

Dominionism and Epistemology: How Religious *Anti-intellectualism*
Subverts Liberal Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Dominionism is an authoritarian ideology that combines political hegemony with metaphysical certitude. A key impediment to any authoritarian leadership is the capacity of subjects to question and counter its claims to power. Human reason and critical analysis provide the inspiration to subvert an authoritarian regime. This paper examines an American political movement that works within the confines of liberal democracy to supplant liberal democracy. Critical to its agenda is the undermining of institutions that cultivate reason in citizens. The underlying difference in the conflict between dominionism and reason is best understood as a competition of epistemologies.

Introduction

On April 16, 2007 America was shaken by its worst school shooting to date. Cho Seung-Hui murdered 32 people on the Virginia Tech campus after a history of psychological problems that predated his time at the university.¹ In the weeks following the tragedy many interest groups used the massacre as an observable example buttressing their political agendas. Jack Thompson appeared on both MSNBC and FOX News to make the case that the shootings were a result of violent video games. Even though no video games or console were found in Seung-Hui's room, Thompson told MSNBC, "This is not rocket science. When a kid who has never killed anyone in his life goes on a rampage and looks like the Terminator, he's a video gamer."² The Brady Campaign to End Gun Violence saw the opportunity to call for restricted access to firearms blaming the shootings on, "How easy it is for an individual to get powerful weapons in our country."³

After the shootings, many parents of the victims blamed the university's administration for not doing everything it could to reduce the amount of deaths. Their complaints included the university's methods for notifying students of the threat during the time between Seung-Hui's initial shootings and the larger massacre two hours later. Critics of Virginia Tech have also objected to the lack of action taken after student complaints of harassment against Seung-Hui and suspicions of his mental disorders.⁴ But, among all the political capitalizing and accusations regarding the administrative aspects of the university, one high-profile political activist took issue with the curriculum instead. According to Phyllis Schlafly, longtime conservative Christian leader and founder of The Eagle Forum, Seung-Hui's actions were the logical result of messages imbibed in the classroom.

In an article featured on the dominionist news source World Net Daily (WND) titled, *College Students: Don't major in English*, Schlafly reacts to the shootings by saying, "...it was no surprise that Cho Seung-Hui, the murderer of 32 students and teachers at Virginia Tech, was an English major." She explains, "...the English departments are the most radicalized of all departments, more so than sociology, psychology, anthropology, or even women's studies." This "radicalization," according to her, produces political positions that run contrary to her religious-political agenda. Schlafly reasons the, "Western canon of what educated Americans should know ...was replaced with relativism and the goals of opposing racism, sexism and elitism." And, because universities concerned themselves with these more liberal, non-explicitly religious concerns the logical product is a student that devalues human life to the point of mass murder.⁵

The critique is not unique for this website. Months earlier Craig McMillan relayed a similar assessment of the Virginia Tech killings. In a piece titled, *Is God Laughing at Us?*, McMillan ascribed Seung-Hui's murderous motivations to cultural messages he received in the classroom and viewed the violence as an important marker on the "roadmap between history past and history future." McMillan claims the shootings are the product of a culture that rejects God by saying, "God describes the result of a nation or culture attempting to free itself from God's rule and law as articulated in the Bible. Perhaps it is a culture where pedophilia, homosexual couplings and adulterous behavior are deemed the mark of a good shepherd of the sheep. A culture, perhaps that no longer wishes to base its laws upon the laws of Gods." McMillan's concept of the Christian God takes hysterical amusement in random, blood-soaked expressions of this "secular humanist" worldview.⁶

The juxtaposition of pedophilia and homosexuality is not an accident and the reference to basing American laws on "God's laws" is quite intentional too. While some may view curricula and ideology on college campuses as weak explanations for a murder spree, the theme of blaming

academia and, to a larger extent, human reason for society's ills is a central tenet of the dominionist political agenda. Beyond the isolated quotes and headlines lies a message between the messages critical of all secular institutions of education and science. The Christian right pursues a dominionist agenda by undermining education and science because of a conflicting institutional preference for contemporary developing and naturalistic epistemology over historical fixed and metaphysical epistemology. Evidence of this agenda appears repeatedly in the rhetorical publications dominionist groups produce as well as through the creation of parallel, religious institutions that mimic their secular counterparts.

The Christian right and Dominionism

It can be challenging to define what one means by "Christian right" or "dominionist." Often criticism of a political agenda whose leaders self-identify as Christian is mischaracterized as anti-Christian bigotry when the target of derision is not the Christian faith *per se* but the specific policy objectives of a particular agenda.⁷ The Christian right (CR) is an organized political movement in America with a heavy emphasis on socially conservative political positions based on a specific interpretation of Christianity and the Christian Bible. Sometimes, non-Christian members of other faiths are considered auxiliary members of the Christian right if they agree with the political goals of the movement. However, a key position of most CR organizations is that only conservative Christians should hold public office. The CR usually expresses itself through activist groups and corresponding agenda-based "news" websites. The principal characteristic among these groups is a political orthodoxy and messaging CR organizations self-define and carefully control. For this reason, the CR does not accept Fred Phelps' Westboro Baptist Church and Rick Warren's Aids Conference because they profess political messages that are contrary to the orthodox CR agenda.⁸ Although these and other groups like them also self-identify as Christian, most CR websites describe

these groups as “Christian” in quotation marks indicating the CR view of a lack of true Christian faith evidenced in their political positions.

Dominionists are Christians who interpret an explicit commandment, found in Genesis 1:26-31, to dominate and control every aspect of life. Genesis 1:26-31 (King James Version) reads,

26. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. 27. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. 28. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. 29. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. 30. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. 31. And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

Dominionism is the belief that God has called Christians to gain political power in society and use that power to enforce biblical law.

The Christian right is comprised of influential groups with a dominionist political agenda. Often in media sources the Christian right is described as fundamentalist or evangelical. While these two adjectives may be useful in describing aspects of the faith of CR leaders and followers, they are inadequate descriptors of the specifically dominionist political movement. There are many forms of Christian fundamentalism including separatist and open fundamentalism as well as varying categories of evangelicals including establishment evangelicalism, new evangelicalism, and charismatic revivalism.⁹ Each of these categories of evangelicalism can be subdivided into numerous Protestant denominations. While evangelicals and fundamentalists may be leaders and supporters of the CR, not all fundamentalists or evangelicals share the same political ambitions of the CR. Therefore, it is misleading to label the Christian right *political* movement as synonymous with Christian fundamentalism or evangelicalism.

The political agenda of the CR is expressed in a variety of political positions. For every issue raised in public discourse there is a corresponding dominionist viewpoint usually parroted throughout the CR's websites. The CR tends to focus heavily on certain political themes but the list of themes is by no means exhaustive. These themes include: (1) opposition to gender equality including strident opposition to all forms of abortion and birth control; (2) opposition to legal recognition of rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, and non-gender conforming individuals; (3) advocacy of creation "science" and efforts to ground explanations for physical phenomena in metaphysical terms; (4) advocacy of state-sanctioned governmental expressions of Christianity including displays of the Ten Commandments; and (5) simultaneous opposition to any public expression of other faiths including a Hindu prayer before Congress. Recently CR groups have also increased rhetoric opposed to immigration and efforts to counter global warming.

