A History of Educational Humanism

By Andrew McColl, 1/11/2011

Humanism is the world’s second oldest religion. Its origins were in Satan’s heart, described in Isaiah 14:12-14:

...you said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north, I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’

The simple definition of humanism? A life apart from God, with the associated pride and self-exaltation; its all about me.

In the garden of Eden, Satan wanted his first human converts. He attracted them with the original humanistic promise- a lie: “you shall be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen.3:5).

The message of the Old Testament prophets to Israel was always to abandon humanism’s lies and to return to godly obedience according to the Word of the Lord. Elijah’s confronting message to Israel on Mount Carmel was at root a religious and ethical issue: “How long will you halt between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him, but if Baal, follow him” (I Kings 18). Elijah also “repaired the altar of the Lord that had been torn down” (v.30-32).

When Satan came to Jesus in the wilderness temptations, true to form he wanted Jesus to behave humanistically, defying God’s Word. In the final temptation, Satan promised Jesus, “all these things I will give You, if you fall down and worship me.”

To serve God we are not called to choose self-denial or sacrifice, rather are we called to fulfil God’s purpose. The basic principle is not to choose the cross but to obey God’s will. Should the principle on which we work and serve include rebellion, then Satan will obtain and enjoy glory even through our sacrifices. Saul might offer sheep and oxen [I Sam.15], yet God never accepted them as sacrifices to Himself because there was a Satanic principle involved... man’s action... should be motivated by a sense of obedience.1

God directed in Deuteronomy that education was a responsibility of parents, not the state: “These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them...” (Deut.6:6-7). But Christian parents have effectively resigned from this duty today, to our great loss.

While the Church slumbered in the nineteenth century, the enemies of God worked. Enter Charles Darwin and *The Origin of the Species*. Darwin’s book sold out to a Victorian intellectual population clearly impacted by Christian thought, but eager to live apart from God. Darwin’s work not only seemed relevant in terms of human origins and biology; it was quickly applied to theology, ethics, politics, law, sociology and many other disciplines. The Church had no real answer, and began to flounder.

Marx loved Darwin. Darwin’s work gave Marx’s evil political theories of class-warfare, socialism and communism a great opportunity for propagation.

Marx’s legacy today? Think of the deaths of 100 million people in the twentieth century throughout Soviet Russia, Communist China and Cambodia. When people who hate God gain influence in the world, the world is in for a sorry time.

I could go on to discuss Freud (who taught psychoanalysis), Dewey (who gave us an ideological blueprint for state education) and Keynes (the homosexual, child-abusing teacher of perverse economics). They all illustrated that a world opposed to God will gladly rush after almost any intellectual but persuasive Pied Piper.²

And where were we in the Church? With very few exceptions, we hardly knew what to make of all these, and so we thought it easier to bury our heads in the sand and hope the trouble would all go away. It didn’t.

History shows us that Christians over the centuries, have consistently under-estimated the religious intentions of our enemies. We have made the fundamental error for instance, of trusting in government and in bureaucracy, and found out the hard way, how political and bureaucratic power can be used against God’s people. This foolishness and naivety has been our fault, and to our shame. Hitler said of the German Protestants:

> You can do anything you want with them...they will submit...they are insignificant little people, submissive as dogs, and they sweat with embarrassment when you talk to them.³

² See Breese, D., “Seven Men who Rule the world from the Grave,” 1990.
This attitude of naïve trust on the part of Christians has consistently been reflected in our attitude towards State education. As early as 1930, humanists realised that education and in particular public education, would be a means of alienating students from Christianity. In that year, Charles F. Potter, a signatory of the first Humanist Manifesto, indicated that

\[\text{education is thus a most powerful ally of humanism, and every public school is a school of humanism. What can the theistic Sunday School, meeting for an hour once a week, and teaching only a fraction of the children, do to stem the tide of a five-day program of humanistic teachings?}^4\]

Dewey had his way.

\[\text{At present humanism has brought all things, including most churches, under the sway of man the lord. The purpose of state schools...was twofold: first, to establish centralism, the priority of the state over every area of life, and second, to eliminate Biblical faith. The founders of statist education in the United States were Unitarians.}^5\]

So what is the difference between Christian and humanistic education? Rousas Rushdoony (1915-2001) was a ground-breaker in exposing the humanism of state education. He had some excellent insights. The following chart from his book, “The Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum” (p.172-173) begins to lay it out:

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<tr>
<th>Christianity</th>
<th>Humanism</th>
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<td>1. The sovereignty of the triune God is the starting point, and this God speaks through His infallible Word.</td>
<td>1. The sovereignty of man and the state is the starting point, and it is the word of scientific, elite man which we must heed.</td>
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<td>2. We must accept God as God. He is alone Lord.</td>
<td>2. Man is his own god, choosing or determining for himself what constitutes good and evil (Gen 3:5).</td>
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<td>3. God’s Word and Person is the Truth.</td>
<td>3. Truth is pragmatic and existential: it is what we find works and is helpful to us.</td>
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<td>4. Education is into God’s truth in every realm.</td>
<td>4. Education is the self-realization and self-development of the child.</td>
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<td>5. Education is discipline under a body of truth. This body of truth grows with research and study, but truth is objective and God-given. We begin by presupposing God and His Word.</td>
<td>5. Education is freedom from restraint and from any idea of truth outside of us. We are the standard, not something outside of man.</td>
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<td>6. Godly standards grade us. We must measure up to them. The teacher grades the pupil.</td>
<td>6. The school and the world must measure up to the pupil’s needs. The pupil grades the teacher.</td>
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<td>7. Man’s will, and the child’s will, must be broken to God’s purpose. Man must be remade, reborn by God’s grace.</td>
<td>7. Society must be broken and remade to man’s will, and the child’s will is sacred.</td>
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<td>8. Man’s problem is sin. Man must be recreated by God.</td>
<td>8. Man’s problem is society. Society must be recreated by man.</td>
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<td>9. The family is God’s basic institution.</td>
<td>9. The family is obsolete. The individual or the state is basic.</td>
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Education in the hands of the state is coercive, compulsory, and a form of humanistic predestination. In every sphere, the state is coercive because it is anti-God, anti-Christ. It insists on playing the potter with the lives of the people. But nothing is more evil or more deadly than a non-god playing god. We then have the triumph of the demonic.6

Conclusion:
Believers must understand what it means to obey God in terms of education. We have given up a vast amount of territory, and it is no wonder that we find ourselves in the midst of societies in the western world that are generally indifferent or even hostile to God. All this must change if God is going to be truly glorified through Christian education. The present woeful state of the Church has come about over at least six generations, and it may take a long time to be turned around.

But without repentance and a picking up of educational responsibility amongst believers in obedience to God, the Church will continue to be an ineffective and stunted institution, prone to abuse by evildoers.

Repentance is the first bit of firm ground underfoot... Repentance is the only starting point for spiritual growth. For each and every individual. And every trend of social thought.7

Jesus promised us that “if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (Jn.8:36). Believers must lead the way for the world out of the morass of humanistic education, in pursuit of God’s truth for His people and for the nations.

It’s time for the foundations of godly education to be laid again, right back where they should be laid: in the family and in the Church, in obedience to God. Yes, it will take time, and it may also require our blood, sweat, tears and court cases.

But now it’s commenced, it is exciting to behold.

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