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## ***Humanism. Its Roots and Development.*** ***What humanism consists of***<sup>1</sup>

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In the first section of his paper Dr. L. Elders traces the use of the term *humanism* and the historical movements it came to devote: besides its original meaning of *studia humanitatis*, that is of the Greek and Latin languages and classical literature, it signified the organized attempt to recreate the cultural climate of antiquity believed to possess an ultimate value. Used in a less specific meaning the term denotes the attitude of a well educated person who distinguishes himself by the wide range of his mind, his courteous behaviour, who respects and defends human rights and moves with ease in the higher circles of society. While at first the term comprised also Christian values, in the wake of certain trends of the Age of the Enlightenment references to religious truth and virtue came to be excluded from its concept. Some even went so far as to argue that submission to God kills true humanism. So we witness the rise of Marxist humanism and the existentialist humanism of Jean-Paul Sartre and others. Heidegger's position is somewhat ambiguous. Finally there is the International and Humanist Union which sees humanism as the emancipation from ideologies and religious dogma and insists on man's task to give himself meaning to his life. Common to these different types of humanism is the conviction that man is a basic value and the center of reference for whatever one undertakes and desires. The exclusion of any religious dimension raises the question of what makes up humanism, which is examined in the second part of the paper. Concluding his paper Dr. Elders indicates that the ultimate foundation of true humanism is man's nature as created after the image of God.

The first to use the term humanism was the German author F.J. Niethammer (1808) who was inspired by an expression of Cicero, sc. *studia humanitatis*. Niethammer meant the formation of young students in Greek, Latin and classical literature. Somewhat later the term came to denote the work of those scholars who from 1300 to 1600 renovated the study of Greek, Latin and the liberal arts. Their movement was marked by a growing interest in nature. Some of the best known humanists are Petrarch, Marsilio Ficino, Rudolph Agricola, Erasmus and Budé. They were considered models of well educated persons. The humanists often opposed scholasticism as it was practiced and taught at the universities of their time. In a culture where literary studies held the place of honour the humanists could boast of having facilitated access to the original texts by their study of manuscripts and the use of philological methods, so that they claimed to have rediscovered the authentic

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<sup>1</sup> Roma, Pontificia Università di San Tommaso "Angelicum", lunedì 22 settembre 2003.

meaning of classical literature. For them the *homo humanus* is the Roman citizen who distinguishes himself by the practice of the traditional Roman virtues and has - to a certain point - made his own Greek *paideia*. The humanists aimed at restoring the (idealized) culture of the ancients. But their movement carried the seeds of decay in itself: the humanist was so much absorbed in his study of antiquity that he created a distance between the past and the present. Moreover many humanists advocated anthropocentrism and so contributed to a process which would cut Western culture loose from its biblical and Christian roots<sup>2</sup>.

In relation to this first meaning "humanism" came to be used also for a movement which originated in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and which insisted on the need to make the young generation study the classical languages instead of training them exclusively in the sciences. Those who advocated the education in the humanities were convinced that Greek culture provides the fundamental categories of thought, literary expression and the arts. This movement idealized antiquity and did perhaps not offer a satisfactory answer as to how to educate the young in our time.

In a broad meaning "humanism", as the term is used now, signifies the courteous attitude of well educated persons, who distinguish themselves by their pleasant conduct, spirited conversation and the use of style in their work. The humanist promotes the culture of the mind, is well versed in the different sciences and arts and possesses those virtues which are highly regarded in inter-human contacts, such as respect of others, courtesy, kindness. For the humanists cultivating the mind is more important than the possession of political power or great wealth. This ideal of humanism guaranteed some measure of unity to a Europe which because of the Protestant Reformation had lost the spiritual cohesion the Catholic Church had provided<sup>3</sup>.

