

An Analysis of Secular Alternatives to Religion

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Abstract Secular alternatives are not Religions in themselves, but they are presented as ideas or ideologies or lies to which man can commit himself so deeply & unreservedly that they replace religion in him. A person can opt for one of the modern ideologies rather than a religious adherence to give him guidance in life. He will commit himself to such an ideology or with the same dedication & personal commitment as is demanded of a religious believer. The term “ecumenical” in theology today generally refers to the movement which seeks to achieve external unity among the world’s denominationally divined churches. The original meaning of the word (from oikeo: to dwell, inhabit; and oikos: house, household; oikoumene: the whole inhabited earth [Lk. 4: 5]) has lapsed into disuse, as did the later development of the sense of a common basic attitude or into disuse, as did the later development of the sense of a common basic attitude or doctrinal consensus by the “inhabitants” of the surface of the earth or the members of the church. A more modern, comprehensive meaning has since been developed: “ecumenical” means the entirety of the church, which, looking back to its common original traditional and looking forward to its hope, seeks a commonality in doctrine and in the life of faith. The ecumenical movement consists of those Churches which “together seek to know Christ.

Keywords Ecumenism, Humanism, Existentialism, Secularism

1. Introduction

Karl Marxes of “Dialectical Materialism” (logically disputable materialism, debatable materialism), demands of its followers faith in revolution, like Positivism demands faith in Science & scientific knowledge). Marxism is also known as a Communism. Therefore it believes that all things are common for all). Its followers are taught to believe that all men can become rich & enjoy the benefits of his labour here on earth without the help of God. Karl Marx (1818 - 83) based his teaching of Scientific Socialism on the belief that if the masses of the people the proletariat, are motivated strongly enough, they are capable of changing history and transforming the world into a heaven here on earth where all people shall be equal.’ Animal Farm, “some are more equal than others).

Marx attributed to the working class people the power of being the moving force to transform the world into a classless society. In this lies the very ideal of Redemption. (to redeem yourself from the Capitalistic Oppressors). From Humanism Karl Marx took the idea to put man first & everything else, including God, second Humanism is the Philosophy of a man - centred society rather than a God

centred one. (Borkowski, James D.,2007)

This new of Marxism stirred up the suffering masses of the oppressed working - class people into a tremendous anti-religious movement.

All along Religion has taught them that they should not be worried about the hardships they had to endure here on earth for their reward was to come in the Kingdom of Heaven after death. “Religion is the opium of the people”. (make people docile & submissive as Marx called it). Scientific Socialism, however, convinced them that they had a right like the privileged classes, to enjoy the fruits of the earth. They were stirred up to fight for this new revolution, this transformation of society & were even ready to die for it if necessary. Heaven was to be enjoyed here & now in this world & not in an imaginary world that is to come after death. (this is the gift of the Marxist.

We can well imagine how this new of ideology of Karl Marx, angels & Lenin, gripped the world, & appealed to the people & how it drove the labourers away from the Church by the thousands, particularly in the Western Countries of France, England & Germany & Italy where industrialization really treated the workers in most inhuman condition, e.g. child - labour). Thus Communism became the greatest challenge to Xty in our modern times. It shook some of the complacent prelates out of their sleep & made them realize that if they didn’t change their approach to Xty & the gospel - teaching quickly they would lose the majority of believers in their Churches who were of the working- class anyway.

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All this lead the theologians to re-think and to re-formulate their Christian teaching to become actively involved in the welfare of the working - class people, to fight for human rights & take a serious stand on the side of the poor & down trodden rather than dine & wine with the powerful & mighty. Liberation theology is a direct result of this new awakening in the Church. This is particularly visible in Latin America & South America. Priests & Bishops take up the challenge to be the defenders of the underprivileged, for unless the Church is with the people in the hour of need & suffering, they'll not need the Church when life is good.

Some outstanding Churchmen have given their lives for this spirit in the Church, e.g. Archbishop Romero of Latin America who was murdered in his Church because his solidarity with the poor & oppressed could not be accepted by the powerful & mighty in the world. Bishop Helder Camara of South America, one of the most outspoken champions of the underprivileged had this to say, "If I give bread to the poor, they call me a saint. But if I ask the question why the poor have no bread, they call me a Communist".

