

The Blumenfeld Education Letter



"My People Are Destroyed For Lack Of Knowledge" HOSEA 4:6

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The purpose of this newsletter is to provide knowledge for parents and educators who want to save the children of America from the destructive forces that endanger them. Our children in the public schools are at grave risk in 4 ways: academically, spiritually, morally, and physically — and only a well-informed public will be able to reduce those risks.
"Without vision, the people perish."

Humanists Launch Attack on Christian Fundamentalist Schools

The Fall 1987 issue of Free Inquiry, a quarterly magazine published by the Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism, and edited by Paul Kurtz, a signer of Humanist Manifesto II and professor of philosophy at State University of New York (Buffalo), has launched a sharp critical attack on Christian fundamentalist education, calling it a "national scandal."

In a lead editorial headlined, "A Call for Public Scrutiny," the reader is told:

"It is estimated that there are now more than one million students in twelve thousand such schools across the country -- but little is known about the quality of education offered by these institutions. . . .

". . . Our review of their curricula, textbooks, and educational philosophy reveal that they are flawed in numerous and serious ways. . . .

"Their admitted aim is to indoctrinate students rather than to educate them. This indoctrination pervades the

entire curriculum. . . . Dissent is not tolerated. . . .

"Their textbooks present an extremely one-sided, and often verifiably false, view of the natural and social sciences, philosophy, literature, and the arts. . . .

"These schools do not develop in their students the skills of critical thinking. True education can only begin when a questioning outlook is cultivated, yet any questioning in these schools is repressed, and rote memorization remains the principal educational tool.

"While parents undoubtedly should have the right to send their children to schools outside the public school system, we believe that children, adolescents, and young adults have a concomitant right to learn elementary logic, critical thinking, and other problem-solving skills and to test ideas before accepting them. The schools included in our research deny their students these basic elements of education and employ a subtle form of mind control."

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"Truth With A Capital T"

The major article in the magazine is written by Alan Peshkin, professor of education at the University of Illinois (Champaign-Urbana), who sees the Christian school as a threat to pluralism because it adheres to an absolute truth. Peshkin spent 18 months observing Bethany Baptist Academy in Illinois, enrollment 115, and writes:

"The Christian school is based on Truth with a capital T, a Truth that is absolutely known, universally applicable, and beyond the claims of empirical evidence; a Truth that needs to be inculcated; a Truth subject to questioning only to clarify, not to modify or interpret. Since the mood of Bethany's doctrinal Truth is imperative, the only proper response of believers is obedience."

To Peshkin this smacks of totalitarianism, although he does not use the word. He writes: "Bethany seeks to shape the entire life of each of its students, in and out of school. This charge requires the academy to operate as a 'total institution,' very much like the total institutions sociologist Erving Goffman describes as places 'where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life' (1961, p. xiii). . . . Absolute Truth requires educational means no less absolute."

In other words, what really disturbs Peshkin and his fellow humanists is the fact that Christians believe that they have the truth and insist on teaching it to their children. He writes:

"From my first day there to my last, I never heard a contradictory message. Whoever stood before any assembled group of students, teachers, or parents spoke with one mind, as though they had been pressed through the same template and all their differences had been cut off and swept away."

"Forcing Houses"

Although everyone who patronizes the school does so voluntarily, Peshkin can't help but attribute some sinister coercive motive to everything that goes on there. He writes:

"Goffman described total institutions as 'the forcing houses for changing persons' (1961, p. 12). Of course, all schools hope to change their students' behavior. But the extreme to which Christian schools go to achieve their ends, and, moreover, the unlimited compass of their ends, distinguishes them as forcing houses. As undeviatingly single-minded places, they define and redefine all the ordinary elements found in any school in order to attain their one right way."

Peshkin knows how to use language to paint his biased picture. He writes: "Bethany's web of control also extends to its library. Before books may circulate, the librarian scrutinizes each one, eliminating those found unacceptable and expurgating others that can be made acceptable by drawing clothing on naked bodies, blacking out offensive sentences, or pasting together disreputable pages."

