

A RIGHTEOUS APOLOGY

by Martin C. Wiltgen

LYCON. . . there are some matters a nation must not question if it is to continue. It must not question its virtues, its standards, its religion! If any nation questions these things it will wither away.

SOCRATES. . . The evidence will not destroy a free city, Lycon. Far from destroying it, the truth will make and keep it free. A despotism dies of the truth, a democracy lives by it. . . Shut out the light and close our minds and we shall be like a million cities of the past that came up out of the mud, and worshipped darkness a little while, and went back, forgotten, into darkness!<sup>1</sup>

I

Hardly a week passes without my seeing or hearing something in the media pertaining to the issue of censorship. Nationally, censorship issues take the time and energy of those involved either as protagonists or antagonists. Each side in a censorship issue believes it possesses and guards the standards of truth; each makes for a confrontation in the battleground of absolutes. Any compromise convolutes the meta-issues involved.

Minnesotans have heard the opposing arguments in censorship skirmishes fought in the communities of Sauk Center, Forest Lake, Lakeville, Fairmont and several other communities over such works as Of Mice and Men, The Lottery, Ms. Magazine, The Signal Series by Scott Foresman, Person to Person, and Catcher in the Rye. Nationally, communities such as Kenawha, Iowa;

Island Trees Union, New York; Helena, Montana; and Warsaw, Indiana have experienced censorship confrontations over such works as Grapes of Wrath, Slaughterhouse Five, The Naked Ape, The Best Short Stories of Negro Writers, Our Bodies Ourselves, Growing Up Female in America, and Brave New World. Some works are censored for reasons of sex -- The Scarlet Letter by Hawthorne; of politics - The Republic by Plato; of inappropriate adolescent behavior - The Diary of Anne Frank; of war and peace - Hiroshima by Hersey and Johnny Got His Gun by Trumbo; or of religion - Sounder by Armstrong and To Kill a Mockingbird by Lee. Even dictionaries have been censored because the word "bed" is defined as a verb as well as a noun. In Texas, the Commissioner of Education removed five standard dictionaries from the list recommended by the State Textbook Committee because some of the word meanings were interpreted as in violation of two sub-sections of the Texas State Textbook Adoption Proclamation.<sup>2</sup> In Florida, there are communities which censored the works of John Milton and Emily Dickinson because of their alleged homosexuality.

What of the unknown number of works used in public schools which are surreptitiously removed and not replaced in libraries, curriculum, or media-centers out of fear of a potential censorship case? School librarians, teachers, and administrators have and are removing some works in print and non-print media in order to avoid possible censorship pressures. Such works as Father Christmas by Raymond Briggs, The Eye of the Needle and The Key to Rebecca by Ken Follett, certain issues of Life Magazine and Sports Illustrated, and Catch 22 by Heller

are examples of other works which have been removed from school curriculums, library shelves, and media centers or "conveniently" lost and not replaced because they have received the onus of "suspect" recognition in national, regional, or local news media. Schools which engage in such surreptitious acts of censorship disenfranchise students of their Constitutional rights of freedom to knowledge and wisdom and betray their commitment as educators in the war on ignorance.

## II

The appetite for censorship is fed by frustrations with a society which undergoes rapid and uncertain change - a society under stress because of inflation, energy problems, and social-political-religious uncertainties. When people feel that their own best interests are ignored and that the future is bleak, they look for someone or something to blame. Unfortunately, one of the targets of these collective frustrations is the local public school curriculum.

Because the ability to voice frustration and opposition to change and uncertainty at the state or federal level is often viewed as a distantly difficult and disappointing process, it is easier for some citizens to direct their frustrations and prescriptions for certainty and equilibrium at the local public school. The local public school system is viewed as a major change-agent in attitudes, ideas, and values. When the public school curricula are viewed as landscapes of fear, they can become targets for direct or surreptitious censorship.

## III

Recently, fear of ideological change and the frustration

with the status quo are being ambitiously fed by individuals and groups who hold to relatively narrow and paranoiac ideologies. Some of the architects of these passionate ideologies at the national level are Richard Viguerie, Meldrim Thompson, Howard Phillips, Paul Weyrich, Terry Dolan, Jesse Helms, and Paul Laxalt. These persons use sophisticated computer technology to write, edit, and distribute these views per such political and quasi-political organizations as RAVCO (Richard Viguerie Corporation), The Conservative Caucus, The Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress, and The National Conservative Political Action Committee. Some sponsor a bill in Congress known ironically as "The Family Protection Act." These persons, organizations and legislation are identified with the New Right.

