

# THE BIBLICAL EDUCATOR

*"To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding" Proverbs 1:2*

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## EPISTEMOLOGICAL SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS:

by Kevin Craig

In a recent *Biblical Educator*, Terrill Elniff's article, "Epistemological Self-consciousness: When push comes to shove," appeared. Although the point of the article, concerning a school's relationship to government, was inescapable, the title may have caught some readers off their guard: "Epistema-what?!" It is important, therefore, to take some time to insure that readers of the *BibEd* are relaxed in the presence of this somewhat pendant-sounding phrase. "Epistemological Self-consciousness" is an extremely important concept. If we break the phrase down it will be as easy to understand as it is important.

*Epistemological* comes from the Greek work, *epistamai*, "knowledge," and here refers to the *source* of our knowledge. For the Christian, the Bible is the source of all knowledge. For the humanist, "*man* is the measure of all things." Let there be any doubt, there are only two "epistemological" alternatives: the word of man or the Word of God.

Once we get past "epistemological," *self-consciousness* is easy. The man who had a frightening experience with cats as a child now jumps three feet when he sees one. He may claim to have "seen the light" and know cats to be harmless, but he still moves out of *unconscious* fear. Another man has a well-thought-out theory concerning cats. He believes cats are an extraterrestrial race bent on the destruction of mankind. To escape their control, one must jump three feet away from them. And so he does. Every cat he sees. One man jumps *in spite* of his claim, another jumps *in terms of it*. However absurd this second man may seem, at least he is *self-consciously* acting out the implications of his belief. The person who is "epistemologically self-conscious" is thus a person who is aware of what his faith leads to, and is working to implement it in his life.

What would characterize an "epistemologically self-conscious" Christian? As we have indicated, a Christian is one who "believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word" (Westminster Confession of Faith, ch. XIV, sec. 2). For the Christian, *all* knowledge comes from God and his Word. (Col. 2:3). This means that the Christian judge will turn to Deuteronomy to decide his case. The Christian doctor will go to Leviticus to find a healthy diet. Christian legislators will heed the words of the Prophets. In every conceivable vocation, the "epistemologically self-conscious" Christian will turn to the Bible, even the Old Testament (Mt. 5:17-19), to find God's direction, and he will implement that rule in his life.

Christians should bear in mind this important truth: "Ideas have consequences." Our thoughts, our emotions, our perceptions of life, all shape our actions. It is insufficient to say, "God wants me to *do* this." We must study the Bible to be able to say "God wants me to *think* this." Even our attitudes must be Biblical, for they form what is called our "world and life view." It must be Christian. When we think of a Christian, we should think of a scientist, a doctor, a skilled craftsman, a diligent laborer, or a talented musician. Whatever his vocation, he believes that this is God's universe, that he has God's revealed word to follow, and he *acts* in terms of this belief. He

is Dominion Man (Genesis 1:26-28).

On the other hand, what should we think of when we think of a non-Christian? Matthew 13 gives us a hint. There we have the parable of the wheat and the tares. While the Christian grows up to be productive wheat, the unbeliever turns into an impotent, ugly weed. The most obvious example of this was the rebellion of the "hippie," and now, the "Punk rock" or "New Wave" movements. Here, groups with names such as "The Dead Boys," "Germs," or "DEVO" (short for "Devolution"), dye their hair orange or blue and proclaim the meaninglessness of all things. These young people are at war with God and law, with the world of meaning. They profess to believe in an evolutionary, atheistic universe, and they are now starting to *act in terms of their faith*. You need to see a punk rock band in action to appreciate the hideousness of a world without God. It is nothing short of frightening. Picture a man who by night sticks a safety pin through his cheek, straps raw meat to his tattered, mismatched clothing, and thrashes around on the ground screaming a song called "Anarchy in the U.K." (lyrics: I am an antichrist/I am an antichrist/Don't know what I want/But I know how to get it/I want to destroy). Now, can you imagine this hate-filled rebel donning a white laboratory coat and preparing a delicate formula that will be the cure for your son's illness? Do you think he will be any kind of competition for the musical genius of a Johann Sebastian Bach? The contrast between a Sid Vicious and a Bach is overwhelming. Both are acting out the implications of their faith. Both are "epistemologically self-conscious." But one is productive wheat, the other an ugly, useless tare.

