

# THE BIBLICAL EDUCATOR

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

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## CHRISTIANITY AND WORLD HISTORY

*By Jim West*

Mark Twain used to tease school boys by telling the "yarn" about a man in Nashville, Tennessee who actually dwelt in a house built in North Carolina. The children responded that this was impossible. "How could you move a house from North Carolina to Tennessee?" they demanded.

Twain knew that he had them. "Who said they moved it? There was a time," he said, "when Tennessee used to be a part of North Carolina. Now if you'd studied up on your history a mite harder..."

Twain was using the story as a tease and as a tool for arousing curiosity. For us, the story demonstrates the *one* thing that history can never be: *uninteresting*. A cursory reading of the 11th chapter of *Hebrews* demonstrates how history is *verbally-centered*. But it is verbally-centered because the God of the verb has verbalized all things into existence (Psalm 33:6). The theme then of this article is the *theistic determination* of all history.

### *Toward a Definition*

Many inadequate definitions of history have been put forth. Some have stated that history is simply "the memory of the race." Others have defined it: "history is the record of the past actions of mankind, based upon surviving evidence." Still others have described it as "social studies." *History is simply hindsight of God's decrees of creation, redemption, and providence. The study of history is the study of the activity of God.*

Of course, this does not mean that history is entirely non-eschatological. It is not. Wherein God's revelation depicts the future course of the world, history is *emphatically eschatological*. In the words of Tennyson's poem: "One far off divine event toward which the whole creation moves." The great eschatological goals of future history include:

1. The call of the Jews.
2. The conversion of "the fullness of the Gentiles" (Romans 11).
3. The second coming of Christ.
4. The General Judgment and Resurrection.

History is a past with a future, but it is primarily the study of the *actual execution* of the decrees of God in past time. Because of this, the mere reading of today's newspaper is the act of reading about God's works of providence and redemption!

### *The Comprehensiveness of God's Government*

In order to emphasize the totality of God's reign, we recommend the memorization of the following outline. God rules over:

1. The natural or physical world (Nahum 1:3; Amos 4:7).
2. The animal creation (Matthew 6:26; Daniel 6:22).
3. The nations (Daniel 4:17; 4:35; Judges 6:1).
4. Individual men. (Proverbs 21:1; Isaiah 44:28).
5. The sinful acts of men (Acts 2:22-24; 4:27-28; John 9:11).
6. Chance happenings (Proverbs 16:33; I Kings 22:28,34).
7. The actions of Christians (Philippians 2:13).
8. The history of the cosmos. (Ephesians 1:11).

God is the Sovereign. Therefore, He is not a lackey nor can He be check-mated by the supposed free-will of men. Calvin has keenly pointed out that even the gnawing of worms is under His domain (Jonah 3). And although secular historians have fallen short of making the proper *theistic application*, we can say that if indeed the nose of Cleopatra had been longer, the whole course of history would have been changed.

### *World History Narrowed*

The comprehensiveness of God's government is total. But this does not mean that it is as *equally valid* to study the history of Hindi culture as it would be to study the growth and influence of the British Empire. If history is under the supervision of God, we must give priority to the study of where He has *especially manifested Himself*. This means that our study of B.C. history must emphasize the activities of God in Emmanuel's land. (Deuteronomy 7:6-8; Romans 9:4, 5). This is not to depreciate the common grace of God wherein the Chinese were enabled to invent dynamite and the Egyptians to wield mighty architectural skills. The Lord's common grace often comes like a deluge even upon the ungodly (Genesis 4:19-20).

