

NOURISHMENT FOR THE HEART SIDE OF HUMANISM

by Edwin H. Wilson

With much current talk about the divided brain, with one side affecting the emotions, the other the reason, a review of Humanist efforts to meet the needs of "the heard side" of imagination, feeling and creativity may be helpful. My interpretation will be strongly weighted with the experiences of early Unitarian Humanist ministers. A parallel story could be told by an ethical leader as indeed it has been approached by Algernon Black in his valuable book *Without Burnt Offerings: Ceremonies of Humanism*, (Viking edition *The New Humanist*, predecessor of *The Humanist*, but also to concern by Dr. Vogt for humanistic material which appeared in the Unitarian *Hymns of the Spirit*.

Humanist Counseling of the AHA also tend toward the secular side.

Obviously my characterization of "the heart side" and "the reason side" of Humanists is not that of a psychologist, but suggests analysis and guidance from one competent in the psychology of religious experience. We need a contemporary humanist equivalent of William James, James H. Leuba or Edward Scribner Ames.

With effort to gather inspirational material ideologically in accord with naturalistic Humanism began as a struggle for inner integrity. The second issue of *The New Humanist* (May 1928) contained a section called "The Humanist Pulpit," a term possibly borrowed from John Dietrich whose bound sermons appeared under that title in seven volumes. The editor stated: "Our purpose is . . . to list books, periodicals, hymns, meditations, poems, responsive readings etc. that are in keeping with the ideals of Humanism." Appeal was made in the same issue for "a sufficient quantity of such materials to furnish a genuinely Humanist service for every Sunday in the year." Harold Lawrence as column Editor later published a Litany of Thanksgiving arranged by Von bgen Vogt, Minister of the First Unitarian Church of Chicago at that time. A revolt in 1927 by students at the Meadville Theological Schools against the required use of "the bloody Psalms" led not only to the organization of the Humanist Fellowship and its publication *The New Humanist*, predecessor of *The Humanist* but also to concern by Dr. Vogt for humanistic material which appeared in the Unitarian *Hymns of the Spirit*.

The first issue of *The New Humanist* cited Ernest Caldecott, then minister of All Souls Unitarian Church of Schenectady. In that church the words of Felix Adler had been inscribed in the Chancel's archway indicating influence of the Ethical Movement on Caldecott: "The Place Where men meet to Seek the Highest is Holy Ground." (Note the word: "men"; Humanist awareness of the feminist rejection of male chauvinist words had not yet penetrated the Humanist controversy.) It is certain that liberal ministers seeking useable material turned to the Ethical Societies to learn how they met the need. A two volume edition of *Social Worship for Congregational Use* (Macmillan

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Co., 1914), compiled and edited by Stanton Coit, British Ethical Leader with many ties in the U.S.A. was used. The Schenectady item, probably written by Dr. Caldecott, read, "It is frankly recognized that in a liberal religious society, different types of intelligence require different stimulation, a wider variety of Sunday morning service does not yet seem practicable. On the other hand devotional and formal services are not agreeable to all." The Schenectady congregation met their needs by providing good instrumental music without the impediment of words. Ernest Caldecott's suggestion of two types of services to meet different needs was not adopted.

The summer, 1928 issue of *The New Humanist* contains a note on "Words of Aspiration" by A. Wakefield Slaten, then minister of the West Side Unitarian Church of New York City. In an all too short ministry there, Slaten received unusual publicity in the city newspapers. Excerpts from his book *Words of Aspiration* appeared widely in church letters a sample of which follows:

To look out upon the astounding universe with eyes unblinking and a face unblanched; to ignore no truth and fear no fact; to be ready at all times to re-cast opinion in the crucible of new experience; to build high hopes upon a firm foundation; to forgive without demanding apology; to keep affection in spite of misunderstanding; to set our thought upon the things of value and spend our strength in the fulfilling of noble purposes; to reverence the reverences of others rather than what they revere; to be alert to Nature's pageantry of beauty, though we dwell amid the city's clamor; to get the most out of Life and give the most we can; to be sincere, faithful to responsibility, cherishing honor above indulgence and service above gain; to be guided in our conduct by the shining angel of Intelligence and not by the gaunt spectre of Fear; to approach our last hour with the calm of a philosopher and the gentleness of a saint, and to leave the world enriched by a treasury of kindly deeds and a memory of love; this is our Aspiration, this is our Ideal.

