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Is humanism a religion?, 1929.

"IS HUMANISM A RELIGION?"

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,

MAY 19, 1929, CLEVELAND, OHIO.







The reaction against the idolatry of science, as well as the reaction against the excessive romanticism and realism in vogue in the last years, was bound to set in, and it has set in. From many quarters today the attack is being made upon that naturalistic philosophy which the advance of science has fostered in recent years, and upon that uncontrolled - shall we say? - tempermentalism and romanticism which the absence of standards, codes of conduct and control, have made possible.

In the last few decades science has created the illusion among a great number of people that inasmuch as man is a part of nature, that therefore he is to be studied and interpreted in terms of nature; and by nature they meant physical nature. The laws which scientists found to operate in the external objective physical world are the same laws which, it was maintained, are operative in the inner life of man. Nothing of a qualitative nature distinguishes man from other living animals; man, like all other animals, is nothing more than matter in motion, and the same laws which govern animals govern man. Man is not free because there is no freedom in the material world. Human life has no ends and no objectives, because there are no ends and objectives in the physical world in nature. And all this has, unfortunately, dwarfed the

stature of man and robbed him of his high sense of dignity and pride in himself.

Then, too, the advance of the sciences has created another illusion in the minds of people, namely that the increase of human knowledge will, of itself, increase human happiness; that all the past unhappiness in the race was due to man's inability to master nature, but once man gains knowledge he will most assuredly employ that knowledge to his highest and best advantage; that every new discovery, whether it be of physics, chemistry, biology or psychology, will add so much to the store of human well-being and human happiness. And there grew up an optimistic philosophy based upon the truly remarkable gains and discoveries of the scientists.

Now, this assumption that the increase of knowledge will increase human happiness has been an altogether gratuitous assumption. It is not borne out by human experience. The most advanced scientific formulae, the most skilfull and complicated scientific machinery, the most advanced chemical knowledge, was employed by man in the last war for destruction, for the infliction of pain, for the undermining of that which we call civilization, of that very thing which the sciences were supposed to build up.

Science has made possible the rapid expansion of industry--the machine. Whatever of profit has accrued

indirect gain, not at all a direct gain; and they have not all been profits. The industrial machine is reducing man to the position of a cog. The industrial machine is robbing man of a great deal of his intellectual freedom and independence. The industrial machine uses up man and consumes him, and frequently it exploits man, enslaves him. The most scientific loom is being employed today in South Carolina and In Tennessee, where men and women are being ground down under the heel of industry and forced to live in degradation and in misery on 46¢ a day, in the midst of the most advanced machines, most perfected industrial machines which science has built up.

Nor has the increase of knowledge of itself made man any happier. In this scientific age our prisons are more fullof people than at any time in the past.

Crime is on the increase; our asylums are increasing year by year, more and more crowded with the wrecks of our scientific age. Our wars are increasing in destructiveness, and our revolutions as well.

Now men are learning about these two illusions which the scientific age has created, -- the illusion that man can be understood in terms of the mechanical laws operative in the physical world, and the illusion that the increase of scientific knowledge in and

by itself contributes to human happiness, and the recognition of these two illusions has set in motion in recent years a counter-intellectual movement which goes by the name of humanism. In other words, humanism is not new one. It came into vogue during the renaissance, and at that time humanism meant the redirection of the interests of man from purely theologic thought to essentially human interests and considerations. Humanism in those days meant a shifting of interests from the heavens to the earth, from the hereafter to the now. Humanism was a turning away from scholastic speculation to scientific investigation.

Humanism rediscovered the fine classic tradition of the love of life, and the beauty of life, and the glory of the free intelligence, and called man back from his preoccupation in theologic thought and in the world to come to this world in which he lives, and to the need of making this world a pleasanter place in which to live.

Modern humanism is an attack not on the usurpation of theology but rather on the usurpation of science, or rather that part of science which seeks to impose, without any warrant or justification, upon men, a philosophy of imperialistic monism, a philosophy of animal materialism, thereby robbing man of much of the glory and beauty of life.

Now the humanist maintains that while it is true that man shares with all other animals much that is physical and animalic, there is still a sphere left for man alone, a sphere which is unique unto man, and which in essence constitutes all that man really is, and that sphere is the sphere of conscious intelligence, of spiritual awareness, of capacity for self-appraisal and self-examination, of moral freedom and volition, over and above man's instinctive reactions to stimuli of art, of literature, of science, of ideals.

