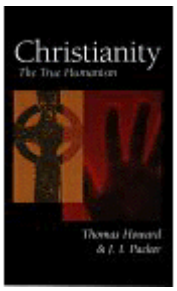
Christianity: The True Humanism

Christianity and Humanism

What does it take to be human?



Does that sound like an odd question? One is human by birth, right? J. I. Packer and Thomas Howard seek to explain and answer that question in their book *Christianity: The True Humanism*.{1} This delightful and insightful book, first published in the mid-'80s, is now back in print. Since it provides valuable insight for apologetics—and is one of my favorites—I'd like to share a few of its insights.

To bring out a Christian view of what makes for a truly fulfilling human experience, the authors contrast it with that of secular humanism. Secular humanism is the belief that mankind can truly find itself apart from any reference to God. It seeks to elevate the human race through a confidence in our ability to understand and order our world guided by our own reason and standing on the findings and possibilities of science.

One note before continuing. Some have objected to connecting the word *humanism* with *Christian*. Doesn't it suggest the exaltation of people? If you are familiar with either of the authors, you'll know that isn't their intent at all. As they say, "This book is an attempt to describe the sense in which the Christian religion both undergirds and nourishes all that seems to mark our true humanness."{2}

Because *Christianity: The True Humanism* explores the meaning of Christianity for the human experience, it adds to our apologetic for the faith. The authors write: "The best defense of any position is a creative exposition of it, and certainly that is the best means of persuading others that it is true."{3}

What Do We Need to be Human?

So, what *do* we need to live a full life? It might be hard to get started answering that, but once the answers start they come in a rush. A sense of identity is one thing we need. How about adequate food, companionship, peace, beauty, goodness, and love? Freedom, a recognition by others of one's dignity, some measure of cultural awareness, and a worthy object of veneration also fill certain needs. Recreation, a sense of one's own significance, and meaning in life are a few more.

Animals don't seem to be concerned about most of these things. As the authors say, "Once you get a dog fed he can manage. Give a puffin or a gazelle freedom to range around and it will cope without raising any awkward questions about esteem and meaning."{4}

Far from being a religion of escape which calls people away from the realities of life, as critics are wont to say, Christianity calls us to plunge in to the issues that matter most and see how the answer is found in Jesus Christ. The good things in life are pursued with God's blessing. The difficult things are taken in and worked through, leaving the results to God. Here there is no need for submerging oneself in a bottle of alcohol to relieve the stress, no approval for running from the faults of a failing spouse into the arms of another, no settling for a grimy existence from which there is no escape but death.

What is the testimony of saints around us and those who've

gone before us? “If what the saints tell us is true,” say the authors, “Christian vision illuminates the whole of our experience with incomparable splendor. Far from beckoning us away from raw human experience, this vision opens up to us its full richness, depth, and meaning.”{5} They tell us that to run into the arms of Christ is not to run away from one’s humanness, but to find out what it means to be fully human. Even our imaginations give testimony that there is more to life than drudgery; we might try to walk machine-like through life ignoring its difficulties, but our imaginations keep bringing us back. There is something bigger. “Our imaginations insist that if it all comes to nothing then existence itself is an exquisite cheat,”{6} for it keeps drawing us higher.

In this article we’ll consider four issues—freedom, dignity, culture, and the sacred—as we explore what it means to be fully human.

Freedom

What does freedom mean to you? When you find yourself wishing to be free, what is it you want? Are you a harried supervisor facing demands from your superiors and lack of cooperation from your subordinates? Freedom to you might mean no demands from above and no obligations below. Are you a student? Freedom might mean no more course requirements, no more nights spent hunched over a desk while others are out having a good time.

My Webster’s dictionary gives as its first definition of freedom: “not under the control of some other person or some arbitrary power; able to act of think without compulsion or arbitrary restriction.”{7} To be free is thus to be able to do something without unreasonable restriction. Of course what will constitute the experience of freedom will vary from person to person according to our interests and desires. But are there any commonalities rooted in human nature which will inform everyone’s understanding of freedom?

A Christian View of Freedom

When we think about freedom we typically focus on our external circumstances which hinder us from doing what we want. If only our circumstances were different we could *really* be free. But if freedom lies primarily in being able to do as we please, very few of us will ever know it. So, freedom can be very elusive; it comes in fits and snatches, and too often our sights are set on things outside our reach anyway.

Given the contrast between the dimensions of our dreams and the restrictions we face, is it possible for anyone to truly be free? It is when we understand our true nature and what we were meant to be and do.

Let's first distinguish between *subjective* freedom and *objective* freedom. *Subjective* freedom is that psychological sense of contentment and fulfillment which comes with doing the best we know and want to do. *Objective* freedom is that condition of being in a situation well-suited to our own makeup which provides for our doing the best thing. It lies, in other words, in being and doing what we were meant to be and do. Like the car engine that is free when the pistons can move up and down unhindered—and not flop wildly in all directions—we, too, are free when we operate according to our makeup and design.

Because we were created by God according to His plan, freedom results from aligning ourselves with God's design. This requires understanding human nature generally so we can know those things which are best for all people, and understanding ourselves individually so we can know what we are best suited to be and do. This understanding of human nature and of ourselves is then subjected to the law of love in service to others. Because we are made like God, we are made to do for others; to sacrifice for the good of other people. It is God's

love which has set us free, and which enables us to let go of our own self-interests in order to reach out to others. This is true freedom in the objective sense. “When nothing and no one can stop you from loving, then you are free in the profoundest sense.”{8} But this means being free from any desires of our own which would hinder us from doing those things for others we should be doing.

This focus on love of others contrasts sharply with what we’re told in modern society, that freedom means focusing on ourselves. “It is the stark opposite of all egocentrism, self-interest, avarice, pride, and self-assertion—the very things, so we thought, that are necessary if we are ever to wrest any freedom from this struggling, overcrowded, and oppressive world of ours.”{9}

The key figure to observe, of course, is Jesus. We might consider Him bound by his poverty and by the rigors of His ministry. But remember that He freely accepted the Father’s call to sacrifice Himself for us. His very food was to do the will of the Father. Jesus was free because He fit perfectly in the Father’s plan, and there was nothing that could keep Him from accomplishing the Father’s wishes which were also His *own* desire.

In summary, the freedom people long for—of being rid of expectations and restrictions so one can do what one wants—turns out to be illusory. We are free when we rid ourselves of the things which prevent us from living in obedience to the God who has loved us and given Himself for us, for this is what we were designed to do.

Dignity

The Imago Dei

One of the words seldom heard today to describe a person is *dignified*. What does that word bring to mind? Perhaps a

stately looking gentleman, dressed formally and with impeccable manners . . . but looking all the world like he'd be more comfortable if he'd just relax!

Packer and Howard believe that dignity is an important component of a full humanity. Dignity is "the quality of being worthy of esteem or honor; worthiness." It refers to a "proper pride and self-respect"{10} True dignity is not the stuffiness of some people who think they are not part of the riff-raff of society. When we react against such arrogance we need to realize that our reaction is not against dignity itself. For it is our innate sense of the dignity of all people, no matter what their place in society, that makes such airs objectionable.