However, at the centre of European society, some authors who subscribed to the rationalism of the Enlightenment, rejected the Christian faith and sometimes also its moral teachings. As in the age of the Enlightenment the religious dimension of man's life became shallower, the idea of humanism changed, which was now understood as meaning the total autonomy of man. Some went so far as to exclude transcendence, or even argued that religion and submission to God kill any true humanism. Man came to be considered the only master of his life, whereas submission to God was seen as an alienation. As Feuerbach said, theology must become anthropology, since God is nothing but man's essence projected before his own mind, - a projection loaded with

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<sup>2</sup> See Francisco Rico, *Le rêve de l'humanisme. De Pétrarque à Érasme*, Paris 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Christopher Dawson, *Understanding Europe*, London/New York s.a., p. 207.

frustrations and desires<sup>4</sup>. Nietzsche pursued this line of thinking and wanted us to create ourselves our values and to wipe out the religious past. He was aware of the upheaval this would bring about, since our past with its preponderant Christian contribution to European culture, the sciences and the arts, would no longer make sense. In this view the physical universe becomes empty space for it no longer reflects the wisdom and love of God<sup>5</sup>. This nihilism, Nietzsche said, would pave the road for a new humanism and a new morality which places man beyond good and evil and allows the most powerful to impose their will.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century this theory was taken over by certain existentialists as Jean-Paul Sartre in his manifesto *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*. Sartre claims that existentialism is a humanism. It defines man by his existence, by what he does and to what he has made himself. Man is a project, sc. pure subjectivity. There is no human nature, no universally valid ethics to guide him in his choices. Man is nothing else but a series of actions<sup>6</sup>. He has no other legislator but himself and must refuse any openness toward a God, but be always engaged in a battle against established, oppressive powers. Sartre vindicates total freedom for individuals and believes that, if God exists, man's subjectivity is destroyed, or, in the words of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, that man becomes totally superfluous, since he cannot do anything which is not already present in God<sup>7</sup>. - It is hard to see how this sort of view can coexist with some of the values which were hitherto believed to be components of humanism, since an entire section of our spiritual life is cut out. Man loses all transcendence, and the material world loses its unity, truth and goodness. The new morality which comes with it recommends to do anything one likes as long as it does not hurt others.

In his *Brief über den Humanismus*, Heidegger presents a survey of the history of humanism, which, he says, originated when man became free to live in a humane way (*Menschlichkeit*). However, he adds, humanism differs according the view one has of human nature and man's freedom. Heidegger adds that all forms of humanism assume that man is a rational animal, - which he takes to mean that man is a being which expresses its thought in language. He wants to go beyond those views which base themselves on an immutable essence of man and so he sees humanism as being rooted in the subjectivity of man's personal existence<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> *Das Wesen des Christentums* (edition Leipzig 1909, p. 37).

<sup>5</sup> *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* I, 125 (Schlechta II, 127).

<sup>6</sup> *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, Paris 1966, 108 ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Sens et non-sens*, p. 309.

<sup>8</sup> *Über den Humanismus. Brief an Jean Beaufret*, published in *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit*, Bern 1947, 53-119.

Turning now to a different model of humanism, sc. that of Marxism, we notice that Marx attempted to render the condition of working people more humane. He thought that one could bring this about by inserting human individuals in the process of dialectical evolution. Man is alienated from himself since he is deprived of the product of his work. Religion results from this alienation. By rejecting religion man will become himself again and transform society. But Marxism is one of the worse mutilations of humanism one can imagine, although it cannot be denied that certain of its representatives fought the egoism of capitalistic society and struggled to improve the life of the workers. Official Marxism professed belief in an ideal future, whereas the Frankfurter Schule argued that in order to preserve humanism in our personal life, we must incessantly criticize social structures, all of which are oppressive. This criticism rejects Christian culture, its ideals in respect of man's religious and moral life. Not only Marxism, but also national-socialism attacked the Christian vision and refused to acknowledge the rights of the human person.

There finally is a brand of humanism, proposed by the "Prague International and Humanist Union" and other, similar groups which define humanism as a democratic, non-deist and moral position. While affirming that human beings must themselves give meaning and form to their life, it proclaims the need of a liberation from all ecclesiastic or ideological dogmas. Free thought is essential to the ideal of humanism. Those who sympathize with what the French call *la laïcité* seem to share these views in their refusal to ascribe any role to religion in public and sometimes even in private life. Some believe that a real humanism is not possible if it is not anti-religious<sup>9</sup>. In this way the vocation of humanism would be to liberate man from religious dogmas.