Yet, Peshkin also admits: "The thrust of my data indicates that the vast majority of the 115 high-school students in my study were happy to be enrolled at Bethany." And he admits that, "Its students, along with Christian school students throughout the country, score at or above grade level on standardized tests without benefit of specific prepping." But that does not satisfy him. He writes:

"As I see it, the school is a profoundly serious venture, mounted by powerfully dedicated persons who manage to avoid sounding like megalomaniacs when they proclaim the Bible to be the inerrant Word of God. . . ."

"I readily see the logic that leads from possessing the Truth to establishing a school as a total institution to inculcate this Truth and ensure its

perpetuation. However, lacking the faith requisite for accepting Bethany's Truth as more than just one group's perception, I see the evangelizing true-believer as an arrogant doctrinal imperialist who impugns the integrity of nonbelievers.

"I am concerned by a group whose beliefs permit no uncertainty, whose members frequent, accordingly, a polarized world where things are either this or that, not this and that. Scriptural Truth, as Bethany holds it, rejects negotiation; compromise is unthinkable; purity of doctrine is the scriptural standard. To me, such Truth is awesome, its implications intimidating."

But Christian Education Works

Since fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, perhaps Professor Peshkin is on the verge of conversion! But what really concerns Peshkin is the fact that Christian education works. It does shape student attitudes. He writes:

"When I questioned academy students and a comparable group from a local public high school about their commitment to pluralism, their answers, overall, were not far apart. But on each item relating to a point that Bethany's doctrine covers, the differences between Christian and public school students were enormous: Is interracial marriage okay? Yes, say 61 percent of public-school students; yes, say only 30 percent of Bethany students. Should books by communists be available in public libraries? Yes, say 73 percent of public-school students; yes, say only 29 percent of Bethany's. Is it good that America has so many different religious groups? Yes, say 82 percent of public-school students; yes, say only 27 percent of Bethany's. And, finally, should homosexuals have the same rights as non-homosexuals? Yes, say 58 percent of public-school students; yes, say only 26 percent of Bethany's. Given the differences on these specific items, I

conclude that the academy and its parental and church allies successfully communicate their beliefs and values to a responsive audience."

Pluralism Threatened

And because these schools are so effective, Peshkin concludes that they are a growing danger to America. He writes:

"I feel anything but indifferent to the Bethany Baptist academies of America because I fear people who believe they know the Truth and are convinced that everyone else should adhere to the same Truth. Their implacable logic is never moderated by the need to be pragmatic, to find compromise, or to see things in terms of degrees."

"Indeed, the existence of independent fundamentalist Christian schools is paradoxical. Because ours is a pluralist nation, these schools are legal. But, Christian-school practices would subvert pluralism in an attempt to produce a homogenized, fundamentalist America. Further paradoxical is this fact: that such schools exist -- that they thrive -- is one prime measure of our pluralism's vitality. Yet, the more such schools we have, the greater the threat to the survival of pluralism."

"I hope the day never comes when our society -- feeling threatened by its success -- concludes that Christian schools must be suppressed or curtailed in any way. Paradoxes of pluralism testify to our ideological health. I trust that my and others' concerns about the cost of Christian schools never exceeds the need to be externally vigilant about their effect."

Social "Costs" of Christian Schools

What are the "costs" of Christian education to students and American society? Peshkin is not talking about tuition. His fear is that Christian youth "may be effectively cut off from

society's political, economic, and social diversity." He seems unaware that the Christian viewpoint is one of the elements in that diversity, without which there would be less diversity. Apparently, believers in the Truth have no legitimate place in a diverse society where nobody has the Truth or is entitled to have the Truth. Peshkin writes:

"Bethany's students lack the opportunity to understand the basis and the need for compromise in a democratic society. They are likely to develop the ideological intransigence of what Eric Hoffer termed the 'true believer.'"

Another cost of Christian education to society is that the arts suffer. "Where orthodoxy prevails, creativity is confined," Peshkin writes. Apparently he has not visited Bob Jones University where the arts flourish or visited the great museums of the world where the masterpieces of Christian art are on display.

Also, according to Peshkin, "These schools effectively encourage their students to limit their cognitive experience. Students may come to believe that such self-censorship is generally a sound practice for non-Christians as well. . . . The textbook-censoring practices of the Gablers in Texas and Judge Brevard Hand in Alabama suggest this outcome is real, not extrapolated."