This sphere, then, in which the animal does not share, represents man's true world, and that world is sufficient unto itself, a law unto itself, autonomous, and must be understood and interpreted in terms of itself and in terms of the mechanical laws which are operative outside in the physical world.

The humanist maintains that while it is true that man is a part of nature, it is also true that he is unlike any other part of nature, and it is this unlikeness which represents what we call man. Now the scientist takes a reverse point of view. The scientist is interested in those facts about man which are found elsewhere in nature or in the animal world. The scientist likes to put man into the physical world and read him and interpret him by the same canon as he reads and interprets the rest of nature. The humanist takes man out of

that world, and insofar as man has something which is unlike the rest of nature, he is interested in reading him and interpreting him in that sphere in which he is unlike, separate and distinct.

The humanist, therefore, is opposed not only to any and every naturalistic philosophy which conceives of man as only an animal, but he is also opposed to every tendency which surrenders man to the animal In other words, he is opposed to any and part of him. every tendency which simply means the giving of free scope and play to the animal instincts and impulses and proclivities of man. Every such impulse, says the humanist, must be curbed and controlled by that sphere or world which is truly the human world, namely, the intellect. Therefore the humanist is opposed to what we call romanticism, to what we call excessive selfexpression or temperamentalism, to anything and everything which is not subjected to the control of an enlightened and critical human judgment.

The humanist harks back, like his confrere, the humanist of a few hundred years ago, to the classic traditions, to the Greek tradition of the balance—the sopheosyne—temperance, the proper measure in life. The modern humanist too is opposed to extremes, to the extreme of rationalism and to the extreme of mysticism.

And what is quite important in the outlook of the humanist

come about, must come about, through self-discipline and self-control, not necessarily through the increase of scientific knowledge. The humanist believes in self-cultivation and self-improvement, not merely through the acquisition of more and more of scientific information, but through probing deeper and deeper into human life and human values; through the cultivation of finer discriminations and finer sensibilities; through coming in contact with the great minds of the past; through literature and art; through all that the mind of man has created in these centuries. He is not a reformer; he does not attempt to reconstruct society. He is interested in saving, as it were, his own soul, of cultivating his own life.

humanist is opposed to the attitude of all naturalistic philosophies which try to degrade man's estate, which try to destroy the concept that man is a little lower than the angels, which try to see him as just a more skilfull and more enterprising animal. The humanist is interested in man and in that world of values, artistic, intellectual and moral, which man and man alone has created, --with all of which, of course, religion has no quarrel. In fact, the position of the humanist is taken over bodily from religion.

When the humanist speaks of the status of man, of moral freedom, of man's capacity to perfect himself, the humanist is employing religious terminology. These concepts are the basic postulates or the basic assumptions of all true spiritual religion, and the rise of modern humanism is just another indication that men, after they follow the enticements of strange gods, after they pursue the will-o'-the-wisp of strange philosophies, are compelled in disillusionment and in frustration and in dread of moral nihilism, to return to the basic and eternal dogmas, if you will, of religion.

What is of interest in modern humanism is this: that some humanists would like to make their philosophy of life a substitute for religion. They would like to make their creed, --which we can summarize best by calling it the creed of moral intelligence, --they would like to make this creed a substitute for the religious creed of mankind, and they would like to build up a system of morals without God.

Now, it is my belief that no moral system, however beautiful, will have any driving power unless it is based on divinity. The more moral systems which have survived and which are today touching the lives of hundreds of millions of human beings, are those systems which are grounded in an invincible faith in a purposeful world, and in the existence of a creative and moral

intelligence in the universe whence their own moral idealism derives.

I should like to stress that thought, to clarify it, if I can. You cannot build up a world of human moral values and purposes in a universe which you know to be without values and without ends and without purposes and without reason. Your own world, if it is at all to satisfy you, must be a reflex of that great universe about you. If you know that your own world is only an artificial creation of yours, which does not correspond to anything in reality, then in moments of crisis your world will collapse.

You cannot speak of the need of selfdiscipline, as the humanist does, without knowing just
why you ought to discipline yourself. If there are no
ends and goals in life, if the world is just a blind,
unheeding mechanism, and you an unessential being of an
hour, to be burnt up and consumed and annihilated, then
why struggle and strive to self-discipline and control
yourself? Why not adopt that other philosophy, which
is more logical in a world assumed to be without intelligence and purpose, -- "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow
we die:"?