The ideological correlation among right wing political organizations is, unsurprisingly, supported and endorsed by fundamentalist persuasions, attitudes, and theologies of certitude. The works of Richard Hofstadter, Anti-Intellectualism in American History (1964) and "The Paranoid Style in American Politics" (1964), and the work of Erling Jorstad, The Politics of Doomsday: Fundamentalists of the Far Right (1970), precociously illustrate a natural alignment of fundamentalist righteousness with political righteousness in times of political, economic, and social uncertainty.

This religious and political right directs its crusading thrusts at several issues and groups. One of the targets of their discontents and cures is the curriculum of the public schools which it feels contains the elements of SECULAR

HUMANISM. As textbooks and media are the basis for specific evidence of "sin" according to the Rev. Jerry Falwell, he says "Textbooks have become obscene and vulgar. Many of them openly attack the integrity of the Bible. Humanism is the main thrust of the public school textbook. Darwinian evolution is taught from kindergarten right through high school,"<sup>3</sup> and, "For our nation this is a life and death struggle and the battle line for this struggle is the textbooks."<sup>4</sup>

Falwell and his sympathizers make strident efforts to show that the Supreme Court recognizes Secular Humanism as a religion and that it is THE religion of the public schools. The Supreme Court gave Secular Humanism "status" in footnote reference to it as a term in the cases of TORASCO v. WATKINS (Clerk, 367, U.S. 488, - 1961) and UNITED STATES v. SEEGER (U.S. 163, - 1965). The footnote qualifications by the Supreme Court are OBITER DICTUM in law, not a matter of binding legal recognition but rather a clarification in meaning. Nevertheless, followers of a Falwellian mind-set choose to use this "dictum" as DICTA for their own purposes of malfeasance.

To add to the charge that Secular Humanism is a religion taught in the public schools, organizations which use this term as a scapegoat for their frustrations with the schools frequently cite Humanist Manifesto I (1933) and Humanist Manifesto II (1973). These organizations single out the fact that John Dewey signed the first manifesto and that B. F. Skinner signed the second. Because these two signers were and are influential in educational philosophy, it is therefore understood by these rightist critics that the public schools

unequivocally endorse these manifestoes.<sup>5</sup>

Some of the organizations and publications using Secular Humanism as a funnel for their frustrations and discontents with the public schools are: THE EAGLE FORUM (The Phyllis Schlafly Report); GUARDIANS FOR EDUCATION (GEM): Onalee McGraw's "Secular Humanism and the Schools: The Issue Whose Time Has Come" published by THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION - a conservative think tank; THE NATIONAL CONGRESS FOR EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE (The School Bell); PARENTS ALERT; PARENTS OF MINNESOTA; and CALM (Citizens Alert for Liberty and Morality) led by the Rev. Richard Angwin of St. Paul, Minnesota.

#### IV

Recently, three authors whose works are illustrative of this religious-political right as well as gaining in popularity among some conservative groups in Minnesota are Tim LaHaye, Zig Ziglar, and Barbara Morris.

LaHaye, a San Diego preacher who identifies himself as a Christian fundamentalist, attacks Secular Humanism as a major ideology of evil in society. In his book, The Battle for the Mind, he states that books can be reduced to either those based on man's thoughts or God's thoughts. The idea that Christianity could be enhanced or enriched by outside sources appears invalid to him. Anything not inspired by Biblical truth is therefore anti-Christian. Therefore, St. Thomas Aquinas is criticized for introducing Aristotelian ideas into Christian theology.

LaHaye criticizes Michelangelo for sculpting the Biblical David in the nude and shames the Renaissance artists for their

obsession with nude art forms. LaHaye, a modern Savonarola, says that such art forms in the Renaissance were a prelude to the modern humanist's demand for pornography in the name of freedom. To LaHaye, anything not inspired by Biblical truth is therefore anti-Christian.<sup>6</sup>

Zig Ziglar, founder and president of The Zig Ziglar Corporation of Dallas, Texas, and a promoter of positive motivation and salesmanship, attacks not only non-Christians, but welfare, government regulation of business, and negative trade balances in his books The Confessions of a Happy Christian and See You at the Top.