History since the coming of Christ is "the year of our Lord" (Luke 4:19-22). It is precisely because of this that our study of A.D. history must magnify Western Civilization and particularly the role of the Church in Western Civilization. It would be a deadly mistake to forget that the affirmation of the Trinitarian faith at Chalcedon in 451 was *determinative* of Western Civilization. *The study of A.D. history is the study of Western Civilization; the study of B.C. history is the study of Israel.* A jeremiad is certainly not in order if your history course omits non-Western civilization. However, the right reason for such an omission must be supplied: their omission is not due to the voluminousness of the subject, but to the Cainite nature of these societies. *The study of non-Occidental civilization is not just for the birds; it is (according to Christ) for the dogs!* (Ephesians 2:12, 19; Mark 7:26, 27) And to equate the Occident with the Orient is, at best, quenching the Spirit. At worst, it is blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

We must, however, narrow our subject even further. The study of A.D. history is indeed the study of Western Civilization and precisely Western Civilization because Western Civilization is founded upon the Trinitarian Faith which flows from the *Trinitarian Western Church*. Since Roman Catholicism asserts the Trinity plus Mariolatry (Mary being the "Mother of God") our study of the Western Church must lionize the *Western, Trinitarian Protestant Church*. And why must we give special attention to the Western Protestant Church? Because God has given special attention to it. As someone has said:

The church has been the dwelling place of God through the centuries. It is not just that we are related to Christians of days gone by. The important thing is *how* we are related—by God's special presence.

### *History and Faith*

Although the task of this article has not been to show how we must interpret history, it is necessary to assert that history cannot be understood apart from faith. Hebrews 11:3 says: "Through faith we understand that the *worlds* were framed by the Word of God, so that things which were

seen were not made of things which do appear." "Worlds" here does not just comprehend the creation, but may properly be translated, "ages." The reference would then refer to history and its different cycles. *The Word of God frames all history!* But it is only *by faith* that we "understand" this. A faithless historian then simply will not allow the facts of history to speak for themselves. He is always striving to rewrite history. Because he denies the God of history he will prostitute the history of the God. Therefore, John Osborne's *Luther* ends his ecclesiastical career on stage in response to the question: "Martin, do you know that you are right?" and contrary to all history Osborne makes him utter the convictionless phrase, "Let's hope so." Mozley's Oliver Cromwell is a flinty, pragmatic politician. Puritan political writings were but an insignificant footnote to their devotional writings. The First Amendment guarantees the complete separation of Christianity and the State. Shakespeare wrote the 46th Psalm (compare the 46th word from the beginning with the 46th word from the end). The Israelites crossed the Red Sea in 1250. The reason for the extermination of the Canaanites was that the God of the Old Testament had not yet become a Christian! Such jaundiced history is the trademark of the secular historian.

Thus, an accurate historian must be a predestinarian. *The theistic determination is determinative of the theistic interpretation.* Without this significant premise, there is not assurance of an authoritative word of God *by which history must be judged.* There is no reasonable reliable method of identifying the Word of God in human history unless human history itself is controlled by God. As Van Til says:

If history is not wholly controlled by God, the idea of an infallible Word of God is without meaning.

## AN EDUCATIONAL COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE

By Rodney N. Kirby

### #14 "Regularity and Predictability"

"While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Genesis 8:22)

Noah had just witnessed the greatest catastrophe ever seen (both before and after his time). Until then, nature had been rather predictable—a uniform climate, minimal seasonal changes, long lives (except for occasional "disruptions" such as Enoch), etc. Now, all of this had changed. Because of such cataclysmic changes as had taken place, there was no reason to think nature would be regular and predictable any more. Perhaps now there would be complete chaos—long periods of cold, no growing season, blistering heat for years at a time, maybe even long days and no nights.

To prevent this kind of thinking by Noah, God promised him that nature would remain predictable. Noah could count on a time for crops to grow before cold weather came. He could predict that, after the winter, warm weather would return. Noah could have confidence in the regularity of nature.

This was essential in order for Noah to exercise dominion. If he did not *know* there would be several months growing time before the frost, he would not be willing to plant seeds to begin with. Regularity and predictability are essential to an exercise of dominion. If a man does not know with some degree of accuracy what is going to happen in the future, he cannot act in the present. Also, if one does not know the consequences of his actions, he will not act. We may work, because we can predict the outcome of our actions.