This Marxistic Communism is sometimes referred to as a Secular religion (worldly religion as opposed to Godly & sacred) But this is a contradiction in terms, for it is atheistic, anti— God & religion as such deals with God the sacred). It would be better to call it a "political creed". However, whatever we may call it, it has provided a secular alternative to Religion. As such it has managed to dominate Western Civilization in the past century & has shaken Xty in its very roots.

Another idea or theory that has shaken the world & Xty was Charles Darwin's theory of Evolution, published in his book "The Origin of the species" in 1859. Therein he expounds the theory that mankind was not a specific creature of God, but rather a part of a chain of evolution in the development & unfolding of the Universe. By 1860 this theory had gained considerable acceptance among the educated public of the Western World. It shattered the belief of those who took the Genesis story literally. Theologians set to work to formulate a new natural theology which looked upon evolution as a gradual unfolding of God's providential plan. In these secular assumptions they tried to find a relationship between religion & science arguing from the premises that evolution could be a basic truth. Controversies over this have not stopped yet, even in the 20th Century, but have irretrievably shaken the (basis or) foundation of revealed religions. (according to Darwin man has evolved from the monkey. If anyone takes this so far himself, let him do so, but none can stop someone from believing that he or she is a unique creation from God).

2. Humanism

Since the 15th century the word "Humanist" has been used to distinguish students of subjects that are of a non-scientific nature, But with the advent of Marxism the word "Humanist"

was used to describe persons that followed non-religious beliefs and values.

The tradition of "liberal" and "ethical" humanism, associated with the educated and enlightened persons of the 19th century, however, was viewed by the Marxists as "bourgeois individualism".

There are no set doctrines attached to this form of Humanism and although humanists believe in the importance of political reforms, they are not committed to any particular political programme. They have concerned themselves more with defending of the individual against the shackles of forced political beliefs or ideologies and have stressed personal freedom of conscience in matters of abortion and euthanasia. Their position has been summed up as a belief in an "open mind" and "open society", according to the philosophy of Karl Popper (born in 1902). The human ideals were stressed and its followers considered themselves enlightened, emancipated & freed from the dictates of religious leaders. It introduced a mentality which centred on man and human values as opposed to making God the centre of society, as was the case in the Middle Ages. In humanism Christ is reduced to a mere teacher of ethics and morality. It brought about a worldly-minded society that has the spiritual benefits in sight. Even Popes and Bishops succumbed to it, as they were often entrusted with worldly princes rather than as pastors of the flock of Christians. In this capacity they were incapable of reforming the church, thus the Protestant Reformation was brought about by Martin Luther.

Liberal and ethical humanism can be distinguished in theory, if not always in practice from scientific, humanism. The emphasis of the former is on political reform, the latter on science, as the means of improving the human conditions. The former emphasises the freedom and dignity of the individual, the latter may deny that freedom and dignity have any place in a scientific view of man.

Persons, like Bertrand Russell (1872 - 1970), have attached importance to both science and social reforms. In the 19th century Humanism took various church-like forms which gave it the character of a secular religion. In our present-day views, however, Humanism has lost its quasi-religious forms and has found a close ally in Existentialism (a philosophy which follows the idea that man has to create himself or for himself the kind of world of existence which he chooses to have).

Christian Humanism: Erasmus Of Rotterdam(1466-1536) is called the "Prince of the Humanists", for his life, work and achievements have best characterised what Christian humanism could be. He managed to combine in himself an allegiance to the old and the new, to priesthood and laity, to sacramental life and individual piety, to be loyal to the Catholic Church and yet uphold the principals of Protestant Reform.

He stressed the idea that Christianity is to be found in exercising the virtues of Christ, receiving the sacraments and reading the Scriptures. He attached the ecclesiastical Christianity where religion is identified with pomp and ceremony as was the practice of certain Popes and Bishops at

that time. In all this Luther and Erasmus supported each other enthusiastically, even though later on they disagreed and went separate ways.

