

SECULAR HUMANISM

AN OVERVIEW



Secular humanism in the driving seat - the implications for our faith and society.

A Christian commentary and response from the Maranatha Community
for the Church in our country today

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Foreword

Secular humanism has become a pervasive and destructive influence in contemporary culture.

It is a major challenge to the fabric of our society in the United Kingdom and threatens many of our values. It undoubtedly seeks to destroy the Judaeo-Christian¹ foundations of our society and invariably denies the spiritual dimension of life.

It is militantly antagonistic to the concept of God.

It seeks to extinguish the Church, and to sweep to one side the Christian faith. It often dismisses, ridicules and victimises believers. It seeks to privatise and marginalise all religious belief and practice.

The message of secular humanism is that humanity is in sole control of its destiny and that the solution to all our problems is in our own hands. In denying the spiritual dimension of life, secular humanism robs life of meaning and value. Significantly, Charles Swinburne arrogantly boasted *“Glory to man in the highest, for man is the master of things”*.

“The culture in which we find ourselves is in turmoil” says Ravi Zacharias in pointing to the confusion which secular humanism inevitably generates. Speaking of the confrontation which is now emerging he says, *“Let us not lose sight of this titanic battle in society, because it hides the heart of our struggle”*.

It is vital for Christians to understand the consequences of efforts to silence the supernatural. Christians have a responsibility to come to terms with the secular humanist challenge and to warn of the considerable costs to our society of embracing its attitudes and ideas.

The implied and actual message of secular humanism is dire. Albert Camus said *“I believe in nothing and that everything is absurd”*. Somerset Maugham said *“There is no reason for life, and life has no meaning”*. Jean-Paul Sartre said *“Every existing thing is born without reason, prolongs itself out of weakness and dies by chance”*.

By contrast the way of God is the way of hope for a hopeless world. Augustine reminded us that *our hearts are restless until they rest in God*. Christ brings meaning and purpose to life amidst the chaos and confusion of a fallen world.

This document has been written by a ‘Spearhead Group’ made up of members of the Maranatha Community. Its purpose is to inform, to encourage deeper consideration and prayer, and to generate a healthy dialogue with those who currently propound atheistic secular humanism.

Dennis Wrigley
Maranatha Community

¹ See Glossary

Introduction

This is a pivotal moment in history, and a time of choice and opportunity for God's Church. We believe that God is urgently calling Christians to proclaim and defend the core, non-negotiable truths of the Gospel, and to respond to growing influences in our society which are a cause for concern and which, in some cases, have become assaults on our faith. These influences and their implications are social, political, and spiritual. As the Apostle Paul says *our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*². Ultimately this assault is upon the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church.

The most immediate concern is secular humanism, spread by secular humanists. Secular humanism is now a major - perhaps the major - influence on all areas of our society: in government, the mass media, education at every level, public policy and business, even within the Church. Secular humanists are increasingly well organized, literate, articulate and very persuasive. Society has come to accept their doctrines as normal, even regarding them as common sense.

The secular humanist influence is fast becoming a major problem for many Christians, because the basis of secular humanism, and many of its doctrines and values are contrary to the Christian faith. More and more cases are reported in which Christians and churches are challenged and penalized for expressing and practising their long-held beliefs, simply because they do not conform to secular humanist values.

We believe that it is now time for all Christians, across all traditions, to meet the challenge of this assault with one voice, courageously, honestly and effectively.

It is hoped that this briefing document will be a helpful resource for the Church.

² Eph 6:12

I. What is Secular Humanism?

Secular humanists have several core beliefs in common. They are either atheistic³ or agnostic⁴ and they are called secular because they subscribe to the doctrines of secularism⁵, which excludes any 'God dimension' from its thought or practice.

The origins of secular humanism lie in thinkers and activists who wanted to develop and put into practice beliefs and ethics excluding God or religion. As humanists⁶, they wanted again to better humankind. Their faith is in humanity alone as master of its own destiny without God or religion. They believe that humankind can improve in and by itself, through science, social engineering, reason, technology and medicine.

2. The implications for the well-being of our society

As well as affecting the Church, secular humanism has major implications for our whole society, given the dominance of secular humanist doctrines, programmes and policies.

The Church is not a political movement. Nevertheless, politics is about values. The call of the Church is to share Jesus Christ and the values He reveals and represents, and to set out the implications of His Gospel for the good of society and its members. This is a non-negotiable part of the Church's

mission. The Gospel, by definition, can never be just a private matter. Neither can it be separated from social, political or economic policy or issues. Rather, the Gospel provides an interpretation of these in the light of Judaeo-Christian values.

