



Christian Humanism in Education

presentation for ED 475

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OVERVIEW

■ *Early Developments*

- Greek philosophy
- Old Testament theology

■ *Modern revisions*

- the Renaissance
- the Reformation
- the Enlightenment
 - cosmology
 - philosophy
 - psychology

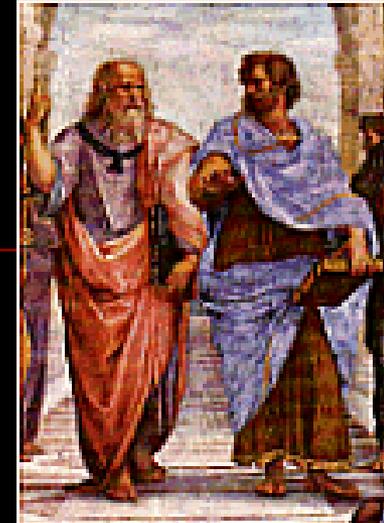
■ *Contemporary*

- “Christian” humanism
- 21st century humanisms
- a “crisis” in humanism
- experience of grace
- culture of freedom

■ *Salesian*

- synthesis (SFDS)
- education (DSU)

Philosophical (Greek)



- In the early age of Greek philosophy, where the universe is considered to be an **ordered reality** (Aristotle), humans are thought to enjoy a pre-eminent status. In this world, the pursuit of happiness is impaired not by death but by **ignorance**. Thus, it is the task of the great philosophers, like Socrates and Plato, to provide **educational** dialogues by which men and women could grapple with the larger questions about the meaning of life, and thereby better themselves.

Biblical (Old Testament)



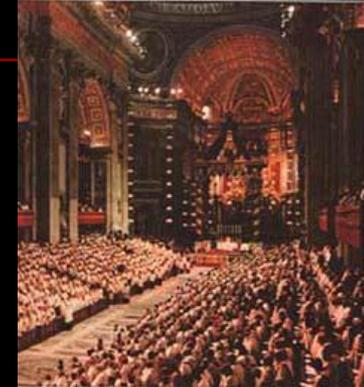
- In a Christian humanism, the order of the universe is seen as a result of the **providential** hand of God at work in creation and, subsequently, in the redemption of the world. Human beings in this world do, indeed, enjoy a pre-eminent status, owing to their having been created "in the image and likeness of God" (Gen 1:26); as such, their worth and **dignity** remain dependent on God rather than on their own ingenuity. In this relational context, the real limitation to human happiness is not ignorance, but **sin**.

the Renaissance



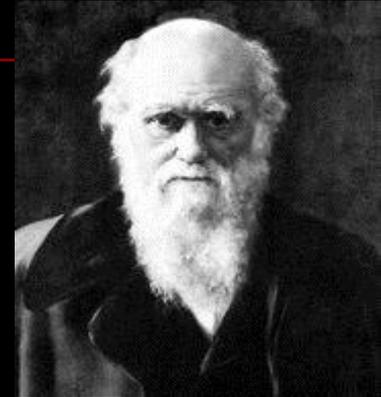
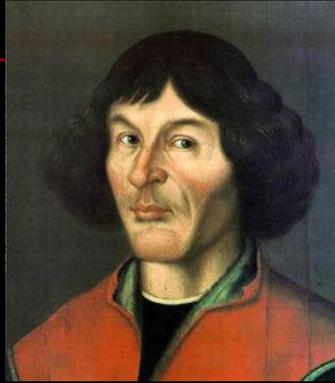
- In the age of the Renaissance, humanism in its classical form takes shape. Extolling the virtues of human freedom and championing the potential of human action, the Renaissance thinkers bring about a cultural revolution. Attention is drawn to the arts, as the expression of human **creativity**, and thought returns to the **antiquities** (Erasmus), as the cultivation of human knowing.

the Reformation



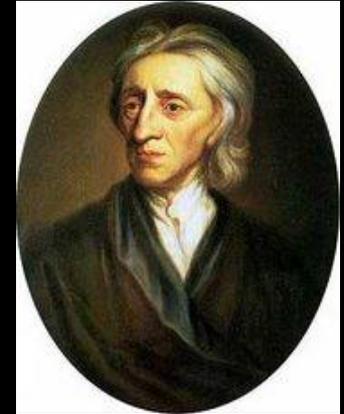
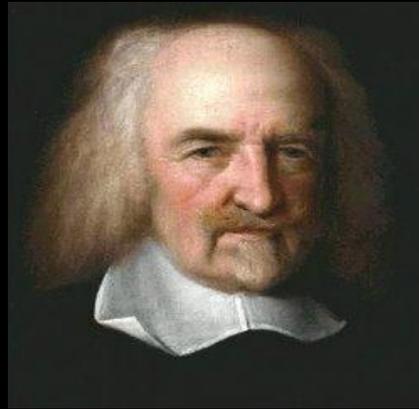
- The classical humanism of the Renaissance, with its focus on human freedom and potential, encounters a biblical humanism that highlights our dependence on God and the need for divine grace in order to realize our potential. We are reminded that, prior to human creativity, **faith** is the first and foremost need for the good life (Luther). In addition, human greatness is found not in the revitalization of ancient knowledge but in the present works of a truly **good life** (Council of Trent).

