PS for 3/29/90

Special-Interest Agendas in the Classroom

Look who is trying to impose a special-interest agenda on the captive audience of other people's minor children in the public schools! It's not the right wingers, not the fundamentalists, but the environmentalists, the media, and the liberals.

Earth Day organizers are busy trying to induce the nation's 45 million schoolchildren to use a specially prepared curriculum and participate in selected projects on April 22. Earth Day started in the 1970s as a counterculture holiday organized by disgruntled hippies.

Earth Day organizers have distributed four lesson plans for teachers to use in talking about the environment in the classroom. Some of the suggested activities are of the do-good variety, such as cleaning up the schoolyard and recycling paper.

Other suggestions, however, are overtly political. Teachers are urged to make "the connection between population growth and environmental problems" and then to worry the pupils about the population doubling until "there's no room left." Teachers are provided with the phone number of Zero Population Growth and urged to contact this advocacy organization for more information.

The Earth Day instructions tell the students to monitor their own homes and check up on whether their parents are making an adequate effort to save the planet. When students return the survey to school, they are to be given an "action guide" for how they can get their parents to improve their behavior.

"Channel One" is another ingenious idea now invading the public-school classroom. Devised by Whittle Communications, an outfit in partnership with Time-Warner, Inc., it is a 15-minute newscast beamed directly into the nation's classrooms. Whittle certainly isn't doing this out of charitable motives; it's a $200 million business investment which is expected to make lots of money from the sale of two minutes of commercial advertising time within each newscast.

To lure the schools into accepting Channel One, Whittle offers each school a generous proposition: free television sets and VCRs for every classroom, a free satellite dish for the school, plus free installation, wiring, and maintenance. All the school has to do to receive this bonanza is to sign a contract agreeing to show the program daily to all its students.

The format is two anchorpersons hosting a 12-minute news program geared to youthful viewing. Our parent who viewed it, however, reported that the program really consisted of 4 minutes of current events, 2 minutes of commercials (in 4 spots of 30 seconds each), and the rest of the time in various public service announcements.

A school which contracts for Channel One would be inflicting on its students 2 minutes a day of commercial advertising, 5 days a week, or a total of 6 hours of commercial advertising per school year. By the time a 9th grader enters his senior year in high school, he would have had 18 hours of commercial advertising, using time that encroaches on his class day.

The New York and California school systems have told Whittle Communications "no thanks," and other states are approaching the idea cautiously. However, by approaching schools directly, Whittle claims that Channel One will reach 2,000 to 8,000 public schools this year.

Schools have an alternative. They can instead subscribe to Cable News Network's "Newsroom," a 15-minute news program specifically designed for use in classrooms. It airs at 3:45 a.m. eastern time; teachers are encouraged to tape it and show the program to their students the next day.

CNN's Newsroom doesn't contain any commercials, but subscribers to this service should be on guard that Ted Turner is a strident advocate of liberal political and social views.

Turner has already stamped his political imprint on the programming of his four cable networks, CNN, CNN Headline News, TBS, and TNT. This included a pro-abortion documentary called *Abortion: For Survival*, an anti-nuclear movie called *Nightbreaker*, and a documentary on the U.S.S.R. which gave such an idealized view of the Soviet Union that even the Soviet government ran disclaimers stating that the film did not represent reality when the program aired in their country.

Turner has spoken out against Whittle's Channel One because he opposes television commercials in the classroom. However, he is not against using political indoctrination in TV programming if it can "stop the arms race, control the population, and protect the environment."

Turner recently announced that the Ten Commandments are “obsolete.” He suggests that we replace them with his own “Ten Voluntary Initiatives,” including “I promise to have no more than two children, or no more than my nation suggests.”