### Content

In science, we have here a foundation for scientific laws. We may do experiments repeatedly, and come up with the same results. However, let

us remember that "laws" of nature are *laws under God*. In Genesis 8, it was *God* who established the regularity of nature; God was not making an observation about some laws which existed outside of Himself. What we call "laws" of nature are rather our observations of the way God regularly operates this universe. Too many Christians seem to believe (Deistically) that the world usually operates on the basis of these laws, and that *sometimes* God intervenes directly (miracles). What we must say is that God is continually operating all of nature directly (Heb. 1:3), and that sometimes (miracles) God works differently than He usually does.

The laws of nature are not independent of God. This writer has encountered Christians who oppose his postmillennialism on the basis of the Second Law of Thermodynamics (in a closed system, things progress from order to chaos). "We cannot expect long life-spans in the future," it is objected, "because that would deny the Second Law of Thermodynamics." The Second Law, however, must be seen as being *under God*. It is part of the curse which God placed upon sin. However, God's saving grace overcomes *all* effects of sin, even the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Let us not make the laws of nature separate from the controlling hand of God.

In history, there is a regularity as well. We have all heard the saying, "History repeats itself." There is both truth and falsehood to this. History does not automatically go in cycles, as many seem to think. History is not bound fatefully on recapitulation. On the other hand, there is a consistency of regularity to history. This is because the one true and unchanging God is in control of history. Also, men (who make up history) are under the same covenant with God. Thus, a given act by men in history will bring a consistent response from God. If America disobeys God the same way ancient Rome did, it will meet the same fate—not because of some independent historical cycle, but because the God of covenant will mete out the same punishment. In this way we can learn from history. How has God punished disobedience or rewarded obedience in the past? What characteristics has a rebellious culture manifested in the past? How does this fit in with such passages as Deut. 28? The history teacher can build much on this concept of regularity.

Finally, in all subjects, there must be the notion of the consistency of truth. The truth taught in one class must not contradict the truth taught in another class or grade. If the Bible teacher teaches creation, the science teacher must not teach evolution as true. This creates a schizophrenic mind in the children, and reduces the amount they can learn. They start questioning (in an unhealthy way) *everything* they are taught. If, however, the entire faculty of a school is in agreement on basic issues, then learning is enhanced. Students know they can apply truth learned last year to their present class, because they know it all fits together.

### Methods

One method of teaching which greatly increases efficiency is to have a regular, consistent daily schedule. This is especially true in the lower grades. Every day, have Bible at the same time; then have phonics, every day; then writing, every day; recess at the same time, every day; etc. The students know what is coming next, and can mentally "gear up" for it. This removes any uncertainty they may have. It also makes for a smoothly operating class. The writer teaches kindergarten, and follows a rigorous, consistent schedule. If, for some reason, the schedule must be altered, the children are lost; the class becomes chaotic. However, when classroom schedules and procedures (lining up, passing out papers, etc.) are reduced to a routine, all operates smoothly.

This is not an absolute rigidity, however. Remember, although God promised there would always be summer and winter, not all summers and winters are alike. There is variation within the structure. So too in the classroom. There is much room for flexibility and freedom within the overall structure.

### Discipline

The children must see consistency in our discipline of them. The

standards must be the same—from day to day, from one class to another, and from grade to grade. The punishments for disobedience must be consistent as well. This enables the child to exercise dominion fully. He knows where the boundaries are, he knows what will happen if he transgresses, and he knows if a contemplated action is right or wrong. Thus, he may act freely within the boundaries.

If discipline is inconsistent, one of two things may happen. The child may be reduced to inaction. He does not know what is right and what is wrong. Moreover, he does not know what punishment he will receive if his action is wrong. He does not know, if his action is wrong, if he will receive a light reprimand, a spanking, or expulsion. So he is afraid to do anything. He will not talk, he will not play with other children, he will not do anything which might conceivably (to him) be wrong.

