

The Texts of the Convivium

**IS THE GOSPEL ANTIHUMANIST?
OR DOES IT NOT RATHER IN ALL THINGS
ADOPT THE KINGDOM OF MAN
IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD?**

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1. What is to be understood by “humanism”?

I don't think there can be any doubt that the Gospel is profoundly human. But there does arise a question as one passes from humanity to humanism.

By “humanism” I understand the affirmation that there exists a *regnum hominis*, an autonomous kingdom or dominion of man, constituted by the sciences, the arts, technology, the economy, politics, sociality, philosophy, psychology and pedagogy and all the human sciences in general, and that all this dominion has an inherent significance, a function, a value and a dignity of its own.

In this perspective, on the other hand, one can define as “anti-humanist” any tendency to belittle, to diminish the value of these activities and forms of the spirit.

One could, for example, belittle its value by saying that humanism gives little or no help to man in truly realizing himself in relation to his eternal, supernatural destination. And also by asserting that, taken as a whole, the humanist activities distract man from religious life in the strict sense, from the “holy” life that is the only one that can merit us salvation, the only one that can obtain paradise for us. All the rest has to be considered as a dangerous distraction, a waste of time and energy: in the last analysis, therefore, something negative for man.

2. Seemingly anti-humanist motives in the Gospel and the Church

Reading the Gospel – and leaving aside its unquestionable humanity – one often gains the impression that humanism as such is not only accorded very little space, but is devalued by it and even rendered vain.

On numerous occasions the Church has assumed retrograde and archaic positions in the course of its history. Before accepting new ideas, it may put them in quarantine for periods that are often deemed to be excessively long. These are things that can happen as incidents from time to time. But the Church as such, theologically and in general principle, is not by any means anti-humanist.

Nevertheless, anybody who reads the Gospels and the other books of the New Testament with due attention may easily get the impression of a widespread antihumanism.

Convinced and passionate humanists may remain profoundly deluded. They will wonder what to do about it. Devalue humanism? Accuse the Gospel of falsity? Or accept it, though not without pruning it, verifying it?

But is the Gospel anti-humanist? Is it really so? And if it is, in what sense? Or could it be that, thoroughly considering all the aspects of the question, it would be right to conclude that the Gospel leaves humanism all its due space? The problem exists and is a serious one.

3. As announcement of the Kingdom to come the Gospel calls for the exclusive attention and commitment of men with suspension of any other instances humanist ones included

If we want to put matters in appropriate terms, we must, first of all, try to answer the following question: what is it that constitutes the essence of the Christian message?

Even more than message, Christian preaching sets out to be an announcement. It proposes itself, par excellence, as the Good News, the *Eu Anghélion*. Jesus and the Apostles evangelise, preach the Gospel, that is to say, give the Good News to all people.

And what is this Good news? It is the coming of the Kingdom of God. It is the Parousia: the triumphant “advent” or “coming” of the Lord.

It is the glorious return of this selfsame Christ, to judge the world and regenerate it, to complete its creation in the perfective sense, there to establish the Kingdom of God.

It is the definitive and irrevocable triumph of God over Satan; of good over sin and every form of evil; of eternal, indestructible, full and perfect life over death; of the light of truth over the shades of illusion, incomprehension, ignorance and lies; of authentic values over pseudo values; of felicity over suffering.

The preaching of Jesus and the Apostles is all centred on an unavoidable need that can no longer be delayed. And it is not a need associated with normal good living, but rather the need for preparing oneself for an event of universal import considered to be imminent.

The kingdom of God comes by grace: by an autonomous initiative of God himself. But this self-revelation of God has to be accepted and welcomed. It requires us men to prepare ourselves and keep vigil.

It requires us to convert to God, making amends for our sins and repudiating all idols, or false gods, any pseudo-absolutes to which we may have paid excessive and undue attention.

This self-manifestation of God requires us to pay every attention to God, open ourselves to him, completely entrusting and abandoning ourselves to him.

And it also calls for a change of life and an entirely new existence of full, intense and continuous communion with God, namely what – to use a single word and in its widest sense – we may describe as prayer.