Western society is diverse; all societies change. As a bridge between society and the Gospel, the Church changes too. In the quest for social harmony and integration, there is no place for narrow fanaticism, whether religious or secularist⁷. Recognising the insidious increase in secular humanist influence on society over the past fifty years, the following questions must be asked: what would a fully secular humanist society and State be like? do we really want one? have we ever been asked? does secular humanism offer enough on which to build a just society that allows all to flourish?

3. Secular Humanism and religious faith

Many secular humanists fervently believe that all religion is irrational, divisive, unscientific and usually malevolent. So they believe that modern, enlightened societies must urgently and totally get rid of religion if humanity is to progress. They appear particularly to dislike orthodox Christianity. Work is well underway, in the UK, towards a fully secular humanist State, with the particular aim of isolating Christianity as the former mainstream religion in the West and the removal of any reference to it from modern culture.

³ See Glossary

⁴ See Glossary

⁵ See Glossary

⁶ See Glossary

⁷ Cf Hebrews 12:14

Other secular humanists, in contrast, are more tolerant and appreciative of religious art, culture, customs, identity and festivals, believing that religion will, with scientific and technological progress, wither away spontaneously. They are happy to work with faith groups on common humanitarian causes.

In this new millennium, religion is actually flourishing outside Europe. Secular humanists are becoming more militant in response. Their influence in all key areas of our society has grown as that of Christianity has decreased. Using this influence, they are pressing society into accepting ideas and policies that they favour and Christians reject. Secular humanists seek to mould our society and change Western civilization to reflect their own doctrines. They are also deeply influential in the UN and other international organizations.

4. The assault by Secular Humanism on the Christian Faith

Secular humanists are fully entitled to disagree with Christian belief. However, we are concerned that Christian belief and practice is often seriously misunderstood or misrepresented. This in turn distorts how others perceive the Church and Christianity. Secular humanism is the source of misleading themes such as 'Faith versus Science' and the widespread notion that faith and reason contradict each other. Yet there is no conflict between reason, the sciences and authentic Christianity. Reason is God-given and enables development of thought; it supports and clarifies faith. The sciences

explain the wonders of God's Creation and of humanity itself. The problem arises with the claim that science, along with mathematics, is the **only** valid, meaningful source of truth, and that anything else, including theology and faith, is invalid and meaningless.

A product of secular humanist influence is a failure to separate a person or people from their belief, behaviour and practice. Therefore, for example, someone who disagrees with the teachings of Mohammed is labelled 'Islamophobic'. Similarly, the rejection of same-sex 'marriage' is presented as a hatred of homosexual people. Jesus teaches His followers to love their enemies, and traditional Christian teaching is that we should love the sinner, hate the sin. It has become almost impossible to disagree with somebody without being deemed to be antagonistic towards them personally. Conversely, the word 'equality', which was originally rooted in the equal worth and value of all human beings, created by God in His own image, has now become equated with the equal acceptance and validity of all human behaviours and beliefs.

5. Freedom of conscience should be for all

A culture of open, lively debate is vital for a living, healthy society. It is part of the way that God has made us as human beings.

The democratic principles of our society, with the hard-won freedoms of conscience and speech, must be cherished and upheld. Nobody can force anyone's conscience. All must be free to believe what they think is right.

Yet today, a public or even private challenge to the particular views, policies, practices or lifestyles of others, carries the risk of being accused of bigotry, intolerance, 'hate crime' or 'hate speech'. Are there really such things? Can we 'criminalize' personal thought? Do we want to? Historically, authoritarian regimes have demonstrated that nobody can stop people believing what they wish. It is the consequences of the enacting of that belief that matter, and particularly when it harms others or works against the common good. History and experience show that we best meet words with dialogue, not with imposed, reactive gags, fines or prison sentences. Attempts to force people's consciences rapidly lead to authoritarianism and tyranny.

6. Reasonable men and women may differ on what is reasonable

This principle is a foundational, well-established principle of our legal systems. Western democratic tradition values each person's and group's right to their own conscience. This tradition has been worked out in, and emerged from, a Europe in which Christianity has long been a fundamental, and perhaps even the most important, influence. State and law require that we be reasonable citizens, and respect and value all equally. However, neither the state nor law can tell us how or what to think. True Christianity accepts such freedom. Faith should not be imposed on others. Jesus Himself shows that this is not God's way.

