

nation of our efforts on the supra-national level than by explaining why and how in France, the first time for so many years, we succeeded in bringing together this vast majority of intellectuals shouldering with quiet enthusiasm this task of corroborating the honour and value of humanism and ethical culture.

Movement is proved only by moving. Our vitality will be proved only by advancing; and in the field of spiritual freedom the only efficient strategy is collective and public testimony. Furthermore the denial of our differences is of no avail, for this is precisely one of our characteristics. That which is original is living. But we are bound to understand each other, for we live the same ideal. Yet it is not enough to know this, it must be expressed and proved. Let us proclaim and prove this by uniting in a union which will assert itself and be concreted by the foundation of an international centre radiating through our courage and our will the ever living spirit of humanism.

THE CHALLENGE OF OUR TIME

by J. P. van Praag¹⁾

Introduction. A programme of humanism should be based on the elaboration of essential humanist ideas. It cannot and should not be a formal enumeration of claims and aims, or it will fail to inspire a living and steadily changing movement. Moreover it should be limited to those fields of thought and action that cover the centre of humanism as a conviction of life. It cannot be the pretension of humanism to offer detailed solutions for questions of practical politics or technical arrangements. If humanism and ethical culture are to mean anything to mankind, they should inspire daily practice, without relieving anyone of his responsibility for concrete decisions. It is in the light of these postulates that the following reflections, based on six years' experience in the Netherlands, will deal with the subject under discussion.

Conception of world civilization. The present-day situation of mankind is characterized by the slogan of the United Nations "One world or none". In other words: the time is over when men and

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nations could be considered disconnected entities of noncomparable nature. In the mental sphere this means full acknowledgement of the essential equivalence of men and of the fact that neither insufficient endowment nor unfavourable circumstances, nor peculiarities of race, class or nation can deprive man of humanity. Technically it means that the material base of modern life constitutes the interdependence of all human problems, which implies a joint responsibility for the happiness and prosperity of the whole of mankind.

The paradox of the present phase, however, is that the realization of the dignity and worth of man in the mental sphere has been made both actually possible and highly dubious by the inner dynamics of the technical world. Modern technique aggravates the consequences of human conduct, which has lagged behind technical progress. This is the reason why mankind is menaced by rivalry, destruction and poverty. But unless man succeeds in eliminating the threat of world-war and solving the problems of material want and population, there will be no world in which mental freedom is balanced by social justice.

It sometimes may seem as if freedom and justice can be realized only at each other's cost. But justice cannot be furthered by affecting freedom, nor can freedom by affecting justice. Humanism appreciates freedom apart from its importance for true humanity, particularly as a guarantee for society to adapt itself steadily to the progressive conception of justice. Therefore it aims at the social realization of both freedom and justice, the combination of which alone can lend practical importance to the conception of human dignity. Humanism cannot but demand of each society both reasonable prosperity for everyone and unhampered development of human values.

Inspiration of humanism. The contribution of humanism towards the solution of the present crisis by virtue of its nature can be no other than to strengthen and deepen the inspiration that humanists derive from their views on man and the world. They conceive the world in its infinity of time and space as a purpose in itself, in which man emerges to realize freedom and responsibility as his specific potentialities. It is characteristic of humanism of whatever kind to emphasize the uniqueness of man whom it conceives, though emerging from nature, as a spiritual and moral being. This uni-

queness constitutes at the same time the essential equality of all men: as spiritual and moral beings they are tied together in a really human solidarity.

So in humanism it is considered a moral demand to attribute humanity to all men. This does not mean that men are equal in every respect, but it means that they all share in humanity and consequently in the right to human development. It is therefore the task of humanism to promote the idea of full humanity as an inspiring conception for all men and a living force in society. It will do so by creating a sphere of life which will enable humanists to become "rooted in existence" and from which a real human inspiration will radiate into all forms of individual and social existence.

Types of organization and action. A humanist organization should be a community of congenial spirits, a fellowship of co-operators. They should not associate for the sake of studying and discussing only, not even for reflection and Sunday-lectures, however important these manifestations may be from time to time, but they should build up community-life by means of group activities such as practising music and recitation, song and dance, biology and folklore, camping and other kinds of social action. But they should also go deeply into problems of education and familylife, cultural responsibility and political justice.

A humanist movement, however, is neither a cultural organization nor a political party. It is concerned with all the above topics from the point of view of humanist philosophy. It has its own area of pursuits and produces its effect by the inspiration its members derive from it in their personal, social, political and cultural activity. Besides, it need hardly be mentioned, any humanist movement should have its own scientific apparatus and its own publicity-machinery. But only by means of group activity can a humanist movement become an organization of substantial importance in the everyday life of any people.