The above mentioned types of humanism have in common that they make man the supreme value and the centre of reference, but there are considerable differences between them. This raises the question of the components or ingredients of authentic humanism. We must examine whether this refusal of religion can go together with true humanism.

### **What Humanism consist of**

#### 1) *Greek-Roman paideia or its equivalent*

As our historic overview has shown, the origins of humanism must be placed in the Greek and Roman world. Many Greek philosophers held the

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<sup>9</sup> See F. Elders (ed.), *Humanism. Toward the Third Millennium II*, Amsterdam-Brussels 1999.

opinion that there are truths and rules of conduct which are the same for all. Leaving behind a relativism which says that each country should stay with its own culture, the mainstream of Greek philosophy taught the spirituality of the human soul and the basic unity of mankind. So the models and categories could be developed which are at the basis of thought, the sciences and the arts<sup>10</sup>. In the field of letters the classicism of Greek and Latin literature has been acknowledged ever since the Hellenistic period. The Greeks developed the main literary genera by which our best authors have been inspired<sup>11</sup>. - Thucydides succeeded in founding scientific historiography and in his sovereign clarity and impartiality he remains the ideal of later historians. He laid bare the factors which constantly recur in the march through time of political societies: greed and abuse of power, politics of violence, preoccupation with security, the role of fortune, the distinction between the main causes of events and secondary factors<sup>12</sup>.

Hippocrates and his School have established forever not the science of medicine but what should be the attitude of physicians with regard to their patients and nature. Contemporary scientists agree in praising the marvels of Greek mathematics which reached its apogee with Ptolemy and Archimedes but have much less appreciation of Greek natural science, - the development of which was retarded by a merely speculative attitude in respect of nature and the absence of experiences<sup>13</sup>. Nevertheless the Greeks have established the possibility of a scientific study of the world and of scientific objectivity<sup>14</sup>. If progress in the sciences is to be measured by the questions which are raised rather than by the often provisional answers given, we may not have left the Greeks so far behind us as we are wont to think. They bequeathed the scientific spirit to us, so that as soon as a different attitude toward nature began to impose itself, - sc. the will to submit the forces of nature to man -, Europe experienced a magnificent development of the sciences<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. J. H. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, ed. New York 1947, p. 97: "While we are men, we cannot help to a great extent being Aristotelians, for the great Master does but analyse the thoughts, feelings, views and opinions of the human kind. He has told us the meaning of our own words and ideas, before we were born. In many subject matters, to think correctly is to think like Aristotle".

<sup>11</sup> Cf. G. Murray, *The Classical Tradition in Art and Poetry*, Cambridge MA, 1927, and G. Hight, *The Classical Tradition*, Oxford 1949.

<sup>12</sup> See Jacqueline de Romilly, "L'utilité de l'histoire selon Thucydide", in *Histoire et historiens dans l'antiquité*, Vandœuvres 1956, 64.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. S. Sambursky, *The Physical World of the Greeks*, London 1956, 222.

<sup>14</sup> L. Elders, *Aristotle's Cosmology*, Assen 1965, Introduction VII.

<sup>15</sup> L. Edelstein, "Recent Interpretations of Greek Science", in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1952, 573-604, p. 584.

Also in the field of the social, political and economic sciences Greece and Rome elaborated many of the principles which govern our societies<sup>16</sup>. Justice in Athens has been the basis of that of the Roman Empire. In Athens value was attached to the principle of personal freedom: its citizens could freely dispose of their possessions and even slaves were given guarantees to protect them against abuse. In the field of law the confederations of Greek city states have laid down the principles of national and international law<sup>17</sup>. The Roman Empire was considered the realization of the Hellenistic idea of the unity of the civilized world. The emperor Marcus Aurelius even speaks of the same law, the same rights and the same liberty for all, and of a government which considers individual freedom most important<sup>18</sup>. Aristotle had mentioned natural rights (φύσις δὲ πανταχοῦ ἴση ἐστίν) which has everywhere the same force<sup>19</sup>.