It calls for living love for God and men and generosity and an irreprehensible moral life.

It calls for the sacrifice of every egotism and the full dominion of oneself that only an adequate asceticism can sustain.

It calls for preaching, i.e. announcement to others, and witness.

In other words, what is asked is an intensely religious life in accordance with the example of the saints. I am referring to a specifically Christian religiosity.

I do not here want to go into the merit of the objections of Protestant theology to the very concept of “religion” and its “works”. My personal and convinced adherence to Catholicism is also total appreciation of the religiosity and the works associated with it, which for me are full of value. And with this I close the parenthesis.

In short, conversion does not just consist of saying: “Lord, I convert to You”, and that’s all there is to it: to express the idea in simple and non rhetorical terms, conversion implies a series of actions that are particularly demanding and such as to call for a truly substantial expenditure of time and energy that excludes other commitments.

All this is involved in seeking the kingdom of God that is to come. It is the imperative of the situation. It is the only thing to do, and compared with it all the others are useless and harmful diversions, because they distract man from his sole good. It is the only necessary thing.

For man it is a question of first seeking the kingdom of God and its justice, because all the other things will be given him as a surplus. Divine providence will help us for all the rest, and we shall lack nothing essential. We should therefore banish all concern and anxiety for the things of this earth! (cfr. Mt 6, 25-34).

The search of the kingdom of God is the religious moment and, in particular phases of the evolution of the spirit that require us to make a particularly great effort, calls for all concentration, far removed from all distractions, including those that may coincide with even the noblest, most interesting and loftiest spiritual activities.

Now, here we can repeat our question: Is the Gospel antihumanist? As we have begun to see quite clearly, it would not seem that the original Christian preaching wanted to deny and exclude the activities we can call humanism. Rather, it would seem that it simply pays no attention to them.

4. Jesus invites his disciples to seek the Kingdom of God and its justice laying aside all concern for daily living

Humanism – philosophy, science, art, political and social commitment, technology, economic enterprise and so on – form part of a series of things that can interest the Egyptians or the Greeks, but had not importance for the first Christians, so that evangelical preaching does not even lose time to consider them.

Technology and art were concentrated, above all, in the construction of the Temple of Jerusalem and other buildings intended for cult. But they are not domains in which the Jewish people has made a very original contribution. And science and philosophy are even less so. Profane literature has little impact, and the same may be said as regards the application of art outside religion.

Jewish humanism formed part and parcel of the ordinary and daily life of a people of farmers and shepherds.

One may say that early evangelical preaching accorded no more than a distracted look at these humanist values. These things exist and, even though a minimum of account has to be taken of them, they are not important things that merit special consideration. The essential and urgent thing, especially for those who want to follow Christ, is to seek the kingdom of God and its justice, neglecting all other instances, leaving all things just as they are.

Certainly, one cannot remain indifferent to the poverty and material misery of so many people. Human solidarity and charity drive us to help them and, what is more, do not prevent us from choosing poverty of spirit for ourselves.

But let's be sure what the words mean: if it is true that material assets have lost all importance for us, nothing should prevent us – in the limit – from selling our goods and distributing the proceeds among the poor. In this we practice charity not only with others, but also with ourselves, since for the sake of spiritual life we deprive ourselves of a substantial impediment.

The family is traditionally a great human value. Jesus, it is true, affirms the indissolubility of marriage (Mt 19, 3-9; Mk 10, 1-12); but he speaks much less about the family, far less than the popes were to say about it centuries later. When Jesus does mention it, it is above all to denounce the obstacles that the family often opposes to the apostolate for the kingdom of God: "...One's foes will be members of one's own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Mt 10, 36-37).

Second citation: "Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you'. And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother' " (Mk 3, 33-35).

The concept is affirmed once more in a third citation: Jesus "said to another: 'Follow me'. But he said, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father. But Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God' " (Lk 9, 59-60).

Lastly: "Another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home'. Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is

fit for the kingdom of God' ” (Lk 9, 62). Personally, not even Jesus had the habit of saying farewell to those at home when he went out to work for the Kingdom!