Nor can you build a system of morals upon purely human experience. There is nothing in human experience which tells us that human life is holy. There

ought to protect the weak, that we ought not to hate our enemies, that we ought to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Nothing: These exalted ideals are simply the outreachings of the soul of man towards that ideal perfection which he feels to exist in the universe and which he calls God.

They are postulates which have never been proved, which cannot be proved, which man has accepted without proof, and accepted them because his religious intuition, if you will, told him that these are the supreme values in life.

And then again, any moral system which has no religious sanction will have no continuity. Mr. Chesterton has recently written a very stimulating article in which he brings out this thought: that humanism is very much of a mood, and that you cannot build a system of life upon a mood or an attitude which may change. If all that we have to build on are the human ideals of this hour, we have nothing very stable to build on, because ideals are in the habit of changing from generation to generation, and oftentimes from decade to decade. Mr. Chesterton, for example, points out how radically our attitude towards the ideal of democracy has changed in the last few years. A decade or two ago we accepted democracy as an axiom, incontrovertible, not even requiring proofs. Today the best of humanists are

questioning this ideal of democracy. This ideal of democracy is an ideal unto itself, sacred and inviolable.

Now in a world of such changing moods, if you wish to construct a moral system which will abide, you have to ground that moral system not in moods but in doctrines, and docrtines which are anchored to unchanging religious concepts, doctrines which find their source in an unchanging God. And that is why humanism cannot be a religion. The great value of a religion is in that it tides you over your periods of doubt and uncertainty. The great tradition of the ages and the accumulated experiences of thousands of years crystallized in concepts and doctrines and convictions tides you over when you are in doubt and perplexity.

Humanism leaves everything more or less to the individual, and the individual is a very moody, changing person.

and lastly, humanism is not a religion and cannot take the place of religion because, lacking as it does, the divine impulse, the divine mandate, it lacks the social urge. The humanist is concerned in one human in itself, not particularly in humanity. Religion is more than humanism. Religion is humanitarianism; religion is prophetic; religion is concerned with the reconstruction of society after the higher affairs of truth and justice and beauty. It is not enough for religion that

a man, an intellectual aristocrat, a cultured Brahman, retires into his ivory tower and there meditates upon the best ways of perfecting himself. That is not enough. Religion demands of every true devotee to enter the bloody arena of life and do battle for the sanctities of life. It is not enough to know beauty; it is to enable others to share beauty.

of a certain intellectual detachment, of a certain philosophic calm. Well, the human race is not yet ready for such an attitude of detachment and philosophic calm. There is all too much of brutality and vulgarity and poverty and sin and war and hate in the world to permit its choicest spirits to retire into a world of their own, from which they shut out the clamor and the cries and the noise and the misery of the world, and live their own contemplative existence.

Humanism, my friends, is not a way of life; it is only an attitude and a mood. The real way of life must have a goal, because when the way has no goal there will be no pilgrims upon that way. And what is human life if it is not a pilgrimage? When the great intoxication with scientific achievement is over, and man discovers how much of an aching void there still remains in his life, and how little mechanism and invention have contributed to his spiritual peace and contentment and

harmony of living, he will return, contrite and humble, unto the days of old, to the eternal ideals of religion; to a life of piety, of consecrations, of spiritual questing, to a life under the protecting wings of God.

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THE TEMPLE BULLETIN

THE TEMPLE
East 105 th St. and Ansel Rd.
CLEVELAND, OHIO

Abba Hillel Silver, DD.
RABBI

Rabbi Leon 1. Feuer
Minister of Religious Education

SUNDAY, MAY 19, 1929

RABBI SILVER

will speak on

"Is Humanism a Religion?"

The Sabbath Eve Service 5:30 to 6:10

The Sabbath Morning Service 11:00 to 12:00

The Temple Bulletin, published weekly from the middle of September to June, by Tifereth Israel Congregation, E. 105th Street at Ansel Road, Cleveland, Ohio. E. E. Wolf, Pres.; Emanuel Einstein, Treas.; Rabbi Leon I. Feuer, Editor. Subscription price, 50 cents per annum.

Entered as second-class matter, Dec. 11, 1925, at the Post office at Cleveland, Ohio, under the act of March 3, 1879.

Music for Sunday Morning, May 19th

Organ

Prelude (10:15 A. M.)