However, it is through its educational system that Greek culture has most profoundly marked life in the West. The Hellenistic school was in its entirety accepted by the Christians and conquered the entire world<sup>20</sup>. The Fathers of the Church even used the word *paideia* to describe the gradual realization of God's plan with regard to mankind<sup>21</sup>. One should add to this their adoption of the term φιλανθρωπία, which initially signified the friendliness of the gods to man, but later denoted a complex of human virtues such as justice, respect of others, love, hospitality, etc. The emperor Julian the Apostate even read in the word a characteristic trait of the Romans and the Greek. It also means clemency, helpfulness and friendliness<sup>22</sup>. Cicero wrote that those in government must imitate the gods in their philanthropy<sup>23</sup>. According to Flavius Josephus philanthropy shows best in a kind attitude to others<sup>24</sup>.

The qualities of the Greek and Roman civilization mentioned thus far concern above all man's spiritual life. They are connected with a unique awareness of the human person who distinguishes himself from his ethnic group and is conscious of his freedom, his liberty, his rights and his personal

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<sup>16</sup> T. Sinclair, *A History of Greek Political Thought*, London 1959, Introductory: "But the mere fact that political thought does play and has played in European history a very large part in the causation of political action is due to the Greeks".

<sup>17</sup> M. Kaiser, *Das römische Privatrecht*, München 1954, 1-4.

<sup>18</sup> *Meditations*, I, 14: τὸ μὴ σαφὲς παύσει μὴ σταθερῶς εἶναι ἀποφασίζοντα.

<sup>19</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 1134<sup>b</sup>19.

<sup>20</sup> H.-I. Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité*, Paris 1958, p. 421.

<sup>21</sup> W. Jaeger, *Das frühe Christentum und die griechische Bildung*, Berlin 1963.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Epistulae* (ed. Bidez and Cumont, Paris 1922), 89b; 289 b.

<sup>23</sup> *De natura deorum* II, 131.

<sup>24</sup> *Antiquitates* 12. 124; *De bello iud.* 2, 399.

responsibility<sup>25</sup>. What we are interested in here is the classical culture as one of the elements of humanism. Also in other cultures man has transcended his natural life, but stopped short at the awareness of his moral duties or returned to his own self to discover a subjective absolute merging with the cosmos. But in the Hellenistic world man has freed himself from being immersed totally in nature and objectivized what his personal experience taught him, both that of the past and of the present. He began to look for natural, non mythological causes of events and provided rational explanations.

## 2) *Christianity's contribution to Western humanism*

During almost 2000 years, with a partial interruption between 600 and 1000, the European elite was trained by the same masters and exposed to the cumulative influence of classical culture. The rejoinder of Christianity with the classical tradition had a profound influence on the formation of the European mind. Already in the 12<sup>th</sup> century a remarkable renaissance of classical studies took place. The training in the Latin classical authors was considered the best preparation for the study of theology, law and medicine<sup>26</sup>. According to the medieval doctors and in particular St. Thomas Aquinas, man is the most perfect creature of the physical universe. Man with his immaterial mind is the goal toward which cosmic process is directed<sup>27</sup>, a position not far removed from the "anthropic views" of certain modern physicists. All of nature collaborates to the genesis of man<sup>28</sup>. However Aquinas's humanism differs from other anthropocentric theories by its precise appraisal of the human being: man is neither his own essence nor his act of being<sup>29</sup>. Each instant he receives his being from God who is his last end. Man's calling to an intimate conversation with God during his stay on earth, and to full intimacy in afterlife is the core<sup>30</sup> of man's dignity. With his intellect and will man must take control of his life, as a pilot of his ship<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Bruno Snell, "Das Bewusstsein von eigenen Entscheidungen im frühen Griechentum", *Philologus* 85 (1930), 141-158.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. St. Thomas, *S.Th.* I-II 4, 1; II-II 16, 2: "Requiritur ad scientiam sicut praeambulum vel praeparatorium ad ipsam".

<sup>27</sup> *De spirit. creat.*, art. 2; *S.c.G.* III, c. 22: "Perfectissima formarum, id est anima, est finis omnium formarum naturalium".

<sup>28</sup> *S.Th.* I, 85, 3 ad 1; *S.c.G.* III, c. 22; *Q. d. de potentia*, q.5, a. 8.

<sup>29</sup> *Q. d. de potentia*, q. 7, a. 4: "Homo nec est humanitas nec esse suum".