the Enlightenment



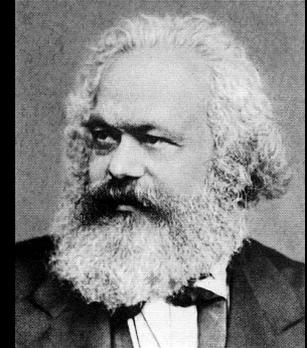
- Scientific theories situate human existence in a new **world-view**:
 - earth is put in its proper cosmic place (Copernicus), and
 - human beings are considered to have evolved over time (Darwin).

the Enlightenment



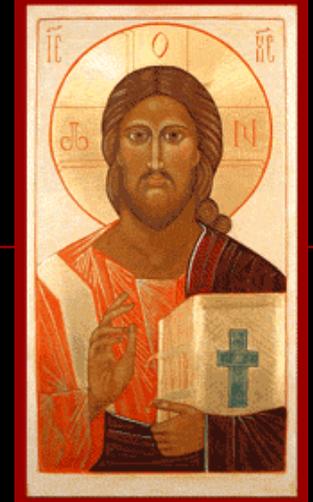
- **Rationalistic** philosophies relegate self-knowledge to a more confined context, where
 - doubt begins the reflective process (Descartes) and
 - brute experience underscores social interaction (Hobbes & Locke).

the Enlightenment



- The nature of human life comes to be explained in **behavioral** terms, where the human species operates according to fundamental, instinctual drives
 - for power (Nietzsche) or
 - for sex (Freud) or
 - for economic well-being (Marx).

“Christian” Humanism



- a vision of the **universe** as ordered by divine providence and oriented toward salvation
- an understanding of human **nature** as dependent on one's relation to God
- an emphasis on human **responsibility** over and against forms of determinism
- an emphasis on human **freedom** as ordered to ultimate beauty, truth, and goodness
- an acknowledgment of human **sinfulness** and faith in the power of forgiveness
- a vision of the individual as rooted in **communion** with God and others through the Church
- a conviction that human **history** as a purpose for which Jesus Christ is the key

21st Century “humanisms”



The Lehigh Valley

- *scientific* -- proclaims itself capable of explaining the human mind, human qualities, and religious faith entirely by means of physical laws
- *technological* -- locates meaningfulness in human capabilities alone, and fulfillment in material objects of human production
- *secular* -- seeks the full meaning of human existence within the boundaries of this age and this world itself
- *ethical* -- values responding to human need but rejects religion as failing to foster independence and courage

the “crisis” of humanism

“The evil of our times consists in the first place in a kind of **degradation**, indeed in a pulverization, of the fundamental uniqueness of each human person. This evil is even more of the *metaphysical* order than of the moral order. To this disintegration, planned at times by atheistic ideologies, we must oppose, rather than sterile polemics, a kind of “recapitulation” of the **inviolable mystery** of the person.”



experience of grace

- silence
- forgiveness
- sacrifice
- kindness



If we can find such experiences in our life, then we have had that very **experience of the Spirit** which we are after here — the experience of the Eternal, the experience that the Spirit is something more than and different from a part of this world, the experience that happiness in this world is not the whole point of existence, the experience of trust as we sink into darkness, the experience of a faith for which this world provides no reason.

“culture of freedom”

Freedom untethered from truth is freedom's worst enemy. For if there is only your truth and my truth, and neither one of us recognizes a transcendent moral standard (call it “*the truth*”) by which to adjudicate our differences, then the only way to settle the argument is for you to impose your power on me, or for me to impose my power on you. **Freedom** untethered from **truth** leads to chaos; chaos leads to anarchy; and since human beings cannot tolerate anarchy, tyranny as the answer to the human imperative of order is just around the corner. The false humanism of the freedom of indifference leads first to freedom's decay, and then to freedom's demise.



SALESIAN Christian Humanism



- In the view of St. Francis de Sales, human beings are a microcosm of the universe, and the history of the world is the story of its gradual perfection in love. Thus, the investigation of what it means to be human naturally leads to a consideration of God, for
- *Man is the measure of the universe;*
- *the mind (is) the measure of man;*
- *love (is) the measure of the mind;*
- *and God (is) the measure of love.*

In this way, the educational experience that unites faith & reason at DeSales University seeks to prepare students not only for careers but for life.



- In the **Natural Sciences** they learn not only the biological and chemical make-up of organisms, but also the respect for that created dignity which makes life human.
- In **Nursing & Health** they learn not only how to diagnose and treat disease, but also how to develop those spiritual goods without which human wellness is incomplete.
- In the **Social Sciences** they learn not only the principles of interaction and organization, but also the virtue of charity that enlivens truly human relationships.
- In **Business** they learn not only the principles of a market economy, but also the fundamentals of ethical behavior by which to live a worthy life.
- In **Math & Computer Science** they learn not only calculations and computations, but also that formula of faith which provides personal order to life.
- In the **Humanities** they learn not only to interpret language and literature, but also to see that Truth which gives fullness of meaning to all human communication.
- In the **Performing & Fine Arts** they learn not only acting and directing, but also appreciating the divine Beauty inherent in human life and the world that is its stage.
- In **Philosophy & Theology** they learn not only the laws of logic and the truths of revelation, but also the One who unites the many and brings salvation to all.