The CR uses democratic means such as elections, lobbying, and judicial decisions to forward its agenda. However, it is important to note that the ultimate political goal of the CR is not democratic. In *Jesus Camp*, a documentary that explores the relationship between dominionist politics and children, CR leader Becky Fischer answers a criticism claiming her agenda is anti-democratic by saying, "I think democracy is the greatest political system on Earth but that's just it, it's just what's on Earth. It's ultimately designed to destroy itself because we have to give everyone equal freedom, and ultimately that's going to destroy us. You know, the perfect world is not going to be perfect until Jesus is lord."¹⁰

In *American Fascists*, Chris Hedges recalls a speech by the late CR minister Dr. D. James Kennedy in which he preached, "Our job is to reclaim America for Christ, whatever the cost... As the vice regents of God, we are to exercise godly dominion and influence over our neighborhoods, our schools, our government, our literature and arts, our sports arenas, our entertainment media, our news media, our scientific endeavors – in short, over every aspect and institution of human

society.”¹¹ Dominating every aspect and institution of human society allows no room for individual liberty or pluralism.

Joseph Farah, founder of WND, wrote the definitive dominionist manifesto titled *Taking America Back: A Radical Plan to Revive Freedom, Morality, and Justice*¹² in which he lays out the battle plan for the CR takeover of government and culture. In it he describes how Christians can use democratic means to remove protections for gays and lesbians and censor objectionable content in the media. “Taking America back” and “reclaiming America” are popular themes in CR rhetoric. They reference an imagined past sometime before the civil rights movement when America was more “Christian” and includes a call to take over institutions to make them conform to their interpretation of scripture and romanticized nostalgia. Among these institutions, science and education receive a lot of attention in CR messaging and are common targets for “reclaiming.” These institutions threaten the CR political agenda because they use a different epistemology than what is required to validate dominionism.

Epistemology in Education and Politics

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge. It seeks to explain how we know what we know. It encompasses methods of obtaining and legitimizing knowledge. When considering epistemology thinkers are encouraged to examine sources of knowledge as well as the validity of truth claims. Within scholarship there are different schools of thought among varying versions of epistemology. For the purposes of this paper, epistemology is generalized in four distinct but not mutually exclusive forms.

In developing epistemology knowledge and truth are gradually discovered over time. Research tools are used to build understanding of the world from internal concepts of self to expansive modeling of space and time. In this epistemology, there is no endpoint. There is no time at which any person declares truth to be totally known. Rather, old truths are challenged by new

discoveries. One conclusion builds on previous conclusions without ever considering the process complete. Knowledge is not absolute and fixed as much as it is adaptive to subsequent discovery. This epistemology measures truth claims in terms of the methods of discovery. Claims pursued dispassionately with minimized researcher, subject, and conditions-based biases are considered more legitimate than those with higher degrees of bias or discernable intentions behind the discovery.

In contrast to this form is an alternative fixed epistemology. In it, knowledge is absolute and finite. Since original truth has already been received by mankind, usually accredited to an omniscient being, research tools are useful only in so much as they reinforce the original truth. In fixed epistemology, truth claims are measured by the degree with which they affirm the original understanding of truth. Findings that disagree with the original, absolute truth are rejected. Likewise, messages from a purveyor of truth are accepted or rejected based on that person's allegiance to the original, absolute truth. Knowledge is neither discovered nor developed but reiterated.

Another way to distinguish epistemologies is in their sources for knowledge. Materialistic or naturalistic epistemology looks to physical phenomena exclusively for sources of knowledge. A naturalistic approach does not prevent personal belief in the metaphysical, such as god, but dismisses metaphysical explanations as unnecessary for achieving understanding.

Contrarily, metaphysical epistemology looks for sources of knowledge outside of the physical world. Physical explanations are still used but are supported with metaphysical explanations. In this epistemology physical phenomena are expressions of metaphysical forces so examining the physical world alone provides inadequate and incomplete understanding.

Epistemology is in no way limited to these generalized forms. But, the contrast in the above descriptions highlights differences between irreligious research in academics and their counterparts in religious fundamentalism.

Understandings of epistemology also have political byproducts. Developing epistemology allows for continued discussion on what is true and not true. It also allows for simultaneous opposing conclusions. This understanding of knowledge lends itself well to a democratic system in which each constituent is allowed a freedom of conscience to accept or reject individual moral conclusions.

Fixed epistemology lends itself to a totalitarian or authoritarian political system. Because knowledge is fixed and absolute, discussion and diversity of ideas challenges the authority of the original truth. Viewpoints are only legitimate to the extent that they agree with the central authority. Fixed epistemology is illiberal because it fails to accommodate disagreement.

Naturalistic epistemology lends itself to secular regimes in which the role of government is limited to the interests of the governed without consideration of metaphysical forces or will. Because metaphysical explanations are unnecessary for law, individual metaphysical beliefs are awarded equal treatment under the law.

Metaphysical epistemology lends itself to a regime with a defined official metaphysical ordering usually expressed in terms of an organized religion. Because metaphysical explanations are considered in law the system privileges a particular religious class and incorporates the perceived will of that religion into governance.

Because different forms of epistemology correspond to deeply personal understandings of the world they can be particularly contentious in the political arena. When it comes to issues in education, conflict is often expressed in terms of independent political positions. A deeper examination looks beyond superficial political issues in education and explains conflict in terms of competing epistemologies.

The fixed and metaphysical epistemologies relied upon by CR organizations stand in contrast to the dominant developing and naturalistic paradigm throughout higher, secondary, and

primary education as well as think tanks and professional research institutions. Although metaphysical and fixed epistemologies are more prevalent in human history, the modern (or postmodern) preference for their developing and naturalistic counterparts tends to exclude CR organizations from the sphere of serious scholarship. For this reason CR organizations express a high degree of frustration with the culture at large that they see as the result of elite cultural influences embracing flawed epistemology. Behind the political positions espoused by the CR is an anti-education undercurrent, as education is currently understood.

Because the CR political agenda is totalitarian and authoritarian, any concession to a developing epistemology violates their understanding of the world and their role in it. Education cannot reflect a developing epistemology because it directly contradicts their exclusive truth claims. Likewise, metaphysical epistemology is necessary, particularly in science, to justify the privileges of the Christian class in the CR ideal government. For this reason, the CR discourages education and research in their current conventional forms and develops parallel alternatives such as CR universities and think tanks.

Forms of Epistemology in Research and Studies

Advocacy groups use published studies to justify their policy preferences. Groups rely on scientific studies or articles published in prestigious academic journals to provide the intellectual skeleton supporting their agendas. Dominionist groups reliably argue that gays and lesbians should not be allowed to foster or adopt children because studies have shown children do better in homes with mothers and fathers. This assertion about the type of household children thrive in is also expanded to arguments against same-sex marriage. Because, they argue, the primary function of marriage is the production and rearing of children, gays unions should not be legally recognized because states have a rational basis for recognizing opposite-sex couples exclusively. These positions are bolstered by research done by the American College of Pediatricians including their

heavily referenced policy statement, *Homosexual Parenting: Is It Time for a Change?*¹³ There is a problem, however, with their use of the research. The American College of Pediatricians is a construct of CR activist groups created to provide “scientific” research to bolster the political assertions of the CR.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has reached no such conclusions on gay parenting. In its policy statement on legal recognition for same-sex adoptive parents it says, “Children who are born to or adopted by 1 member of a same-sex couple deserve the security of two legally recognized parents. Therefore, the American Academy of Pediatrics supports legislative and legal efforts to provide the possibility of adoption of the child by the second parent or coparent in these families.”¹⁴ This policy statement and others like it were derived from the Academy’s comprehensive research article titled, *The Effects of Marriage, Civil Union, and Domestic Partnership Laws on the Health and Well-being of Children* published in *Pediatrics, the Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics*. This article looked at numerous studies on the effects of varying family structures on childhood development. Among the many findings were assertions that children of divorced heterosexual mothers develop comparably to those of divorced lesbian mothers and there is little to no propensity to identify as gay or lesbian if raised by same-sex parents. The article is co-authored by twelve professionals with an MS, MD or JD degree. It also references similar policy statements from the American Academy of Family Physicians, American Association of Psychology, and The American Psychoanalytic Association.