There is yet another type of person. He is a man who is unaware of the "punk rock" movement, even though his daughter is a member of "The Dictators." He is completely ignorant of the cause of inflation, or the Biblical solution to it. He spends most of his time in front of the TV, especially on weekends when he drools over the 48 straight hours of sports (and especially the cheerleaders). His only involvement with his children's education is to go to the school football game on Friday nights to watch his son bash the brains of fellow students. Is this man a Christian or a non-Christian? Hard to say. Whatever he is, he is not epistemologically self-conscious. If he were an unbeliever, aware of where his faith leads him, he would deny all meaning and law, like the punkers, or other modern artists. Instead, he finds *some* meaning (?) in football, TV dinners, and the bliss of ignorance. If he were a Christian, acting in terms of God's word, he would be educating his children to be leaders, disciplined to study, work, and produce, not be part of the lazy, leisure-oriented generation we see today. He himself would be a community leader, not a social parasite. The unfortunate fact is, this man may well be one of the millions who claim to be born-again, but whose lives show little evidence of such a claim (Jas. 2:20).

The goal of the *Biblical Educator* is to foster Epistemological Self-Consciousness. We need a generation of Christians trained to consistently apply God's word to every area of life. This can be accomplished only through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit and the diligent training of children in Epistemologically Self-Conscious Christian schools.

# AN EDUCATIONAL COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE

by Rodney N. Kirby

## #7 - "The Origin of Humanism"

"For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5).

In the recent state meetings of the White House Conference on Families, one word has been brought to the forefront of attention — the word "humanism". The conservative, pro-family groups accuse the "opposition" of being humanists. The term is also brought up often in court cases involving Christian ministries (schools, boys' homes, etc.). Humanism is not a new concept, however. It has its origins here in our text for this month. Satan here tempts Adam and Eve to become "like God," knowing good and evil.

What does it mean here, to "know" good and evil? The word "know" in Hebrew (*yada*) often merely refers to an intellectual apprehension — as in, "I know Columbus discovered America." However, that could not be the case here. Adam and Eve *already* knew good and evil this way — they knew that "good" was obedience to God, and "evil" was eating the forbidden fruit (disobedience). Obviously, this would be no temptation.

The key phrase for an understanding of this is "like God." How does God know anything? Does He look at an already existing universe and then learn about it, as man does? God's knowing is on a different plane than man's knowing. God knows all things (omniscience) *because* He created all things and determined all things. God's knowledge thus has the force of *determining*. God does not know Columbus discovered America because He watched him do it, but because He *planned* for him to do it. See, in this regard, Gen. 18:19; Exo. 3:19 (cf. 4:21); Exo. 4:14 (cf. vs. 11); II Sam. 7:20 (cf. vs. 18); II Kings 19:27 (cf. vs. 25); Jer. 1:5; and Amos 3:2 (cf. vs. 1).

And so here Adam and Eve were tempted to know good and evil like God knows good and evil — *determining* it. They desired to make their own laws, to set themselves up as the lawgivers over creation. This is the essence of Humanism — man is his own god. There is no God above man who defines good and evil. Man defines right and wrong according to his own desires.

Also in Humanism is an emphasis on human experience. All things are to be judged by experience (e.g., "You can't condemn homosexuality unless you've tried it"). This thought underlies Satan's temptation — "God has his hypothesis, and I have mine; you try it and see who is right."

Let us look briefly at how Humanism works itself out in the classroom. By looking at the Humanistic approach, we may be better able to develop a Christian educational alternative.

## Content

In every subject area, Humanism shows itself in the idea that there are no pre-established rules to follow. Any rules must be those which the student himself has formulated.

In reading, this is seen in many of the non-phonics programs used today. Phonics is usually not discarded completely; it is merely used as one of many methods for learning how to read (along with sight words, configuration clues, contextual clues, and, if all else fails, "looking at the pictures"). When phonics is taught in such a program, it is not taught as a series of rules, such as "*M* says mmm as in milk," or, "*igh* says i as in night." Rather, the children are expected to generalize for themselves such rules. The child is expected to think, "Every time I see this letter with two humps in it, I hear the sound *mmm*. I wonder if there is some connection?" See Rudolf Flesch's classic *Why Johnny Can't Read*, chapter 6, for more information.

In Mathematics, Humanism does the same thing as in reading. Bare facts are presented to the children, who are expected to formulate their own rules (such as the associative property). Another way Humanism is seen in mathematics is in seeing mathematical laws as

man-made laws, and thus as having no relation to reality. Mathematics is thus seen as a sort of game — not as a way of exercising dominion over God's creation by discovering laws created by God. (See Larry Zimmerman's article, "Mathematics: Is God Silent?" in the (January, February and March 1980 issue of this periodical.)