The other, and far more common, result of inconsistent discipline is an anarchistic child. He does not know what the rules are, so he gives up trying to follow the rules. "So what if I swear in class? I did it yesterday, and was sent to the principal. I did it today and nothing happened. You can't please these teachers, so I'll just stop trying. It's impossible to figure out what they want, so I'll just do as I please."

The administrator must take the responsibility here for seeing that all of his teachers adhere to one set of rules, and that these rules are followed carefully. Only in his way can the children be free to work their best.

## BOOK REVIEWS

By David H. Chilton

*Sketches From Church History: An Illustrated Account of Twenty Centuries of Christ's Power*, by S. M. Houghton (The Banner of Truth Trust, P. O. Box 621, Carlisle, PA 17013), \$8.95.

If your school has a Church History course, its textbook probably is B. K. Kuiper's *The Church in History* (Eerdmans, [1951] 1964), by far the best general history available for the high school level. I do not believe Houghton's book should be made a substitute for Kuiper's, but as a supplement it is excellent. Kuiper deals with the church as a whole, and attempts to give a well-balanced treatment of each age; Houghton's emphasis falls, as Iain Murray says in his introduction, "chiefly upon Britain, Europe and America." Thus, for example, while Kuiper merely outlines the conversion of Britain in four short paragraphs, Houghton spends nine pages on it. On the other hand, those nine pages comprise the first two chapters of his 23-page section on the Middle Ages—ground covered by Kuiper in about seventy pages! Of course, this is to be expected: Kuiper's book is over one-and-a-half times as long as Houghton's, and Houghton's title itself tells us that it is composed only of "sketches." Still, I wish he had been a bit fuller on certain subjects. The Council of Nicea receives only passing mention, and those of Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon are not noticed at all (whereas Kuiper has a brief but very helpful discussion of each).

A major portion of Houghton's book is on the Reformation and Puritan periods—almost half, in fact. Since the book is published by The Banner of Truth Trust, this is not at all surprising. The chapters on Puritanism in particular will make good collateral reading for a class using Kuiper. Kuiper does mention Cartwright, Cromwell, the Westminster Assembly, and Bunyan; but Houghton writes, in more detail, of them and many others: the pseudonymous pamphleteer "Martin Marprelate," William Perkins, Richard Sibbes, Thomas Goodwin, John Owen, Richard Baxter, Joseph Caryl, Matthew Henry and several more (unfortunately, William Gurnall is in there too, praised along with the rest; but the judicious teacher can use him as an example of pious-sounding apostasy from the battle of his age—see my article "Cromwell and His Critics," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, Vol. VI, No. 2, pp. 34-37).

Houghton continues with a fairly good but brief discussion of the American colonies, especially the Puritan ones, and gives John Eliot, the Puritan missionary to the Indians, some very deserved space. On the minus side, George Fox and Roger Williams are mentioned without call-

ing attention to their very serious heresies. (For instance, Williams is cited as "the first American Baptist," presumably on the grounds that he was baptized by immersion—and on that definition, Mormons are "Baptists" too! Williams was *not* an orthodox Christian, and Baptists would do well to look elsewhere for their historical roots.) A whole chapter is devoted to the Pietist movement and the Moravian Brethren under the leadership of Count Zinzendorf, again without reference to their anti-Christian practices (see R. J. Rushdoony, *Revolt Against Maturity*, Thoburn Press, 1977, pp. 46-47).

In Kuiper, there are a scant four pages on the Great Awakening; in Houghton, there are twenty, with a comparatively full account of the Tennents, Jonathan Edwards, the Wesleys, and George Whitefield. With regard to the 18th- and 19th-century missionary movements, revivals, and philanthropic activities, Houghton again is more complete than is Kuiper, providing material on Carey, Judson, Paton, Taylor, Alexander, Simeon, Wilberforce, Chalmers, Booth, Spurgeon, Monod, Kuyper, Baedeker, and many others. Indeed, one of this book's strong points is its emphasis on the various personalities in the church's history. The book's subtitle is a bit misleading, however, for the *twentieth* century is not dealt with at all, apart from Murray's comment that "perhaps it is still too soon to place developments in the present century in their true perspective." (This could also be due to The Banner of Truth's noted inability and unwillingness to deal with modern issues.)