Dignity is defined objectively by our nature, and is subjectively revealed in the way we act. What is that something about us that warrants our being treated with dignity and calls for us to act dignified (in the best sense)? That something is the *imago Dei*, the image of God, which is ours by virtue of creation. We have a relationship to the Creator shared by no other creature because we are like Him. This gives us a special standing in creation, on the one hand, but makes all people equal, on the other.

Secular humanism, by contrast, sees us as just another step on the evolutionary ladder. Our dignity is dependent upon our *development* (as the highest animal currently). Although at present we might demand greater honor than animals because we're on the top, there is nothing in us by nature that makes us worthy of special honor. "By making dignity dependent upon development," Packer and Howard say, "the humanist is opening the door to the idea that less favored, less well-developed human beings have less dignity than others and consequently less claim to be protected and kept from violation than others."{11} Hence, abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia. One has to wonder, too, if there is a connection between we've been taught about our lack of natural worth by evolutionists

and the lack of concern for behaving in a dignified manner in public life.

Furthermore, secular humanism treats people according to their usefulness, either actual or potential. “To be valued for oneself, as a person, is humanizing,” say the authors, “for it ennobles; but to be valued only as a hand, or a means, or a tool, of a cog in a wheel, or a convenience to someone else is dehumanizing—and it depresses. . . . Secular humanism, though claiming vast wisdom and life-enhancing skills, actually diminishes the individual, who is left in old age without dignity (because his or her social usefulness is finished) and without hope (because there is nothing now to look forward to).”{12}

Worship—Drawn Up to Full Height

If recognizing our dignity means understanding our highest self or nature, in what kind of situation or activity is our dignity most visible? Packer and Howard say it is in worshipping God that our dignity is most fully realized.

Why is that? There are a couple of reasons. First, we are made to worship, and dignity is found in doing what we are made to do. “The final dignity of a thing is its glory—that is, the realizing of its built-in potential for good. . . . The true glory of all objects appears when they do what they were made to do.”{13} Like a car engine made to operate a certain way, we were made to bring all of our life’s experience into the service of glorifying God.

Second, the object of one’s worship reflects back on the worshipper. Those who worship things lower than themselves end up demeaning themselves, being brought down to the level of their object of worship. But those who worship things higher are drawn up to reflect their object of worship. To worship God is to be drawn up to our full height, so to speak. We are ennobled by worshipping the most noble One.

Moral Life—Marking the Dignity of Others

Does all this mean non-Christians have no dignity or aren't worthy of being treated in a dignified manner? Of course not. The authors summarize their idea this way: "To the Christian, every human being has intrinsic and inalienable dignity by virtue of being made in God's image and realizes and exhibits the full potential of that dignity only in the worship and service of the Creator."{14} Because of our inherent value as human beings, we all deserve to be treated in a certain way. Christians are to treat people according to their innate worth. We love people as Christ loves us. We also seek to guide them to the place of their highest fulfillment which is in Christ.

Thus, Christianity "reveals us to ourselves as the most precious and privileged of all God's creatures."{15} And therein lies our dignity.

Culture

What does it mean to be cultured? In one sense it has to do with the finer things in life. People visit the great museums and cathedrals and concert halls of this and other countries, take evening classes at the local college, learn foreign languages, take up painting and pottery making as hobbies. Even those who have little interest in the fine arts have an appreciation for skilled craftsmanship.

Being cultured also can mean being well-mannered, knowing what is considered appropriate and inappropriate in social interaction.

What is at the root of what it means to be cultured? Personal preference is part of it, if we're thinking of the arts for example. But culture goes deeper than that to matters of *taste*. "Taste is a facet of wisdom," say Packer and Howard;

“it is the ability to distinguish what has value from what does not.” It has to do with *appropriateness*, with fitness and value.

But how do we measure appropriateness? Traditionally we have measured it by our view of the value of humankind. Does what comes off the artist’s easel in some manner elevate our humanness? Or at least does it not degrade humanity? Do we treat people in a way which shows respect for them, which is the essence of good manners? To be in good taste is to be characterized by being appropriate to the situation. With respect to culture, it is to be appropriate given our nature. On the other hand, to be in poor taste is to be “unworthy of our humanness.”{16} To appreciate the value in people and in their creative expression is to be cultured.

Should Christians be concerned about culture? While Christianity *per se* is indifferent to matters of culture (for the message is to all people of all cultures, and we should value the contributions of all cultures), Christians ourselves aren’t to be indifferent. In our daily lives we should be demonstrating habits and tastes informed by the Gospel, and these should mark whatever we put their hands to. We are to treat people with respect as having been made in God’s image. We also apply ourselves creatively in imitation of God, and our creativity should reflect God’s view of mankind and the world. Our creative activity in this world is what some refer to as the “cultural mandate.” “When man harnesses the powers and resources of the world around him to build a culture and so enrich community life, he is fulfilling this mandate,” say our authors.{17} In doing this we reflect the redemptive work God has been doing since Adam and Eve.

While, on the one hand, we should appreciate the cultural contributions of anyone which elevate mankind and more clearly reflect God’s attitude toward us and our world, on the other hand we are under no obligation to accept anything and everything in the name of “creativity.” We can’t applaud the

blasphemous or immoral. And this is where Christianity stands against secular humanism. For the latter, in its demotion of man to the level of animal and its elevation of human liberty above all transcendent standards, must allow wide freedom in creativity, whether it be crucifixes in urine or erotic performance art. But in doing so it ultimately degrades us rather than exalts us. A sweeping look at the 20th century with its horrific assaults on humanity offers a clue as to the strength of moral standards devoid of God's will.

A few important notes here. First, although the Bible doesn't teach standards of beauty, "it charges us to use our creativity to devise a pattern of life that will fitly express the substance of our godliness, for this is what subduing the earth, tending God's garden, and having dominion over the creatures means."{18} Second, "the Gospel is the great leveler."{19} There is no room for pride, for exalting one culture above others.

One final note. Even given all that has been said about the significance of culture and our contribution to it, it is important to note that the demonstration of God's goodness to those around us through love and works of service is more important than "cultural correctness." We cannot turn our nose up at those who prefer comic books to classics or rap to Bach. For to do so is to deny the foundations of all we have been talking about, the inherent value of the individual person.

The Sacred

Convention, Taboos, and the Divine

In his book *The New Absolutes*, William Watkins argues that people today aren't truly relativists; they've merely swapped a new set of absolutes for the old.{20} It's fairly common for conventions and taboos to change over time, rightly or

wrongly. One important question we need to ask, according to Packer and Howard, is this: “Which way of doing things does a greater service to what is truly human in us?”{21}

Taboos have to do with bedrock issues of fitness and decency. Packer and Howard tell us that our many social codes of behavior are “a secular expression of our awareness of the sacred, the inviolable, the authoritative, the ‘numinous’ as it is nowadays called—in short, the divine.”{22}

Wait a minute. Isn’t it a bit of an exaggeration to talk about taboos and conventions in terms of the divine? No, say our authors, for what we are seeking in all this is what is ultimate and fixed. Wherever there are conventions or attitudes which have such binding authority over us that to disregard them is taboo, “there you have what we called the footprints of the gods—an intuition, however anonymous and unidentified, of the divine.”{23} As ideas and beliefs exert authority over our spirits, they become sacred.