Dr. Arthur W. Slaten
West Side Unitarian Church 1927

Of Slaten's book, Frank Swift, an Ethical Leader himself, wrote: "They are ethical aspirations" which according to Slaten represented "an effort to conserve all the positive values of prayer without any assumption of, or appeal to the supernatural." Wrote Swift: "Dr. Slaten's compositions have real liturgical quality and his naturalistic utterances have an almost lyrical style." Frank Swift also had an editorial in the same issue on "The Problem

of Terminology" stating that: "One of the most difficult tasks which the modern Humanist confronts is that of clarifying old conceptual terms. So many concepts are encrusted with traditional notions and with conventional ideas that a number of Humanists are achieving expression by dropping the older words and symbols altogether." Also he wrote, "A term which has to be explained each time it is used ceases to have much practical value."

In an article by Edwin H. Wilson* appearing shortly after this in the *Meadville Journal* entitled "The Use and Abuse of Words in Developing Religious Experience," he said that with a repeated definition of terms, "The Church of All Souls becomes the Church of All Definitions."

In volume I, No.5 of the *New Humanist*, October 1928, several ministers discussed methods of initiation or otherwise formal welcoming new members into a society. Not only Slaten but Frank F.S.C. Wicks, John Dietrich and James H. Hart commented, but little was suggested beyond signing a book, reading the by-laws and, if there is one, reading the church covenant. The need for humanistic wedding, funeral, and naming services was felt and said Frank Swift,** "The Humanist Fellowship is ready, in a modest way to publish such materials." Jacob Trapp and Corliss Lamont both published widely used funeral and wedding services.

By the November 1928 (Vol. I, No.6) issue of *The New Humanist*, A. Wakefield Slaten became editor of The Humanist Pulpit, beginning with "Humanists must dare to be creative." Presenting six of his own hymns as used in the West Side N.Y. Church, he stated, "With some humanists it may be indeed a question of whether hymns should be used at all. . .even a de-theologized hymn is still a continuation of a tradition, a reminder of churchliness so offensive to occasional out-and-outers who would be clean free of conventional religion and all its works." He invited other to submit opening hymns.

A number of Unitarian Churches developed humanistic alternatives to the theistic affirmations or covenants widely used in Unitarian Christian contexts. One of these was by James Vila Blake, minister at the Evanston, Illinois, and West Side Chicago churches, caught on and is still used in many places.

Love is the spirit of this church
and service is its law.
This is our great covenant:
to seek the truth in love,
to dwell together in peace, and
to help one another.

One church, perhaps puritanically squeamish about the word "love" changed the initial word to something with no sexual connotation.

*The author of this review speaks of himself in the third person. At 87 he finds these happenings so remote that he seems to be another person.

**Later Frank Swift, when assistant leader of the Philadelphia Ethical Society was killed in an automobile accident.

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The November, 1928 (Vol. I, No.6) issue of *The New Humanist* included several hymns by Edwin H. Wilson, including the original publication of "Where is our Holy Church" which in the A.U.A.'s "Hymns of the Spirit" became known as Hymn 412. This is the only one of Wilson's hymns to catch on. Published later in *Unity*, it brought Wilson an appreciative note from John Haynes Holmes. Kenneth Patton did not include Hymn 412 (now 259) in his privately printed hymnal (still available) because "it is not literature," but it is still widely sung. Intended as an almost antiphonal contrasting of the old and the new in religion, Wilson would not give permission to the Editor of a Hymnal published at the First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles who wanted to remove words symbolic of the old such as "Holy" and "Paradise," thereby missing the whole point of the hymn.

In 1973, now aware of the fact that much or most of the past service material was filled with masculine terminology offensive to the exploding feminist movement, the author of "old 412" changed four words effecting an adequate degenderization of the song. The Rev. Vincent Silliman who for years gathered and published service materials, especially hymns, had a friendly but spirited discussion over revising old hymns by deleting a word here and there. But Silliman agreed it was different when the original author of the words did the changing. Most recently, (1985) Lindsey Press, London, published *Hymns for Living* with hymns by a number of persons sometimes identified with the humanist movement in the USA including Howard Box, Edwin T. Buehrer, John I. Daniel, John G. MacKinnon, Kenneth L. Patton, Vincent Silliman and Jacob Trapp.

