

The Christian and The World

Your Child and Humanism

[The Family of God series is published by Northwestern Publishing House © 1985 under the auspices of PACE (Partners Advancing Christian Education), Wisconsin Lutheran High School Conference, Milwaukee, WI.]
Joel C. Gerlach

Your Child and Secular Humanism

“Man is the measure of all things,” the Greek philosopher Protagoras said. William Henley’s poem “Invictus” puts it this way: “I my am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul.” Humanism’s goal is to put man on God’s throne. Humanists see themselves as masters of the universe rather than as guests in it. *Time* magazine defined a humanist with the quip, “Humanist means a believer in an ethical non-religion in which the Supreme Being is man, and prayer is a telephone conversation with no one at the other end.”

Humanism’s Credo

The creed of contemporary humanists (not to be confused with humanitarians) was first set forth in the Humanist Manifesto in 1936, and updated in 1976. Manifesto excerpts include:

“Religions that place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs do a disservice to the human species.”

“We can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species.”

“No deity will save us; we must save ourselves.”

“The human species is an emergence from natural evolutionary forces. There is no credible evidence that life survives the death of the body.”

“We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational, needing no theological or ideological sanction.”

Humanism’s Proponents

Humanism’s proponents are legion. Children meet them chiefly in public schools and on television. Dr. George Benson, editor-in-chief of the “National Program Letter” observes, “The tax-supported school systems in America are directed by humanists ... and are used for the humanistic shaping of the impressionable minds of the millions of youngsters in these schools.”

Many TV sitcoms are influential proponents of humanism. Director Norman Lear freely acknowledges that he uses TV to promote humanistic objectives - debunking traditional values in the process. National Geographic specials sometimes do the same in more subtle ways. Carl Sagan’s popular series “Cosmos” offers another case in point. “The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.”

Humanism on Stage

Let’s visit a social science class in a sixth grade classroom to see how humanism is advocated. “Hector and Abigail” is the title of the story. The teacher’s guide for the story designates the lesson as a “values clarification exercise.” Students are told to list the names of the five characters in the story as they appear and to rank them in order “according to how you liked or admired them.” After they have done so the teacher asks for a show of hands to indicate, “How many voted for Abigail first? second? etc.” and then fills in a chart on the chalkboard to show the consensus of the class.

Hector and Abigail were planning to be married. A storm destroyed a bridge, separating them. Abigail begged Sinbad to take her across the river in his boat to be with Hector. Sinbad agreed, if

Abigail would first spend the night with him. Perplexed and desperate, Abigail asked friend Ivan what she should do. Ivan said, "It's your decision." Abigail agreed to Sinbad's proposition. The next morning, true to his word, Sinbad took Abigail to Hector. When Hector learned what happened, he dismissed Abigail. So Butch took Abigail in and cared for her from then on.

The objective? 1. "To enjoy interacting around individual values." 2. "To gain tolerance for differing value systems" and "to see where blocks to consensus appear." The teacher's guide explains, "In consensus, each person owes a commitment to what the group decides. In order to have commitment from each group member, then, consensus is vital."

How do you suppose Hector would fare in the voting? He showed himself a man of principle. He did what he believed he had to do. Yet he ranks with Sinbad in the child's mind as one of the bad guys. Butch and Ivan are existentialists. Butch probably wins the popularity vote hands down. Right and wrong are determined, not by what God reveals, but by what seems right to the majority. It is not difficult to imagine what social science lessons like this one would do to undermine children's beliefs about God's absolutes. If the religion of humanism had its own bible, the story of Abigail and Hector might well be part of it.

This is not what Jesus had in mind when he commissioned us to busy ourselves "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." There is a "way" in which your children are to be trained so that when they are old they will not depart from it. That "way" is not what the majority thinks it is.

Parents, be on the lookout for Hector and Abigail.

Practical Suggestions

Take time to be familiar with the content of your child's textbooks and other literature, examining them for humanistic influences.

Know what your children watch on TV and engage them in a positive way in evaluations of program content.

Encourage the reading of books that reinforce traditional Christian values and ethics.

Create an atmosphere in your home which makes God-talk easy and natural and which promotes a healthy respect for God's Word.

Visit a library and read Humanist Manifesto II.

Something to Think about

1. What parallels can you find between contemporary humanism and the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9?
2. What kind of world are humanists trying to create for themselves? Why is their utopian dream doomed to fail?
3. What books or magazine articles have you read recently which incorporate a humanistic bias?
4. What TV programs can you think of which serve humanism's cause?
5. Which type of TV program is more subtle in promoting humanistic goals: comedy, docu-drama, or soaps? Why?
6. What steps can you as a Christian parent take to guard yourself and your child against humanism's influence?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, help us as parents to help our children to know you as the Way, the Truth and the Life, and then to follow you faithfully. Amen.