We are a worshiping race. Because of our createdness we naturally find ourselves looking for the transcendent (although we typically look in the wrong places, and although secularists will deny they’re looking for anything higher than what we ourselves can produce). We naturally find ourselves giving obeisance to one thing or another, often without conscious thought. “You can no more have a tribe, community, or civilization without gods,” say our authors, “than you can have one without customs.”{24} It is the rare secularist who is never pushed to the point of offering up a prayer in hopes that there is Someone listening. An awareness of the reality of the sacred seems to be built in to us.

In our post-Christian world there are a number of substitute religions. Even secular movements like Marxism become religions of a sort with icons and symbols and sacred books. In shrinking the sacred down to our own proportions we lose what we sought, however, for as the theology becomes debased,

so does the religion. And debased religion in turn debases its devotees. Note what Paul said about this in Romans chapter 1.

The Meaning of Sacredness

With respect to God, sacredness refers to His holiness and inviolability and to the value that inheres in all He has made. He is set apart from and above us. "He is not to be profaned, insulted, defied, or treated with irreverence in any way."{25} God both *cannot* and *ought not* be challenged.

Furthermore, that which He has made is due a measure of honor, and those things which are set apart for special service are deserving of special honor. We wouldn't think of tearing up the original copy of the Constitution of the United States or of splashing paint on the Mona Lisa. Likewise—but even more so—we shouldn't think of abusing that which has come from the Maker's hand or treating that which has been set apart for His use as cheap. Here's an example of the latter: How many of us think of our church buildings and their furnishings as sacred in any sense? We no longer have the Temple; but are buildings erected expressly for the purpose of God's service really just cinder blocks and wood?

Sin and the Sacred

If we aren't to treat the objects of this world as less than they deserve, much less should we mistreat those who have been made in His image. To sin against others is to violate their sacredness and our own, for in doing so "we profane and defile the sacred reality of God's image in us."{26}

For the secularist, as we've said before, without God all things have functional value only. As things or people outlive their usefulness they are to be discarded. The unborn who are

malformed are of no use; they can be discarded. So, for example, the aged, now costing society rather than contributing to it, are to be assisted in death. But not so for the Christian. In taking seriously the sacredness of God and of what He has made, we preserve ourselves and provide protection against those things and ideas that would lessen or destroy us.

Freedom, dignity, culture, and the sacred—four aspects of the human experience. When we look at the Christian worldview and at secularism, it is clear which provides the greater promise for mankind. It is Christianity, and not secularism, which provides for human life in its fullness.

Notes

1. J. I. Packer and Thomas Howard, *Christianity: The True Humanism* (Berkhamsted, Herts, England: Word Publishing, 1985).
2. Ibid., 38.
3. Ibid., 13.
4. Ibid., 37.
5. Ibid., 39.
6. Ibid., 44.
7. *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 4th ed. (1999), s.v. "free."
8. Packer and Howard, 60.
9. Ibid., 68.
10. *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 4th ed. (1999), s.v. "dignity."
11. Packer and Howard, 138-39.
12. Ibid., 160.
13. Ibid., 152.
14. Ibid., 155.
15. Ibid., 160.
16. Ibid., 167.
17. Ibid., 177.

18. Ibid., 178.
19. Ibid., 172.
20. William D. Watkins, *The New Absolutes* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers, 1996). An article I wrote on this book can be found at Probe's Web site at www.probe.org/the-new-absolutes/. This article was reprinted in Jerry Solomon, ed., *Arts, Entertainment, and Christian Values: Probing the Headlines That Impact Your Family* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2000).
21. Packer and Howard., 187.
22. Ibid., 187-88.
23. Ibid., 189.
24. Ibid., 188.
25. Ibid., 195.
26. Ibid., 206.

Christmas Film Favorites

Todd Kappelman highlights some favorite films of the Christmas season, encouraging Christians to enjoy the films while separating the sacred from the secular.

A Christmas Carol

In this article we will examine several classics of film and television that have become perennial favorites during the Christmas season. We'll start with a review of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. The 1938 Metro Goldwin Mayer version is our primary reference, although there are several remakes and versions that would be worthy of our attention. Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* remains one of the all-time favorite seasonal films and is worthy of an annual viewing for

a number of reasons.

The primary reason that the *Carol* is still important is that Christmas has become a commercial disaster that tends to focus our attention on the material aspects of the season and neglect the spiritual and humanitarian dimensions. *A Christmas Carol* must be understood as the loud cry of a Victorian prophet sounding the warning of the evils of poverty. The settings in Dickens' stories, illustrating the abysmal conditions in nineteenth century England, have long been understood to be a valuable reminder of the social inequities during the industrial revolution. This is the background of the famous Christmas tale.

The film opens with Ebenezer Scrooge's nephew Fred playing in the snow with several young boys. One of the boys is Tiny Tim, the handicapped son of one of Scrooge's employees, Bob Cratchet. The story develops quickly as the merry and cheerful lives of every man, woman, and child in England are contrasted with the disgruntled and miserable life of Scrooge (Reginald Owen). Scrooge is a rich business man with want of nothing, and yet he cannot, or will not, find it in his heart to enter into the spirit of the season. At midnight on Christmas Eve all of this will change as he is visited by the three ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future.

The ghost of Christmas past shows Scrooge his childhood school and friends. He remembers the time as mixed with joy and confusion. Joy because of his friends, and confusion because his father does not participate in the season in the same manner as other families. It is at this point that he becomes hardened as a young man and turns to a life of greed.

When the ghost of Christmas present comes, Scrooge is shown how other people are spending the evening. This is where he learns that Christmas may be enjoyed in spite of being poor

and that it is a time of opportunity for those who have material blessings to share with those who do not.

Finally, when the ghost of Christmas future comes, Scrooge is shown the grave that awaits him. He inquires whether one may not change his ways and thus alter his destiny. Although the ghost, who is actually the Grim Reaper, does not respond Scrooge surmises that this must be possible or the ghosts would not be visiting him in the first place. Scrooge learns his lesson in the end and has what amounts to a "conversion" for Dickens. The film and story conversion amount to a humanitarian change of heart and are thin on the Christian emphasis in spite of the presence of worship services and praying families. What we should take with us from the film is the fact that we can learn from the past and appropriate it in the present for a better future. Likewise we can use the Christmas season as an opportunity to focus on that which really matters, which for Christians is the birth Jesus Christ.

Miracle on 34th Street

Miracle on 34th Street, much like *A Christmas Carol,* is an example of the humanitarian variety of Christmas films.

Miracle on 34th Street opens during the Macy's Annual Thanksgiving Day Parade. The man who has been hired to play Santa is drunk, and the organizer, a Mrs. Doris Walker (Maureen O'Hara), is desperate to find a suitable stand-in. Fortunately the real Santa, a.k.a. Kriss Kringle (Edmund Gwenn), has been wandering the streets of New York and reluctantly agrees to help out. After the parade is over he begins to work at Macy's as the store's Santa Claus and causes quite a commotion.

