



# The devil called humanism

## 4. Assessment of progress

Geoff Walker

### The Christian perspective

**F**ROM THE point of view of the development over the years of the welfare of society, a Christian assessment of progress towards a beautiful and bountiful world is not possible. The Christian does not expect a general improvement in the lot of the earth's inhabitants, in terms of happiness, at the present time. Rather, he expects the intervention of God and the return of His Son from heaven to further that desired end. His own part now, the development of a godly character, can only be adequately assessed by God.

On the other hand, the knowledgeable Bible Christian considers that the history of the nations of the world conforms well with the programme of events which, according to the Bible, will end with God directly intervening by sending His Son Jesus back to the earth. To him, the course of history has developed just as he expected it would from his reading of Scripture. From its very beginning the Bible describes a trend in world history that has as its goal the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.

### God's developing purpose

Consider how this programme has developed. In the first place there has to be a suitable King found for this Kingdom. In the very first chapter of Genesis the eventual outcome was foreseen. Immediately consequent on the creation of the world and of man, as any enquiring reader would expect, the purpose of this creation is communicated to Adam and Eve. The Genesis record has it that the earth was created to be cared for and ruled by created man. What a responsibility to their Creator devolved on the man and the woman! It would be unthinkable that in managing the earth they should displease Him with impunity. In fact, they were found to be quite irresponsible, disbelieving His Word.

So, justly, God deprived them of the task that He had given them. The rest of the Bible describes how God so controlled world events that a man would be born to be His King, a man unlike any other man, who would be perfectly responsible and loyal to Him even in the most testing circumstances. The Christian is amazed at the steady and consistent way this work of God has progressed throughout history.

In pursuance of this purpose God chose Abraham, a man who took God at His word, and then worked closely with his family, the nation of Israel. The experiences suffered at God's hand by this nation eventually produced a woman who, when the Spirit of God came upon her, gave birth to a unique child, Jesus. Throughout his manhood he remained loyal to his Father in all his ways, often under the severest trial, and consequently qualified to be King of God's Kingdom. Christians, viewing the developing circumstances that produced such a man, realise that men, of themselves, could never have contemplated or worked through such a purpose.

Further, Jesus, being a man, was subject to death as all other men are. Yet, because of his perfect life, God was pleased, after his death, to raise him from the dead and give him immortality. Such a reward was also anticipated in the Old Testament Scripture. What a contrast to the humanist position that 'this life is all'! But the Christian sees things developing just as the Scripture foresaw right from the beginning.

The New Testament develops the picture. Jesus ascended to heaven awaiting God's pleasure to send him back to the earth as His King. While Jesus is in heaven a community of people from all nations are being prepared through trial in suffering. They will collaborate with their King to rule the earth. This process is described in the New Testament as "God . . . visit[ing] the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name" (Acts 15:14).

**Encouragement from Bible prophecy**

Another exciting and encouraging feature for the Christian arises from the Bible teaching concerning Abraham's seed. Because Abraham pleased God, God promised that the nation of which he was the father would eventually play a leading role in God's Kingdom. The Bible story of this nation of Israel's persistent disobedience, which God just as persistently punished, nevertheless insists that God will ultimately fulfil His promise and promote this nation. And, despite this people being dispersed from their own land for many centuries as a judgement on them, in these days in which we live developments in the earth have brought about a considerable movement for their return. This is in readiness for the coming of their King to rule, as the Scripture says, in Jerusalem. All these happenings delight Christians.

From a quite different point of view, the Christian is also much encouraged by the very success of humanism in these days, for is it not written in the Scripture, "in the last days . . . men shall be lovers of their own selves" (2 Tim. 3:1,2)? Humanists may cause the Christian much grief, but their high profile can only mean to the Christian that the triumph of God's ways and the demise of humanism is close.

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**The humanist perspective**


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**I**N a sense, the progress being enjoyed by humanism can be more precisely assessed than that of Christianity. It is entirely concerned with the present life. It is mostly involved with the material welfare of the earth's inhabitants, with the implication that greater prosperity will lead to satisfaction and happiness. Humanism in the West has been in control at all levels of government, education and science for the past hundred years or so. Innumerable political experiments have been tried all over the world, and an amazing range of scientific discoveries has been harnessed to the service of man.

Today man is pressing ahead with his inventions. In the West the common man enjoys luxuries unknown in earlier times; such things as advanced medical care, high speed transport, instantaneous distant communication, a wide variety of foods and a constant supply of entertainment. Surely man can take pride in his achievements! Is he not on a progressive upward path? Day by day there are reports of new

discoveries in every field of man's activities in the sciences.