Peshkin hopes that these "costs" will never exceed the humanists' ability to bear them. The inference is that Christian schools exist because pluralist humanists permit them to exist and that without humanist tolerance these schools would be outlawed.

Apparently the professor has got his history turned upside down. It was Christians who settled America and gave it its basic Christian character. It was Christians who created an independent United States and its unique form of government. It was Christian freedom

which permitted diversity to flourish in America. And it was Christian tolerance which permitted atheism and secularism to take hold of American education. The diversity which Peshkin and his fellow humanists celebrate could never have arisen in anything but a Christian society where individual rights are respected within a Biblical framework. But humanists have destroyed the Biblical framework, created a society that now wallows in pornography, the blood of the unborn, venereal disease, perversion, divorce, child abuse, satanic music, devil worship, etc. This is what the humanists call "diversity."

Since humanists believe that Christian schools exist only through the sufferance of a tolerant secular society, they insist that Christian schools be regulated. Paul Kurtz writes in his editorial:

"Free Inquiry believes in a pluralistic society -- in which parents need to have the legal right to seek educational alternatives outside of public schools. But this right is not unqualified. Society has a duty to raise important questions. Parents have never been granted total authority over their children. [Except when the child is still in the womb!] They are not, for example, permitted to abuse or maltreat them, or to deprive them of adequate food and shelter or health care. [But they can murder them legally before they are born!] Similarly, parents surely do not have the right to prevent their children from learning how to read. [Only the government schools have that right!] By what justification, then, can fundamentalists restrict their children's opportunities to grow intellectually, to develop their skills of critical thinking, to be exposed to a range of alternative ideas?"

"That is what is at stake in our call for public scrutiny of the textbooks and curricula of fundamentalist schools. Our writers and researchers have found these schools intellectually deficient and culturally narrow."

And what about the public schools? Millions of children emerge from them functionally illiterate, with no employable skills, with little or no knowledge of history or geography. We wonder when humanists will get around to scrutinizing the publicly funded intellectual wasteland they already control.

Home-School Parents Sentenced

Ronald and Deborah Gieseke, of Pleasantville, Iowa, were sentenced to 20 hours of community service for violating Iowa's compulsory education law by home-schooling their son. Marion County Magistrate Fred Kreyes found the couple guilty of a misdemeanor.

The Giesekes feel that their constitutional rights are at stake. They plan on educating all six of their children at home. "We are prepared to face a jail sentence or move out of the state," said Deborah Gieseke. The Giesekes are appealing the decision. (Liberty Report, July 1987)

Home-Schoolers Face Tyranny in North Dakota

Home-schooling parents Richard and Kathy Riemche, of Bottineau, North Dakota, have been fined \$500 for carrying out their deeply held religious belief that God wants them to home-school their three children. Their decision to home-school was made in 1983 after their daughter Annalisa, then 3½, was hit and almost killed by a drunken driver. Not expected to survive, Annalisa miraculously recovered, and today she is a normal 7-year-old. She suffers only with a minor weakness of her fine motor coordination.

The drunken driver received a 30-day jail sentence with a work release, a \$230 fine and a short probation period. The judge had not been told that a child had been injured in the incident, which reveals something

about the state of justice in North Dakota.

According to Mrs. Riemche: "Because my husband and I choose to teach our children as we believe God intends us to, we have been repeatedly taken to court in the last three years. We have been fined \$500 which is causing us financial difficulty. We are now being taken to criminal court and are looking at a possible jail sentence, stiffer fines or both."

"The case is filled with irony," says Rev. Clinton E. Birst, executive director of the North Dakota Home School Association. "This family faces a more severe penalty for home schooling than did an out-of-control driver who nearly killed one of their daughters."

Attorney Michael Farris, president of Home School Legal Defense Association, says, "The state of North Dakota seems determined to wipe out any vestige of religious freedom in education.

"These parents simply will not comply with some state regulations because of religious convictions. However, I know of no instance where home schoolers in North Dakota are guilty of poorly educating their children.