Christian Humanism had its representatives in France, England and Spain through John Colet, Thomas More and Ximenes. But only in Germany did it grow into a predominantly intellectual movement, chiefly due to the influence of its leader Erasmus of Rotterdam.

The Christian Humanism had proposed programme of Reform in the Church. Their first remedy, however, consisted in a sharp criticism of what they deemed to be wrong in the church:

Firstly: They scorned at Scholasticism, the traditional school of Theology which prided itself in ridiculous speculations and which were irrelevant in real life- situations. As a substitute the humanists proposed the study of scriptures and the Church-Fathers with a biblical and life-related approach to Theology.

Secondly: They attacked popular piety with its emphasis on external devotions and rituals and with its money-making business. They felt that these abuses in the church would be corrected if the people were educated and would then find a more inward or internal sort of piety.

Thirdly: A reform of the clergy and the hierarchy was needed. To achieve this, the Priests and Bishops had to be stripped of political privileges and titles and S&' administrative posts. They were to be shepherds of the flock, rather than worldly rulers and they were to base their life-style on that of Christ and not on that of worldly rulers.

The Spanish Humanists, however, were entirely in the service of the church. A reformed clergy, and a sound theology, combining old and new ideas as well as new insight, let Spain become the model for the Catholic Reform which followed the Protestant Reform.

In the wake of Humanism, 16th century, came also the founding of about 25 new universities in Europe. These brought into existence of the finest and greatest libraries in the world. This was due to the invention of the printing press by John Gutenberg, in 1445. Books could now be produced in greater numbers and at cheaper prices. The knowledge and learning became more accessible to the people. All these affected not only the secular society, but also the Church and made it throb with new ideas and a new vitality.

In all this we can see that Humanism brought many challenges to the established church, helping the church to re-think its mission in the world and to create a better environment for Christian to exercise their religious beliefs.

3. Existentialism

Existentialism is a philosophical doctrine which largely derives from the Danish philosopher and theologian Sren Kierkegaard (1813-55). He took a standpoint of radical concern for the individual person, just like Pascal (1623-62) before him. With regard to religion, he emphasized the necessity of a leap in the dark, a leap of faith by the individual as one who stands alone before God. He stresses that faith is

committed trust in a person (or in God), rather than an assent of dogmatic propositions.

Kierkegaard had a horror of systems. He was also acutely aware of the danger of trying to manipulate God. He said, "We must never forget that God is the other. God exists on a different plane and in a different way from ourselves. It is therefore folly to try to prove his existence by rational arguments. We can know God only by faith. The faith that counts is one which is willing to put all at the risk of God, lead a life of personal discipline and discipleship."

My Life Extends To That of other one, To God For That Matter, That Is Existentialism. And If I Extend My Life To God As The other, Then It Is Christian - or Religious Existentialism.

Kierkegaard learnt to allow God to act in his life, He once said, "God created everything out of nothing, and everything or everyone whom God uses, he first reduces to nothing."

Martin Buber, a great Jewish personality, wrote a book, called, "Prophet and Jewish Thought." In it he distinguishes the "I - THOU" relationship from the "I - IT" relationship. This distinction contains the main problem of Existentialism, namely how to be or become an "I" and not an "IT". In other words, "how to be or become a person and not a thing. How to be or become free and not determined."

Long before the recent existential thinking appeared, Martin Buber had asked and answered these questions on the basis and by the power of prophetic religion: "There is no other way of becoming an "I", than by meeting a "THOU" and by accepting it as such, And there is no other way of meeting and accepting a 'THOU' than by meeting and accepting the "Eternal THOU" in the finite THOU' (the human person). In order to become a real person I must God in the other person.

In the strictest sense. Existentialism is not a philosophy, but it denotes a general attitude towards life and philosophical as well as religious thoughts. Those who call themselves Existentialists share the same thoughts and ideas along the following lines:

Priority should be given to the practical rather than the theoretical.

Priority should be given to the concrete and personal rather than to the general and abstract.

Involvement is more important, than detachment in our quest for God and in our understanding of humanity.