Frontiers are for ever being pushed back; men travel into space, life expectancy is greater, democracy defeats authoritarianism, medicine has advanced at a phenomenal pace. Humanism is clearly seen to be prosecuting its aims with vigour. The humanist is, it seems, conquering body, mind and life. He is responsible for himself and his own destiny. Humanism appears to triumph.

**Looking to the future**

The pertinent question remains. Has the quality of life improved with all these remarkable discoveries? Has it improved when there is pollution, noise, chaos, stress and strain as never before? when hospitals and prisons cannot cope because of the influx of inmates? All the humanist can say is that we learn from our mistakes. Yet experience teaches that new solutions only produce different and often worse situations. The humanist can never admit that he might be wrong.

All the humanist experiment and discovery has not produced universal happiness. Within the developed world prosperity has brought an alarming increase in crime and the breakdown of many institutions thought to be essential to a stable society. Concerned people in the West have come to realise that their own prosperity has come not only as a result of exploitation of the earth's resources but also through exploitation of millions of its peoples. Man can never foresee the outcome of his own experimentation.

**The humanist and God**

Despite all these drawbacks in all branches of human activities resulting from humanistic thinking, humanism has been eminently successful in turning the minds of masses of people away from God. Although there are many who retain some conception of God in their mind, their appreciation of what God has purposed and promised according to the Bible is remarkably hazy. Education, education, education (the rallying call of the present British Government) has nothing at all to do with instructing students in the ways of God as set out in Old and New Testaments, but very much to do with honouring men's achievements in the arts and sciences. In such ways does humanism make a popular appeal as a reasonable philosophy. Could it be anything but popular when it supports the rights of the

individual to self-expression, self-determination and self-indulgence?

Progress continues to be made in the whole area of theology. In general the effect has been twofold. First, from about the end of the nineteenth century, establishment theology laid itself open to the influence of higher critical theories and very quickly abandoned its former allegiance to Scripture. So debased has it become that it is prepared to tolerate views such as those expressed by the late Bishop of Woolwich when he jettisoned the idea of God as a real supernatu-

ral being and for it substituted what he termed "an experience at one and the same time of ultimacy and intimacy". On the other hand, popular theology sought to find a way of accommodating evolutionary theory into some sort of modified view of the truth of Scripture; this always entailed seeing the early chapters of Genesis at best as allegorical or symbolic, and at the worst as irrelevant.

In all these ways the God of the Bible is discredited and man is exalted. All is far from well.  
(Concluded)

## New Testament references to angels

David Green

**T**HIS ARTICLE examines some of the passages in the New Testament where the Greek word *aggelos*, pronounced *angelos*, occurs. Although this word is mainly translated 'angel',<sup>1</sup> it does not always refer to God's heavenly ministers. Whether a passage refers to an angelic being or a human must be decided from context.

*Aggelos* is derived from *aggellō*, which means 'to deliver a message', and is connected with *agō*, 'to lead' or 'to bring'. Consequently the basic meaning of *aggelos* is 'messenger', 'envoy', 'one who is sent', whether by God or by man.<sup>2</sup> However, lexicons mention certain implied meanings, such as pastor, guardian and representative.

An angel will hold a position of authority derived from the one whom he serves or represents. For example, the angel of God's presence (Isa. 63:9) acted with great power and authority: "Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him and obey his voice; do not provoke him, for he will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in him" (Ex. 23:20,21).\*

### Quotations from the Old Testament

The first two chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews contain quotations from the Old Testament concerning angels. It is interesting to note that in these passages, which are set out below, the plural of *aggelos* is used to translate both *elohim* (mighty ones) and *malakim* (messengers).

"But when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says: 'Let all the angels of God worship Him'. And of the angels He says:

'Who makes His angels [*malakim*, Psalm 104:4] spirits and His ministers a flame of fire'" (1:6,7);

"You made him a little lower than the angels [*elohim*, Psalm 8:5]; You crowned him with glory and honour" (2:7).

The words quoted in Hebrews 1:6 are not to be found in the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament, though a very similar passage occurs in Psalm 97:7, which reads: "worship Him, all ye gods [*elohim*]" (AV). The actual quotation appears to be from the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy 32:43, where the following additional words occur at the beginning of the verse: "Rejoice, ye heavens, with Him, and let all the angels of God worship Him".

### Ministering spirits

The angels are God's ministers, carrying out His will, and part of their remit is to look after His sons and daughters. The writer to the Hebrews picks up this aspect of their work in 1:14: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?". The verb translated "to minister" in this passage implies aid and service, and the NIV translates it "to serve".

No doubt Jesus had this aspect of the work of angels in mind when he referred to the angels of

1. According to *Young's Concordance*, angel 181, messenger 7.

2. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*.

\* All quotations from the NKJV, unless stated otherwise.