Nevertheless, Houghton's book is very worthwhile; I hope my statements about its shortcomings will not dissuade you from using it. Houghton is very readable, and your students will in all likelihood enjoy his book more than Kuiper's. The chapters are short, racy, anecdotal and not given to abstract analysis. That is not an unmixed blessing, but an author has the right to set his own limits (especially in view of his limitations).

Having delivered some faint praise to Houghton, let me now go on to suggest the kind of history text we really need. Obviously, no book will be equally suitable to or appreciated by every Christian schoolteacher, and a textbook is generally only as good as the teacher who uses it. But I think it is possible to write a Church History text that can be easily read by students, yet comprehensive and analytical at the same time. I have not yet seen *any* orthodox text that deals with the church in its relationship to the surrounding culture in an understanding manner. The kind of book I have in mind would handle economics, politics, the arts, and so on, as they involved the church of Christ. It would not be afraid of naming names. It would assume from the outset, with no apologies, that the faith of the Reformation is nothing less than "Christianity come into its own." It would discuss issues. And it would do all this without being dull, prolix, sluggish, elephantine, vapid or boring. It would grab the kids by the throat.

If the author truly believes that Jesus Christ is the ruler of all history; that all events are working together for the good of those who are called according to His purpose; that God's Word gives us the key to a true understanding of history—and if the author can *write*—such a book can be written. Let me give fair warning: if someone out there doesn't seriously take up the challenge, I may get so worked up over this that I'll do it myself. The threat alone should be enough to set some of you to work immediately.

*Before Columbus: The New History of Celtic, Egyptian, Phoenician, Viking, Black African, and Asian Contacts and Impacts in the Americas Before 1492*, by Dr. Samuel D. Marble (A. S. Barnes and Co., Cranbury, NJ 08512), \$12.95.

With a title like that, does this book need a review? Nevertheless, it is an interesting work, flawed but at times fascinating. Marble has collected a vast amount of information on his subject, and he presents it convincingly. No one, however, approaches facts in a vacuum, least of all conscientious humanists. Virtually everything this one says comes fully packaged with presuppositions intact. To put it mildly, his interpretation of Christianity (and thus of everything else) is about as wrong

as it could possibly be.

Dr. Marble, you see, loves pagans and everything about them. Take his comments on the Celts. Their phallus-worship was okay, he says, because "Celtic law... accorded women a position of equality"; abominations don't count as long as you've got women's lib. He rejoices in the Arianism of Celtic Christianity, seeing Trinitarianism as a form of polytheism. And to hear him tell it, the Celts were the first libertarians, and community-centered, loving and joyful to boot. He even says this:

Had Celtic Christianity predominated, we might have had more hilarious fistfights, and even a larger number of murders, but fewer wars. In Roman Christianity there were fewer violent confrontations, but there was more warfare (p. 54).

So the Celts' deep sense of community was completely compatible with a large number of murders. For all the horrors of war, one thing can be said in its favor: you know who the enemy is, and he isn't usually your neighbor. Once the war is over, the community as a whole can have peace. This is not true of anarchy—which is really a *constant state of war within the community*. "Had Celtic Christianity predominated," Western civilization would not have existed (a thought Dr. Marble might relish, except that it was Western civilization that produced such non-essentials as printing presses; he would have had to publish his book on obelisks, and all culture as he knows it would lie in utter wreck and *rune*).