Scherzo PastoraleFederlein The Garden of Iram (Persian Suite)Stoughton

MeditationSturges
Postlude

Festive PostludeSchminke Paul Allen Beymer

Contralto Solo

Psalm One Hundred ThirtysevenGrant-Schaefer

Alice Shaw Duggan

Memorial Services Under the Auspices of the Jewish Veterans of the Wars of the Republic and the Cleveland B'nai B'rith Lodge

Memorial Services will be held in The Temple on Sunday, May 26th, at 10:30 A. M. Rabbi Silver will speak on "What To Remember On Memorial Day."

Temple Annual Dinner Meeting

Sunday, May 26th

All members of the Congregation

are invited and urged to attend the Seventy-Ninth Anniversary Meeting of The Temple to be held in Mahler Hall on Sunday evening, May 26th, at 6:30 P. M.

- 1. An important new policy for Temple activities will be presented.
- 2. The election of trustees will be 4 held.
- 3. The Temple Theatre Guild with one of its best casts will present "The Ring Scene" from Lessing's "Nathan The Wise" in honor of the Mendelssohn Lessing Bi-Centennial which is being celebrated that week in our community.
- 4. The entertainment feature of the evening will be a musical program on the piano by the talented young Cleveland artist, Carl Buchman, who is a confirmant of The Temple.

Reservations for the dinner, which is being catered by Baumoel, are \$1.25 per person. Reservations should be sent in as early as possible. Due to the limited capacity of Mahler Hall reservations can be taken for only 500 and no reservations will be accepted after Friday, May 24th.

Jewish Teachers' Institute Graduation Exercises

The Jewish Teachers' Institute which trains teachers for the religious schools of Cleveland will hold its annual graduation exercises on Sunday evening, May 19th, in the Gries Memorial Chapel of The Temple. Rabbi Feuer will deliver the commencement address. The public is cordially invited.

Send in your reservations now for the Annual Dinner on Sunday, May 26th, 6:30

Temple Women's Association

Annual Meeting

The Temple Women's Association brought its program to a fitting close with its Annual Luncheon Symposium last Wednesday, May 8th. It was one of the finest afternoons of its kind ever held at The Temple. The Symcommemorated the anniversary of the death of Dr. Theodore Herzl. The life, work and achievements of Dr. Herzl presented in two splendidly written and thoughtful papers by Mrs. Leo Neumark and Mrs. S. H. Vactor. The latest moving pictures of Palestine were shown on the screen. program was thoroughly enjoyed by the capacity audience of women.

Preceding the Symposium, Miss Flora Rohrheimer, retiring President, read an excellent message describing the many and varied activities in which The Temple Women's Association has engaged this year. Election of officers was held, and under the incoming administration the Association is looking forward to another year of fine achievement. The following officers and members of the

Board were elected:

Mrs. Sigmund Joseph—Hon. Pres.
Rabbi A. H. Silver Hon. Trustees
Mrs. A. H. Silver Mrs. Jos. H. Gross—President
Mrs. Helen E. Bing—1st Vice-Pres.
Mrs. Benj. Lowenstein—2nd Vice-

Mrs. M. K. Einstein—Rec. Sec'y. Mrs. H. Thorman—Corres. Sec'y.

Mrs. P. Goldberg—Financial Sec'y.

Mrs. N. Sloss—Treasurer Mrs. Sam Rosenthal—Auditor

Mrs. Chas. Barnett
Mrs. H. Devay
Mrs. S. Freedman
Mrs. S. Goldhamer
Mrs. H. V. Haas
Mrs. Roy Hexter
Mrs. Moe Haber
Mrs. S. Spiro

Mrs. Henry Marks
Mrs. M. Lappin
Mrs. M. Metzenbaum
Mrs. Leo Neumark
Mrs. R. C. Norberg
Miss Flora Rohrheimer
Mrs. J. Politzer
S. Spiro

Mrs. Oscar B. Markey, Mrs. Chas. Kahn and Mrs. I. E. Rosenberg were elected to fill the unexpired terms of three members who are unable to serve.

The following were elected to serve as representatives to The Temple Board of Trustees:

Mrs. Sam Freedman Mrs. Jos. Gross Mrs. George Furth Mrs. R. C. Norberg Mrs. Walter GoldsmithMiss F. Rohrheimer Miss Marguerite Feder, Alumni Representative for the T. W. A.

Temple Alumni Association

At its Annual Meeting held last Sunday in the Ballroom of the Statler Hotel, The Temple Alumni Association made several important decisions which will have a decided bearing on its future organization and activity The Temple. By raising its minimum age limit to eighteen the Alumni becomes an adult organization. The rate of dues was raised to enable the organization to throw open all of its activities to its members. A new program policy was adopted which commits the organization to activities which are almost exclusively of an educational or cultural nature.