"The Supreme Court of North Dakota has been totally insensitive to these parents. The court refuses to follow the Constitution. If the U.S. Supreme Court would look at these cases, we would win. But the Justice Department is unwilling to help. They simply don't want to help."

On June 2, Mr. and Mrs. Mark Dagley of Mandan were found guilty of violating the strict state regulations. Their 8-year-old daughter Carrie had been subpoenaed by the Morton County assistant prosecutor to testify at the trial of her parents in March 1987.

The judge ruled that the state had shown inconsistencies in the Dagleys'

defense. Wayne Goter, the county's assistant state's attorney, contended that the Dagleys used the Bible strictly for their own purposes. He chided the Dagleys' faith, saying the Bible mandates that a disobedient child must be stoned or put to death and attempted to show that the family's beliefs were not consistent with the scriptures.

Mr. Dagley responded that there is now no need for the disobedient child's death since Christ has atoned for the sins of man. "Jesus died for our sins," he said.

Attempting to show further inconsistencies in that testimony, Mr. Goter said the Dagleys "are willing to quote from one passage and apparently willing to ignore others."

An angered Rev. Birst countered, "A man's faith does not have to be consistent with the faith of others."

The Dagleys face a potential fine of \$500. (Liberty Report, July 1987)

Bennett Rips Into NEA

Secretary of Education William J. Bennett has established himself as the administration's toughest critic of the NEA. This is something new for that organization which has rarely heard criticism from any governmental quarter. In fact, the NEA has expected to make the Department of Education its own fiefdom so that it could boast of being the only union in America with a seat in the President's cabinet. It was expected that retiring NEA presidents would become secretaries of education. But this will never happen so long as a conservative Republican occupies the White House.

Here are some recent Bennett digs at the NEA:

"There's barely a speech I give when I don't say the NEA needs to

improve. . . . They're a mess. They represent the status quo incarnate. They've very big and very powerful and they're not doing anything much constructive. . . .

"They're the most powerful labor union in the world, the most powerful special interest in education, maybe the most powerful special interest in the United States. But it's not just because they're big. It's that they're big and wrong. That's the problem. Big doesn't bother me. But big and wrong, big and obstructive, big and self-interested and not working in the interest of children, that's what bothers me."

Bennett is particularly critical of the NEA's opposition to accountability. "There are greater, more certain, and more immediate penalties in this country for serving up a single rotten hamburger than for furnishing a thousand schoolchildren with a rotten education," he said. "Pay based on performance is the best way we have to introduce accountability to teaching. Yet there is no concept more vehemently opposed by the NEA." (Educ. Wk. 9/16/87)

And the reason for this is quite clear. Mary Hatwood Futrell, president of NEA, was one of the education leaders who warned us last June to expect massive educational failure in the years ahead. And she should know, for the schools are still using the teaching methods that turn millions of children into functional illiterates. Mrs. Futrell and her colleagues want to be paid for producing failure, for that's what they do best.

Memphis School Admits Student With AIDS

A youngster infected with the AIDS virus has been cleared to attend a Memphis public school by authorities who said he would not be a danger to other students.

The youngster, identified only as a 17-year-old male, is the city school system's first student known to carry the virus, but Dr. Sherman Kahn of the Shelby County Health Department said there likely are others. The Memphis school system has more than 107,000 students.

"We believe that it's highly probable that there are other students attending classes at the Memphis city schools that may be infected with this virus," Kahn said. (Johnson City Press, 9/19/87)

Christian Student Sues School Officials

Charlie Johnson, a 15-year-old student, has filed a \$200,000 lawsuit against school officials at his suburban Chicago high school, charging that his freedom of speech and religion were violated when he was suspended from school for distributing a Christian youth publication.

Attorneys for the student filed the suit in U.S. District Court in Chicago, contending that the youth made five attempts in May, before being stopped by school authorities, to distribute copies of Caleb: Issues and Answers, a publication of Students Action for Christ, Inc., The Caleb Campaign, at Round Lake High School, where he is now a junior.

The suit further contends that he was suspended for five days when he refused to turn over his copies of the publication, a monthly newspaper that discusses social issues of interest to students, to his principal. Named as defendants are the principal, the superintendent of schools and the school board.