As a general rule, a great deal of space among the domestic rites is occupied by the preparation of dinner and everything that goes with it, especially when there are guests of great esteem. Martha is fully taken up by her role as mistress of the house and far more concerned with serving the Master in an unexceptionable manner than listening to his teaching, as does Mary, rapt and forgetful of all else. Indeed, Martha complains to Jesus that her dreamy sister has left her alone to serve him.

There is an important guest, who has to be served; what he says, his words of eternal life interest her far less: even the duties of hospitality play their part in hindering the Gospel!

The Lord's severe reply, though expressed in a more indulgent tone, not devoid of some affectionate irony, is therefore rather fitting: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need for only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her” (Lk 10, 38-42). Who knows whether Martha understood him!

Jesus exhorts his disciples to leave all concern and worry for their life, for food and clothing, like the lilies of the field, who neither spin nor toil and the birds of the sky who neither sow nor reap: : “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear... But strive first for the kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today” (Mt 6, 25-34).

Jesus said: “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Lk 9, 58). The disciples of Christ must not be inhibited by economic worries. In the parable of the marriage feast, a king invited many of the local rich to the marriage of his son: “but they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business...” (Mt 22, 5).

Similarly, in the parable of the great banquet, which resembles it, a servant brought the invitation to the banquet to his master's acquaintances, “but they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets’. Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets’. Another said, ‘I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come’ ” (Lk 14, 18-20).

One can hardly doubt that each one of these excuses had some validity, if it were not for the fact that the declined offer constituted the sole true good compared with which all the others vanish and lose their significance and that the offer called for a timely and immediate acceptance, laying aside all other cares and solitudes of this world.

In the context of a patriarchal civilization like the Jewish one, cultivating one's field, buying and selling or taking a wife are normal everyday occupations, form part of the life of man. We could add, in the language used so far: they are the prime and most elementary humanism.

Here, then, we have the normal life of man; but Jesus proposes a life of a much higher order, an eternal life, a divine life, and therefore he can say: “Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it” (Mt 10, 39).

5. In the Gospel there is no contempt for human life and its values

It can surely not be said that Christ shows disdain for human life and its values. He is a man with all the normal human sentiments. He feels friendship and human sympathy in a profound and live manner.

He is fully at ease among people, likes company and willingly accepts invitations to dinner, just as he does not disdain intercourse with people who are “talked about”, even those who are completely scorned. He is close to them for compassion and solidarity, but in a spontaneous manner, without either the airs, the effort or the condescension that other and even well-intentioned people would show on such occasions.

He is a good son, who lives at Nazareth and is obedient to his parents (Lk 2, 51), even though his mission induces him to leave his family – perhaps a little distractedly, without informing anybody – at twelve years of age on the occasion of his pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover (where his parent found him sitting with the teachers at the Temple, Lk 2, 41-51). Above all, many years later, he was to leave his family for the three years of his preaching. It is not known whether and when he explained his motivations to them, who – to be truthful – did not exactly show understanding, especially in the initial period, when they even sought “to restrain him, for they were saying, ‘He has gone out of his mind’ ” (Mk 3, 21).

He did what he could for his mother. Possessing nothing other than the grace granted him by the divine Father, he sought to content his earthly mother by satisfying an innocent and legitimate desire at the marriage in Cana: the guests did not remain without wine! (Jn 2, 1-10).

Suffering on the cross, just before he died, he entrusted his mother to the disciple who had humanly dearest to him (Jn 19, 25-27).

As would seem from the Gospel according to Saint Mark, during the thirty years he lived at Nazareth Jesus exercised the carpenter’s trade, just like his father, giving his fellow citizens the clear impression that he was a man like all the others, absolutely “normal”. So much so that, meeting him again later and finding themselves unexpectedly face to face with a prophet, a man of God, who spoke with authority and performed miracles, the Nazarenes did not believe him (Mk 6, 1-6).