<sup>30</sup> *S.c.G.* IV, c. 54: "Hanc igitur hominis dignitatem quod scilicet immediate Dei visione beatificandus sit...".

<sup>31</sup> *S.Th.*I-II, 2, 5: "Sicut autem navis committitur gubernatori ad dirigendum, ita homo est suae voluntati et rationi commissus".

In fact the view we have of human nature has a decisive influence on how we think about humanism. In a very significant text Aristotle opposes the opinion of certain poets who felt that man, being mortal, should limit his thinking to human things. He writes that, on the contrary, the human mind is something divine in comparison with the rest of man, so that the life according to the mind is most noble and divine<sup>32</sup>. This yields the conclusion that a life devoted to contemplation is best. Man becomes really human - and on this point Aristotle rejoins the Platonic tradition - if he lives in accordance with what is best in him, sc. his mind. Man's intellectual vocation is not only directed to the study of the world and the practice of the arts. As Jacques Maritain writes, the wisdom of the ancients understood that we cannot define humanism by excluding that man is ordained to what is above him and to the religious<sup>33</sup>.

In fact, one of Christianity's most important contributions to humanism is on the level of moral life, sc. the doctrine that man's is called to enter into a communion with God, that is, to a destiny beyond the limits of the physical world; the insistence on absolute values such as truth, the human rights, the inviolability of life, the control by reason of emotions and passions, the duty toward the common good, kindness, compassion with those who suffer, active charity toward the destitute.

Indeed, the heritage of the Christian faith has become an essential component of Western humanism. The humanism of Petrarch, Erasmus and others is not the same as that of cultivated persons in the Roman Empire. Theirs was a humanism moulded by the Christian tradition. Behind the humanists at the beginning of the modern age stand the great spiritual doctors of the Middle Ages, St. Augustine, Bede, Alcuinus, John of Salisbury and so many others, as well as the tradition issuing from the apostolic era which stressed the ideal of *strenuitas*, the goodness of the heart. Christianity cannot be reduced to a philosophy or a civilization, but it carries with it treasures of human wisdom and it offers man the ideals and goals which allow him to reach his flourishing. The central contribution of Christianity to humanism has been the introduction of a transcendent vocation, - man's destination is God -, and of a new elan of spirituality and charity. One may add that this is accompanied by a special development of moral thought as well as of social and political life. Basically all men are equal. Owing to the influence of Christianity there has also been an evolution to better forms of trade, to a development of the sciences, of law and the ideal of a democratic organization of political life.

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<sup>32</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 1177<sup>b</sup>32.

<sup>33</sup> *Humanisme intégral*, 10.

In addition to the legal obligation to assist one's fellow men, decency has also its demands such as showing gratitude, being friendly and truthful. Furthermore there is the unique development of the arts under the inspiration of Christian ideas and ideals: architecture, poetry, chant, music, painting, and the flowering of mystic. All this has been accompanied by innumerable initiatives to lenify suffering, to educate the young, to render our life more humane and to make progress in the sciences and technology<sup>34</sup>. Far from promoting a flight from the world Christianity insists on the social virtues. The virtues bring about the harmony of man's sensitive and intellectual nature and allow reason to impose its order. A general line of conduct stands out: sc. man must live up to what is best in him.

However, when one insists on Christianity as an integral part of true humanism one collides with a position which radically excludes any religious dimension from humanism. In the light of the cultural history of the West this exclusion is against all sound judgment and cannot be defended rationally. The a priori exclusion of any religious doctrine seems itself a dogma. We also observe that man has a desire to live for ever, to possess the best, to be loved and fully understood by others, to live in a never failing happiness. Denying these desires or considering them illusions maims man and reduces him - in the words of Sartre - to a useless passion. One also wonders which is the source of this virulent anti-Christian attitude. Is it the conviction that religion and humanism are incompatible? But the great Christian humanists of the past refute this view. Is it the illusion of total liberty which makes one refuse the Other who might threaten this freedom? However, that such a fear be reasonable one should first consider what our freedom really is and to what extent man can be autonomous. The freedom Sartre wants is meaningless and has no use except to rebel against the world and to live according to one's animal instincts.- Or do some deny the religious dimension of man because of a grudge against established churches or certain forms of popular devotion? But what if the freedom of investigation, upheld by atheist humanists leads certain meditative minds to affirm the existence of God because of both philosophical and of historical reasons? Would they no longer be humanists?