Another comparable policy statement from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) reads, “There is no evidence to suggest or support that parents with a gay, lesbian, or bisexual orientation are per se different from or deficient in parenting skills, child-centered concerns and parent-child attachments, when compared to parents with a heterosexual orientation. It has long been established that a homosexual orientation is not related to

psychopathology, and there is no basis on which to assume that a parental homosexual orientation will increase likelihood of or induce a homosexual orientation in the child.”¹⁵

The AAP and AACAP represent the breadth and consensus of their fields. They abide by stringent research and peer-review guidelines detailed on their respective websites. Their academic journals receive submissions from university faculty from around the world. In numerous respects they are reliable sources on which to base policy. The American College of Pediatrics (ACP), however, disagrees with the policy statements of these groups. Their policy statement says, “It is inappropriate, potentially hazardous to children, and dangerously irresponsible to change the age-old prohibition on homosexual parenting, whether by adoption, foster care, or by reproductive manipulation. This position is rooted in the best available science.” The ACP does not have the broad professional constituency of the other groups. In fact, they are quite small and comprised of only a handful of religious conservative psychiatrists.¹⁶ Joseph Zanga, a former employee of the Family Research Council (FRC) – a CR lobbying group - founded ACP specifically to protest the policy statements of the AAP. ACP deliberately parallels the AAP in its name, the design of its website, and even its slogan in order to appear equally legitimate.

The studies ACP produces are cited by the FRC in its political lobbying materials and by other CR groups like Americans for Truth About Homosexuality (AFTAH).¹⁷ Peter LaBarbera, the founder of AFTAH, is also a former employee of the FRC. This small, closed circle of questionable ethics in generating research is not limited to this isolated example. Often employees of CR activist groups will split off to form redundant satellite activist groups or niche professional organizations that seek to mirror more credible professional organizations. The research each produces is then cited and used by the original advocacy group and further cited by other CR activists.

The citing of questionable research is not contained within the dominionist political cohort. At the beginning of his second term in January 2005, President Bush was asked about same-sex

parenting in an interview with the New York Times. His response was, "Studies have shown that the ideal is where a child is raised in a married family with a man and a woman."⁸ The "studies" President Bush was referring to were those produced by the ACP and the FRC. The FRC is one of the CR groups who claimed to have a deciding effect on Bush's reelection in 2004. This could explain why President Bush preferred "studies" from small, religious motivated professional organizations rather than the broad consensus of the larger professional community.

The research of the AAP and similar professional organizations follows a developing form of epistemology because it uses research tools to develop knowledge and reach new conclusions absent the bias of political intentions. For this reason the research produced by the AAP is considered more scholarly and its truth claims more legitimate. The ACP's research follows a fixed form of epistemology because the purpose of their study is supporting a particular representation of original truth. In this case, the original truth is understood as the will of God and the research is valuable to CR groups because it supports their certitude about fixed, absolute moral condemnation of gay people. The use of "studies" in President Bush's anti-gay explanation demonstrates how research conducted under the understandings of fixed epistemology is more convenient for the CR political agenda.

Alternative Research and Science

Frustration with the contemporary preference for developing epistemology is one explanation for the aggressive resurgence of creation theology in recent years. In the past decade creationism has undergone a makeover and the redesign appears scientific. Intelligent Design proffers the universe is too complex to have developed absent the guiding hand of a superior being. Those that purport Intelligent Design are careful to keep the superior being anonymous in order to circumvent the Supreme Court's prohibition of religious teachings in Science classrooms handed down in *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 1968.¹⁹ But the mask on the being is thin and the role CR

organizations have played in developing and marketing Intelligent Design (ID) suggests their nameless designer is really the Christian God.

CR leaders support creationism based on a literal interpretation of the Bible. Constructing ID arguments has more to do with public relations than softened beliefs. Throughout the 20th Century religion developed a reputation for being unscientific. In response CR leaders no longer rely solely on metaphysical explanations and instead create think tanks with the impression of a developing epistemology. One example of this is Answers in Genesis (AIG).²⁰

Like the American College of Pediatricians AIG is a think tank and professional organization designed to counter the overwhelming consensus of a profession. Their mission is to defend the creation story in the Bible literally using science. However, they are not coy in embracing a fixed/metaphysical epistemology. Their priorities statement states, "The scientific aspects of creation are important, but are secondary in importance to the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as Sovereign, Creator, Redeemer and Judge. The doctrines of Creator and Creation cannot ultimately be divorced from the Gospel of Jesus Christ."²¹ Scientific understanding, in their view, is not developed over time but rather evaluated in terms of an original truth; here a religious belief. AIG was instrumental in establishing the Creation Museum.

Recently the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky celebrated its 250,000th visitor. The popularity of the museum in its first year of business surpassed even the optimistic projections of its founders.²² The Creation Museum houses numerous exhibits touting the scientific accuracy of Young Earth Creationism (YEC) that estimates the universe and all its contents to be 6010 years old. According to YEC, God created the entire universe in six 24-hour days. Their original truth is Genesis 1:1 - In the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth. All subsequent research and science must comport with this original truth and the rest of the Bible in order to be valid because

the Bible is the literal word of God. Needless to say, YEC incorporates a fixed/metaphysical epistemology in their understanding of natural science.

The Creation Museum contains life-size models of the Adam and Eve story. In the tale of original humans God's only commandment prohibits eating from the tree of knowledge. The fruit of knowledge is the discernment of right and wrong. In this story, seeking knowledge is man's original sin. In the dominionist worldview displayed throughout the museum, the opinion of intellectual pursuits has not improved.

The museum tells a cohesive story from the first exhibit to the last. Always aware that its truth claims challenge those of the empirical scientific community the Creation Museum seeks to explain its conclusions in terms of "different starting points." One placard near the start of the museum displays a message in three rows. The first row says, "same facts, same world." The second row displays two lines. One curvy line represents billions of years of development over time while the second straight, short line represents 6000 years of universal history. Under the long, curvy line reads "human reason." Under the short, straight line reads "God's word." The third row says, "different views." The message is that man's understanding of evolution comes from human reason but their understanding of YEC comes from the Bible.

Although the placard is simplified it demonstrates two competing epistemologies with just a few words and pictures. Basing scientific conclusions on "God's word" requires a fixed/metaphysical epistemology. Scientific findings can only be true if they reiterate original truth. However, basing scientific findings on human reason, which includes our capacity for observation, measurement, and testing, leads one to reach conclusions other than YEC. The placard not only shows the preferred epistemologies of the CR and scientific communities, it bluntly demonstrates the CR's hostility to reason. This explains much about the CR's frustration with science, research, and academia. Reasoning ability is threatening to the central authority of original truth and those

that speak for it. The development of reasoning skills through education is an affront to their claims of manifest dominion.

Another placard shows two pictures beside each other. The first picture has the inscription “Rene Descarte said, I think therefore I am.” The other picture says, “God said I AM THAT I AM.” Above the pictures is the message, “Different views because of different starting points.” Again, the simple display demonstrates the epistemologies. YEC is the result of adherence to original truth. Evolution is the result of human reason. The CR prefers allegiance to original truth rather than critical thought because it justifies their entitlement.

An interesting aspect of the placards is their summation of competing findings as “different views.” The placards suggest evolution and YEC are just two viewpoints from different opinions and beliefs. Throughout the museum evolution is depicted in terms of personal belief. “Do you believe in evolution? Why do you believe in evolution?” For the serious scientist one can no more believe in evolution than one can believe in photosynthesis and penicillin. There is no doubt personal belief is the primary inspiration for YEC’s conclusions but the museum projects the reliance on personal belief onto developing epistemology in which belief is irrelevant. It exploits the popular misunderstanding of the term ‘theory.’ In informal conversation a theory is synonymous with a hunch or supposition and no more reliable than personal belief. However, in science a theory is just below a law in the ordered hierarchy. It includes a collection of propositions that have each been independently tested for veracity and replicability.