Good as these points may sound they reveal a tendency toward glorifying Individualism. Each person is free to do his or her own thing. Truth, it is argued, has been reduced to a matter of what is true for me.

Sren Kierkegaard is the father of Existentialism. After a personal crisis in his life, he came to believe that God was calling, him to show in his life and personal commitment what true Christianity meant in contrast to both; an armchair philosophy and a nominal Christianity. Kierkegaard saw Christianity not as an 'ism', but as a personal commitment. However, he did not in his ideas the danger of devaluing the Christian community at the price of an individualistic account of faith.

It could be said that the 20th century popular religion in Europe is not religion at all, but the new ideas of Existentialism and Communism. These two philosophical ideological trends have by now a great number of followers. It has become fashionable to call oneself a Communist or an Existentialist.

Our study of Comparative Religions would not be complete with out mentioning at least some of the most popular of these ideologies or philosophies, which though, not religions in the strict sense of the word, often have the same place in people's lives as the major religious beliefs of the world.

4. Ecumenism

What is Ecumenism. The word itself comes from the Greek language which means the whole inhabited world - So it has to do with the whole world, with the cosmic vision, with a search for a world -wide community, not just an ecclesiastical community. (Hein, David.,1997)

In Religious studies we treat Ecumenism as the discipline that concerns itself with the History, with the sociology and with the doctrine of an on-going search for unity among the Christian churches and with a deeper understanding and tolerance of the non-Christian religious.

Ecumenical Theology is a result of the existential situation of disunity in Christendom, and the intolerance with which Christians have confronted other religions. (Kasper, Walter, 2004).

The study of Ecumenism is essentially a pastoral and practical one. In this sense it points to what Theology is really meant to be: namely 'a means of reflecting on the reality of life in the light of faith so that a deeper and deeper understanding of Christian living could emerge. ' In our study of Ecumenism we must look at that which keeps churches apart and we must see what efforts are being made to search for practical ways of bringing about unity among Christians.

The aim of ecumenism is not just Conformity with the Roman Catholic, implying the unconditional return to her; we have to see that fullness of unity with Jesus Christ is desired by all and is possible for all. It requires on all sides recognition of what is good in the separated denominations and the humility to admit that there are genuine Christian truths and values outside the Catholic Church. These ideas have only been articulated in the Catholic Church during the Second Vatican Council. In fact 'Promoting Unity was the original idea of Pope John XXIII's inspiration for a council. In the first session of Vat II, 3 different documents on Ecumenism were presented: one as part of the Constitution of the church, one prepared by the Secretariat for Christian Unity and one by the secretariat for Christian Unity and one by the commission for the future but was rejected for its rigid tone and its reluctance to admit Catholic faults in the past. Then it was decided to combine all three into one document. (Decree on Ecumenism, 5 chapters).

5. Ecumenism in Africa

The history of ecumenical interaction in Africa may be traced back to the first 10 years of the 20th century. at least as far as the major Protestant Churches are concerned. World Ecumenism is usually traced back to the World Missionary Conference held at Edinburgh, Scotland in 1910. The need for the Protestant Missionary Society (ies) to co-operate among themselves in East- Africa, arose out of a unique situation which developed in the British East Africa Protectorate (Kenya to-day) and happened between 1907 - 1923.

A certain Historian Roland Oliver and M.G. Capon have shown how, after the first world war the Alliance of Protestant missions was compelled by secular circumstances to shift its emphasis from the development of a united native church to denominational Christianity that transcend all racial barriers.

The major landmark for this was the Kikuyu Conference in 1913. which was an important highlight in the development of Ecumenism of Africa. It was to promote mutual understanding between the different churches in Africa. But by that time the-African Christians themselves had no say yet in.. any of the proceedings and the missionaries looked upon themselves as the authorities of whatsoever concerned the future of Christianity in Africa. The Catholics as that early stage did not get involved in these early initiatives of Ecumenism. They only started doing so after the Second Vatican Council in 1965 or so.

Many short - coming based on suspicion and hostility dating back to the Reformation and Counter-Reformation period kept the different missionary groups at logger- heads with one another. (Metzger, John Mackay.,2010). But once African Churchmen were involved and given a say in decision - making policies this lack of trust and suspicion diminished between the churches and better relationships developed as African values of harmony and solidarity were brought in by the African Church -leaders.