It would seem that those who, while calling themselves humanists, cut out a dimension of human life, de-humanize man and destroy his foremost dignity, sc. to have been made in the image of God. Mircea Eliade, a specialist of the science of comparative religion, observes that when one denies such an essential element of man's condition as is the sense of the sacred, there no

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<sup>34</sup> On may recall the role of abbeys and monasteries, of the ancient religious orders and later religious congregations in the development of the sciences, the arts, agriculture, the crafts, education, nursing the sick and social assistance.

longer is real humanism. C. Jung suggests that Western man is mistaken when he thinks that he no longer needs neither God nor religion.<sup>35</sup>

The same seems to apply to those authors who expect man's salvation to come from science and technology. Actually if one uses nothing but the principles of the positive sciences to judge all aspects of human life, one performs a reduction to the quantitative order and to low-level usefulness, depriving things of their value and de-personalizing man. As a result people will eventually experience an emptiness, of which they themselves are the cause<sup>36</sup>. Finally, those who promote this type of an anti-religious humanism place religious dogma and ideology in the same basket despite the abyss which separates ideologies from the Christian faith. An ideology is a human product by means of which one tries to subject persons and things to one's ends, whereas the Christian faith looks beyond the world of men and introduces us to a higher sphere of reality, while respecting our intellectual, physical and moral integrity<sup>37</sup>.

### 3) *Life in accordance with reason.*

A further element of humanism is reasonableness in this sense that while attaching much value to the poetic, religious and moral dimensions of human life, an authentic humanism distinguishes itself by the place of honour given to reason in the direction of the life of individuals and of society at large. This reasonableness is based on the insight that the world is full of rationality and that man must organize his life in agreement with the criteria of sound reason. The conviction that the universe is organized by reason lies at the root of the rise of the sciences and of man's dominion over physical nature. Plato considered the view of a world governed by the irrational an impious error<sup>38</sup> and Aristotle shared this conviction<sup>39</sup>. The order of nature is the work of a mind: all things and all process have a rational explanation, since intelligent order is present everywhere<sup>40</sup>. Chance is found only in a minority of cases<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, New York 1933, ch. 10 (The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man).

<sup>36</sup> G. Marcel, *Les hommes contre l'humain*, p.70.

<sup>37</sup> Ch. Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, London 1950, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> *Philebus* 28 D: "Are all things and what we call the world, Protarchus, governed by an irrational power, by chance, by blind encounters, or shall we say, on the contrary, as did our predecessors, that a mind and some admirable wisdom have brought about order and govern things?... A positive answer to the first question is nothing less than impious".

<sup>39</sup> *Fragm. 12 and fragm 13* (Ross).

<sup>40</sup> See L. Elders, *Aristotle's Cosmology*, Assen 1966, 37.

Chance cannot be the cause of the marvellous cosmic order we observe: thousands of letters thrown together on a heap, do not become the text of Homer's epic<sup>42</sup>.

The Christian authors took over this interpretation and argued that our reason makes our end known to us and judges what actions are conform to it. Whatever is comprised under the order of right reason, is conform to the order established by God<sup>43</sup>. Consequently, Aquinas can say that "the good of man consists in a life according to reason"<sup>44</sup>. On the other hand, what is irrational in our conduct or in religion must be banished, since it may become a real threat for humanism. The passionate interest of certain of our contemporaries in oriental sects, Gnosticism, the New Age movement etc. may find its explanation in the needs and desires of the human heart which no longer disposes of an established religion to give them an acceptable form. But in surrendering himself to these sects man risks to get lost in the irrational, whereas reasonableness, historical criticism, the autonomy of the sciences and of research have citizenship in the Christian religion<sup>45</sup>. If the Church shows some tolerance with regard to religious phenomena and manifestations which at first sight baffle reason, it examines them, applies rules, canalizes rites and devotions, while trying to make them keep a certain dignity and an acceptable meaning. It respects the freedom of the individual and the free initiative of God. But quite often messages, alleged to come from the beyond, are rejected as disagreeing with reason and the doctrine of the faith. The Church maintains that human reason can know with certitude that God exists and has created the world. Man's vocation is, as Plato said, that of a celestial plant, whose home is heaven<sup>46</sup>. So prayer is reasonable as is true mystic. It is also reasonable to accept the arguments which show the sublime meaning of the mysteries of the Christian faith<sup>47</sup>, the reasonable aspect of liturgy and morals<sup>48</sup>. Finally, in view

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<sup>41</sup> For the presence of the irrational, see E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley 1956.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum*, II, 93.