Being the real Santa Claus, Kringle puts the children first

and the commercialism last among his job concerns. He has been instructed by the store manager to influence the children to ask their parents for toys that are in abundant supply and thus help to sell the store's surplus merchandise. Kringle laments the request and will have nothing to do with further commercializing the season.

Kringle elects instead to listen seriously to the children's requests and send their parents to rival department stores if necessary to secure the desired presents. This causes the store's manager and Mrs. Walker great concern about what Mr. Macy, the owner, will do when he finds out. The customers could not be happier with the store and it is considered a great humanitarian gesture on the part of Macy to put the children ahead of the profits. Other stores follow suit, and there is a citywide, then nationwide, movement to assist customers and children ahead of the store's interests.

There is a major plot twist when Santa is brought to a competency hearing in the New York County Court because he claims to be Santa Claus. His trial is front-page news, and everyone anxiously follows the story to see if the court will find in favor of the existence of Santa Claus or rule that it has all been a commercial hoax of the tallest order.

Mrs. Walker's daughter, Susan (Natalie Wood), has been watching the story unfold and serves as a prop for those who posture themselves more realistically to the Christmas myth of Santa Claus and reindeer. The little girl has been raised by her divorced mother to accept nothing but the sober truth about life; there are no fairy tales, myths, or Santa for this young girl.

However, when Santa is found to exist in actuality by the court there is a new opportunity for both the girl and her mother to reconsider their skepticism. The mother willingly concedes the existence of Santa Claus, but the daughter is much more demanding concerning what is necessary for her to

believe. The emphasis of the story is not Christian specifically, but rather humanitarian. The lesson is that if one will turn from one's crass commercialism and embrace one's fellow man the true spirit of the season can be enjoyed. As Christians we should be happy that a classic such as this warns us against the pitfalls of materialism, yet cautious about adding too much by way of Christianizing the story.

How the Grinch Stole Christmas

As we continue in our survey of Christmas films you will notice the difference between films such as Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, which have a more humanitarian emphasis, and films like *It's A Wonderful Life,* with a stronger Christian emphasis. The film we now turn to consider, Dr. Seuss' *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, conveys more of the humanitarian message. This is the first of two animated classics to be reviewed.

The tale is set in Whoville where the inhabitants are preparing for their Yuletide celebration. The Whovillians enjoy a classic Christmas similar to that of most middle-class suburbanites. There are plenty of presents for the children, snacks and food of every conceivable kind, trees, fireplaces and even "roast beast."

The Grinch (Boris Karloff, voice), a villainous creature with a twisted and defective spirit due to his tiny heart, lives in the mountains of Whoville. He is devising a scheme to steal Christmas from the townspeople below by taking the trees and gifts and food. The Grinch's rationale is that Christmas is somehow dependent on these things. If he steals them it will cause the Whos to wake up on Christmas morning and "find out that there is no Christmas."

The Grinch pulls off the heist and returns to his mountain hideout with every tree, gift, and crumb of food from all the Who houses only to discover a most startling surprise on

Christmas morning. The Whos in Whoville awaken and begin to sing songs in spite of having no presents or food. The Grinch cannot understand how Christmas can come “without ribbons and packages, boxes and bows.” He had expected the Whos to “all cry boo-hoo.” Instead, he finds that Christmas does not come from a store. At this discovery the Grinch’s heart grows three sizes. He has seen the true meaning of Christmas.

There is an extremely important message in Dr. Seuss’ cartoon classic. Christmas does not come from a store and we should not participate in the commercial trappings of the season to the detriment of the real reason we have cause to celebrate. The season is about Christ, the Savior of the world, and it should be used as an occasion to celebrate this fact with fellow Christians and witness to those who are lost. We can learn from the Whovillians that Christmas can come without all of the whistles and bells that have become so much of the emphasis in our contemporary celebrations.

The message that we should be careful of is the simple humanitarian turn that is so frequently substituted for the real message. The Grinch has a change of heart, much like the change of heart experienced by Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*, and Mrs. Walker in *Miracle on 34th Street*. It should not be inferred that this is a complaint against Dr. Seuss for not rendering a Christian message; that was certainly not his intent. It is, however, a reminder that the Christmas season is not a success just because we use it as an occasion for good will to our fellow men. It is true that the world needs more good will between men, from the nuclear family to international affairs. But Christ said that “I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly.” True abundant life and good will which will last for eternity are found in a personal relationship with Christ. Keep this in mind and have a truly merry Christmas.

It's A Wonderful Life

We are offering a list of suggestions for films which may be enjoyed by the whole family as both a point of fellowship and an opportunity for reflection during the Christmas season. The film we'll now consider is Frank Capra's 1946 classic *It's A Wonderful Life*. This film has achieved a cult status as the embodiment of why we should be thankful as well as a reflection on the dignity and value of every individual regardless of one's perceived worth.

The film is the story about a young man named George Bailey (James Stewart) who is saved from suicide by a guardian angel named Clarence (Henry Travers). In the opening sequence the people in Bedford Falls are giving thanks to God for what George has meant to them. The scene of the action then changes to the celestial heavens where Joseph, Clarence, and God are discussing the need to intervene in George's life.

George's father, the owner and executive officer of Bailey Building and Loan, suffers a stroke at the beginning of the film and George, the eldest of two children, must assume his father's position. George foregoes his desires to travel and go to college. Instead he remains in Bedford Falls and marries a childhood acquaintance named Mary Hatch (Donna Reed). He and Mary are poor but extremely happy during the early years of their marriage. The events in George's life will become unbearable when the Building and Loan is in danger of a scandal and foreclosure through no fault on his part. Considering his life insurance policy, he concludes that he would be better off dead than alive.

The dramatic action of the film shifts when Clarence, George's guardian angel, rescues him from his suicide attempt. In response to George's statement that everyone would be better off if he were dead, Clarence offers George a guided tour of what Bedford Falls would be like if he had never been born. One of the first and most startling discoveries George makes

concerns Mr. Gower, a druggist whom he worked for when he was a young boy. George had prevented Gower from making a deadly mistake in filling a prescription that would have killed a patient. However, on this occasion George was not there to prevent the accident. Without George Bailey, Gower spent twenty years in prison and became an alcoholic.

The events continue to unfold as George learns that the men saved by his brother Harry in World War II were killed because George had not saved his brother from drowning when they were young. George's wife, Mary, has become an old maid and his children Zu Zu, Tommy, and Janie were never born. The town is no longer called Bedford Falls, but Pottersville, after George's arch rival and evil banker Mr. Potter (Lionel Barrymore). The entire town—from the druggist, to the girl next door, from the saloon owners to the librarian —is different as a result of George's having never been born. There is an oppressive cloud over the town as it mourns the loss of a citizen it never knew.

The idea that all men have a purpose can only be understood in light of a world created by a God who designed that purpose and gives all men a chance to fulfill their end. Frank Capra's classic *It's A Wonderful Life* can serve as a reminder to all this Christmas season that God puts each and every individual here for a specific purpose. It truly is a wonderful life!