It will not be possible, however, to get a grip on the masses by means of group activity only, while merely popularizing humanist ideas will prove ineffectual as well. For these ideas cannot be made popular enough nor can group life become sufficiently enthralling for an average man to feel attracted to them. Humanism will mean nothing to him, unless it turns out to be of some importance in his personal life, when it succeeds in helping him in his

personal difficulties. In a humanist way of course, that is helping him to help himself, but helping notwithstanding. A humanist movement therefore should have its own spiritual leaders to whom people may apply in their difficulties, and its specific organizations for social and mental welfare, or, in accordance with national conditions, it would share in the general organizations of the kind. It need hardly be said that the humanist movement, provided that it is fully conscious of the necessity of being abreast of the state of knowledge and insight in this field of action, can supply an important contribution towards the scientific research and the empirical development of modern welfare organization. The more so, because the specific interest that it takes in man in his human condition makes it eminently suited for a novel approach and a fertile practice. Thus, among other things, it will contribute substantially to the dignity of man and the moral resistance of mankind, achieving in its area as far as possible the full development of human capacities and thereby strengthening the inspiration of humanism.

Humanist strategy. The strategy of humanism that emerges from the practice described above, is dominated by the purpose to put forward humanism as a philosophy and a base of life that ranks equally with any other philosophy or any creed. This does not mean that differently-minded people could be called upon to acknowledge the equivalence of humanism, nor can the humanist consider other opinions in that way, but it means that humanism shall claim fully equal civil rights. Convinced as it is of the existential starting-point of any creed or philosophy — even if this startingpoint is reason — it does not try to prove its superiority, but likewise it firmly rebuts any suggestion of its inferiority.

Therefore it does not emphasize fighting religion, but insisting on its own right to full development in spiritual and social life, it should resist and condemn dogmatic claims to monopoly with the harmful effects on personality that are entailed.

The gist of its strategy should be the foundation of a human sphere of life by development of its philosophic, scientific, social and practical activities, thus supplying its specific contribution towards modern civilization.

For this purpose it should unite in a definitely undogmatic spirit all those who cannot believe any longer in the conceptions of the

various creeds and are willing to base their conviction on a respect for man as a spiritual and moral being; for this purpose it should call upon prominent personalities both cultural and political to support it by their capacities and positions, and to sanction it by their authority; for this purpose it should create its corporations, funds and organs to further humanism as a power that counts; for this purpose, it should appeal to the organizations of social life and to every individual by means of resolution, explanation and testimony, by investigation and report, to pay attention to its conceptions and to consider its solutions. Needless to say that it should do this both on a national and a worldwide scale.

Significance of humanism. Humanism thus conceived is not a hobby but an answer to the challenge of our time. It lacks a magic word that can solve all the troubles of our civilization; it cannot surpass the most courageous thinkers and workers of to-day; but it can renew thought and work by creating a climate in which new faith awakens, and new courage expands. It is a way of living that takes seriously the condition of man as placed in a precarious world and responsible in every respect for what he makes of it. This way of living becomes visible all over the world nowadays, in different forms, it is true, but with an unseizable, yet unmistakably characteristic impetus.

If this impetus is to meet the challenge of our time, it will have to conquer growing groups of humanists and through them inspire the masses. Humanism has been the conception of a spiritual upper ten for ages. But currently proceeding industrialisation, urbanisation, massification and secularization will promote the reign of "nihilism" or at least of partial ideologies that cannot cope with the problems of our time and will end in the "rebellion of the masses", unless a new inspiration will get a grip on our civilization. It may be doubted whether any idea will not be levelled down when reaching the masses, but it is still more true that any civilization is bound to decay if it fails to inspire them. Therefore there is no choice. Humanism shall be a leading idea in society or it will forsake its responsibility.

But humanism will not necessarily be levelled down, if it preserves the tension between its longing and its realization. And it can, because it works through the intermediary of a humanist movement. It should be a centre of inspiration for all cultural, political, social and personal activity, but it should not get entangled in poli-

tics nor lapse into a system of uniform conduct. It should represent a steady appeal to human capacities to find the solutions that mankind is longing for, but it should not identify itself with any formula of the moment. It has no system of its own but is a stimulus to really responsible and efficient humanity.

No more is humanism an idea transcending reality, but a reality itself in everyday life, the precarious vision of man taking seriously humanity. So it is neither bourgeois nor socialist, neither capitalist nor communist, neither militarist nor pacifist, but an energy that blasts all systems, because it derives its strength from the needs and joys, the desires and capacities of the living man.

For humanism in this period is bound to realize the idea of which it is the historical promoter: the idea of integral humanity. And in this sense it is true that working for humanism means working for a life worthy of man and attainable for all.

Conclusion. A full understanding of humanism can only be achieved by means of the decision to be humanist. Then it provides strength and solace for the eventualities of existence. Thus it offers a philosophy of worldwide significance that can be understood in China as well as in Europe, in India and Indonesia as well as in America. Therefore too it may be called an answer to the challenge of this period in which a worldcivilization seems to emerge.

The first congress on humanism and ethical culture will be devoted to the shaping of humanism at a really international level. Therefore it is a sign of the times. May the groups and individuals attending the congress succeed in coming up to the expectations it has raised.