By describing the competing epistemologies in terms of “views” the Creation Museum seeks to invalidate science’s truth claims or at least put its conclusions on an equal plane with religious belief. However, the truth claims of YEC cannot be tested. One belief expressed in the museum is that chemical properties changed when Adam sinned. One placard seeking to explain the presence of venom in snakes says, “Chemicals that once had non-harmful functions at Creation changed to

venoms after the Curse.” When Eve bit into the apple, nothing happened. But when Adam took a bite animals started eating each other, humans were forever cursed, and carbon atoms took on new attributes. The belief that elements changed their properties when Adam sinned helps YEC explain away things like radioactive dating that show the Earth is much older than a few thousand years. But, it is not falsifiable. The metaphysical explanation for physical phenomenon precludes any worthwhile examination.

The end of the museum includes scary displays of the “consequences of belief in evolution.” There are pictures from Nazi Germany with the clear message that Hitler’s genocide was the logical consequence of “belief” in evolution. This causal link is common among CR websites. A new DVD garnering a feature story and advertising on WND is called Darwin’s Deadly Legacy. The DVD explains how Darwinian natural selection provided the ideological underpinnings for the Holocaust. In the documentary, D. James Kennedy explains, “To put it simply, no Darwin, no Hitler... Hitler tried to speed up evolution, to help it along, and millions suffered and died in unspeakable ways because of it.”²³

Beyond the Nazi connections there are rooms with scary red lighting and collages of social ills including violence and crime juxtaposed with stem cell research and gay marriage. The imagery is a grotesque display of CR politics. The “evils” of gay rights come from the abandonment of God’s word; the same abandonment that leads to “belief” in evolution and Hitler. It is a slick propaganda machine custom made to support the authoritarian claims of the CR. Science, reason, and equal rights are all reprobate blasphemies in the dominionist province.

At the end of the museum hangs a sign with a screen that says, “Millions of years undermines every major doctrine of the Bible.” Many Christian theologians disagree. Some Christian thinkers, including the former Pope, have argued that evolution and belief in creation are

not opposite and exclusive. Evolution is seen as the way in which God carried out his creative forces.

Common rationalizations for balancing religious belief with science include contextual analysis. The 24-hour day is based on the rotation of the Earth that is influenced by the gravitational pull of the sun. The creation story includes three full days of creation before the sun is created on the fourth. It is unclear why an omnipotent being would need to adhere to the confines of Earth time prior to the creation of the contributing factors to that time. Therefore, “day” may have been mistranslated and is more accurate to say “age.” The order in which living things appear in the creation story roughly matches the development of life through evolution. And evolution is an observable process in nature and does not negate other understandings of the distant past.

Although these explanations use metaphysical and fixed epistemologies to make evolution fit the creation story they are still unacceptable to most CR organizations. While many CR leaders have expressed tacit political support for ID as a covert way to sneak creationism back into the classroom most CR leaders condemn evolutionary theology. Even though the rhetorical devices try to marry the conclusions of developing epistemology with the original truth of fixed epistemology, the recognition of the Earth’s age still violates dominionist interpretation of original truth.

To maintain the certitude that a supreme being designed the expanse of the universe, billions of species of plants and animals, and rational beings for the dominion of you and those that think like you requires an appalling measure of existential audacity. As the diversity and strangeness of the universe – from the nano world of ultra microscopy to radiology viewed millions of light-years away – is revealed with research, CR leaders must continually re-filter scientific discovery through their religious narratives in order to maintain their claims of celestial privilege. The “millions and millions of years” claim may not challenge all doctrines of faith but it challenges the doctrine of dominionism.

The world needs to be limited, small, and new in order for the CR to justify their political agenda. Human reason challenges dominion so thought and inquiry must be made the enemies of truth. Alternative science must be manufactured instead to enforce their original truth. Therefore, the CR must create entities like Answers in Genesis and the Creation Museum that have the veneer of science to dissuade followers from more critical analysis.

Forms of Epistemology in Higher Education

In reviewing CR websites it is difficult to find any place in which attending college is explicitly forbidden. No CR leader is bold enough to issue a blanket condemnation of higher education. However, CR websites have a strong degree of message orthodoxy on the topic of education. From site to site the same themes are repeated over a long period of time. The CR discourages attendance at universities in two ways. The first and most common way is subtle. College is depicted as too expensive or physically and mentally unsafe. The second way takes aim at universities for presenting an alternative “worldview” wholly antithetical to the CR agenda. The second, more salient way reflects the CR displeasure with the developing and naturalistic epistemology favored by universities.

Blaming the Virginia Tech massacre on curriculum and university worldview may seem gratuitous but explanations like it are not isolated or unique. Articles depicting college life as imbued with the threat of violence appear on CR websites with many cross-posted on several sites simultaneously.

In August, WND ran an article titled, *After Stabbing, University Investigates Backgrounds*. The story focuses on the mental health of several workers at the University of Colorado. It details horrific acts on campus couched in qualifiers such as “allegedly” and “reportedly” with all the fright building of a campfire ghost story. “Astin allegedly slit the throat of an incoming student.” He reportedly had “been charged with various crimes including criminal intent to commit first degree

murder.” “Astin then took out the knife and tried to ‘ram the knife into a man’s heart.’” Immediately following the last word of the article is a strategically placed advertisement for a book which reads, “Why homeschooling? New resource gives reasons parent education trumps all other options.”²⁴

The article is quite disturbing. But the story is obscure and references to the alleged events are scant on the Internet outside of CR websites. It is initially unclear why it captured the attention of WND. It does not deal with religion or cover any of the core CR issues such as abortion or gay rights. To understand why WND ran this article, which was prominent as its lead article on the day of its original posting, one must look at the messages contained by the repetition and juxtaposition of others like it.

One article about violent activity on campus does not count as an anti-college message. Viewed independently the article is little more than a scary, sensational, human-interest story – the kind posted by all news sites. But for WND this article is not isolated. Regularly they post about acts of violence on college campuses. The articles are archived and grouped under headings such as *University Life*. The message when seeing the headlines together is that campuses are scary places, like the bad parts of a city, and parents should be concerned about sending their children there.

Safety issues are not the only way CR websites discourage college. There is also a repeated theme that college campuses are dangerous places for one’s mental health. Concerned Women for America (CWFA)²⁵ a CR organization founded by Beverly LaHaye, whose husband is famous for the popular apocalyptic *Left Behind* series, professes to be a counter-feminism site for Christian women and often posts articles about the mental risks associated with promiscuity and abortion at college.

One such article titled *Psychological Problems Skyrocket Among College Students* covers the rise in reported mental health issues among college students with a particular emphasis on the female student body. The article pulls from a 13-year cumulative review of counseling services at Kansas

State University published in *Professional Psychology*. It is unclear if the original study of Kansas State is meant to have implications for all universities the way CWFA suggests.