In music and art, Humanism would say again that rules about "good" music are merely man's conventions; beauty is in the eye of the beholder. What I think is good music (Bach, etc.) is merely my personal taste. I have no grounds for recommending it as "better" than John Cage, Elvis Presley, or even Dolly Parton.

## Methods

As mentioned above, Humanism places experience in a central position; this has implications for classroom methods. Modern educators (including Christian ones — pick up almost any issue of *Christian Home and School*) have little good to say about a strictly scheduled class day. To set up a tight schedule is to say that the teacher knows more than the student what he should be studying (say, Phonics from 8:30 until 9:10). According to Humanist educators, the only effective learning is that which arises out of the child's experience. The teacher is to structure education around experiences the children may have (a visit to a dairy farm, a tornado, a new pet, or a car wreck). The teacher is to use these experiences as the basis of art projects, reading assignments, and creative writing projects.

Now, there is an element of truth to this approach — note the "situational" teaching in Deut. 6. — but the Humanist makes it the *center* of his teaching method, not one among many useful tools. The Humanist says, "You must experience something to truly understand it," and thus does not really take education beyond the realm of the child's experience.

## Discipline

The serpent-inspired Humanist rejects the imposition of classroom rules from without (by the teacher, administrator, or school board). Students must have an equal voice in establishing codes of conduct. This is seen in the establishment of classroom and playground rules and the proper punishments ("What do *you* think is fair?"). It has been seen in the last decade on college campuses, with student organizations setting up codes of conduct (dorm visitation rules, alcohol use, etc.) and throwing down those given by the administration.

Again, there is a proper way of using this technique — giving and explaining the relevant Biblical data, and then asking the students to help find ways to implement that. But this is not how the Humanist goes about it. Biblical norms are offered as one among several options (if they are considered at all), which are to be evaluated by the autonomous ("self-law") student.

Humanistic educational theories have swept American education, including much Christian education. Of course, since we as Christians are not yet perfected in holiness, we all lapse into one form or another of Humanism. Let us seek diligently to root it out wherever it appears, that our schools may not reflect the Tempter's wiles, but may show forth the glories of our sovereign Lord.

## BOOK REVIEW

by David H. Chilton

*The Secret Six: John Brown and the Abolitionist Movement*, by Otto Scott (Times Books, 1979), \$15.00. Order from Chalcedon, P.O. Box 158, Vallecito, CA 95251.

Men have always had to choose between two methods of social change: regeneration and revolution. The Christian seeks first to discipline himself to God's standard. He then publishes the gospel and attempts to peacefully implement the laws of God into the life of his culture, trusting in the Spirit of God for the success of his efforts. He knows that there is not, and never will be, a perfect society in this life. He knows that the kingdom of God spreads like leaven in bread — not by massive, disrupting explosions but by gradual permeation. He knows that justice, righteousness and peace result from the outpouring of the Spirit in the hearts of men (Isaiah 33:15-18); a nation's legal structure is, therefore, an indicator, not a cause, of national character. Law does not save.

But the revolutionary believes that a perfect society is possible, and that it must be coercively imposed on men. He seeks to overthrow everything which threatens to obstruct the coming of his made-to-order millennium. God's providence is too slow, His law too confining. Society must be perfect — tomorrow — or be blasted to rubble. As the slogan of the French Revolution put it: "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity — or Death." And in the wake of the early nineteenth-century religious turmoil, there arose a group of men who yearned for such a perfect society, and were willing to slaughter innocent people in order to achieve it. Their chilling history, is recounted in Otto Scott's frightening and fascinating book on the Abolitionist movement — a movement which, like all revolutions, was intensely religious and antichristian:

The new religion had started with arguments against such relatively harmless sins as smoking and drinking, had then grown to crusades denouncing and forbidding even commerce with persons whose morals were held to be invidious; it had expanded into antislavery as the answer to every ill of humanity; and it had finally come to full flower in the belief that killing anyone — innocent or guilty — was an act of righteousness for a new morality (p. 295f.).

This "old, evil and pagan practice of human sacrifice" (p. 62) was put into force by John Brown and his gang at Pottawatomie, Kansas, on May 24, 1856. Late in the evening, they dragged five men from their beds and murdered them. The victims were not guilty of any crime — they didn't even own slaves — but their deaths served the purpose of *creating terror*, a subject on which Brown had lectured in 1851. Northern newspapers hailed the callous massacre as a blow for liberty; the murderers were regarded as heroes.

