

Human Origins and Religious Dialogue in Protestant Homeschooling:

Some Findings

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Introduction

This paper is the culmination of my research this last quarter on conservative Protestant homeschooling in Silicon Valley, focusing specifically on how homeschoolers approach the ongoing controversy over human origins and how these Protestants approach inter- and intra-religious dialogue. I have also designed this paper as an introduction for future undergraduate students doing field research in the local homeschooling community. Finally, it is the product of long personal reflection on my own eleven years as a homeschooled student (from second through twelfth Grade) in Mountain View and Los Gatos. I divide this paper into three parts. First, I introduce homeschooling itself and its various forms. Second, I examine three textbooks that are used in the local Protestant homeschooling community to examine those books' views on human origins and religious dialogue issues. Third, I report the results of some interviews with people who are involved in a local homeschool cooperative.

Before I begin, however, I should note that homeschooling is a diverse movement, and people who have spent as much time in it as I have will come away with various views and experiences. Therefore, I shall begin by briefly discussing my own background to give some perspective. I grew up in an Evangelical family that is active at Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino (PBCC), a non-denominational church.¹ Dad is a sales trainer and elder at PBCC, and Mom has been a homemaker since I was born. Both are university graduates. All three of my siblings are still homeschooled today. I myself spent many years fully believing in Biblical inerrancy, Adam, Noah, and Jesus as my Savior,

¹ For more information on the church, see <<http://pbcc.org>>.

and I was very active in PBCC's high school youth group. However, my story is somewhat unusual because I converted to a form of Agnosticism at the end of high school and thus had to leave the Evangelical community. Nevertheless, Evangelical ethics, values, and even music continue to have an important and, I believe, positive influence on me, and while I now strongly depart from them on numerous issues, I remain in many respects grateful that I was raised in their community.

I say all this not just for full disclosure's sake but also as an encouragement to future students who may do field research on Protestant homeschooling to be careful when coming to conclusions. Conservative Protestants seem to be widely vilified here at Santa Clara and elsewhere as arrogant, uncaring, hate filled, and the source of various political problems before us today. While there is some truth to this, I encourage you to remember their virtues too. I can safely say that I have never known a South Bay homeschooler to receive less than a public school-quality education. Many homeschoolers whom I know have impressive academic portfolios, and I regularly hear about them going off to a diverse range of colleges and succeeding there. I also know nothing to corroborate the occasional stereotype of homeschoolers being dangerous, abusive, or very strange. While many homeschoolers view the right to administer corporal punishment as an important issue, I have never known a homeschooler to be physically or sexually abused. I have also never known a homeschooler to engage in unusual medical practices, nor am I aware of any families that live in physically unhealthy conditions. On the contrary, I have found them to be notably strong families with low rates of divorce or drug and alcohol abuse. Of course, I do not speak for all

homeschoolers—only the ones whom I know. Maybe these stereotypes are justified elsewhere.

Finally, however, I must underscore that my testimony only pertains to Protestant homeschoolers. This is not to speak ill of other homeschoolers but is simply to say that homeschoolers in my experience are generally segregated by religious affiliation. There are Roman Catholic, Mormon, and secular homeschooling groups, but my family has had very little interaction with them despite having been fairly well networked among homeschooling families. Why this is the case is hard to determine and is a theme in this paper. Nevertheless, the phenomenon has limited my personal experience to mostly Protestant homeschoolers and limits my ability to comment on other groups.

Section 1: Introduction to Homeschooling

The Legal Structure of Home Schooling

As I said above, homeschooling is diverse. It is so diverse, in fact, that I often find that the term “homeschooling” itself usually confuses more than clarifies an explanation. “Homeschooling” often does not even occur in the home, and when it does it is not always under the direct supervision of a parent. Using a phrase like “alternative education” would likely be more helpful. Nevertheless, there are a few categories into which homeschoolers generally fall, and I shall summarize each one below.

Before doing so, however, I should introduce the basic legal framework for homeschooling. Each state varies in its legal requirements, but California’s are fairly

minimal.² I am most familiar with two ways of becoming a homeschool. The first (which my family does) is for a family to register annually as a private school. This is a simple process that requires neither academic nor teacher accreditation. The family goes through the exact same process as a larger private school does: it annually submits an affidavit to the government stating that it is a private school, names the school (in my case, Paideia Christian School³), selects a principal (Dad, in my case), and acknowledges that it will adhere to some very basic requirements (such as that the instruction be in English). The family is then free to proceed as it sees fit and may issue a diploma to its students. The second option is to join an Independent Study Program (ISP). ISPs can be either full-size private schools with an ISP option for homeschoolers or an organization fully focused on being an ISP.⁴ While I am not as familiar with ISPs, I do know that The King's Academy in Sunnyvale is a major local example of the former type of ISP.⁵ In short, both registering as a private school and joining an ISP are options for legally becoming a homeschooling family.⁶ Within both, there are multiple ways of pursuing a student's actual education. What follows is a summary of the different formats with which I am familiar. Note that any one family (and any one student in that family) can be engaged in multiple forms at the same time.