<sup>43</sup> *S.Th* I-II 72, 4: "Quaecumque continentur sub ordine rationis, continentur sub ordine ipsius Dei".

<sup>44</sup> *Q. d. de veritate*, q.3, a. 1: "Bonum hominis est secundum rationem vivere". Cf. II-II 47, 6.

<sup>45</sup> See J. Dougherty, *The Logic of Religion*, Washington D.C., 2002.

<sup>46</sup> *Timæus* 90 A..

<sup>47</sup> The fourth book of the *Summa contra gentiles* presents many such arguments.

<sup>48</sup> As a matter of fact, natural law ethics has been integrated in Christian moral doctrine. Cf. *S.Th* I-II, 100, 1: "Cum moralia praecepta sint de his quae pertinent ad bonos mores, haec autem sunt quae rationi conveniunt, omne autem rationis humanae iudicium aequaliter a naturali ratione derivatur, necesse est quod omnia praecepta

of the miracles done by Jesus and the Apostles, - whose historical reality is confirmed by an analysis of the life of Jesus and by the early history of the church as well as by the many Christian saints, it is reasonable to believe the gospel message as preached by the Apostles and the Church<sup>49</sup>.

#### 4) *Humanism and optimism*

Another component of humanism is optimism. Humanists believe that it is possible for man to make his own what Cicero called *humanitas*. Man can develop his knowledge, acquire the moral virtues and artistic skills. Humanists are also convinced that a peaceful and humane coexistence is possible between the different nations of the world. They assume that there is order in the world, that the good prevails and that man is equipped with whatever he needs to lead a good human life<sup>50</sup>. Nature does not fall short in what is necessary<sup>51</sup>. A further reason for this optimism is man's amazing intellectual vocation, sc. his capacity to go beyond the limits of his being as an individual and to enrich himself writing down in his mind the intelligible contents of other creatures<sup>52</sup>.

Related to this optimism is the awareness of man's dignity. The origin of the terms "man's dignity" probably goes back to Cicero who uses them to express the attitude congruous for a person of high social rank<sup>53</sup>. Cicero sees this dignity as belonging to human nature, so different from that of the animals. This dignity demands that one does not direct one's desires primarily to one's physical needs and comfort, but to the health of the mind and the body<sup>54</sup>. He distinguishes the dignity of women, who rely on their elegance, from that of men who must display seriousness and self control<sup>55</sup>. For St. Augustine the term *dignitas* means the respect due to a person because of his honesty, culture and modesty<sup>56</sup>. Aquinas connects the terms "human dignity" with man's

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moralia pertineant ad legem naturæ, sed diversimodo". St. Thomas is convinced that man must be capable of judging his actions. Hence Christian moral life must be controlled by reason. The Fathers of the Church also stressed the harmony between sound moral doctrines of the ancients and the teachings of the Gospel.

<sup>49</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *S.c.G.*, I, ch. 6.

<sup>50</sup> This is the reason why he refuses to assume the existence of a common intellect outside man as Averroes did *S.Th.* I, 79, 4; 84, 6.

<sup>51</sup> I, 78, 4: "Cum natura non deficit in necessariis...".

<sup>52</sup> *Q. d. de veritate*, q. 2, a. 2: "... ut in una re totius universi perfectio existat. Unde hæc est ultima perfectio ad quam anima potest pervenire secundum Philosophum, ut in ea describatur totus ordo universi et causarum eius".

<sup>53</sup> *Tusc. Disput.*, II, 31.

<sup>54</sup> *De officiis*, I, 106.

<sup>55</sup> *O.c.*, I, 130.