A confusion has now arisen between the right to free speech and the

intention to impose one's views on others. What has come to be called 'political correctness' effectively forbids freedom of expression in many cases. This means that when Christians or others express views, particularly publicly, that differ from currently accepted 'norms', they are accused of imposing them on everyone else, and even of bigotry. This suggests that not all citizens and groups have the right to express and present publicly their own beliefs, policies and proposals for society.

7. Secular humanism, equality and human rights

Christians believe that, because every human being is created in the image of God, each individual has equal human rights. Most secular humanist doctrines and policies make much of human rights, which they believe are 'self-evident', rather than derived from the existence of a Creator. However, the question needs to be asked on what basis can human rights be 'self-evident' and on what other grounds can they be based and from where do they come?

The concept and practice of freedom and human rights needs to be rescued from secular humanism's revised and exclusive interpretation. This requires recovery of a fuller vision and understanding of humanity and what it is to be human, in order to find and agree a clear definition of equality, freedom and human dignity. In denying any existence of a Creator it is difficult to see how secular humanism can do this. Respect for human freedom, equality and dignity

fundamentally rests upon the solid rock of two fundamental principles:

1. God created human beings in His own image to be and live like Him.
2. Life and the universe has meaning and purpose because God created it.

8. The Christian vision of human dignity

Any healthy and just society must be person-centred, respecting the humanity in each of us, expressed in individual lives and relationships. This brings together all that makes us human. This principle is at the heart of European civilization upon which Christianity has long been a basic influence. Christians believe that 'equality' means that every person has equal dignity and worth, because God created us in His own image as body, mind and spirit, for the purpose of relationship.⁸ Sin, expressed in selfishness, has damaged our human nature. Yet we still bear the divine image, albeit marred.⁹ Human value is not a human creation, it comes from God.¹⁰

Human beings are not simply subject to an abstract, ambiguous set of rights that we tick off from a list. We are human beings and live within the confines as well as the freedoms of our humanity and human nature. It is not something we have or make. We value each human being as a unique person and seek the common good of all. God enables all who trust in Him to become, behave and live like Him.

⁸ Genesis 2:7

⁹ Genesis 1:27 & 28 and 5:1 & 2.

¹⁰ Cf Psalm 8:4 - 6

What matters is people, their values, relationships and responsibilities, as well as their human rights. This is lived in the context of family, local and faith communities, their history, traditions and cultures. In this vision, true freedom involves responsibility. As mature adults, we grow our consciences in wisdom and truth. We seek the courage and self-discipline to live by them.

9. The assault on humanity itself

There are forces and ideas in our society which now cut at the root of human nature itself. The Bible tells us that from the beginning spiritual powers in rebellion against God have worked against humanity. Satan and demonic beings hate God and humanity, which is created in God's image for His glory. Humanity believed the Satanic lie, that we, not our Creator, decide what is right and wrong, according to our own desires. This rebellion sown into human nature demands its own way in everything, to please itself rather than God. This is the greatest delusion of all, and one that has become a feature at the heart of our modern society: that the individual is completely self-sufficient, and able to lead a satisfying and meaningful life apart from God.

The truth is that we did not and cannot create ourselves. By our very nature, we depend totally upon God and each other, and are the product of our world and history. Therefore, we are not free to write our own laws of morality and justice, just as we cannot write the laws of physics. If we try, as we often do, we will always fail. The results are broken humanity and

societies, whose members are disconnected and disengaged from each other and reality.

We believe that now is the time for the Church faithfully to declare these truths publicly, by pointing to current, particular secular humanist doctrines and policies; to name them for what they are; to declare and expose the forces behind these assaults on human nature itself.

10. Some specific assaults on human dignity today

There are attacks on human dignity today from secular humanism which are of particular concern. These occur throughout modern Western society.

- There has been an aggressive campaign since the 1960s to propagate what is called 'women's reproductive rights'. This has enabled the active promotion of sexual promiscuity with the assertion that sex is entirely for personal pleasure rather than as an integral part of a committed exclusive relationship. One of the most serious consequences, which is now very evident, is the increasing rate of relationship breakdown, with inevitable human suffering. This is particularly serious for children for whom there are longterm consequences individually and socially.
- Associated with 'women's reproductive rights', abortion on demand up to the point of birth has now become accepted as a normal and automatic woman's 'right', often as a form of contraception. Some

even appear to justify killing babies already born, on the basis that only those who can demonstrate full actual 'consciousness' at any given moment can be designated as 'fully human'.¹¹