Jacob Trapp was actively Humanist in his earlier career when Minister at Salt Lake City. With R.T. Porte of the Porte Publishing Company, Trapp published a 72-page bound collection of *Songs and Readings*. The first edition, (1931) states in the Foreword, "Out of many such beginnings may come a new ritual, expressing in the language of our own day, the spiritual hungers and aspirations of all mankind." (Today one would say "humankind.") A second and much amplified edition of *Songs and Readings* was published in 1937 with a section of sentences quaintly termed "introductory and dismissory." Copies will now be difficult to obtain, but it remains useable and a fine resource book to this day.

Others who developed Humanistic service material should be mentioned among Unitarian ministers including Edwin Palmer, predecessor of Roger Greeley at the People's Church of Kalamazoo for twenty years, who issued many inspiring readings and other service bits. Kenneth Patton's work in the field would be a chapter in itself. His writings have the creativity and feeling of a Walt Whitman and have been widely used among the lay led Unitarian Fellowships.

The New Humanist continued in mimeographed form through Volume III to June 1930, but appeared in printed form in November 1930 (Vol. IV, No.1). Humanist discussion of service material gave way to other concerns. The influence of Alfred Korzybski and the General Semantics movement was however felt as early as 1933, when a semantic plank stating that we should not use words for which there is no verifiable meaning was dropped from the Manifesto. Between the cessation of publication of *The New*

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Humanist, The Humanist Press Association, forerunner of the American Humanist Association, published *The Humanist Bulletin*. Starting in 1938 with four pages, the *Bulletin* grew to 12 pages in 1941. Professor James H. Leuba, known for his work in the psychology of religion, discussed "The Ethics of Symbolism" in the first issue of the *Bulletin*. He attacked the modernists who read new meanings into old symbols. His concern was for the young. "Must the young also form the habit of feeding on misleading symbols instead of getting a chance to pass on symbols acceptable to a modern mind." And he said further, "The modernist use of symbols in traditional churches helps to hide from too many of us its ethically repulsive character and makes it difficult to see its evil consequences."

The challenge to develop new symbols for "the heart side" as against merely objective language continues to this day. Abraham Maslow at a U.U.A. General Assembly in Boston stated that he found the average Unitarian service bleak and uninspiring. Many aroused U-U ministers felt that he could not have meant their church.

Sherwin Wine in the Birmingham Temple has developed services for those with a background in Judaism, with what seems like an existentialist quality to them, but difficult for an "outsider" to appraise.

All the source books need to be examined for their accommodation to feminism (the elimination of "manlish"), as well as for the elimination of theistic carryovers. Hymnals and other books produced for the pluralistic Unitarian-Universalists are meant to be used selectively, and serve varied theological orientations. Elbert Hubbard's *An American Bible* usefully made readings from eight Humanistic Americans, including the deist Thomas Paine, and Robert Ingersoll, but some of the eight only went as far as Humanistic theism. Elbert Hubbard's son told me personally when I visited the Roycrofters' establishment at East Aurora, N.Y. that his father was most certainly a Humanist. And Elbert Hubbard II joined the A.H.A. Hubbard's *Scrap Book* was stated on the fly leaf as "Presenting the inspired and inspiring selections gathered during a lifetime of discriminating reading for his (Elbert Hubbard's) own use."

Another source with many Humanistic readings often embedded in theistic overtones is found in the two volumes known as *Great Companions*, edited by Robert French Leavens with the collaboration of Mary Agnes Leavens. The convenient pocket size form of these bound volumes makes one wish there were a third volume with updated material selected with greater emphasis on the development of Humanism. Such a book with proper documentation and necessary permissions is a consuming task that awaits devoted competence and commitment. (Beacon Press may still have *Great Companions* available.)

In 1981 the Unitarian Universalist Minister's Association produced *A Selection of Services for Special Occasions*, (paper 105 pp.) that approaches the need felt by the dated material in *Great Companions*. The format however is less serviceable. Any Ethical leader could probably add a considerable list of other sources.

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A study of the successive hymnals of the A.U.A. and U.U.A. will show that much Humanistic material has made its way into widespread use in the liberal churches. Most recent Unitarian publication of Hymns was a collection of 25 degenderized hymns. Time and use will do the sifting, with the satisfying material surviving and thus never outdated. Time will surely mellow the newer expressions and give them the quality that will stir and nourish the emotions without stultifying the intellect.