The atmosphere in which Abolitionism thrived was produced by men such as the creedless Unitarian crusader, William Ellery Channing. Boston's leading heretic had stated in 1841 that the French Revolution was caused by "a corruption of the great too deep to be purged away except by destruction" (p. 137); thus, when he decided that American corruption warranted similar purging, he called for "guerrilla war...at every chance" (p. 15). Channing was a major influence on the young Ralph Waldo Emerson, who became the chief exponent of New England pantheism and transcendentalism — and a considerable war-monger as well. To many, his nature-worship seems harmless: the very mention of *Emerson* conjures up serene visions of gurgling brooks, sparkling dew on new-fallen leaves, and Henry David Thoreau behind bars. The soporific calm is shattered when the Sage of Concord drops his mask long enough to declare: "If it costs ten years, and ten to recover the general prosperity, the destruction of the South is worth so much" (p. 319f.).

At the core of much of the Abolitionist rhetoric and activity were the Secret Six, a group of wealthy and influential men for whom slavery was the ultimate evil, and who agitated for revolution *now*, agreeing with Emerson that Christianity was a myth. They financed John Brown's murderous exploits, and helped to create the popular image of him as Prophet of a new order — that is, disorder. One important conspirator was the Rev. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, an eager advocate of chaos, "always willing to invest in treason," as he phrased it (p. 259). Before the War, the Abolitionists specifically repudiated the Constitution; only later, when it became apparent that the Constitution had been effectively "amended by arms," did they claim that they had been Unionists and Constitutionalists all along. "Give us the power," Higginson cried in 1857, "and we can make a new Constitution...how is that power to be obtained? By politics? Never. By revolution, and that alone" (p. 243).

Gerrit Smith, the primary financier of the revolution was a champion of pacifism who feared war so much that he turned down a request for support from a boys' military company — yet helped to raise two million dollars to send an army of Abolitionists in Kansas. Government had failed, Smith believed: therefore, "we obey the necessity of the case, and recognize ourselves to be the government" (p. 72). Smith approved of all the bloodshed, endorsed John Brown's tactics, helped keep the Kansas issue alive (when it appeared that the situation might degenerate into peace at any moment), claimed all governments were "conspiracies against human rights," and urged

men to arms — but sought to remain pure by staying ignorant of Brown's specific plans.

The Rev. Theodore Parker, another member of the Six, was a militant devotee of German skepticism. He once declared that "God will create a soul yet larger and nobler than Jesus"; he found that soul in John Brown. Parker equated Abolitionism with the law of God, held that revolution was the antidote to the ills of poverty, and wrote that "all the great charters of Humanity have been writ in blood" (p. 302).

The remaining members were: Frank Sanborn, who observed that "treason will not be treason much longer, but patriotism" (p. 259); George Luther Stearns, a manufacturer who ardently hoped for a financial crash, in the prospect that it would destroy the South as well as the North; and Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, husband of lovely Julia Ward. It was she who wrote that thoroughly pagan ode, *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, a stirring paean in honor of the impending annihilation of Southern culture (composed, by the way, to the tune of *John Brown's Body*). The Secret Six and their numerous associates knew that most Southerners were not slaveowners; nevertheless, they believed that such evil could be atoned for only through chaos and revolution, and "cheerfully contemplated the shedding of innocent blood" (p. 262).

The central actor in this drama, of course, was John Brown, the father of modern terrorism. With a remarkable capacity for logical perversion, he called the Pottawatomie massacre an "absolutely necessary...measure of self-defense" (p. 191). Brown viewed himself as God's "instrument for killing men," His "special angel of death" (p. 212), and in terms of this he led countless terrorist assaults against peaceful settlers in Kansas and Missouri, tracking down and slaying witnesses to his crimes. Believing in his own sovereignty, he constructed a godless and amoral "provisional Constitution" — a predictably grisly contribution of one who regarded the Golden Rule as his personal license to kill at will, convinced that "if any great obstacle stands in the way, you may properly break all the Decalogue to get rid of it" (p. 251). In his bloodlust he finally plotted and executed the famous raid on Harper's Ferry, a move concocted for the sole purpose of creating panic. One of the many ironies of Brown's career was that his first victim in the assault was a free black man.