- Recent years have seen an increasing momentum with regard to embryo experimentation. IVF is routinely offered for infertile couples. However, the important questions surrounding the status of frozen embryos and their disposal have not been addressed. Genetic editing of 'spare embryos' from fertility clinics is now being approved by the Human Fertilisation & Embryology Authority. This denies that an embryo has any status of personhood or intrinsic value. These embryos are to be routinely 'disposed of' after seven days.
- There is growing pressure to legalize euthanasia and assisted suicide, to give society the legal power and 'right' to kill the elderly and terminally ill. It is largely based on the Utilitarian assertion that human life is ultimately expendable because it has no inherent value and that suffering and pain are the ultimate evil. Experience from other countries, such as the Netherlands and Belgium, which already have such legislation indicates that this soon also develops into a 'right' to kill without the consent of the individual or their family. Human rights are thus not truly universal, but only apply in set circumstances depending upon the condition of the person concerned.

¹¹ An example of one who takes this view is the Australian philosopher Peter Singer.

I I. The sexualization of modern culture

These attacks on our humanity are causing increasing individual and social damage with escalating family and community breakdown, increasing the number of single-parent families, abortions and divorces, and the misery that results from these. There are continual pressures to extend abortion rights. Condoms are freely handed out to everyone, including children, and ever-more explicit sex education is being directed towards ever-younger children. This has potentially disastrous consequences for the view of sex and sexuality with which they will grow up. The normalization, use of and addiction to pornography has spread almost beyond control, and is now even more easily promoted and made available through the internet which is accessible from every PC, laptop and mobile device.

Modern society and its now accepted radical libertarian¹² sexual ethics, demands that free rein is given to all sexual desire. These hedonistic sexual beliefs insist that any restraint is 'repression'; lack of restraint is claimed to be 'true freedom'; sexual relations are thereby reduced to merely instant, personal gratification and superficial feelings of intimacy. Marriage is presented as an optional 'piece of paper', or entry in a register. This is despite the obvious fact that human beings have been marrying from time immemorial without any such administrative arrangements.

In families, which should grow out of the commitment and loving faithfulness of husband and wife, secular humanist

values and policies have led to selfish, unstable, superficial and immature relationships, with the associated psychological, emotional and physical disorders. Far from being 'enlightened' and 'liberated' these values and policies cut at the very heart of marital love, human faithfulness and commitment. Secular humanism presents a radically different view of human nature and society from that which has been the basis of western civilization from its beginning. What has taken place as a result of this ideology needs to be fully recognised as a real assault upon the very nature of human sexuality and humanity itself.

For example, secular humanist ideology has not, so far, found an adequate response to the growing problems of sexually transmitted disease and unwanted and underage pregnancy. Christian teaching and practice, on the other hand, encourages love expressed in sexual union in the context of the commitment of marriage, abstinence and self-control. If this were practised, it would deal with these problems entirely at their source.

God created human sexuality to unite a man and a woman, through the covenant of marriage, to share His love and assist in His creation of more human beings. This is basic to human nature and any healthy society. Human sexuality and its God- created purpose is now especially subject to attack. Satan seeks to destroy humanity, by perverting human sexuality and sexual reproduction as God created them, and destroying their vital role in God's plan. This is evident today in his attempt to destroy marriage itself.

¹² See Glossary

I2. What can Secular Humanism offer society?

A healthy society encourages its citizens to learn from one another. There is much to learn from the many varied groups within society, including secular humanists. However, secular humanism's claim that it is establishing a 'neutral' or 'ethics free' culture or society must be challenged. There is no such thing as spiritual or ethical neutrality. The denial of a God-given spiritual dimension of life in fact denies humanity itself which is by nature body, mind and spirit. The aggressive imposition of secular humanist doctrine demands that only its views are recognised as valid, blocking any public expression of religious faith.

The dismissal of the Judaeo-Christian framework, upon which is based reverence for human life and dignity, has not been accompanied by a replacement with anything but a restricted and legalistic version of rights and freedoms. This in turn is dominated by preoccupation with technology and modernization, which becomes increasingly impersonal and indeed depersonalized. None of this can provide society with a solid, broad basis for a moral framework which is able to inspire and upon which most can agree.

Secular humanism has no answer, nor anything to offer, in situations of tragedy and suffering. If the universe is meaningless, there can be no meaning or hope in or for humanity. Tragedy is but one particular arbitrary event, part of a meaningless scatter of events. In secular humanist doctrine, human beings are simply material

processes, because that is all there is. Values and beliefs, sympathy and empathy, have no objective reality and therefore can only be subjective, nothing more than 'the firings of the brain's neurons'.

