

Humanism essential to good religion

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In our present time of political correctness we are hesitant to state that some religions are better than others. Yet, if we are honest with ourselves, many of us agree that we favour some religions over others for exactly this reason.

While humanism is not a religion in and of itself, nonetheless, it does permeate some religions more than others. As a humanist, I favour those religions that accept humanist principles within their religious ideas.

The more conservative elements of right-wing evangelical religion have often condemned humanism. Some Sunday morning televangelists claim that humanism is threatening Christianity, and unless the growth of humanism can be stopped it will endanger all religions.

Following are a few ideas that may set fundamentalist minds at ease: There are presently a little over 1000 registered members of Humanist Canada, a small number representing approximately one Canadian out of every 33,000. Fortunately, there are many good religions that aspire to most humanist principles although they may phrase their ideas in slightly different language.

It may relieve critics of humanism to take a closer look at the main principles that guide humanists, from the 2002 Amsterdam Declaration, the most recent world consensus on the definition of humanism:

1. *Humanism aims at the full development of every human being.*
2. *Humanists uphold the broadest application of democratic principles in human relationships*
3. *Humanists advocate the use of the scientific method as a guide to distinguish fact from fiction.*
4. *Humanists affirm the dignity of every person and the right of the individual to the maximum possible freedom compatible with the rights of others.*
5. *Humanists acknowledge human interdependence, the need for mutual respect, and the kinship of all humanity.*
6. *Humanists call for the continued improvement of society so that no one may be deprived of the basic necessities of life, and for institutions and conditions to provide every person with opportunities for developing their full potential.*
7. *Humanists support the development and extension of fundamental human freedoms, as expressed in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and supplemented*

by UN International Covenants comprising the United Nations Bill of Human Rights.

8. *Humanists advocate peaceful resolution of conflicts between individual, groups, and nations.*
9. *The humanistic ethic encourages development of the positive potentialities in human nature and approves conduct based on a sense of responsibility to oneself and to all other persons.*
10. *A fundamental principle of humanism is the rejection of beliefs held in absence of verifiable evidence, such as beliefs based solely on dogma, revelation, mysticism or appeals to the supernatural.*
11. *Humanists affirm that individual and social problems can be resolved by means of human reason, intelligent effort, and critical thinking joined with compassion and a spirit of empathy for all living things.*
12. *Humanists affirm that human beings are a part of nature, and that our survival is dependent upon a healthy planet which provides us and other forms of life with a life-supporting environment.*

While not all religions will accept each of the Humanist principles stated above, there are many ideas upon which there can be common agreement. Humanists believe that there are many problems such as pollution, war, starvation, climate change, and continued improvements in food distribution. These are examples of human-made problems that can be solved through human efforts regardless of our individual religious persuasions.

It may be helpful to remind ourselves that the historical humanistic ideas of compassion and caring that have pervaded religions throughout the centuries have their origins in early Greek philosophy. These same humanistic principles have helped to keep religion relevant, personal, and dynamic. A religion devoid of humanistic principles is not likely to flourish in the western world.

The philosophy of humanism extends early humanistic principles into modern life in the twenty-first century. Extremist religious movements, like ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), now also known as IS, (Islamic State which aims at forming a global caliphate) , whether arising out of Muslim, or any other religions, are ones that western civilizations fear most because they are lacking the humanistic values of caring sharing and respect for our fellow humans. Religions have been improved and can be improved with the acceptance of more, rather than less, humanism.