A Charlie Brown Christmas

We conclude our series on films and television specials of the Christmas season with what many believe to be one of the most overtly Christian programs in the genre, Charles Schultz's *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. Thus far we have looked at *A Christmas Carol, Miracle on 34th Street, How the Grinch Stole Christmas,* and *It's a Wonderful Life*. The major division between these films and specials is that some have a merely humanitarian theme, and others have a more or less classic Christian interpretation of Christmas. We have mentioned that

there is nothing wrong with the humanitarian emphasis as far as it goes, but Christians should understand the finer distinctions between the two renderings of the meaning of Christmas.

A Charlie Brown Christmas opens with Charlie Brown in his usual state of mild depression, searching for the meaning of something. This time it is the true meaning of Christmas. He proclaims to Lucy that it just does not feel like Christmas and that his problem is that he just doesn't understand it. Lucy charges Charlie Brown five cents and tells him nothing of any value; her solution is a naturalistic approach with a focus on monetary gain.

Charlie Brown's little sister, Sally, is a prototypical adolescent. She proclaims that all she wants for Christmas is everything that is coming to her; she wants her fair share. She represents the voice of all who equate Christmas primarily with a time of getting presents. It is sad when a child believes this about Christmas; it is tragic when an adult holds the same view. Lucy interrupts the exchange between Charlie Brown and his sister Sally to announce that we all know that Christmas is a big commercial racket. The truth here is that we all know that Christmas has become a big commercial racket; the tragedy is that we do so little about it.

The scene changes again when Charlie Brown is put in charge of the Christmas play and must find an appropriate Christmas tree. In true Charlie Brown fashion he selects a pitiful specimen that is losing all of its nettles and cannot support itself. The tree becomes a symbol for Charlie Brown and the limp and pathetic status of our contemporary celebration of Christmas; something has gone terribly wrong. Lucy's jaded expectations and Sally's crass materialism have only led Charlie Brown to a deeper state of depression. The answers have failed to comfort him, thus the season looks bleak and hopeless. This leads to his final cry for someone who knows the true meaning of Christmas to come forward.

Linus, the blanket introvert virtuoso, enters and assumes center stage. As the existential hero of the story, the true meaning of Christmas has not eluded him. He tells Charlie Brown that he will now give an account of what Christmas means. In a direct quotation from Luke 2:10-11, Linus tells them of the annunciation by the angel concerning the birth of the baby Jesus.

> *And the angel said unto them, Fear not: For, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. (KJV)*

In this, the most overtly Christian of the Christmas specials we have discussed, there is a clear and unmistakable account of the true meaning of the Christmas season. Have a merry Christmas and a happy New Year!

Education and New Age Humanism

The Humanistic Charade

Most religions consist of a unified system of beliefs that deals with basic views on such things as God and human ethics. The two basic elements in all religions are: (1) a view of God or some ultimate reality, and (2) a view of ethics, derived from ultimate reality. Most often these are expressed in some kind of holy book. Each major religion has a holy book or books. Christianity is no exception. Humanism, as well, has

its holy books: *The Humanist Manifestos I and II.*

The manifesto itself regards humanism as a religion. The very first sentence reads: “Humanism is a philosophical, religious and moral point of view as old as human civilization itself.”(1) So, humanism not only has its “holy books,” but has a view of God as well: It says there is no God.

The second *Humanist Manifesto*, published in 1973 states; “As in 1933, humanists still believe that traditional theism, especially faith in the prayer-hearing God, assumed to love and care for persons, to hear and understand their prayers, and to be able to do something about them, is an unproved and outmoded faith.

“Salvationism, based on mere affirmation, still appears as harmful, diverting people with false hopes of heaven hereafter. Reasonable minds look to other means for survival.”(2)

The manifesto goes on to say, “We find insufficient evidence for belief in the existence of a supernatural; it is either meaningless or irrelevant to the question of the survival and fulfillment of the human race. As nontheists, we begin with humans not God, nature not deity.”(3)

The *Humanist Manifesto* goes on to state, “we can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species. While there is much that we do not know, humans are responsible for what we are or will become. No deity will save us; we must save ourselves.”(4)

Regarding the individual, the *Manifesto* says that “in the area of sexuality, we believe that intolerant attitudes, often cultivated by orthodox religions and puritanical cultures, unduly repress sexual conduct. The right to birth control, abortion, and divorce should be recognized. While we do not approve of exploitive, denigrating forms of sexual expression, neither do we wish to prohibit, by law or social sanction,

sexual behavior between consenting adults."(5)

And humanism has a firm position on ethics. Their "bible" says, "Moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational."(6)

In other words, morals are not derived from absolutes given by God, but are determined by the individual from situation to situation. By and large, the humanists deplore any reference to them as being "religious." However, the Supreme Court identified secular humanism as a religion on at least two occasions: *Abington v. Schempp* and *Torcaso v. Watkins*.

In Torcaso the court spelled out that "religion" in the constitutional sense includes non-theistic, as well as theistic religion and the state is therefore forbidden to prohibit or promote either form of religion.(7)

The concern I have is not whether "humanism" is recognized as a religion by the humanists themselves or not. It is that those who shape the young minds of America are humanists and in most cases they are not willing to be honest about it.

The Great Brain Robbery

Humanism is the dominant view among leading educators in the U.S. They set the trends of modern education, develop the curriculum, dispense federal monies, and advise government officials on educational needs. In short, they hold the future in their hands. As Christian taxpayers we are paying for the overthrow of our own position.

Charles Francis Potter, an original signer of the first Humanist Manifesto and honorary president of the National Education Association, has this to say about public school education:

> *Education is thus a most powerful ally of Humanism, and every American public school is a school of Humanism.(8)*

Not only are the leading educators of America promoting humanism, but so are those who write the textbooks children use in the classroom.

A sociology textbook dealing with ethics states: “There are exceptions to almost all moral laws, depending on the situation. What is wrong in one instance may be right in another. Most children learn that it is wrong to lie. But later they may learn that it is tactless, if not actually wrong, not to lie under certain circumstances.”(9)

To show how this is coming about, we will go first to the basic issue the change in the philosophy of education. We will then examine some of the fruit the specific programs carrying the humanist message into the classrooms. Finally, we will examine the attitude of those in educational leadership who are trying to promote humanism in the schools, whether it be secular or cosmic in nature.

Educational Philosophy

Most of us have thought that the schools’ basic responsibility is to teach what is known as the three “R’s”: reading, writing and arithmetic. But the fact that many students today cannot pass basic aptitude tests indicate the failure of the public schools in teaching the three “R’s.”

A recent *Time* magazine essay stated that “a standardized math test was given to 13-year-olds in six countries last year,” and that the “Koreans did the best. Americans did the worst.” Besides being shown triangles and equations, the kids were shown the statement “I am good at mathematics.” Koreans were least likely to agree with this statement, while Americans were most likely to agree, with 68 percent in agreement.(10)

The conclusion one might make regarding these informative results is that American school children are not very good at math, but they feel good about it.

Today leading educators no longer see their job primarily to be the teaching of these necessary skills. The philosophy of education has undergone a fundamental change. Educators now perceive their jobs to be the complete "resocialization" of the child—the complete reshaping of his values, beliefs and morals.

Teaching is now being viewed as a form of therapy, the classroom as a clinic, and the teacher as a therapist whose job it is to apply psychological techniques in the shaping of the child's personality and values.