<sup>56</sup> *De diversis quæstionibus*, 31, 3.

ontological being, his immaterial soul and the grace and privileges God had given first men in paradise. Nowadays the terms are often understood as signifying man's difference from the animals; they remind us that we are called to a noble behaviour and must acquire the treasures of the sciences and the arts as well as live in a world governed by a universal order of objective law.

#### 5) *The acknowledgment of the human rights*

One of the most important components of humanism is the acknowledgment of the human rights as derived from the natural law and based on man's nature. They are universal and are applied to all men, since all possess the same human nature<sup>57</sup>. They impose themselves immediately on the mind as evident, since they are derived from the principles of natural law<sup>58</sup>, they do not change and cannot be wiped out totally from our mind<sup>59</sup>. Religion does not do away with or suppress what right reason has established, such as the natural rights<sup>60</sup>. One may recall here the opposite position of numerous Muslims who attribute priority to the Koran over the human rights, - a position which makes an international order of law impossible. - One may hope, however, that in the course of time the awareness and recognition of certain human rights may further develop among the nations, especially if cultural exchanges increase

#### 6) *Humanism and the political society*

By his very nature man is a social being. Family life and membership of a political society are necessary to provide for his needs and to enable him to attain his spiritual perfection. With his entire being man is part of a political society, but he is not totally subject to it. As a free person he has a personal end which stands above the rights society has over him. In fact, the state cannot claim any right over the spiritual and religious life of its citizens<sup>61</sup>. The basic rule for life in a human society is the practice of justice. The tasks of the members of a society differ, but as human persons all are equal. Life in civil society must be based on friendship among the citizens and mutual benevolence. We must partake in public life and perform our task for the common good.

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *In V Ethicorum*, lesson 12.

<sup>58</sup> *S.Th.* I-II, 100, 1.

<sup>59</sup> *Q. d. de malo*, q. 2, a. 4 ad 13. Cf. Jesús García López, *Los derechos humanos en Santo Tomás de Aquino*, Pamplona 1979, pp. 66 ff.

<sup>60</sup> *S.Th.* II-II, 10, 10: "Ius autem divinum quod est ex gratia, non tollit ius humanum quod est ex naturali ratione".

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *S.c.G.* III, 112 & 113; *S.Th.* I-II 113, 9 ad 2.

## Conclusion

Jacques Maritain tried to define a new humanism by rehabilitating man in his social, intellectual and religious dimensions<sup>62</sup>, a humanism which also comprises awareness of what the Gospel demands from us for a worthy life in the temporal society. Maritain is right, but we should add that at the basis of every humanism lies the fact that man has been made in the image of God. The text of *Genesis* on man made in the image of God expresses man's primary vocation, sc. to seek union with God and to partake in triune divine life. If man is made in the image of God because of his intellectual nature, the reason is that the human mind is ordered to the vision of God. God's image in us is at the basis of our friendship with Him<sup>63</sup>. This image of God in us must develop both on the level of our natural life and in the life of grace, to reach its full flowering in the vision of God<sup>64</sup>. The humanism which appeared in the West was at first quite general, and was so to say a first stage. Christianity delved deeper and uncovered a spiritual depth in man and opened the way to participate in divine life<sup>65</sup>, - a participation which manifests itself in the faith and heroic virtues of the saints. Christianity shows us the road to God, who before had been thought to be inaccessible, and offered a model of a life according to the image of God in us, - an ideal which Plato had seen from afar when he exhorted his students to imitate divinity. Christian humanism results from the discovery of what man is, what he can and must be, according to all his capacities, while he chooses Jesus-Christ, God become man, as his model<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> *Humanisme intégral*, 81.

<sup>63</sup> *S.c.G.*, I, ch. 2. Cf. *S.Th.* I-II, 27,3 (likeness is a cause of friendship).

<sup>64</sup> See L. Elders, "La teología de santo Tomás de Aquino de la imagen de Dios", in *Colección de ensayos en honor del Profesor Don José Luis Illanes*, Pamplona 2003.

<sup>65</sup> *S.c.G.*, IV, ch. 54.: "Hanc igitur hominis dignitatem, quod scilicet immediate Dei visione beatificandus sit...".

<sup>66</sup> Peter Wust, *Goethe als Symbol des abendländischen Geistesschicksals*, Regensburg/Münster 1961.