The former antagonism between NCCK & KCS changed into remarkable development in ecumenical relations: among these, 3 are outstanding:

The translation and use of the Bible. The advance of ecumenism has led to the attempt of a standardized Bible Translation into the major languages.

1. The establishment of the national Bible Society with the participation of both Protestant and Catholics.

2. Because of the ecumenical consensus it has been possible to set up a new ecumenical syllabus for

3. Religious Education Teaching in our schools.

Ecumenism Influences and the renewed interest in the Bible among Catholics have changed the one-sided Situation of only the Protestants reading it. Now the Bible is read in all the churches of Africa.

6. Ecumenical Dialogue

During the period of 1960 - 1980 many valuable discussion on 'theological matters between scholars and church - leaders of various denominations have taken place in Africa. Vatican II has opened up the Catholics to ecumenical dialogue with other churches. On the Protestants side the formation of AACC in Kampala in 1963, provided a new forum through which African Christians could exchange views. (Mackay, John A., 1964)

In 1959 at Arusha, Tanzania, Catholics & Lutherans priests held ecumenism meeting, but except for one Catholic & one (1) Lutheran Pastor, all were Europeans or Americans.

In Kenya at the Limuru Conference Centre several major consultations on Church Union were held between 1970-1971. In the same year attempt on theological Dialogue were made by a dozen Anglican & Catholic Bishops. They touched on such topics as: The Church, Eucharist & Ministry.

In Uganda too, some valuable ecumenical attempts have been made. There, more than in any other country of E.A., the churches have suffered from a tradition of hostility and bitterness imported by (CMS in) the Anglican church and by the Catholics. In 1963 the first "Ecumenical Discussion group" was held at the Makerere University, Kampala. The participants were chiefly Europeans, 4 Catholics, 4 Anglicans & later on some Orthodox Christians were include. But 10 years later out of 20 participants only 3 were Europeans the rest indigenous Africans. Two important documents were the results: a n international commission on the Eucharist's and on ministry were formed proposals were also made on the Ugandan Joint Christian Council in 1976 for allowing inter-church marriages.

7. Conclusions

During the 1960s there were many efforts made in order to promote Christian students organizations. in Africa such as: Student Xtian Movement (SCM), the Scripture Union (SU), the Xtian Student Follow- ship, the YMCA, YWCA, YCS and Catholic Action. In 1971 a new organization came into being to facilitate the exchange of views among Protestant & Catholic Youths in Kenya. This is known as "The Christian Student Council of Kenya". From the beginning it took on an ecumenical approach and concentrated on inter- church activities on behalf of the poor and the oppressed.

When the Christian Student Leadership Centre was opened in the residential Campus of Nairobi University in 1976 the CSCM moved its national office to this Centre. This building is called UFUNGAMANO HOUSE is one of the most significant ecumenical projects so far carried out in Kenya as a joint enterprise by both the Catholics and Protestants. It was inaugurated in April 1977 and has become the centre of an utilized to its full capacity.

Another means of educating people in ecumenism include the Association of third world Theologians. The later. held its first meeting in Dar-es-Sallein in 1976.

In Africa, the advent of Independence obliged the church

to be more open and accommodating to new events. The establishment of the National Council of Churches and the All Africa Conference of Churches, (NCCCK + AACC) helped much in this respect as did the Catholic Episcopal Conference & AMECEA, (Associated members of Episcopal Conferences in E.A.).

The AACC function is to demonstrate visibly that it is possible to have one common purpose in the efforts for Unity and collaboration among churches.

We are all victims of sad divisions among the churches. But this need not be so, change is possible and it may well be that the Independent Churches of Africa are ones most able to play the key-role in the dialogue for unity. Because they are so open and uncomplicated in their manner and approach to vital issues. They may very well be the ones who can pave the way to unity and witness effectively to the love of Christ and to his urge for unity among the churches is the final and greatest challenge which is needed to make the message of Christ credible to all especially to the people of Africa.

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