It does not seem that Christ wanted to criticize and even less so condemn the modes of human life. As to the Law, he did not by any means want to abolish it. On the contrary, he wanted to complete and perfect it (Mt 5, 17-20). He accepted its substance to the full, though not necessary all its detailed exterior application, which rendered it heavy and betrayed its spirit (Mt 15, 1-20; Mk 7, 1-23; etc.).

Jesus exhorted his listeners only to forget many of their worries. There are things not to abolish, but to suspend in a particular moment, when the coming of the kingdom of God required men to have a new and different attitude that I have already briefly outlined.

6. Evangelical preaching presupposes a traditional Jewish humanism

What was this new attitude to be different from? I would say that it distinguished itself from an attitude that was particularly traditional in Jewish religiosity, namely the tendency to consecrate every aspect of normal human life. As we shall see in a moment

or two, in traditional religiosity every moment of human existence is lived as a collaboration in the divine creation of the world.

Let us not forget that, according to the first two chapters of the Bible, man is called upon to till the soil and to dig the channels to irrigate it, that is to say, to complete the divine work.

If we want to convalidate this concept with an appropriate reference to the text of the Bible, we should look, above all, at the beginning, the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis.

Each phase of the creation is there followed and qualified by the words: "And God saw that it was good" (Gen 1, 10 etc.). The final comment on the work as a whole is as follows: "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (1, 31).

At the beginning the earth was barren, not least because "there was no one to till the ground, and to make the water of the canals rise out of the ground and irrigate the surface of the soil, then Yahweh God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being" (2, 4-7).

The humans, made in the image and likeness of God, were ordered not only to grow and multiply, and to subjugate the earth, eat its fruits and have dominion over all the animals (1, 27-29). And the Lord God brought each species of animal to man "to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name" (2, 19-20).

Here we already have the premises for a celebration of human with its productive activities and its arts and its legitimate joys and satisfactions. All this continues the creation and enriches it and adds something to its beauty and goodness.

And then the Lord God said; "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner" And so he created woman (2, 18 and 20-23). And thus there was born the love of which the Song of Songs is the living and poetic exaltation. And with the human relationship there was born friendship and solidarity. And also the sociality that is a recurrent motive throughout the Bible.

Though their spirituality, so fully centred in strictly religious motives, never encouraged the Jews in a particular way towards the sciences, there are no limits to what man may come to know, except the "knowledge of good and evil" (the nature of which, indeed, remains somewhat indeterminate and rather mysterious) and knowledge of the future: one and the other are forbidden, because they belong to God's dominion (Gen 2, 17; Lev 19, 26; Deut 18, 9).

As far as literature is concerned, its emerging expressions corresponded more or less to the books brought together in the canonical series of what we call the Old Testament, while the more demanding artistic expressions were first and foremost those connected with the construction of religious buildings - and, more particularly the Temple - and their decoration. Literature and the arts were generally placed in the service of religion, while their profane destination was less frequent.

The sacred books are said to be inspired, and the same can be said of art. A certain passage of Exodus strongly suggests the idea that even art is not only licit, but inspired by the Divinity: when the sacred Tent of the Meeting was to be made, "Yahweh spoke to Moses, 'See, I have called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: and I have filled him with divine spirit, with ability, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft' " (Ex 31, 1-5).

So God's Spirit "bestowed the gift of teaching" on Bezaleel and a close cooperator of his, Oholiab; and other skilful men were "filled with skill" (35, 30-35; cfr. 36, 1-2). The vision of these various forms of human commitment suggests and confirms that

man, as such, not only cooperates in the creation, but in some way completes and enriches it by the building of an autonomous city, civilization and culture. This autonomous kingdom is precisely what is meant by humanism.

Certainly, in the vision of the Bible we have a humanism that is far less developed than those of other modern civilizations and even ancient ones. It has to be stressed that, notwithstanding the high level of their spirituality, the Jewish people of antiquity remained essentially a people of farmers, shepherds and merchants, and not scientists and artists like the Greeks (and not even navigators like our own!).