Ziglar who admits to having spoken to God twice, first in his arrow-shaped swimming pool on a hot summer night in 1972 and a few days later on the telephone in Corpus Christi, Texas, burned a set of books on Eastern religion sent to him as a gift for fear they would poison his mind. In his book See You at the Top he warns of the dangers of women's liberation (that our Creator said that man is the head of the household) and rock music (when this kind of garbage is dumped with a rhythm into an open mind, the result is disastrous.<sup>7</sup> Ziglar's splenetic frustrations include his condemnations of declining military strength, the recognition of mainland China, and the condemnation of Darwin and Freud as being the two most negative men who ever lived.<sup>8</sup>

Barbara Morris, a staff member of the National Educator, attacks the public schools for possessing a philosophy of atheistic humanism. In her text Change Agents in the Schools she claims that change-agents harm the children and betray the

country.<sup>9</sup> She feels that the best thing that could happen in America is the demise of public schools because "American education is based on the religious philosophy of atheistic humanism, and the values promoted in the schools are humanist values or 'articles of faith' as expressed in the Humanist Manifesto."<sup>10</sup>

Authors of the persuasions of LaHaye, Ziglar, and Morris echo the motifs of the passionate certainties of extremist and paranoiac religious and political righteousness. In their zealous rhetorics they prescribe specific and surreptitious restrictions of the freedom of exploration and expression. They choose to restrict the opportunities for the free exchange and debate of issues and ideas which challenge their historical, political, social, or Biblical interpretations. In their earnest sense of loyalty to their sense of values, authors of such an ilk wish to censure and change those areas which threaten their tunnel perspectives on righteousness. Although Norma and Mel Gabler of Educational Research Analysts from Longview, Texas are the most well known critics of "offensive" textbooks and progressive, humanistic education, they are not alone. Other LaHayes, Ziglars, and Morrises have joined in this crusade against the rights of exploration, examination, and expression of pluralistic issues and ideas.

Such authors either wittingly or unwittingly feed the fears of the grass roots political arena, inflame voters' sensitivities, and prescribe absolute remedies for their fears. The rhetoric of certainty and fear took its toll in the polls in the defeat of George McGovern (D - S.D.), John Durkin

(D - N.H.), Birch Baye (D - Ind.), John Culver (D - Iowa),  
Gaylord Nelson (D - Wis.), and Don Fraser (D - MN.).<sup>11</sup>

Now this righteous rhetoric is being prepared to "target" the defeat of Senators Don Riegle (D - Mich.), Howard Metzenbaum (D - Ohio), Bob Stafford (R - VT.), John Chaffee (R - RI.), George Mitchell (D - Maine), John Melcher (D - Mont.), Quentin Burdick (D - N.D.), Lowell Weicker (R - Conn.), and Paul Sarbanes (D - MD.). Senator Ted Kennedy (D - Mass.) is also likely to be added to this list.<sup>12</sup>

A specific "target" of the New Right was the former and Honorable U.S. Senator Thomas J. McIntyre of New Hampshire. Senator McIntyre outlined the growing forces of religious - political discontent in America in his book The Fear Brokers. In 1978 Senator McIntyre, who wrote this study during his campaign, was defeated by Gordon Humphrey, a former field coordinator for the Conservative Caucus - a group exposed in the study of New Right tactics and philosophy.

Now this coalition of the New Right is trying to effect its authoritarian postures by censoring the media. Moral Majority is the authoritarian voice and force behind such matters as "The Family Protection Act," threats to boycott sponsors of television programs, arguments for scientific creationism vs. evolution, opposition to E.R.A., support for prayer in the public schools, and censorship in public libraries and public schools.

This conservative coalition of righteousness fails to recognize the Constitutional rights to explore and participate in a pluralistic diversity of ideas. These arbiters of

righteousness seem to desire a Christian "Reich" for their limited certainties at the expense of others. What Moral Majority fails to understand is that the Third Reich of Germany enacted the Nuremberg Laws in 1935 because the politicians of righteousness and moral purity of that epoch thought such laws were for the good of all. Today, the Moral Majority doesn't speak for freedom in its Christian Bill of Rights. It speaks for license rather than freedom - the license to divide in the name of loyalty and the license to deny in the name of Christianity. Its threats of political retaliation, boycotts, and censorship are indicative of a spirit of meanness and bigotry. The voice of Moral Majority is that of hate rather than of love and caritas.