² The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), a major national homeschooling organization discussed below, divides states into four categories (no, low, moderate, or high regulation). California has "low regulation," the second from simplest ranking. See <<http://www.hsllda.org/laws/default.asp>>.

³ Paideia is a Greek term for holistic education.

⁴ For a summary of and contact information for about a dozen local ISPs, see San Jose Families, <<http://www.sanjosefamilies.com/homeschool.html>>.

⁵ For more information, see The King's Academy website at <<http://www.tka.org/info/isp.html>>.

⁶ The HSLDA identifies two other ways of becoming a homeschool in California. One is to hire a fulltime private tutor, and the other is to enroll in independent study through a local public school. I do not know a case of either actually occurring, but these could form a separate branch of homeschooling with which I am unfamiliar. For a summary of all four options as well as recent judicial rulings in the area, see <<http://www.hsllda.org/laws/analysis/California.pdf>>.

Types of Home Schooling

In-home instruction: This is both the stereotypical form of homeschooling and the source of the term's name. A student—whether a kindergartener or a high schooler—takes an academic course in the home. A parent may have this study occur on a daily or weekly schedule (say, doing grammar from 9:00-10:00 each morning) or may allow the student more control over the schedule (say, the student simply has to do a certain number of math problems each day). Several companies and publishers offer educational products explicitly for homeschoolers and sometimes print catalogues. Many homeschoolers will order curricula, video lecture series, and other tools from them.⁷ There are also books available to assist families in developing their courses of study.⁸ Families can also receive assistance from their ISP if they are members of one. In section 2, I shall examine some examples of textbooks in some detail.

Once a family has established its curricula, a parent may play an active role in teaching by regularly meeting with the student and giving lectures, but this is by no means always the case. Sometimes a student will use a textbook or other tools essentially to engage in independent study. Overall, this type of education mostly occurs for younger students (although I know of a couple of families for whom this was their main source of instruction through high school). Most often, from what I have seen, actual home instruction decreases during junior high and is sometimes completely gone by the end of high school.

⁷ For instance, one family has posted links and contact information for twelve such companies on their family webpage. See <<http://www.angelfire.com/va/hearose/index.hsinfo.html>>. My family has used several of these companies too.

⁸ See, for instance, Cathy Duffy, *100 Top Picks For Homeschool Curriculum: Choosing The Right Curriculum And Approach For Your Child's Learning Style* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005) and Mary Pride, *Complete Guide to Getting Started in Homeschooling* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2004).

Cooperatives: Sometimes families combine their efforts and share instructional responsibilities. The families will meet at given times, and one parent will instruct several students. Two of my siblings are currently part of one called Live Oak Academy, and they go for a couple of days a week to a rented facility at a church with several other families.⁹ Part of the rationale for developing cooperatives is that some parents have expertise in a particular area (such as a language or an historical period), and other parents want to utilize that knowledge. Dad, for instance, teaches Latin. I shall return to cooperatives in section 3 since my interviews were all with people active at Live Oak.

Support groups: Families also sometimes pool their efforts into groups to do extracurricular activities. There are numerous groups that organize events like field trips and roller-skating days for homeschooling families with younger children. For instance, Bay Area Schools in Christ (BASIC) has park days twice a month and a monthly mothers' meeting.¹⁰

Online courses: There are some organizations that offer online courses for homeschoolers. I am mostly unfamiliar with this type of education, but I do understand that it is fairly widely used.

Community college supplementation: Often high school and (not infrequently) junior high homeschool students enroll in a local community college to fulfill some

⁹ For more information, see their website at <<http://liveoakacademy.org>>.

¹⁰ For more information, see San Jose Families, <<http://www.sanjosefamilies.com/homeschool.html>>. This site also gives summaries of and contact information for over a dozen similar groups.

requirements. I know that a lot of homeschoolers are using West Valley and De Anza for this purpose. (I, for instance, fulfilled some of my English, math, and science requirements at West Valley.) It is not uncommon for homeschoolers in high school to begin going to a community college full time as a way to overlap their high school and college GE requirements. My sister, for instance, is currently at West Valley almost fulltime for her senior year. Enrollment for homeschoolers, however, can be complicated because the students have not yet received a diploma. Sometimes enrollment has required an instructor's signature and special paperwork. Some homeschoolers avoid this by acquiring a high school-diploma equivalent such as passage of the California High School Proficiency Examination (CHSPE).