On the other hand, the contribution of each of these two people to human development seems decidedly different, But this diversity is far from excluding complementarity. Together with Rome, Greece and Israel proved to be very essential components of the grandiose and complex synthesis that was to give rise, centuries later, to Western civilization.

**7. The Gospel justifies
a suspension of humanism
only in view of the urgency
of getting ready to cooperate
in the universal Regeneration
that was expected
in the very near future**

A question that Christ was asked on quite a few occasions was when the prophesied events would take place. He refrained from giving a precise answer, but let it be understood that the advent of the Kingdom was close at hand.

“But about that day or hour no one knows”, affirmed Jesus according to Mark’s Gospel (13, 32), “neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father”.

“It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority”, is what Jesus tells the apostles before ascending to heaven (Acts 1, 7).

Note, however, that he immediately adds: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (v. 8).

This makes one think that the Gospel has first to be announced to the entire world, to all men. The ultimate events do in any case presuppose the establishment of certain conditions. Though the kingdom is already present and operative in seed (Lk 17, 21), its full advent is not something to be expected in the immediate future.

The early Christians, however, had no doubt that the event was close at hand. They could have been induced to expect the event within a generation by the Master’s own words as reported by Saint Mark (9, 1): “Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power!”.

There are also the words reported at the end of the Gospel according to Saint John. Peter, seeing that “the disciple whom Jesus loved” followed them, asked: “Lord, what about him?” And Christ replied: “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!” The evangelist comments that “the rumour spread in the community that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but ‘If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?’ ” (Jn 21, 21-23).

Given the probable imminence of the Regeneration, Christ’s insistence on the need for concentrating one’s entire attention and all one’s heart and strength on “seeking the

kingdom of God and its justice” was surely justified. The time had come to suspend all other interests in order not to distract energy from the sole end to be pursued at that moment.

**8. In medieval Christianity
the seeming postponement
of the Parousia
led to a reassessment
of the humanist instances
of the Jewish people
and a new synthesis, enriched
by the contribution of other cultures**

In actual fact, the advent of the kingdom did not take place within the short term in which it was at first expected.

Nevertheless, one has to recognize that the concentration of Christians on the *unum necessarium*, the “one needful thing” (as Jesus called it, speaking to Martha, Lk 10, 42) proved to be far from unproductive. Rather, it turned out to be highly functional and undoubtedly providential. It made Christians more receptive to the infusion of the divine Spirit and thus contributed to the gradual formation and accumulation of an immense spiritual force.

This tension impressed a soul upon historical Christianity of the Middle Ages. At that time Christianity experienced a historical edition, a human implementation that was undoubtedly conspicuous, even though it was imperfect and, in certain respects, even deviating.

Medieval Christianity, in its turn, having assimilated Greek culture and Rome’s juridical civilization, transformed itself little by little into the great modern civilization of the West, destined to prevail over all the others, while yet integrating them.

Here Christian principles became incarnated in the social structure and even the constitutions of the states, giving rise to the affirmation of the fundamental rights of man and the citizen.

Attention became shifted onto human life, science, technology and the arts, producing a vast flowering of humanism, while the truly religious sense, and with it also metaphysical sensitivity, tended to recede.

In this situation the great problem is that a religious re-awakening (which seemingly can be brought about only by a strong initiative from above) should restore to modern civilization the soul it needs first and foremost to survive, and then also to implement a new synthesis with the humanism of our time.

Christianity is eschatological expectation, is preparation of men for the advent of the Kingdom. Certain words of the prophet Isaiah (40, 3-5) were later attributed to John the Baptist. Each of the four Gospels cites them, at times with cuts and small variations (Mt 3, 3; Mk 1, 2-3; Lk 3, 4-6; Jn 1, 23).

According to these prophetic words, the Christian message, the “good news” of the kingdom of God to come, is: “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: / ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, / make his paths straight. / Every valley shall be filled, / and every mountain and hill shall be made low, / and the crooked shall be made straight, / and the rough ways made smooth; / and all flesh shall see the salvation of God’ ” (Lk 3, 4-5).