Such arbiters of righteousness fail to understand that teachers are bound by a professional ethic to war against ignorance and one-sided parochial views and ideas. Teachers in the public schools need the right to academic freedom. Because they are responsibly bound by their training to search for truth and openness rather than echo narrow catechetical political-religious-social "dogmas," teachers must be free within their contractual bounds to select materials, concepts, and ideas in teaching students basic, conceptual, and judgmental skills.

Teachers are more than the extensions of their employers. To restrict the right to academic freedom inherently restricts the opportunities for students to be involved in the open forum of the free exchange of ideas. As public schools are for the total public rather than parts of the public, teachers are

given the charge to educate students for effective citizenship in a participatory democracy. Thus the right to explore divergent views of sensitive or controversial issues and ideas cannot be left solely to the institutions of higher education. The opportunity to intelligently explore, discuss, debate, and discriminate the value differences in all subject areas must continue without bias and prejudice in the public schools. Those students who cannot have the advantages of higher education could easily become educationally disenfranchised if only the views of the majority or elitist minority were taught. The tyranny of the majority or the minority is as contrary to the basic principles of the Constitution as the authoritarianism of a political-religious autocracy.<sup>13</sup>

The tyranny of absolutes, righteousness, ignorance, revenge, and fear caused the defeat and demise of teachers such as Jesus, Abelard, Thomas More, Galileo Galilei, Thomas Paine, Adlai Stevenson, and Robert Oppenheimer. Socrates, one of the first philosophical martyrs accused and found guilty of being a doer of evil, corrupting the youth, not believing in the gods of his state, and having other new divinities of his own, said it best when he knew he would not be the last to incur the wrath of the righteous of his time,

"If you think that by killing men you can prevent someone from censuring your evil lives, you are mistaken; that is not a way of escape which is either possible or honorable; the easiest way is not to be disabling others, but to be improving yourselves."<sup>14</sup>

The accusers of Socrates - Meletus, Lycon, and Anytus - have reappeared in the togas of righteousness worn by the Virgueries, Laxalts, Helmses, and Falwells. The affidavits of today's righteous are similar to the ones sworn against Socrates in the troubled times of Athens in 399 B.C. The message of Socrates is the same:

"The unexamined life is not worth living! The unexamined life is built on lies and a free world cannot live by lies."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Maxwell Anderson, "Barefoot in Athens," The American Experience: Drama. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968, pp. 242-243.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Jenkinson, Censors in the Classroom - The Mind Benders. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern University Press, 1979, p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> "Clean-Up America Campaign, Still Important," Thomas Road Family Journal-Companion for Truth, 26 January 1979, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Jerry Falwell, Clean-Up America, Special Edition, April 1979, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Jenkinson, op. cit., pp. 102-103.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth L. Woodward with Eloise Salholz, "The Right's New Bogyman," Newsweek, July 6, 1981, pp. 48 & 51.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Friedman, "Inspiration Inc." Esquire Magazine, Sept., 1979, p. 30.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara Morris, Change Agents in the Schools. Elliot City, Md: Barbara M. Morris Report, 1979.

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Morris, "Schools' End Best for U.S.," National Educator, July 1977, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> George W. Cornell (AP Religion Writer), "Religious Right Claims Success," Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN., Nov 6, 1980. p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> DuShane Fund Reports, Vol XI:1, Dec 80-Jan 81, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Bob Cary, et. al. v. Board of Education of the Adams - Arapahoe School District 28-J, Aurora, Colorado, 427 F. Supp. 945, 952 (D. Colo. 1977). p. 14 (acc. to mimeographed copy of decision).

<sup>14</sup> "Apology," Dialogues of Plato (ed. Robert M. Hutchins, Great Books of the Western World, Chicago: Enc. Britannica, Inc., Vol. 7, p. 210).

<sup>15</sup> Maxwell Anderson, op. cit. p. 245.