Much of what CWFA pulls from the study does not contain direct citations, suggesting there may be some message filtration on the part of the author. Conclusions loosely drawn from the study include, “Female students constituted about 2/3 of the clients [at the university counseling center] over 13 years,” and, “Students are more likely to need counseling the longer they are in college, that is, each successive year brings more students to counseling centers with senior students constituting more than a quarter (26.8%) of the total clientele.” One conclusion, which does not seem to be pulled directly from the original study, references the costs of the services by saying, “Some students now receive, dollar for dollar, more in psychological services than they paid in tuition and fees.” There is no indication how CWFA came up with that assessment but the message is clear. College is not only expensive and dangerous to one’s mental health; the two problems compound each other.²⁶

Another article that has appeared more than once on the CWFA homepage is titled, *College Coeds Experiment with Paganism*. The article claims there is a University Pagan Society at Syracuse University that is allowed to meet and use campus facilities. The presence of a student club at Syracuse is expanded to more broad statements about all colleges including, “On campuses today, sorcery and witchcraft no longer carry a negative connotation,” and, “Television series like *Charmed* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as well as films like *The Craft* and the *Harry Potter* series are fueling interest in Wicca.” The paganism is linked to sex and particularly unsafe sexual practices. The culprit behind this “pagan sexuality” is Women’s Studies department who “spend far more time on Wiccan beliefs, feminist empowerment, and goddess worship than on traditional Christianity.”²⁷

The assessment of Paganism is echoed in the *American Family Association Journal* in an article titled, *Pagan Sexuality 101*. The article argues that in schools we are seeing, “The latest reincarnation

of the pagan sexuality that has smoldered and sulked jealously under the restraining influence of Judeo-Christian morality.”²⁸ The relaxed sexual mores on college campuses create an environment in which women are particularly at risk for a host of tragedies.

This understanding of college life was recently covered in depth in the book *Unprotected: A Campus Psychiatrist Reveals How Political Correctness in Her Profession Endangers Every Student*.²⁹ The author uses the pen name “Dr. Anonymous,” and warns about the “dangers of immorality” for female students attending a university. In a piece for Christian Post titled, *How Universities Can be Hazardous to Student Health*, Anonymous describes her book saying, “Campus counseling centers are whitewashing the painful consequences of causal sex, STDs, and abortion. They are promoting the notion that men and women are the same.”³⁰ Predictably, advertisements for *Unprotected* are ubiquitous on CR websites with many articles referencing it. Without knowing who the author is, or at what school s/he works, it is difficult to determine if the observations made in *Unprotected* are really the opinions of a respected professional or just an CR construct.

Colleges are not only unsafe for students’ physical and mental health, they are also threatening to students’ future financial success. College is condemned as costly by religious and secular commentators alike. No one argues that four years at a university is inexpensive. CR websites, however, have a repeated message that college is not only pricey; it is not worth the money invested.

In *Boundless*, the magazine for college-age singles produced by Focus on the Family (FOTF), there is an article about the unnecessary cost of college roughly once a month. Often the articles seem to be about different subjects but contain messages strongly discouraging investing in education. In *How to Wallow in Debt*, a humorous article about money management in youth, one of the main trappings for financial failure is trying to attend college.³¹ The next month’s issue has the article *God, Money, and You*, in which college is depicted as four years in a poverty-induced hell.³² The

following month there's an article called, *The Student Loan Swindle*. It looks at factors such as return on investment and opportunity costs to see if the paycheck after graduation justifies student loans.³³ Not surprisingly, it does not. The simple message of the article is that if you do not have cash-on-hand to go to school, don't bother. The tradition continues month after month.

WND draws similar conclusions. In an article titled *Lower the Boom on High-Cost Colleges*, Len Kinsolving presents a compelling case that an education is not worth the investment.³⁴ In an article called, *Is a College Degree Required for Success?*, not only is college not required for success, the article contains a list of "geniuses of humanity" that did not bother getting a degree. Although the commentary does not appear to be intentionally humorous, the list of degreeless success stories is hard to take seriously. The "geniuses" that did not need college include, Jesus, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Napoleon, and Mother Theresa. The article concludes with the derisive statement, "A professor is a mediocrity that is an expert on the works of great men."³⁵

The examples above are just a tiny portion of the endless articles with similar themes. In perusing the news archives of numerous CR websites going back to the mid 90s there is not one article depicting college as fun or a time of personal growth and priceless memories. Not one article encourages college as necessary to grow critical thinking skills or make lifelong connections that will carry a graduate through a professional career. This is no accident. These messages come from the CR's view on the role academia plays in politics and culture. In CR rhetoric, the enemy is academic. Among all the articles that subtly discourage college for making students crazy, broke, and diseased there are less subtle messages that bluntly claim universities produce graduates with an anti-Christian worldview.

Epistemological Competition

In articles attacking the dominant epistemology in secular universities *Boundless* takes a more direct aim with comparable regularity. In *How to Become Educated Despite Going to College*, J.

Budziszewski depicts a conversation between an imagined student and Christian advisor. In the story, the advisor tells the student, “A lot of people [at universities] laugh, ...because they think that holiness, truth and beauty are matters of personal preference. That’s a false sophistication. Holiness for me has to be the same as holiness for you, because there is only one God, and both of us were made for Him. Truth for me has to be same as truth for you, because there is only one reality.”³⁶ This quote succinctly demonstrates the CR hostility to the developing epistemology in academic departments.

The idea that there is *one truth* is a central theme to CR criticisms of education. Liberal Arts in particular operate on the idea of discovering truth and encouraging debate and disagreement. Critical thinking skills are emphasized over conclusive agreement. The extent to which any one person holds a monopoly on truth is always questioned.

The CR operates on certitude instead. They know the truth and what they know is applicable and enforceable for everyone else. The purpose of education becomes the reinforcement of a set of beliefs about God, and corresponding political positions, rather than an inquisitive examination of the human experience. Just as in the Creation Museum where human reason is the root of all evil, thought at universities is sinister. The competition between developing/naturalistic and fixed/metaphysical epistemologies permeates CR articles arguing subtle and not-so-subtle dissuasion from higher education.

The preferred fixed epistemology coincides with the CR view of the role of government. Deriving from their understanding of knowable, singular truth is the idea that the role of government is the political projection of truth. Because the reigning education philosophy of almost all accredited universities includes the pursuit of truth rather than the proclamation of it in absolute certitude academics stand in opposition to the fixed worldview and the subsequent political objectives that derive from that worldview.

In *The Senseless World of Academia*, Karla Dial quotes heavily from William F. Meehan, a frequent commentator for FOTF on the state of American universities. Meehan complains, “It’s the whole PC movement, and that just means there’s no objectivity, no absolute truth. History of Western civilization is just one perspective on the world, America is not the greatest civilization.”³⁷ Many in academia would not disagree with much of what Meehan says but would take issue with his negativity. Most professors do not assume it is in the interest of free thought to glibly declare America the greatest civilization ever or profess absolute truth from a purely Western perspective. In the CR world, free thought is beside the point. Appreciation of other cultures or ways of thinking is tantamount to rebellion against almighty God. An education that includes less hegemonic cultural analysis is, by Meehan’s assessment, senseless because it rejects fixed and metaphysical epistemology.

Some CR articles dealing with the “worldview” at universities claim that it is the schools themselves that do not allow free thought. Because certain observations are considered unfounded, universities are accused of academic censorship. Like other accusations, these themes appear with regularity across the CR spectrum with headlines such as, *Mind Control University*³⁸ and *Anti-Intellectualism Among the Academic Elite*.³⁹ The latter argues, “Suppression of ideas that are seen as being out of the mainstream has become all too common at universities. The creed of the leftist religion is that any difference between people is a result of evil social forces. That’s a vision that can lead to the return to the Dark Ages.”⁴⁰ One example from the article of an idea “suppressed” at colleges is, “The genetic physiological and biomechanical characteristics that cause blacks to excel in some sports – basketball, football and track – spell disaster for those [blacks] who have aspirations to be Olympic-class swimmers.”⁴¹

In the CR opinion orthodoxy, racial inequality is not the “result of evil social forces” but rather “genetic, physiological and biomechanical characteristics” that tend to produce different

attributes and skills in different races. Racist ideas like this, of course, are not taught in schools so CR websites label their exclusion as an affront to academic freedom. Other ideas that are “suppressed” because they are “out of the mainstream” are suppositions that homosexuality is a mental disease and humans lived with dinosaurs. Because most colleges do not teach these ideas, CR articles cast them as “elite” and “anti-Christian.” The argument claims universities adopt political positions first then come up with the scholarship to support them rather than pursue discovery through rigorous methodology. CR writers that express this view errantly ascribe a fixed epistemology to universities but claim their original truth is flawed. While most CR articles object to academia because of the reliance on developing epistemology, in these cases the authors assume the epistemology is just as fixed as their own but follows from a contrasting reference point of fixed truth.