Teachers Tests Too Easy

A survey of state-mandated teacher tests reveals that they are so easy that "only the grossly incompetent are

denied access to the profession." This is the conclusion arrived at by Lawrence M. Rudman, a research consultant who conducted the survey for the U.S. Dept. of Education.

According to Rudman, most teacher tests focus on simple literacy skills, such as basic reading, writing, and mathematics. They do not require candidates to demonstrate advanced levels of competence. "At best," Rudman wrote, "such programs can assure that teachers are not illiterate."

On most tests applicants had to answer only an average of 47 out of 104 questions correctly to be certified. Despite the easiness of the tests, about 17 percent of teacher candidates failed. The report notes that minority candidates generally fare much worse on written teacher exams than do whites. In California, 33 percent of black candidates taking the state test for certification passed in 1985. The passing rate for white test-takers was 81 percent. At present about 44 states require prospective teachers to pass a written test to be fully certified. (Educ. Wk. 9/16/87)

Lab Worker Gets AIDS

A second laboratory worker has become infected with the AIDS virus after handling highly concentrated solutions of the agent, National Institutes of Health officials disclosed 10/8/87.

NIH authorities said the unidentified worker apparently became infected when his or her hand was cut accidentally during the process of concentrating the virus. The accident occurred in late 1985, and the infection was first detected in May 1986. The person as yet has not developed symptoms of acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

In September, the NIH reported the first case of a worker contaminated while handling concentrated virus. (Detroit News, 10/9/87)

Home-Schools Thrive in Michigan But Few Register With State

The trend toward home schooling is on a roll in Michigan, but when it comes to keeping track of the latest statistics, state officials do not make the grade. They say they are being hampered in their counting efforts by parents who do not fill out required reports. "There are a lot of people who just refuse," said James Phelps, associate state school superintendent for school management.

Although estimates range from 5,000 to 10,000 home schools in Michigan, Phelps said so far only 450 have been counted. The state Board of Education last year ordered parents to report when they set up a home school and to have a state certified teacher involved in the program for a mandated 180-day school year.

However, Patricia Montgomery of Ann Arbor, who operates the 43-student Clonara School, a private, ungraded school for 5- to 18-year-olds and a home school service, won a temporary injunction earlier this year in Ingham County Circuit Court against enforcing the requirement.

Judge Thomas Brown ruled a certified teacher only needs to be available between one and 899 hours during a school year. The case is still pending. Meanwhile, legislation has been introduced to drop teacher certification requirements for religious as well as home schools. Phelps said the bill would strip the state of regulatory powers as well. (Detroit News, 10/9/87)

Vital Reading

Yes, Virginia, There Is Right and Wrong by Kathleen M. Gow, Ph.D., Fidelity House, P.O. Box 5694, Sun City Center, Florida 33570, 256 pp., \$6.95.

Dr. Gow has written an excellent critique of values education as now being taught in the schools of North America. She covers the whole gamut of programs that have become an integral

and dangerous part of American schools: values clarification, sensitivity training, decision making, sex education, death education, group therapy, etc. She demonstrates how values clarification encourages "children to clarify their values about stealing so that they can be clear about their own individual choices concerning theft, and feel comfortable with these choices." The results of the entire exercise is to demolish the notion of absolute standards of right and wrong.

Dr. Gow's discussion on death education is quite instructive. She writes: "It has also been my experience that unless one knows each child and his or her parents' convictions very well, one can, without knowing it, unleash immeasurable distress by choosing to give a classroom of young children the cafeteria-style unit on death and dying." She ends the discussion with the sobering thought that "courses which focus on death and suicide education, such as the ones described, are causing many to ask whether a correlation exists between what is being offered in this section of the moral values cafeteria and the statistics on suicide which are skyrocketing in this age group."

The book is written with the judicious temperament of a professional hoping to influence other professionals. However, the temperament of humanist professionals is satanic, and they won't listen. But parents will find in this book a great deal of information that will help them counter these insidious values programs in their local schools.

Vital Quotes

"Mankind will last only so long as children are born and cared for; and no plausible substitute for the family has been proposed. . . . The school by its nature weakens the family, for it takes the children away from home and gives them interests not centered in the home."

-- James McKeen Cattell
(Science, 2/25/44)