



The Idol of Our Age: How the Religion of Humanity Subverts Christianity

Daniel J. Mahoney

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This book is a learned essay at the intersection of politics, philosophy, and religion. It is first and foremost a diagnosis and critique of the secular religion of our time, humanitarianism, or the “religion of humanity.” It argues that the humanitarian impulse to regard modern man as the measure of all things has begun to corrupt Christianity itself, reducing it to an inordinate concern for “social justice,” radical political change, and an increasingly fanatical egalitarianism. Christianity thus loses its transcendental reference points at the same time that it undermines balanced political judgment. Humanitarians, secular or religious, confuse peace with pacifism, equitable social arrangements with socialism, and moral judgment with utopianism and sentimentality.

With a foreword by the distinguished political philosopher Pierre Manent, Mahoney’s book follows Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in affirming that Christianity is in no way reducible to a “humanitarian moral message.” In a pungent if respectful analysis, it demonstrates that Pope Francis has increasingly confused the Gospel with left-wing humanitarianism and egalitarianism that owes little to classical or Christian wisdom. It takes its bearings from a series of thinkers (Orestes Brownson, Aurel Kolnai, Vladimir Soloviev, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn) who have been instructive critics of the “religion of humanity.” These thinkers were men of peace who rejected ideological pacifism and never confused Christianity with unthinking sentimentality. The book ends by affirming the power of reason, informed by revealed faith, to provide a humanizing alternative to utopian illusions and nihilistic despair.

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Jon Beadle says

A wonderful little book on the religion of secularism: humanitarianism. Mahoney is a wonderful reader of Solzhenitsyn's work, and in particular, the liberal conservatism of French catholic, Manent. He spares no Christian from taking the task of Christianity seriously above and against radical egalitarianism, especially when those people happen to be the pope (the author is a catholic). If you are sick of the way people easily conflate bland humanitarianism with the rich complexity of the Christian Faith, this book is one you need to read.

Melissa says

This was a good book but requires a knowledge of a great deal of background information from philosophy and theology to fully appreciate. It would also be good to have a good working knowledge of the philosophy of history/politics.

I think the premise of the book--that the religion of humanity subverts Christianity was well developed and is accurate.

I thought that the author did a great job of breaking down some difficult texts and passages from other works in order to give the reader an overview of those that would take a great deal more time to research and read independently. He uses examples from thinkers (Soloviev, Solzhenitsyn, Brownson) of the past and in the current age to make his argument. He writes about Auguste Comte and the positivism movement that began in the mid-19th century and its espousal of the religion of humanity and its inherent errors.

His commentary on Pope Francis and the Catholic Church was helpful. I learned some information about the Catholic Church's stance on issues (collectivism, nation formation, government) that I wasn't aware of prior to reading the book.

I do think this would be a difficult read for those who do not like a detailed analysis of history or philosophy.

Overall, I'd recommend this to those who are interested in a detailed analysis of the works of the thinkers who have been on the cusp of theology and philosophy and how they have also seen how humanitarianism subverts Christianity.

Christianity cannot be boiled down to simple humanitarianism. The divine is a necessity in Christianity--and cannot be unmoored from it. True Christian discernment means being able to separate what is right from what is almost right. The religion of humanity is deceptive and Christians and non-Christians alike continue to be confused. Jesus was not a social justice warrior in the modern sense of the concept.