The advent of the kingdom of God completes the creation of the universe and perfects it. Evangelical religiosity presupposes that of the Old Testament, intent as it was on consecrating every act as cooperation in the creation of the world.

In the preaching of Jesus and the apostles the coming of the Kingdom is felt and affirmed as close at hand and therefore such as to call for man's full attention, all the cooperation and preparation he can give, complete vigilance. This is the moment in which, due to this sense of urgency, the religiosity of the Old Testament with its consecration of the creation remains as if suspended.

The advent of the Kingdom was felt close at hand and yet subordinated – as I suggested before – to the prior verification of certain conditions that are known only to the Father but not to Jesus (and it is Jesus himself who tells us this). It is a situation that has yet to mature.

And so the years and the centuries pass. And since the coming of the Kingdom seems decidedly to have been postponed until who knows when, the new Christian society becomes established as the new people of God and, similarly, stands once again in need of a religiosity that consecrates every act of human life and every institution and law and moral and civil rule.

Hence the attention that those responsible for the Church nowadays pay to the family (which the Pope has so greatly and rightly at heart). And not only to the family, but to every expression of life bound up with the everyday of our present condition in the present economy, which is not yet that of the final events, does not form part of the “ultimate”, but rather, as we might say, of the “penultimate”.

For this reason there is now beginning to take shape a return to aspect of the religiosity of the Old Testament, which that of the New Testament undoubtedly updates and develops and vivifies, but at the same time slackening its own eschatological tension. To some extent, therefore, the vision of the ultimate events comes to enter a shadow zone.

**9. Though always animated by the tension
towards the Kingdom of God
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the Christian humanism of modern times
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At this point the times are mature for becoming conscious of yet another aspect: the kingdom of God will certainly come to crown the creation of the world, but this will happen when the creation has been completed, thanks to the cooperation of man and the full advent of humanism.

The new humanism of the modern and contemporary age has developed and, even more so, will continue to develop the motives and the germs offered it by Greek culture and Roman civilization. And it will also develop the motives and the germs it has received, little by little, from the spirituality, civilization, culture, art, science and technology of all the epochs and all the people of the East and the West.

Always inspired and sustained by the initiative of God the Creator, the new humanism will make a decisive contribution to the completion of the creation. And at that point there will mature the conditions for the final divine intervention that, with the manifestation of Christ and his risen saints, will sanctify, deify and crown humanism and the whole of creation.

As we have seen the humanism of the modern age seems incomparably richer than its Jewish counterpart in the days of Antiquity and the Old Testament. And it is precisely in this new perspective that humanism will increasingly come to be seen a imitation of God by man and cooperation that man offers in the divine work of creation.

Art will increasingly be conceived as imitation of the divine Artist; and science will increasingly seem an imitation of the omniscient God and, in its own way, straining towards omniscience; and, similarly, the technologies – in imitation of divine omnipotence – will be seen as straining towards omnipotence and cooperating in the creation in accordance with the divine will.

If the perspective I have just outlined is valid, we can expect Christian religiosity to become far richer in future. It will not only be “search for the kingdom of God and its justice”, but also a full rehabilitation of the substance of what we called the consecration of human commitment understood as cooperation in the divine creation of the universe.

Let me remind you once more that, whereas the former is the religiosity of the New Testament, the latter is that of the Old Testament. But we should also note that the latter, in one form or another, is also present in the religiosity of many other peoples in many different epochs.

**10. In the new spirituality
the religious moment
and the humanist moment
will be such as to require
exclusive concentration for each
and therefore alternation
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Taken as a whole, the religious moment will however have to be of such intensity as to call for all of man’s energies and total dedication.

That is why the religious moment will necessarily have to alternate with the humanist moment. The Bible offers conspicuous examples of such an alternation of prayer and work: though the latter is performed in close continuity with prayer and pervaded with its spirit. The moment of work will be decidedly inspired by a spirit of love of God, offer, gratitude for the inspiration and help that man receives from Him.

Though intimately connected and coordinated with work, an intense and highly committed prayer calls for times wholly reserved to it. This was already envisaged in the Decalogue received by Moses: “Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to Yahweh your God; you shall not do any work – you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days Yahweh made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore Yahweh blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it” (Ex 20, 8-11).