Teacher as Therapist

S. I. Hayakawa, U. S. Senator from California, was an educator for most of his life. On the floor of the U. S. Senate, he stated:

> *In recent years in colleges of education and schools of sociology and psychology, an educational heresy has flourished . . . The heresy of which I speak regards the fundamental task of education as therapy.(11)*

The National Education Association report, "Education for the 70's," states clearly that "schools will become clinics whose purpose is to provide individualized psycho-social treatment for the student, and teachers must become psycho-social therapists."(12)

The February 1968 issue of the National Education Journal states:

> *The most controversial issue of the 21st Century will pertain to the ends and means of human behavior and who will determine them. The first education question will not be `What knowledge is of the most worth?' but `What kind of human behavior do we wish to produce?'(13)*

Who will determine human behavior, and what kind of behavior do we want? Who will engineer society, and what kind of society shall we design? These are the tasks the educational leaders have set for themselves. They are not thinking small.

Catherine Barrett, a former president of the NEA, said:

> *We will need to recognize that the so-called basic skills, which represent nearly the total effort in elementary schools, will be taught in 1/4 of the present school day. The remaining time will be devoted to what is truly fundamental and basic.(14)*

Barrett wishes to press on to bigger and more significant things, such as redesigning society by reshaping our children's values. Educational leaders are saying the big question in education is: What human behavior do we want, and who will produce it?

The question we need to ask is: By what pattern do these educators propose to reconstruct society, and whose values will be taught? You can believe that it will not be the Judeo-Christian value system.

What are the basic programs carrying the humanist message into the classroom? Senator Hayakawa mentions psychodrama, role playing, touch therapy and encounter groups. Others are: values clarification, situation ethics, sensitivity training, survival training and other behavior-oriented programs. Meditation, visualization, guided imagery, along with self-esteem teaching, represent intuitive learning that has become known as "affective education."

Dr. William Coulson of the Western Sciences Institute indicated that affective learning, self-actualization, is at the root of our nation's illiteracy.(15)

These programs are designed to modify children's attitudes,

values and beliefs. The primary problem is not the teaching of values, but the fact that these new programs are designed to "free" the children from the Judeo-Christian value system taught by parents and church.

These programs cover such topics as sex education, death ed, drug and alcohol education, family life, human development and personality adjustment. The teaching today by humanists is void of absolutes; there is not a basis of discerning right and wrong. The only wrong is having or holding an absolute.

Relativism is the Key

The only basis for developing morals is what the child himself wants or thinks, and /or what the peer group decides is right. Strong convictions of right and wrong are looked upon as evidence of poor social adjustment and of need for the teachers' therapy. The bottom line is this the major consensus determines what is right or wrong at any point in our culture, there are no absolutes.

Sheila Schwartz is a member of the American Humanist Association, and her article "Adolescent Literature: Humanism Is Alive and Thriving in the Secondary School" appeared in the January/February 1976 edition of The Humanist. In regard to the impact of secular humanist thought in education, she makes the following statements:

> *Something wonderful, free, unheralded, and of significance to all humanists is happening in the secondary schools. It is the adolescent-literature movement. They may burn Slaughterhouse Five in North Dakota and ban a number of innocuous books in Kanawha County, but thank God [sic] the crazies don't do all that much reading. If they did they'd find that they have already been defeated. . . Nothing that is part of contemporary life is taboo in this genre and any valid piece of writing that helps make the world more knowable to young people serves an important humanistic*

function.(16)

Lastly, what are the basic attitudes of the educational leadership in America?

Sidney Simon is one of the educational elite in the U.S. He is a humanist, teaches at the Center for Humanistic Education in Amherst, Massachusetts, and is one of the main architects of values clarification theory, which is widely used in public schools. Mr. Simon is a professor. He teaches those who will later teach your children and mine in the public school. While Mr. Simon was teaching at Temple University in Philadelphia, he commented on his experience teaching high school students:

> *I always bootlegged the values stuff. I was assigned to teach social studies in elementary school and I taught values clarification. I was assigned current trends in American education and I taught my trend.(17)*

Simon goes on to say, "Keep it subtle, keep it quiet, or the parents will really get upset."(18)

Rhoda Lorand, a member of the American Board of Professional Psychology, made some observations about the attitudes of educators before the U.S. House Sub-Committee on Education. Her testimony related to House Resolution 5163 having to do with education. Her words are as follows:

> *The contempt for parents is so shockingly apparent in many of the courses funded under Title III, in which the teacher is required to become an instant psychiatrist who probes the psyche of her pupils, while encouraging them to criticize their parents' beliefs, values and teachings. This process continues from kindergarten through the twelfth grade.(19)*

As parents, we are expected to fund the very teaching methodology that is designed to destroy our influence upon our

children.

The New Age Seduction

However, the humanist perspective on education is not the only threat we face today. The humanists became entrenched in the late 1960s and during the 1970s.

During the decade of the eighties and now in the nineties we have a new threat. Those who have bought into the New Age movement have a goal to influence the young as well. The January/February 1983 issue of The Humanist carried this article titled "A Religion for a New Age." The author stated:

> *I am convinced that the battle for humankind's future must be waged and won in the public school classroom by teachers who correctly perceive their role as the proselytizers of a new faith: a religion of humanity that recognizes and respects the spark of what theologians call divinity in every human being. These teachers must embody the same selfless dedication as the most rabid fundamentalist preachers, for they will be ministers of another sort, utilizing a classroom instead of a pulpit to convey humanist values in whatever subject they teach, regardless of the educational level preschool day care or large state university.(20)*

The main thrust of this new threat is eastern in philosophy and origin. Humanism as a religion represents a real threat to our Christian heritage, but eastern philosophical ideas by comparison are deadly to our way of life.

Instructor magazine, a publication for teachers, carried an article entitled "Your Kids are Psychic! But they may never know it without your help." The article says that "teachers in particular are in a position to play an exciting role in the psychic development of children."(21) The article goes on to identify psychic ability as the practice of telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition and retrocognition.

As teachers continue their path toward enlightenment of their students, they may step into the world of "confluent education." Dr. Beverly Galyean describes confluent education as a "wholistic" approach to learning. The basic premises of "confluent education" should cause great concern within the Christian community.

Among Dr. Galyean's premises are:

> *In essence we are not individuals but part of the universal consciousness [which is God]. Realizing this essential unity, and experiencing oneself as part of it, is a major goal for a child's education.*
>
> *Because each person is part of the universal consciousness which is love, each contains all the wisdom and love of the universe. This wisdom and love is the `higher self.' The child can tap into this universal mind and receive advice, information and help from it. This is usually done through meditation and contact with spirit guides.*
>
> *Each person creates his or her own reality by choosing what to perceive and how to perceive it. As we teach children to focus on positive thoughts and feelings of love, their reality will become that.(22)*

Dr. Galyean sums up her beliefs by saying that

> *Once we begin to see that we are all God . . . the whole purpose of life is to reown the Godlikeness within us; the perfect love, the perfect wisdom, the perfect understanding, the perfect intelligence, and when we do that we create back to that old, that essential oneness which is consciousness. So my whole view is very much based on that idea.(23)*

As Christians our response to New Age influences in public

school education can be carried out in several ways.