“Truth” in Fixed Epistemology

The idea of one truth and academia’s refusal to teach it exclusively is summarized by a DVD series and accompanying website produced by FOTF called *The Truth Project*. *The Truth Project* challenges the belief that what is true for one may not be true for another. It argues in favor of the existence of absolute truth.⁴² However, absolute truth as they use it does not carry the conventional understanding found in most philosophical discourse.

Traditionally proponents of absolute truth argue in favor of a cohesive reality outside the constructive capacities of the human mind. The extent to which each understands absolute truth is a product of individual perspective. Disagreement is reasonable because there is a singular reality outside of us but each is limited by their five senses and personal perspective. For FOTF, human perspective is irrelevant. Because the truth has already been detailed by “God’s word” differing conclusions challenge its authority. Diversity of thought is dissent. *The Truth Project* provides an epitomized fixed epistemology. But, like the articles referenced above, the alternative criticized is

not a developing epistemology but a competing fixed epistemology in which the original truth is a contrast to the Christian God.

The understanding of truth that *The Truth Project* presents is singular in its assumptions. All of life is summarized into succinct worldviews that the participants are challenged to accept or reject. The reader is presented with an equally singular “secular humanist” alternative. The “truth” worldview comes with ready-made religious conclusions and political preferences. There is no need to think through the complexities of human existence. Just point to the description labeled absolute truth.

Titles such as *How to Get an Education Despite Going to College* and *How to Stay Christian in College*,⁴³ suggest that adherence to the prescribed worldview renders academic inquiry unnecessary. The eighteen-year old college freshman must approach her education with certainty in her understanding of “absolute truth”. Although a degree may be technically required to pursue a career, the student is encouraged to proceed through her requisite course load with an invincible skepticism. In this way FOTF and likeminded CR organizations do not explicitly condemn attendance at a university but the recommended approach negates the value of critical thinking an education provides.

Not surprisingly, part of *The Truth Project* is called TrueU™.⁴⁴ (The U stands for University.) Because the stage on which the competition among epistemologies plays out is usually higher education *The Truth Project* and TrueU™ is explicitly geared toward college students. The hope is that college students will recognize signs of developing/naturalistic epistemology in their curricula and supplant them with the preferred fixed/metaphysical epistemology of the CR while in school.

Alternative Higher Education

The May 11, 2007 edition of Bill Moyer’s Journal on PBS⁴⁵ documented the graduation ceremonies at Regents University. The college and law school founded by CR leader Pat Robertson

provides an alternative to traditional education. The university's mission is dominionism with students trained to seek positions of power. Presidential candidate Mitt Romney provided the key address at graduation and former Attorney General John Ashcroft was present to recruit young Christian men and women to work in the government.

Robertson and the school's dean, Jeff Brock, are not shy about seeking to control the government. Brock first explains how the wall separating Church and State is purely institutional and surmountable through a strategy of placing professionals with a dominionist worldview in positions of authority. Pat Robertson later argues, "There was never any intention that our government would be separate from God almighty." Robertson founded Regents to "change the law to reflect God's law." Because lawyers and justices are needed for that revolution, Robertson also founded the law school 20 years ago.

In the piece, graduates at the law school ceremony repeat familiar mantras of dominionist ideology. Harley Gammel explains her plans for her degree by saying, "I intend to help further the administration of justice and I believe in absolute truth, not grey or relative truth, but absolute truth and that's what God's word is." Regent uses a fixed/metaphysical epistemology in which the purpose of education is affirmation of original truth understood as the word of God. Gammel continues, "Part of the goal of many of us who are going out from this institution is to follow what it really means to be a Christian leader, to share the truth, to offer the truth, and to rely on the truth." Again, the singular, knowable truth is the object of her education and future career. She sees her role in the legal field as seeking avenues to enforce her certitude.

Another unnamed female graduate explains her goals by saying, "The importance to me of having the biblical foundation in the law is because of my belief that God's law is the highest law." Elevating biblical law over the law of the land is a good example of dominionist objectives put into practice. In the CR ideal, "God's law" is the law.

Another unnamed male graduate of the law school explains his take on civil liberties law by saying, “Instead of promoting the individual’s liberties, necessarily, we are looking at what’s good for people in terms of these values that are found in the Bible.” The quote is classically dominionist totalitarianism. Instead of respecting a system in which all citizens’ civil liberties are protected under the law regardless of personal faith, civil liberties take a backseat to Biblical law. In this graduate’s understanding of legal theory those not conforming to the religious teachings he accepts are not worthy of full protection. Just as in the dominionist vision, those not conforming to the authority of original truth have diminished or non-existent rights.

Should comparable questions be asked of graduates at most law schools, the enforcement of absolute truth and “God’s law” through government would likely not be such a common career goal. The quotes from graduates at the law school suggest they are not just devoutly faithful but lack basic understanding of the fundamentals of liberalism. The distortion of Constitutional law evident in the graduates’ explanations might not be so disturbing if Regents was not so successful in its mission to infiltrate the government.

PBS reports 150 graduates of Regents University worked in the Bush administration at one time and had high-ranking positions in the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Commerce, Education, State, Justice, Veterans Affairs, US Aid, Homeland Security, the Drug Enforcement Agency, the Special Council’s Office, the CIA, NASA, and all branches of the military. The scope of placement is startling when compared to the relatively small student body. The saturation of Regents graduates in the Bush administration is quite deliberate. Kay Coles James ran the Office of Personnel Management for four years in the Bush administration where she was in charge of filling hundreds of positions. A graduate and former dean of the Robertson School of Government at Regents, James was also Senior Vice President of the FRC.⁴⁶ Along with John Ashcroft, who changed hiring procedures at the Justice Department to recruit more Christian staff,

James is credited with the disproportionate representation of Regents graduates in the Executive Branch.

Jay Sekulow, a former employee in the Bush administration, received his PhD from Regents. His dissertation argued that judges can and should use their personal religious beliefs to decide cases; a view opposed by the American Bar Association and disputed by decades of legal theory. The dissertation earned him a spot in the Bush White House as an advisor on judicial appointments. Since leaving the White House Sekulow has started his own legal group with the mission of rolling back Supreme Court decisions favorable to gay rights.⁴⁷

Regents' most famous graduate, Monica Goodling, worked for the Bush campaign in 2000. After Bush took office she was appointed to the Justice Department where she served under John Ashcroft and his successor Alberto Gonzales. At age 33 she became the Justice Department Liaison to the White House, a powerful position for a person her age. In this position she was given hiring and firing power over 135 appointees. She later became embroiled in a scandal following the firing of eight federal prosecutors for political reasons after Bush was reelected in 2004. One of the replacement federal prosecutors was a friend and fellow Regents graduate and former coworker in the 2000 campaign. After facing pressure for introducing politics to traditionally apolitical appointments she invoked her Fifth Amendment rights against self-incrimination and promptly resigned. Soon after she was awarded immunity to testify openly before Congress.⁴⁸

The success of Regents University provides a clear picture of the CR agenda to take over national politics. Discouraged with the norms of traditional universities, Pat Robertson founded his own school based on a fixed and metaphysical epistemology in which students are not trained to discover truth but defend original truth and enforce it in law and politics.