Though accustomed to attending synagogue on the Sabbath (Lk 4, 6; etc.), Jesus dedicated long hours to prayer in solitude, and even long series of days (Mt 4, 1-11; Mk 1, 12-13; Lk 4, 1-13; Mk 1, 35-36; Lk 5, 16; Lk 6, 12; Mt 14, 23; Mk 6, 46; Jn 6, 15; Lk 9, 18; Lk 11, 1; Mt 26, 36 e 39; Mk 14, 32; Lk 22, 39-41).

Ever since apostolic times, Christ’s disciples have dedicated specific and often rather long times to praying with extreme intensity, perseverance and commitment.

And, likewise ever since the beginning. This prayer, intensively practiced at its specific times, has been kept distinct from the other activities of work and rest in all the forms of committed religious life, in all the orders and congregations and religious groups. Thus the *ora et labora* of Saint Benedict can be the equivalent of the distinction I have here outlined between the religious moment and the humanist moment, where even the latter is consecrated and blessed and likened to God's creative work, of which it is the continuation.

Be it even as pure example, two citations of Saint Paul will not be out of place here. Though the matter was not of great importance to him, when asked whether in conformity with Jewish usages one had to abstain from certain foods, the apostle noted: "Also those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord, and give thanks to God". And then added that "we do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Rom 14, 6-8).

Let us therefore say that even the moment of eating has to be lived in a religious spirit, in a spirit of prayer, even though clearly distinct from the moment of prayer in the strict sense.

The same may be said of sexual relations between spouses, which Saint Paul admits, though almost as a lesser evil and with an interpretation that today would seem somewhat limitative even to a theologian. However this may be, even though they, too, are legitimate and consecrated and are to be lived in a religious spirit, sexual relation have to be clearly distinguished from prayer and their times have likewise to be kept distinct from those dedicated to prayer: "Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Cor 7, 1-5).

11. Conclusions

The analysis I set out to make has come to an end, and it will be as well to summarize its conclusions. We asked ourselves whether the Gospel, notwithstanding its profound humanity, could be defined as anti-humanist. We can say that it did not even set itself the problem of Humanism.

The Gospel is the Good News of the kingdom of God that is to come. Men are called upon to collaborate in its advent by conversion, prayer, asceticism and the sacrifice of all egotism, by a moral and irreprehensible life inspired by love of God and one's neighbour, by vigilance, by witness. Given the urgency of all this. There remains neither time nor energy to dedicate to anything else.

The Law of Moses and the Old Testament is neither abolished nor superseded by the Gospel, but rather confirmed and completed and perfected. Nevertheless, many of the concerns of the traditional religiosity are as if suspended and forgotten, because they are not concerned with what by that time seems the "only needful thing", the only pressing commitment that cannot be postponed.

In the perspective of the Old Testament as already outlined in the very first chapters of the Book of Genesis, man's work and what he does for improving his condition and for transforming the earth, of which he is the administrator, is conceived as collaboration in the work of creating the universe performed by God. Here we already have an outline of the essence of humanism, even though its practical applications are as yet simple and

rudimental, far removed from the complexity that was later to be assumed by Greek humanism and then its modern counterpart.

Convinced as they were of the imminence of the coming of the kingdom of God, the early Christians suspended attention to the traditional humanism conceived in these terms. Subsequently, however, Christianity became more and more aware that the coming of the Kingdom calls for particular conditions and that an effort had first to be made to let these conditions assume form and consistency.

A different perspective thus began to take shape: the advent of the Kingdom crowns the creation and requires the creative process to attain its perfective completion.

Dimensions of traditional religiosity that had become somewhat hidden in shadow zones were thus rediscovered. And this was associated with reevaluation of the humanism that seemed closely bound up with this religiosity.

One can thus readily understand that the magisterium of the Church should increasingly recognize the full importance of humanism as collaboration in God's work and imitation of God, whose full heredity man, made in his image and likeness, is destined to assume.