Marble believes Celts were the rulers of the Incas, and he presents evidence that the Inca civilization was the basis for Thomas More's *Utopia*. It is at this point that some real silliness begins: Marble describes Inca society as "moneyless," a "democracy of work" in which no one had property, so that the problem of scarcity did not exist! (Obviously, the professor hasn't logged much time studying economics—he and Ronald Sider may want to get together to see if their combined knowledge will choke a gnat). About one-fourth of each Inca's labor went to the state in this Peruvian paradise; they were, of course, great ecologists (as were all Indians, according to the new history); the priests and the government owned a quarter of the land, with "everybody" communally owning the rest—according to government plan. Dr. Marble insists this wasn't totalitarianism, but one is still left wondering what happened to all that glorious Celtic individualism. The State provided "universal economic security," and "the Incas may have been among the first to establish a public school system." Killing animals for sport was forbidden, because "any kind of killing was objectionable to an Incan" (oh—except for the human sacrifice performed by ripping the hearts from the chests of 10-year old girls, but why quibble? Don't you believe in religious freedom?) Every Incan was subject to military training, because they were ever so peaceful; and because they wanted everyone else to share in their dedication to pacifism, they extended their empire in all directions by war and conquest, building one of the most centrally-controlled cultures in history. (*That sounds familiar. Brezhnev announced a while ago that the Soviets are completely opposed to the arms race. Naturally, he was stating the exact truth. If there's one thing the Soviets don't want, it's competition.*) Anyway, the Inca state became so magnificently controlled that at the height of their strength and splendor they collapsed before a mighty Western horde of 150 men.

Well, you get the idea. There is more philosophy than fact in this book, but if you can skip the metaphysics you'll find some good stuff. Here's a hint: When he cites names, dates, documents, or anything else of a historical nature, take him with a grain of salt. When he deviates from strict research, as he often does, tell your grocer to deliver the salt in barrels. Of course, it is not unusual for historians to write history books as a means of propagating their philosophy. In fact, everybody does it. We do it. The difference is, Marble is wrong.

I refuse to review a book that I can't recommend for *some* reason. (As Spurgeon noted, a book can at least be useful to housemaids for lighting fires; but Marble's book is too expensive for kindling. Maybe if they issue a paperback edition, however...) Amid all the error, there is some worthwhile information, and if your American History course begins before 1492, this book can be a help—to *you* (but don't give it to your students). The second half of the book spends more time in hard evidence, with some admissible speculation; and when Marble climbs down from his pulpit to give real information, he is quite good. I *do* recommend it. Marble isn't a dull writer, so even the crazy parts are entertaining.

*The Mortal Danger: How Misconceptions About Russia Imperil America*, by Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn (Harper & Row, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022), \$2.95.

This little book is one of the most powerful statements Solzhenitsyn has ever penned. It first appeared as a long article in—of all places—*Foreign Affairs* (the journal of the Council on Foreign Relations), provoking shrieks and howls from American intellectuals. I urge you to have your students read it. At the very least, *you* should read it and present your students with its main points.

Solzhenitsyn argues that the West is in mortal danger—"a greater danger than that which threatened it in 1939." We have, he says, made two mistakes with regard to the Soviets. First, we have failed "to understand the radical hostility of communism to mankind as a whole"; and second, we speak of *the Russians* when we should really say *the Soviets*—for it is the Soviets who have *enslaved* the Russians. The Communists are a gang of cutthroats masquerading under an ideology, and they are systematically destroying their own people:

It is high time for all starry-eyed dreamers to realize that the nature of communism is one and the same the whole world over, that it is everywhere inimical to the national welfare, invariably striving to destroy the national organism in which it is developing, before moving on to destroy adjacent organisms. No matter what the illusions of detente, no one will ever achieve a stable peace with communism, which is capable only of voracious expansion (p. 46).

The Russian prophet has seen too much to bother with the luxuries of tact. He names some of the fools, moles and spikes among our elite. On a literary level, the book is easy reading; emotionally, it is not. But remember, tears (and prayers) without action are worse than futile. After you read the book, pass it around and write some letters.

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