Other Universities, such as the late Jerry Falwell's Liberty University and Oral Roberts University, share comparable missions. Because the developing/naturalistic epistemology used in

academia does not support CR authoritarian ambitions, CR leaders establish their own parallel institutions with fixed/metaphysical epistemology. They then commission graduates trained in fixed and metaphysical assumptions to assume positions of power and supplant law with religious “truth.”

Forms of Epistemology in Primary and Secondary Education

Objections to developing epistemology are not limited to universities. In fact, much of the CR criticisms of academia are worded in terms of retaining beliefs rather than instilling them. By age 18 if a child is not thoroughly steeped in a CR perspective s/he is unlikely to develop one in early adulthood. For this reason concerns about secondary education eclipse those for higher education both in frequency and in tone. For the CR, public education is ground zero in epistemological warfare. Whereas leaders are hesitant to explicitly condemn attendance at a university, many have called for a mass exodus from public schools. Even private schools who self-identify as Christian may not be Christian enough for most CR organizations. For primary and secondary education, CR messaging is more common, consistent, and intense.

In *Political Agendas for Education: From the Christian Coalition to the Green Party*,⁴⁹ Joel Spring explains the educational goals of a variety of political groups. While most groups’ agendas take the form of curriculum and administrative augmentations, the CR is unique in that they advocate against public education and education training *in toto* as well as radical changes to education overall including, in some cases, the total abolishment of free public education. This is because, like universities, public schools display developing epistemology. According to Spring, CR concerns over education are based in a belief that, “a liberal elite controls the dissemination of ideas in U.S. society.”⁵⁰

Like all groups, the CR recognizes that politics in the near future is shaped by the education of young people now. The CR is certainly not alone in wanting to influence public schools. However, Spring emphasizes the unique way in which CR organizations want to reduce or eliminate

the role traditional education plays in teaching problem solving and discernment. “According to Evangelicals, secular humanism teaches that individuals can reason their way to moral decision rather than rely on the Word of God. Evangelical Christians do not want children to use reasoning in solving moral dilemmas. Instead, they want strict obedience to the Word of God.”⁵¹ As in the Creation Museum and higher education, human reason is cast as the villain. Spring may not realize it but he is accurately identifying the competition among epistemologies.

For the CR, reasoning, and critical thinking skills are bad things. Instead of thinking, CR organizations prefer that students base knowledge on the “Word of God.” While this initially sounds like a mere profession of faith it calls attention to the totalitarian mindset of the Christian right. The “Word of God” is presumably the Christian Bible. However, the Bible’s use of examples from society thousands of years ago makes it difficult to apply directly to contemporary issues. Since an audible voice from the heavens clearing up all questions is not available, God’s word is reliant upon human interpreters of scripture to determine how it is applied to current moral dilemmas.

These human interpreters are almost uniformly conservative white males that bring their own prejudices and anima to their interpretations. Relying on the word of God really means relying on human interpreters of sacred texts. CR leaders prefer their members, and society at large, not to learn how to think or reason but look to them for direction in all things. They bemoan the “liberal elite” that supposedly control education but supplant that elite with their own unquestionable superiors. While the “secularism” of “elite-driven” education allows for free and open discourse, the CR substitute allows for no discussion at all; only submissive obedience to their will which they credit as God’s. The CR view of education, like government, is illiberal. Stated differently, from early childhood through adulthood the CR relies on fixed/metaphysical epistemology to train obedient followers in a dominionist state.

Gay Rights in Primary and Secondary Education

In addition to discouraging doubt or dissent via a subversive developing epistemology the CR seeks to recruit young people into a manufactured culture war. While countering certain political viewpoints is prevalent throughout CR messaging, these issues take on an intensified severity whenever they are identified in public schools.

In, *Who Gets To Shape Your Kid's Values*, author of *Taking America Back*, Joseph Farah, responds to John Edwards answer in a recent presidential debate in which Edwards claims he would not mind a fairy tale in which two princes kiss being read to his second grader. Farah fumes, “He would rather his children be morally molested in the classroom than take a stand against politically correct state indoctrination of his children. This man makes me sick. He’s not only disqualified from serving on the school board, his children should be taken away from him.”⁵² In the perceived ideal of dominionist politics, gays and those supportive of gays are equally unworthy of parental rights. This level of rage is common among CR writers in regards to respect for gay Americans taught in public schools. Gay rights remain a political lightning rod and lucrative fundraising source throughout the CR, of course, but gay inclusive messages in public schools are awarded heightened outrage.

Articles discouraging tolerance for gays and lesbians in public schools are numerous, hysterical, and shrill. Headlines such as, *Telling Kids Homosexuality Innate Challenged*,⁵³ *‘Gay’ Lessons Violate Civil Rights*,⁵⁴ *Parents Ask Court to Stop ‘Gay’ Indoctrination*,⁵⁵ *PTA Endorses Demand to Show ‘Gays’ positively*,⁵⁶ and *‘Mom’ and ‘Dad’ Banished by California: Schwarzenegger Signs Law Outlawing Terms Perceived As Negative to Gays*,⁵⁷ appear daily on WND’s site. Nowhere is gay panic more evident than in the CR rhetoric about public schools.

Much of the articles depict a gay Gestapo forcing children to “accept homosexuality” or worse, practice same-sex behavior. However, most of the programs and messages derided do not

encourage acceptance of anything but rather discourage name-calling and acts of cruelty among children. The mere acknowledgement that gay people exist and should be treated with respect is a great moral outrage to CR leaders. In the article claiming to outlaw ‘Mom’ and ‘Dad’ referenced above, SB777⁵⁸ in California actually outlaws derogatory pejoratives for gay people being used in the classroom by teachers. With the prevalence of anti-gay bullying, particularly among boys in middle school, the bill received wide support in the California legislature.

In the article, Randy Thomasson, a rising star in CR circles and president of the Campaign for Children and Families, describes SB777 as “delivering young people into the hands of those who will introduce them to alternative sexual lifestyles. This means children as young as five years old will be mentally molested in school classrooms.”⁵⁹ Discouraging teachers from using terms that could be interpreted as anti-gay slurs is interpreted as recruiting kids into homosexuality. Thomasson’s choice of words follows a common pattern when opposing any measure recognizing the dignity of gay people. Instead of teaching opposing opinion, students are described as endangered. The use of “molest” is common in these articles because it subtly exploits the misguided linkage of gay people to pedophilia. (Note similar wording in the Farah quote above.)

Creationism in Primary and Secondary Education

Second only to the anti-gay articles about public schools is strong, repetitious messaging regarding evolution. The passion behind views on evolution in public schools mirror those of the founders of Answers in Genesis and the Creation Museum examined above. As previously stated, YEC, in which certain men are privileged and entitled in the universe, is necessary theologically to justify dominionist privilege and entitlement in society. The articles common on CR websites echo predictable arguments for a fixed/metaphysical approach to science displayed at the Creation Museum. One argument that is a unique theme in CR articles dealing with creationism in public schools is the exaggerated claim of controversy. Often the debate over Biology curricula is

described as nationwide and highly contentious. In *Keeping Creation out of the Classroom*,⁶⁰ Anna Maria Gillis explains how the appearance of widespread controversy does not hold up under review.

According to Gillis, “The creation-evolution debate is a controversy of largely homogenous small towns and suburbs.”⁶¹ It is also temporary. While well known CR groups tend to focus their attention on the national government, smaller community groups sometimes organize to put creationists on school boards. When this happens, the typical trajectory involves increased voter turnout in local elections and the eventual repudiation of efforts to introduce religion into curriculum.

