neighbor. (2) She has identified herself too much with the power structures, political and economic, so as to still her voice of judgment on the demoralizing aspects of those structures. (3) She has often mirrored rather than molded the unbridled culture. (4) She has been hesitant to explore ways in which she might use her own “structures” to come to the aid of the people oppressed by economic and social structures. (5) Finally, she acknowledges that though her “city” is in heaven and that she cannot always attain salvation in this world, she has at times preached salvation “by word and deed” (Rom. 15:18).

Specific Plans for Action

While the church laments the anti-Christian aspects of much of humanism, she is thankful that humanism has been a stimulus for repentance and revaluation within the church and its people. As a result of that stimulus a new understanding of civil religion may be envisaged in the church. In brief these five steps are being undertaken and implemented in many sectors of the church.

First, congregations are taking more active interest in applying the Christian morality to the complex issues of society. Often the church can avoid the disaster of repeating the mistakes of the past by dealing with ethical philosophy which has already “mopped up” the “dead ends” and is not addressed to the problems of the present. The church can be most effective in providing a positive toward moral education in the public schools, professional organizations, and social or civic clubs.
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because as Luther reminds us "such belongs to the domain of reason" and law. The church does not disregard "civil righteousness" but encourages and supports those who uphold it.

Third, Christian adult education has become a "must" test the church become merely a retreat from the conditions of daily life. Special interest classes designed to meet the needs of occupational and professional groups in the congregation and community are growing, but more are needed.86

Fourth, the church cannot be satisfied with the status quo in business or society simply because things can never be perfect; nor can the church withhold her love until the ideal has been attained.87 Fifth, the church through her educators is recovering a prophetic zeal, a readiness to preach Law—"not in vague generalities, but through specific cases and situations in business, commerce, social, and political spheres.88

The new directions in Christian thought, in part stimulated by humanism and in part stimulated by the church's self-criticism, are not to be confused by the "Social Gospel Movement" which was short on Gospel and long on Law. The church does have a duty to proclaim God's commandment for the social orders. We do uphold "social law." For the Christian the Gospel alone brings the motivation and power for a new regard for fellow human beings, so that we no longer look at men from a human point of view (2 Cor. 5:16). But as Gottfried Voigt has said, "We, along with our non-Christian fellow human beings, for the best that is possible in the world of Adam.89 Insofar as humanism and Christianity share common roots in the classical, Christianity and humanism can be co-workers; insofar as Christianity hopes in a future inaugurated by God alone and humanism does not, there can be no irreconcilable conflict between the two traditions.

We cannot proclaim the love of God to all who would come to a faith and live indifferent toward them. We cannot announce that God intends to make everything new, and at the same time leave everything in its state of disintegration.90

NOTES
3 Classic works on the Christian life by Luther would be The Treatise on Good Works, and Worship the Treatise on Christian Liberty. His commentaries on Romans and Galatians, the Large and Small Catechisms; works on political and economic issues are: Sermons, Sermons on What Exten... Should Be Observed, Whether Soldiers, Too. Can Be Saved, Address to the German Nobility; On Usury: Instructions for the Organization of a Community Church.
5 Beach, op. cit., p. 240.
6 Ibid., p. 240-241.
7 Ibid., p. 241.
16 Ibid., p. 44.
17 Ibid.
19 Althaus, op. cit., p. 35.
22 Paul S. Schilling, op. cit., p. 156.
25 Breen, op. cit., p. 84.
28 Carneser P. Hall, Editor, On the Job Ethics: A Pioneering Anal
29 David Martin, "The Religious and the Secular, Studies in Secur
30 Gottfried Voigt, op. cit., p. 325.
31 Harold Gram, op. cit., p. 102.
33 Carneser P. Hall, op. cit., p. 138.
34 Ibid., p. 138.
36 Ibid., p. 322.
37 Ibid., p. 327-328.
39 Gottfried Voigt, op. cit., p. 325.

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Is public criticism of church and educational leaders bad or good? The question is appropriate because for a long time these kinds of leaders, unlike political leaders, were relatively immune from the harsher types of criticism in public print. In recent years, however, unofficial publications have sprung up which unashamedly attack church and educational leaders by name and whose methods sometimes make the harsh methods of the secular press seem mild.

How about this growing practice? Is it justified? Is it proper? Does it edify the church? Does it facilitate the achievement of the goals of Christian education?

People will take different views on this, but I happen to believe that church and educational leaders should not be immune from public criticism. They are public leaders and the stewardship of their responsibilities may properly be criticized (a better word may be "critiqued" or "evaluated") in public print.

Let it be understood, however, that the word "properly" in the previous sentence is of the greatest significance. I am not talking about worldly people criticizing religious leaders. I am talking about Christians criticizing each other. It is of the utmost importance that when Christians hold up their own brothers and sisters to public criticism, they go to great pains to demonstrate that they are criticizing in a Christian way. People must understand that the way Christians criticize each other is different, reflects a different spirit, and even a different procedure from the often impersonal, unsympathetic, inaccurate, even harsh and malicious criticism found in secular publications.