The following officers and members of the Board were elected for the year 1929-30:

Elsie Selman—President.
Walter Goldhamer—Vice-Pres.
Sylvia Laibman—Rec. Sec'y.
Ethel Weiner—Corres. Sec'y.
George Traub—Treasurer
Merrill Gross—Historian

Florence Berkowitz
Howard Bloomfield
William Deutsch
Babette Devay
Sybil Devay
Harold Fellenbaum
Julian Galvin
Morton Goldhamer
Ethel Hartman
Leonard Hartman
Rita Hollander
Marguerite Feder

Margaret Jaffe Sally Jaffe Karl Joseph Irving Kane Ben Klein Joy Klein Esther Kluga James Mahler Alvin Silverman Theodore Spilka Wilbur Steuer Andre Ullmo

Temple Religious School Report for the Week

Total enrollment, including the High School-1,334.

Number of pupils, Kindergarten to 9th grade, inclusive—1,209.

The average attendance for the week-94%.

The following classes had 100% attendance: Kg. Miss Pikkel; 2B, Miss Gup; 3A, Miss Markowitz; 3E, Mr. Friedman; 4B, Mrs. Frankel; 5F, Mr. Dreyer; 7A, Miss Gimp; 7E, Mrs. Lyman; 8B, Miss Copenhagen; 9A, Miss Woldman; 9B, Mrs. Reich; 9C, Miss Krause; 9E, 9F, Miss Rubin. Sunshine Fund

The collection of the Sunshine Fund for the week amounted to \$25,09.

Calendar of Closing Events for the Religious School

Saturday, June 1st, and Sunday, June 2nd, at 10:30 A. M. Final Examinations.

Sunday, June 2nd-10:30 A. M. in Mahler Hall—Graduation Exercises of Temple High School Department.

Friday, June 14th, First day of Shabuoth, 9:30 A. M. Confirmation Exercises.

Sunday, June 16th-10:30 A. M.-Rally Day and Closing Exercises for the Religious School.

Tuesday, June 18-Annual Congregational Picnic at Euclid Beach Park.

The Temple Wishes to Acknowledge with Thanks the Following Contributions: To the Floral Fund

Mrs. J. W. Deutsch Dr. and Mrs. S. B. Stern Mrs. Edmond M. Lazard and sister

Edgar J. and Ralph H. Sloss and Mrs. S. Liebenthal

Mrs. E. C. Fleischman, Mrs. C. H. Kleinman and Miss Esther Ruman

In memory of mother, Mrs. Matilda Lauer In memory of mother, Mrs. Louis Stern In memory of mother, Flora Schwab

In memory of Mrs. Rachel Sloss

In memory of Mrs. Anna Ruman

In memory of father, Kaufman Hays

In memory of father, Emil Auerbach

In memory of Mrs. Settie B. Klein

In memory of Paul Liebenthal and Mrs. Settie

To the Scholarship Fund

Mrs. Sigmund Joseph and Mrs. Leon Watters

Miss Hattie Schaffner

Maybelle Lester S. and

Auerbach Mr. and Mrs. Louis B. Iglauer

Mrs. Lena Prentke

Mrs. Morris G. Schaffner

In memory of Mr. M. Morris of Omaha In memory of mother, Mrs. David Fuld

B. Klein

From the Quilting Circle of The Temple Women's Association in memory of Mr. M. Morris of Omaha.

In Memoriam

We record with deep sorrow the death of MRS. ADDIE SLOSS during the past week and extend the condolences of the Congregation to the bereaved family.

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6 Aun. object ut my 10 phil. 9 nativalines - runerder to the aurmal pail is wan -Obung untelled to play -3 ppal to romanthersus self Expression - wirth wais Eurlyht- routed wind - balavee -Thef-describert though perf outliet _ - UN rationalest - ut then werk. disc. (5) hd reformes - mefundement for. 7- ho quand - tales broking - undreaken -8. What is of witerest substituets— - creed of most mobilizenes - without God. 9. no during mifule - great moral rys kans Im count brild - perced to lescephing -- Monate based on Human Exp. only - 1thy-in advance; my - cheskerties- regard as desirable - Menis tastes - Januaray -- defendent in men's changing tastes - history to blockunies! Lock social unge-Cencernish with thungs Prophetir- reconstant. witell. auswents - hund mit also Sond - test enough 12- ho way of hite - Ward. Phil. Calm