Gillis recounts the judicial history of evolution starting with John T. Scopes criminal charges for teaching evolution in 1925. Scopes lost the trial and Darwinian evolution disappeared for a time in American textbooks. It was not until 1967 that the original law used to prosecute Scopes was repealed and later, the Supreme Court ruled against creationism in the classroom in 1968.⁶² More recently, in *Kitzmiller v. Dover*⁶³ U.S. District Judge John E. Jones ruled against teaching ID calling it creationism in disguise and chastising the school board for concealing motives to teach religion in public schools. Despite the loss, articles decrying the teaching of evolution appear regularly on CR websites. Gillis warns that creationism in science classrooms will continue to be a problem “anyplace that extreme fundamentalism gains a hold.”⁶⁴ She recognizes the new strident efforts to give religion the appearance of science and predicts, “The more creationist arguments sound like science, the harder they will be to fight in court.”⁶⁵

Alternative Primary and Secondary Education

In *Religious Conservatives and Public Schools*, William Gribbin describes the conflict in terms of public and private expression. According to Gribbin, supporters of the CR are frustrated with the current cultural norm of keeping one’s faith private. “Secular culture encourages a dichotomy between one’s private and public self because people are expected to subordinate their religious side.

That is, they are to behave as if matters of personal faith are an irrelevance in the public sphere of their lives.”⁶⁶ Gribbin here draws the distinction between religious people and those that ascribe to the mindset of the CR. Religious people can condone irreligious public education because they accept developing/naturalistic epistemology even if they seek metaphysical explanations in their personal life. Supporters of the CR cannot tolerate secular schools because the education presented is illegitimate. Under fixed epistemology there is no secular culture separate from personal belief. There is one truth and education needs to reflect this fixed understanding before it can effectively teach. For this reason, many CR parents have pulled their children from public schools in order to instruct them at home with the fixed/metaphysical epistemology they prefer.

Reasons parents choose to homeschool their children are varied. According to the National Home Education Network (NHEN) the two main reasons are improved academic performance and the desire to provide religious instruction not available in public schools.⁶⁷ The Homeschool Legal Defense Association proudly touts past winners of the National Geography Bee such as James Williams in 2003.⁶⁸ However, they do not specify a link between improved academic performance and the motivations for homeschooling.

In the most recent National Spelling Bee, 36 of the 274 competitors were homeschooled.⁶⁹ The biography of the typical competitor includes descriptions of highly educated parents. Usually the parents of the homeschool student that wins major academic competitions have advanced degrees. Their presumed reason for homeschooling their child is the superior academic environment they can provide at home.

Homeschool sites that are explicitly Christian reference purely religious reasons for homeschooling their children. Students are removed from public school because of a “secular humanist” worldview evident in political views such as evolution and gay rights. Parents commenting on many Christian homeschool sites admittedly lack formal education.

It is unfortunate there are no studies that examine the link between motivations for homeschooling and improved or decreased academic performance. Such literature would add much to the study of religion and education. One might assume that parents who homeschool their children for better academic performance see that improvement reflected while those that pull their kids from public school for purely religious reasons do not. Absent further research it is impossible to draw those conclusions. What can be deduced is that the former tend to accept the dominant education paradigm of developing/naturalistic epistemology whereas the latter prefer a fixed/naturalistic epistemology.

CR websites overwhelmingly endorse Christian homeschooling. They also reject legal checks that seek to verify the academic progress of homeschooled students. In *Homeschool Regulation: The Revenge of the Failures* Bruce Short opines, “If you really don’t want your children to be educated, the most effective strategy is to institutionalize them in ...government schools.”⁷⁰ Those who seek to regulate homeschooling in his home state are “failures” that are envious of the superior abilities of home-school students. He continues, “[Supporters of regulation] also fret about home-schooling parents who have not finished high school. With a little research, however, anyone... can discover that... children homeschooled by parents without a high school diploma are at no disadvantage at all compared to public school students.”⁷¹ It is likely that someone who does not see the need for formal training to educate children probably does not have the discernment to recognize sound research.

Another article titled, “*On the Sin of Sending Kids to Public School*,” WND rejects the notion that a developing epistemology is even possible. “Contrary to what many Christians have been led to believe, there is no such thing as ‘neutral education.’ All education is religious and conveys a worldview.”⁷² The article demonstrates the misconception that the lack of specific religious teachings is itself a religious teaching. Like similar examples in higher education this illustrates a

fixed epistemology in which original truth is accepted or rejected. The lack of acceptance is equated to rejection and the assumed alternative epistemology is just as fixed and agenda-driven but based on an errant original truth. This is an inaccurate understanding of the developing epistemology used in conventional education.

Several CR websites produce advice and resources for Christian homeschooling. A common catalogue used for Christian homeschool resources is ChristianBook.com. The textbooks available in the homeschool section of the catalogue have titles and descriptions that indicate a strong fixed/metaphysical epistemology.

Examples of titles available include: *The Agenda - The Homosexual Plan to Change America* written by Traditional Values Coalition president Lou Sheldon, *Dark Obsession – The Tragedy and Threat of the Homosexual Lifestyle*, and *The Homosexual Agenda – Exposing the Principal Threat to Religious Freedom Today*.⁷³ The listing of potential textbooks categorized under “homosexual agenda” in the homeschool section is four pages long. It is impossible to determine how many parents choose to use homeschooling to indoctrinate their children in anti-gay hysteria, but the breadth of materials available indicates there is a niche market for this version of education.

Textbooks written with overt, discriminatory political positions fit well with a fixed epistemology and the political agenda of the CR. Their totalitarian agenda requires adult subjects that are not trained to critically analyze their leadership but accept their proclamations including the superior-class status of conservative Christians and second-class or criminal-class status of gay people. CR websites vigorously endorse homeschooling under the auspices of academic freedom. In a system dominated by elites in which they feel their views are suppressed homeschooling appears as a more freethinking alternative. But in its place is a strict list of CR political positions within a fixed/metaphysical epistemology that discourages academic inquiry. In the CR world, academic freedom means the freedom to believe as you are told.

Conclusion

Until the 17th Century scientists and priests were certain abiogenesis accounted for new life on Earth. God used the same creative force to pull living organisms from inanimate objects that he did to form Eve from Adam's rib. Assertions to the contrary challenged spiritual belief. Before Charles Darwin was born, Sir Thomas Browne angered religious leaders with the publication of *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* in 1646, which used evidence to disprove abiogenesis. Browne's reliance on the "act of reason" and "empirical experience" made him controversial and endangered.⁷⁴ The new explanations for life were developed during the time of Oliver Cromwell when politicians challenged the divinely inspired and unchecked rule of kings. The development of science that confronted predominant religious thought ran parallel with the development of politics that challenged supernal authority.

Reason and empirical experience still produce new discoveries that subvert metaphysical claims for human supremacy. The dependence on human reason for knowledge predominant in science and education threatens those that claim exclusive knowledge from God.

The Christian right does not merely challenge opponents on singular issues; they challenge the freedom of conscience that allows opposing viewpoints on issues. Since those seeking absolute power can no longer coerce accomplices in the liberal arts and sciences they create parallel institutions that mimic hallmarks of thought. The Creation Museum in Petersburg looks like the Museum of Natural History in Manhattan. The American College of Pediatricians sounds like the American Academy of Pediatrics. Regents Law School has the same ABA accreditation as Harvard Law School. But the epistemology – the way in which they know what they know – is very different.

Accepting that atoms changed when Adam sinned does not lead to cures for diseases or ways to grow more food. Saying biblical law is higher than man's prevents the judiciary from

challenging the tyranny of the majority and protecting individual rights. Claiming to be the heirs of earthly political power because of certainty in absolute truth, a truth that can neither be questioned nor examined is incompatible with liberal democracy.

As long as reason is the antidote for dominion seekers of power will attack thought at its roots. Like the legendary tree in the Garden of Eden, partaking of knowledge remains nefarious for those who mistake their rhetoric for the voice of God.

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