The sincerity of secular humanists cannot be doubted, but the consequences of the doctrine that the universe itself has no real meaning and is a chance event is a serious concern. If this were true, one could legitimately draw the conclusion that humanity too, as part of this universe, is only the product of chance, blind forces, and is ultimately without meaning; as human beings we have come from nowhere, are nowhere, and are going nowhere. In other words all humanity, and the whole of life and the universe would appear to be totally lost!

An urgent call to the Church

What can Christians do to meet this challenge?

The secular humanist experiment of the last fifty years has evidently failed. The Church can and must give hope in the midst of widespread despair; it has the opportunity to speak truth into the darkness of confusion and to promote fullness of life countering the ever deepening culture of death.

Some pointers to the Christian and the Church for our time

- Pray for and actively love all secular humanists as God loves them.¹³
- Respectfully engage with secular humanists and the issues they raise, governed by the principles in 1 Peter,¹⁴ giving a reasoned answer with courtesy.
- Jesus tells His followers not to be naive, but wise as serpents, simple as doves.¹⁵ Challenge errors and distortions. Be well-informed about Christian truth, secular humanism and the issues themselves.
- Seek to re-inject Christian values into political and social life, by being involved in political parties and movements, national and local government, trade unions, professional and trade associations, other interest and pressure groups and the work place.
- Humbly share the full Gospel of God's salvation in Jesus the Way, the Truth and the Life, as His little brothers and sisters.¹⁶ In and like Jesus, seek to change minds, hearts and lives, and share His love by giving freely to all, working alongside the poor and needy, challenging evil, and suffering with those who suffer.¹⁷
- Be one in mind and heart, putting on the mindset of Christ,¹⁸ relying on the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Affirm the sacredness of all human life, and of family life centred upon the marriage of one man and one woman.
- Invite all people of good will to work towards a society where every person is equally valued, and which promotes human flourishing, honesty, justice and wisdom; so that with St Paul,¹⁹ all seek whatever is true, noble, right, pure, beautiful, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy.

¹³ Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:27

¹⁴ 1 Peter 2:11 and 3:15 - 17

¹⁵ Matthew 10:16

¹⁶ Cf Luke 9:1-6

¹⁷ Cf 1 John 3:16

¹⁸ Romans 15:5 to 7, 1 Cor 1:10, 1 Cor 2:16

¹⁹ Philippians 4:8

Glossary

Agnosticism

Agnosticism holds that there is no meaningful way of knowing whether 'God exists, or that the question is irrelevant, or meaningless. The word agnostic comes from the Greek 'not knowing'.

Agnostics neither deny nor affirm God's existence, but attempt to work out and build their worldview, philosophy and ethics without reference to God.

Atheism

Atheists affirm that no god exists in any form and that there is not any supernatural dimension to existence. The universe is all that there is and is its own purpose and cause.

Atheism is the belief that no god exists. In this sense 'god' simply means a powerful spiritual being who is capable of interacting with humans.

Humanism

Humanism is a broad, general term and it has many forms. All humanisms stress the centrality and fundamental importance and value of human beings, humanity and humankind for ethics, society, social development, government, politics, and social and economic policy. Some humanists believe in God, some do not.

Judaeo-Christian

A general term used in this context to refer very broadly, to beliefs and values which are rooted in the scriptures, values, beliefs and teachings of ancient Israel and Judaism, and which, through Christianity, have been absorbed by European and Western societies and civilization from their earliest beginning.

Radical Libertarianism

Radical libertarianism denies the importance of society, the community, family, or common good, and believes that there should be few if any constraints upon behaviour, sexual and otherwise, and wishes to remove as many such constraints as possible.

Secularism

Secularism is a broad movement which seeks to derive its beliefs and values from the world and human race alone, without any reference to God.

Note: See also the following Maranatha publications

- Western Culture and the Christian Gospel
- Our Christian Identity - the de-Christianising of the United Kingdom
- A Matter of Life or Death - The Struggle for the Soul of Our Nation
- Values - The characteristics of our British national identity

The Maranatha Community

The Maranatha Community is a Christian movement with many members from all Christian traditions throughout the United Kingdom and abroad. It is dedicated to praying and working for unity, healing and renewal in and between churches, communities and nations, and pursues a lifestyle characterized by simplicity, poverty and urgency. The Maranatha Community is a servant ministry to the Church of Christ claiming only to be little brothers and sisters of Jesus, holding fast to the non-negotiable core truths of the Christian faith. It has a strong social witness and responds to those in need. It was formed in 1981 and its life and work continues to develop and expand.

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