First, we must develop a relationship with the school. One possibility might be through actively working as a volunteer on campus in some capacity. Another is getting to know your child’s teacher and his or her worldview.

Second, we must discern he particular bias of the textbooks used in the classroom. Whether they are humanistic in their approach or eastern and whether they properly treat the Judeo-Christian world view.

Third, if we discover that our Judeo-Christian perspectives are being sacrificed for the inclusion of alternative views, then we must become politically involved and seek the election of individuals to the school board and other effective positions who reflect a more traditional stance.

Fourth, we must continue to be actively involved in our children’s lives. Furthermore, we must teach our children to become discriminators. We cannot ever accept the idea that our child’s education is someone else’s responsibility.

It is imperative that we educate others as to the problems within the system and then take appropriate action.

As Christians, our response to New Age influences in public school education can be carried out by developing a relationship with the school and getting to know our children’s teacher and his or her particular worldview.

We must also be aware of the bias represented in our children’s textbooks. However, more importantly, we must develop a deeper relationship with our children, thereby becoming the greatest of all the various influences in their young lives. Unless we achieve this goal, we will have emotionally and spiritually lost the battle for our children’s future.

Notes

1. Paul Kurtz, *Humanist Manifesto I* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1979), 9.

2. Paul Kurtz, Edwin H. Wilson, *Humanist Manifesto II* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1979), 13.

3. Kurtz, *Humanist Manifesto II*, 16.

4. Kurtz, *Humanist Manifesto II*, 17.

5. *Torcaso v. Watkins*, 367 US 488, 1961, 495n.

6. Virginia Armstrong, *Humanism in American Education I*, (Blackstone Institute of Public Law and Policy).

7. Helen M. Hughes, *Inquiries in Sociology* (Newton, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon, 1972), 37.

8. Charles Krauthammer, "Education: Doing Bad and Feeling Good," *Time*, 5 February 1990, 78.

9. Address to the U.S. Senate, U.S. Department of Education Hearing, March 1984.

10. "Education for the 70's," National Education Report.

11. National Education Journal, (Feb. 1968).

12. Timothy D. Crater, "The Unproclaimed Priests of Public Education," *Christianity Today*, 10 April 1981, 45.

13. William R. Coulson, "Memorandum to Federal Drug Education Panel," 23 April 1988, Program Newsletter (La Jolla, Calif.: May 1988).

14. Sheila Schwartz, "Adolescent Literature: Humanism is Alive

and Thriving in the Secondary School," The Humanist, Jan. Feb. 1976.

15. Crater, "Unproclaimed Priests," 46.

16. Ibid., 47.

17. Ibid.

18. John Dunphy, "A Religion for a New Age," *The Humanist*, Jan. Feb. 1983, 26.

19. Alex Tanous and Katherine Fair Donnelly, "Your Kids Are Psychic!," *Instructor Magazine*, April 1980, 65.

20. Frances Adeney, "Some Schools Are Looking East for Answers," *Moody Monthly*, May 1982, 19.

21. Ibid.

Humanistic Psychology and Education

Based on an interview with Dr. W.R. Coulson, Don Closson discusses the damaging effects of humanistic psychology and the non-directive approach to drug and sex ed programs that it encourages.

Interview with Dr. Coulson

I recently had the opportunity to interview Dr. W. R. Coulson

concerning the role that humanistic psychology is playing in education. Dr. Coulson was a long-time associate of Carl Rogers, who is considered to be the father of non-directive therapy, a therapy which has now been incorporated into self-esteem, sex-ed, and drug-ed curricula.

Dr. Coulson saw that this form of therapy had some success with mentally distressed people who knew they needed help, but following failures with locked-ward schizophrenics, normal adults, and a parochial school system in California, Dr. Coulson broke with Carl Rogers and is now trying to undo the damage of what might be called humanistic education.

The results of non-directive therapy in education have been disappointing to anyone willing to look at the facts. We asked Dr. Coulson about these negative results. He said:

> *Every major study of [non-directive therapy in education] over the last 15 years . . . has shown that it produces an opposite effect to what anybody wants. There are packaged curricula all over the country with names like "Quest," "Skills For Living," "Skills for Adolescents," "Here's Looking at You 2000," "Omnibudsmen," "Meology," and "Growing Healthy." Every one of them gets the same effect, and that is that they introduce good kids to misconduct, and they do it in the name of non-judgmentalism. They say, "We're not going to call anything wrong, we're not going to call drug use wrong, because we'll make some of the kids in this classroom feel bad because they are already using drugs. Let's see if we can help people without identifying for them what they're doing wrong." What happens is that the kids who are always looking for the objective standard so that they can meet it . . . are left without [one].*
>
> *We've trained [our children] to respect legitimate authority, and now the school is exercising its authority to say, "You've got to forget about what your church taught you or*

> *what your parents taught you; forget about that business about absolutes and right and wrong. Let's put those words in quotation marks— "right" and "wrong"—and let's help you find what you really deeply inside of you want."*

> *We've got youngsters here now who . . . are under the authority of the school [and] are being persuaded that there is a better way. And that way is to make their own decisions. They're being induced to make decisions about activities that the citizenry of the state have decided are wrong—drug use and teenage sex.*

Abraham Maslow

My interview with Dr. W. R. Coulson next focused on the work of Abraham Maslow. Dr. Maslow constructed a theory of self-actualization that described how adults reach peak levels of performance. Much of modern educational practice assumes that Maslow's theories apply to children.

I asked Dr. Coulson, who worked with Maslow, about this connection between the theory of self-actualization and education in our public schools. He responded:

> *Abe Maslow, who invented this thing, said it never applied to the population at large, and most definitely not to children. Anybody who wants to check up on my claim that Abe Maslow did a complete turnabout need only look at the second edition of his classic text called Motivation and Personality. He wrote a very lengthy preface . . . [in] an attempt to say that his followers had completely misused what he had written and that it was going to be applied to exploiting children.*

> *Writing in the late 60s, in his personal journals which were published after his death, Maslow said that this is the first generation of young people who have had their own purchasing*

> *power, and he feared that his theories of self-actualization and need fulfillment (that famous pyramid, Maslow's hierarchy of needs) would be used to steal little kids' money and virtue. . . . In the new preface he writes, "It does not apply to children; they are not mature enough; they have not had enough experience to understand tragedy, for example, nor do they have enough courage to be openly virtuous."*

Our children tend to be somewhat intimidated by their virtue because every other example they are getting, from the secular media, etc., is something very different from virtue.

> *As a good kid himself, growing up in a Jewish household, Abe Maslow knew that he tended to hang back in assertiveness. The good kids, I'm afraid, sometimes do that, and he saw everything thrown out of balance when the class was opened up to the kids to teach one another. His fear was in anticipation of the research results, which is that when you teach the teacher not to teach anymore but to become a facilitator, and you turn the chairs into a circle, and you say to the kids, in effect, "What would you like to talk about?"—the troubled kids begin to teach the good kids. The experienced kids, the kids who are doing drugs and having sex, teach the good kids that they are insufficiently actualized.*

Education has adopted its view of moral and intellectual development from Dr. Maslow, an atheist who argued his views shouldn't be applied to children. The results are exactly what he predicted: our children are being exploited both economically, by tobacco and beer companies, and sexually by the Playboy mentality.