When John Brown was apprehended, the Northern mythmakers went to work constructing the legend that made its way into the history texts. Henry Ward Beecher exhorted his congregation to pray that Brown would *not* escape: the strategic value of his death as a martyr would do even more for the cause than he had accomplished in his life. Soon Thoreau and Emerson were badly linking Brown's hanging with Christ's crucifixion: Old Brown was now "the Saint," "an angel of light" — and the gallows as "as glorious as the cross" (pp. 229, 303). It is not surprising that this revolutionary vision should become the orthodoxy of the insurrectionist academics, the public schools; but it is perpetuated even in some Christian schools. One textbook speaks of Brown as perhaps overzealous, but still a man of integrity, an inspired liberator. What this sort of thing will produce, it is not difficult to guess. "Insurrection of thought always precedes insurrection of action," observed one of the Abolitionists. If we are teaching revolution, morning devotions will not be sufficient to counteract it, and we will create hellraising revolutionaries who will grow up to cut our throats. As the author of *John Brown's Body* so accurately phrased it, "his soul is marching on." Brown's disciples are legion, and it is our duty to overcome them, not add to their numbers. Otto Scott's book is an eloquent treatment of a vitally important era in American history; but more than this, it gives us tools for the work of dominion that lies ahead.

*The Wooing of Earth: New Perspectives on Man's Use of Nature*, by Rene Dubos (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980), \$8.95.

Thirteen years ago, Lynn White wrote a blockbuster article entitled "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis," in which he claimed that man's pollution of the earth stemmed from the Dominion Mandate of Genesis 1:28. According to White, the earth was much better off when our forbears saw themselves as immersed in nature, rather than rulers over it: "Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient

paganism and Asia's religions...not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends...By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects."

Since White's article was published, a number of writers have refuted his thesis (among evangelicals, the best-known of these is Francis Schaeffer's *Pollution and the Death of Man*). Of course, pollution and devastation were *not* components of the Dominion Mandate: Adam was instructed "to dress and keep" the Garden, not to defile it. Moreover, pollution is specifically ascribed in Scripture to man's transgression of Biblical law (Isaiah 24:5). Nevertheless, the Bible does not recognize man as simply another item in the ecosystem. God requires us to develop the earth, to realize the potential of the earth's resources. Regressive, apostate cultures have always chosen one of two alternatives: they either lose themselves in nature (with a capital N), or they rape it. Examples of pagan societies that lived in "harmony with nature" are misleading — the usual reason for the harmony is that these cultures simply didn't have the technology capable of destroying their surroundings. Even so, the notion of the American Indian as the "natural ecologist" is wholly fictitious. The Indians regularly ravaged the land, then moved on to greener pastures; starvation (with its resultant cannibalism) was commonplace. The Indian was conquered by his environment, while the European, with his Christian heritage, developed the earth, and increased the food supply. Godly dominion is beneficial to man and the earth.

With some distortion, Dubos deals with this idea in his latest book. Certainly, Dubos is not an orthodox Christian. He is a convinced evolutionist and environmentalist, and never lets us forget it in

these pages. Still, he does recognize that Lynn White's argument is "completely at odds with historical facts" (p. 71), and lists 50 books supporting his contention that the ecological crisis has its roots elsewhere than in Genesis 1:28 — specifically, in "the failure of people to anticipate the long-range consequences of their activities" (p. 72). For a Christian, that is a woefully inadequate answer. The real roots are in Genesis 3, in man's attempt to be God.

The primary thrust of the book, however, is its demonstration that man, by nature, *must* mold his environment (although, without the Biblical framework, Dubos is unable to explain *why*), and that man's intervention has "helped to create many of the most beloved and productive landscapes of the world" (p. 55). Dubos demolishes the cherished "ecological" view that man's interference is necessarily destructive. And, as he points out, "most people who extol the wilderness have little if any contact with it. The usual practice is to spend a short period in a wild area...then to write about the experience in a comfortable office or home" (p. 129f.). Dozens of examples of successful management of the earth are cited (many of which are now regarded by environmentalists as "natural," not to be tampered with — such as the beautiful vegetation of Hawaii, which was almost entirely imported by the white man). The book has many shortcomings, but it is a healthy corrective to the more numerous errors of the environmentalist movement, and points the way for a soundly Biblical study of man, technology, and the earth. We must both respect God's handiwork and seek to develop it in terms of His command. As my Alaskan friend says, "We should rejoice when we hear the roar of an engine and the call of a loon. God is glorified in both."

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