What are the canons of Christian criticism? They include both do's and don'ts.

The most important "do" in Christian criticism is found in the apostle Paul's exhortation to "be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another." People who assume the awesome responsibility of attacking their fellow Christians in public must try particularly hard to imbue their writing with recognizable Christian kindness.

Similar in importance as a "do" is the requirement of accuracy. Christians who undertake the task of publicly criticizing their fellow Christians must be pledged to a procedure of meticulous and unimpeachable accuracy. No Christian should ever accuse or denounce his fellow Christian in public unless he has checked and double-checked his facts for accuracy, checked both with unbiased sources and with the brother or sister being accused. Christian publishers who argue that deadlines do not give them enough time to do this should either extend their deadlines or omit every reference that has not been checked in a Christian way. The printing of rumor-based, unverified criticism (known in secular circles as journalistic irresponsibility) should be recognized in Christian circles as nothing less than sinful conduct.

The "don'ts" of Christian criticism involve chiefly the misuse of language. Language is such an intricate and manipulable instrument that it can be made to appear to tell the truth even while it is disseminating lies. Christians who truly love the fellow Christian whom they feel called upon to criticize must make every effort to avoid the distorting tricks that language can play, if the writer is willing to let it do so.

Let me name a few of the pitfalls that a Christian critic must strive carefully to avoid.

1. Labeling: Christian writers should not lead their readers to judge people on the basis of labels. Labels are such oversimplifications that they more often hide the truth than reveal it.

2. Mixing truth with falsehood: This is a highly effective propaganda technique because it takes the reader off his guard. Seeing something that is clearly true, he assumes the rest of the paragraph has the same veracity. Christian writers should avoid this procedure like the plague.

3. Half-truths: This is another devastating propaganda tool. Telling only part of the story makes it sound one way. If the whole story were told, it would sound completely different. This is clearly deceptive and should never be used in Christian criticism.

4. Guilt by association: Christian writers should not leave the impression that to agree with a person on one point means that one accepts his whole philosophy.

5. Innuendo: Christian writers should not resort to the use of subtle innuendos against brothers and sisters in the faith, planting seeds of doubt though proof is lacking.

Is the practice of criticizing religious leaders good or bad? It can be good if the canons of painstaking accuracy and considerate Christian courtesy are meticulously followed. It will be bad if they are not. Writers who ignore the do's and don'ts of proper Christian criticism deserve greater criticism than the people they are criticizing.

Effectiveness Training Associates of Pasadena, California, have developed a no-lose method of problem solving that has broad application in the family, church, and world. Though humanistically conceived, P.E.T. forces a Christian to re-assess his value structures in his own relationships in his family, on the job, and throughout his daily living. Dr. Gordon is a licensed psychologist and the founder of Effectiveness Training Associates, a worldwide network of professionals offering training programs for parents, teachers, administrators, and others working in human relationships. Tom Gordon credits Carl Rogers as being the biggest influence in his development and philosophical orientation.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has “bought into” the program via an Aid Association for Lutherans grant to the Board for Parish Education. Hundreds of LCMS people have received the instructor training and are now involved in P.E.T. (Parent Effectiveness Training) and T.E.T. (Teacher Effectiveness Training) classes. Some of the class cost is underwritten by A.A.L. also.

Theological Responses submitted by Dr. Marvin Bergman, Dr. Samuel Goltermann, and Rev. Thomas Green, all of whom attended the training meetings, have been examined by the writer and found to be supportive of the concept and approach of P.E.T. for Missouri Synod (and all) people. Dr. Goltermann, cognizant of complex realities, concluded:

What words to say when I want to communicate Law and Gospel to an individual person in a particular situation on a given day is still my most difficult and important “theological” assignment as parent, teacher, or friend.

It is my profound hope that what we can profitably learn from PET/TET about listening and speaking, about communicating and sharing and relating, joined to what God’s good Spirit teaches us about His love and grace in Jesus Christ will bring a whole new life and vitality and blessing to the ministry we share.

Rev. Green echoes the concern of most Lutherans relative to the use of authority and parent’s power over the child. “Parental Authority in the Biblical sense is God’s means to protect children, to lead them to wisdom, to bring and to keep them in the saving faith.”

In a day when “Speaking the truth in love” is considered passé, one is reminded of the injunctions found in Matthew 18 and the process of communication engendered by our Lord Jesus. Where has the church gone? Where has the church been? Is not the kingdom of God within each of us? Let us, in the body of Christ, establish a “no-lose” policy in communication and problem solving. Presently, this is difficult because winning has become more important than resolving conflicts in love. The methods of P.E.T. encourage disagreement which focuses on the points of conflict and solution rather than on proving or disproving authority. The “no-lose” condition can be reached only when members of the body of Christ learn to express their feelings and to listen to one another.

2 Ibid., p. 7.

GLEN O. KRAFT