Self-Esteem

Parents are awakening to the disturbing fact that many educators see their children as mentally or emotionally in

need of therapy. What is their illness? Low self-esteem. Low self-esteem is now named as the cause for everything from low grades to drug abuse. The solution being offered is to teach children how to acquire a healthy self-esteem.

Programs have been implemented for developing self-esteem at every grade level. DUSO (Developing Understanding of Self and Others) and Pumsy are two of the most popular elementary-school curricula. Most senior high drug-ed and sex-ed programs focus on self-esteem as well.

I asked Dr. Coulson about the use of these programs, and how parents should react to their children's placement in them. He said:

> *I would raise a red flag . . . every time the word values is used. That's been a difficult word, because for a long time Christians were asking for value-oriented education. The problem is that values has become a relativistic word—it's subjective.*
>
> *In California we taught people going through our encounter groups to say, "Well, you have your values, but who's to say your values should be my values?" We taught mothers and fathers to fear that they were selfish if they imposed their values on their children. There are children now who have become sufficiently sophisticated in this mock psychological wave that they can say to their parents, "We appreciate your value of church-going, it just doesn't happen to be mine. My experience is other than your experience. After all, Mom and Dad, you did grow up in a different era."*
>
> *We've taught our children to be clumsy developmental psychologists who are capable of accusing their parents of wanting to oppress them by teaching them the truth. So what we have to do is turn the questions back to those who offer these curricula, like the people who wrote the DUSO*

> *curriculum or the Pumsy curriculum, and say, "Is this curriculum just your value? And if so, why should it be our value? Or is your curriculum somehow true? Do you claim to have knowledge in some way of the way things should be everywhere? Do you think you have a grip on a universal [truth], and, if you can grant that you do, can you not grant that we might, and that there might be some kind of competition between our understanding of what our universal obligations are in this world and your own understanding; that there is some kind of universal or absolute that we are seeking?"*

> *Because, in fact, they don't think that their values are relativistic. They think that everybody ought to be doing this. And that's precisely their error. I'm a non-directive psychotherapist, and if I were doing therapy, I would still be doing it like Carl Rogers, my teacher, taught me to do it. But I would not be doing it in classrooms, and I would not be doing it with people who could not profit from it. DUSO is an example of a method that's been taken out of the counseling room and into the classroom, and they're giving everybody medicine that's appropriate for a few.*

Cooperative Education

Another important topic is the growing popularity of cooperative education programs, programs which place students into groups and allow them to use their own skills of critical thinking to arrive at conclusions about various issues.

Dr. Coulson observed:

> *Cooperative learning just strikes me as another one of those ways to prevent mothers and fathers and their agents, the public schools and private schools, from teaching effectively what is right and wrong to their children. In a cooperative class the questions are put to the kids, and once again we're*

going to find that the impaired children are going to wind up being the teachers of the unimpaired, because the unimpaired tend to have in them somewhat the fear of the Lord. They do not want to give offense, and the other kids don't care. . . . They'll go ahead and say whatever is on their minds.

Research, for example, from the American Cancer Society shows that teenage girls who smoke are far more effective in these classroom discussions than teenage girls who don't smoke, because the teenage girls who smoke have outgoing personalities, party- types. Just let them take over the class and they really will; they'll run with the ball. And so again, the outcome of this kind of education is always the reverse of what anybody wants.

Central to virtually all of these programs is teaching children a method of decision-making. We asked Dr. Coulson to comment on these decision-making skills.

They teach what the moral philosophers call "consequentialism" as though the only morality is, "How's it going to work out?" They teach the children a method that they call "decision-making." Typically, there are Five Steps. Quest is a good example: In the First Step you identify the problem with killing someone for somebody for financial gain. The Second Step is to consider the alternatives. Immediately the Christian, the Jewish, the Muslim, or the God-fearing kid is at a disadvantage because he doesn't think there is an alternative. The only answer is "No!" It's an absolute "never"—"Thou shalt not kill." But the school says, "No, you can't be a decision-maker, a self-actualizing person, without looking at the alternatives."

The Third Step is to predict the consequences of each alternative. We know that teenagers particularly feel invulnerable. They think . . . those things adults warn them

> *are going to happen if they misbehave won't happen, and adults are going to try to fool them and keep them under control for their own convenience. The Fourth Step is to make the decision and act upon it. The Fifth Step is . . . to make an evaluation of the outcome, and, if you don't like the outcome, then try again. And I say there are kids who have never gotten to Step Five because Step Four killed them. There are kids who have literally died from making a wrong decision in Step Four or gone into unconsciousness, and there is no possibility of evaluation.*

The Religious Nature of Humanistic Education

Why would educators implement a curriculum so damaging to what we as Christian parents want for our children? We must consider the religious assumptions held by those who created the theoretical foundations for these programs.

Schools have argued that self-esteem programs are fulfilling parental demands for values education without violating the so- called strict separation of church and state. In other words, they claim that programs such as Pumsy and DUSO are religiously neutral.

As we will hear from Dr. Coulson, the men who originated the theories behind these programs felt it their mission to influence others to see things through their particular worldview.

I asked Dr. Coulson to address the religious nature of humanistic education. He responded:

> *There are four major streams of influence on what I grew up calling humanistic education. . . . Today these influences remain. They are (1) Abe Maslow's work with self-actualization and hierarchy of needs; (2) Carl Rogers's work*

with non-directive classrooms based on his model of psychotherapy; (3) the work of Lewis Rath and his students—Sidney Simon, Howard Kirshenbaum, Merrill Harmon—called values clarification; (4) the work of Lawrence Kohlberg.

All of these men independently attribute their fundamental insight to John Dewey. In 1934 John Dewey wrote a book called The Common Faith. John Dewey wanted a religion which could be held in common by everybody in America, and, in order for that to happen, it had to be a religion which excluded God. He called it religious humanism—that was Dewey's term for it, not my term.

Carl Rogers and Abe Maslow admitted to being religious humanists. Carl was from a fundamentalist, Protestant home; Abe was reared in a Jewish home, a somewhat observant home. Both of them got the religion of Dewey. Rogers was a student at Columbia when Dewey was in his Senate seat in the twenties, and Maslow was a doctoral fellow in the next decade. Maslow said in his journals, of the churchgoers, "They're not religious enough for me." And Rogers said to Richard Evans, "I'm too religious to be religious." What these men meant was, "I'm more religious than you are if you affirm a creed and if you go to church. I'm so religious I don't go to church."

Dr. Coulson went on to state that there is a fundamental incompatibility between Christianity and these programs. The two belief systems begin with different views of man and God.

As parents, we need to know what kind of therapy is being used on our children. If your child is receiving self-esteem training or non-directive therapy, he or she is losing time needed to become academically competent. That alone constitutes educational malpractice. But even more frightening

is the possibility that your child’s faith in the God of Scripture is being replaced with John Dewey’s religious humanism.