Competitive speech and debate and the HSLDA: One group that is very popular among my family's friends is the National Christian Forensics and Communications Association (NCFCA), a national homeschooling speech and debate league comparable to the National Forensics League (NFL).¹¹ Competing students join local clubs throughout the country, and they then pair up with a partner for the entire season (which runs for most of the academic year). There is one topic for the entire year (this year's is medical malpractice reform), and each team creates a proposal on the subject. At a series of regional tournaments, teams go through a number of rounds either arguing for their proposal or arguing against another team's. The top finishers advance to the annual national tournament held at varying places around the country (including the Santa Clara University campus in 2001). Clash, a local NCFCA club (of which my brother is a member), meets at a church in San Jose. Participants may also compete in a series of

¹¹ The NCFCA's website is < <http://www.ncfca.org>>.

other speech related events, including impromptu speeches, dramatic literature recitations, and comedy.

The NCFCA was formed by the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), a major national organization. It monitors legal challenges to homeschoolers across the country, and most people join it as insurance in case their family becomes the subject of legal action, in which event the HSLDA provides legal assistance. As it says on its website, “HSLDA is tens of thousands of families united in service together, providing a strong voice when and where needed.”¹² Michael Farris—an appellate attorney, Virginia’s 1993 Republican lieutenant gubernatorial nominee, and the organization’s founder—is possibly the leading national figure in homeschooling today.¹³

Demographic Information

Giving demographic information on such a diverse movement is difficult, but I shall summarize what I have seen first hand. As I mentioned above, almost all homeschoolers whom I know are Protestants. Almost by definition, they are predominantly two-parent, single-income families with the father being the breadwinner in every case I know. The fathers’ occupations vary, but most families are middleclass or upper-middleclass. Many are Caucasian although there are various exceptions to this. For instance, there is a contingent of Korean immigrants at Live Oak.

¹² Found at <<http://www.hslda.org/about/default.asp>>.

¹³ Farris is also the founder and president of Patrick Henry College, a new conservative institution in Virginia. For its website, see <<http://www.phc.edu>>. Farris’s biography can be found at <<http://www.phc.edu/administration/president/default.asp>>.

Section 2: Summary of Textbooks

In this section, I shall examine three textbooks that, anecdotally, I know enjoy usage among homeschoolers and that I myself used in whole or part while being homeschooled. All three explicitly teach from a definite perspective on both human origins and religious dialogue issues. However, I should note that none of the books are explicitly homeschool books: Protestant conventional schools can also use them. Nevertheless, from my experience these books are representative of at least one type of textbook in circulation among Protestant homeschoolers. I should also note that when a homeschooling family or cooperative purchases this or any other textbook, the purchaser does not necessarily either fully agree with the content or even fully know what it is in advance. The extent to which homeschoolers actually agree with these textbooks is an issue that I somewhat address in Section 3 but that would be an important area of future research.

Bob Jones: World History for Christian Schools

My first book is a 1994 world history textbook by Dr. David Fisher in collaboration with Bob Jones University, a conservative university in South Carolina, and published by Bob Jones University Press.¹⁴ While the University may be best known nationally for banning interracial dating on its campus until early 2000, it is also a source of textbooks for homeschoolers.¹⁵ This book does not specify its intended grade level, but

¹⁴ David A. Fisher, *World History for Christian Schools*, Second Edition (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1994).

¹⁵ I should note that I have also never heard of a racist homeschooler in all these years. The University's segregationist policy is totally unparalleled in my personal experience.

it seems most appropriate for early high school (which is around when I used part of it). It is a 662-page, nicely produced volume: its glossy pages are frequently interspersed with pictures (many of which are color) of people, images, or maps. The text runs in double columns and emboldens key names and concepts. The book also covers a significant amount of material, from prehistoric times through Desert Storm. While it focuses on the West, it repeatedly visits the East, and it also maintains a focus on Europe even after the Revolutionary War.

While much of the book is simply a presentation of information, it also periodically and very deliberately provides a normative framework for viewing historical events. The doctrines of *sola scriptura* (the belief that the Bible is the central source of theological truth) and *sola fide* (the belief that faith in Jesus as Savior is itself sufficient for salvation apart from additional good works) are central to the book's message: it regularly judges people, nations, and events by either their compatibility with the Bible or their reliance on faith over works. Throughout, the book strongly criticizes secular and non-Christian people, and it also and sometimes even more strongly enters into intra-Christian disputes. It opens by telling the reader that it wants "you to formulate your own opinions" but also that "it is important for a Christian always to use the Bible as his guide when formulating ethical and moral standards" (ix).¹⁶ It contrasts itself with other historical approaches by noting that "Ungodly men" have rejected the Bible's historicity but that "they have not and will not prove that the Bible contains any error." As an example, the book points to King Belshazzar in Daniel, and says that while "Scoffers said that the biblical writers simply invented the name," that theory has been debunked,

¹⁶ Because of the frequency of my textual references in this section, I shall rely on in-text citations.

proving that efforts to disprove inerrancy are fruitless: “The Bible does not need to be proved correct; it is true no matter what men may believe” (10-11).

It then moves into ancient history, where it relies heavily on the Bible and offers periodic criticism of other cultures. It opens with the historical Adam, Eve, Noah, and Abraham (19-22). It also says that “the Sumerians rejected God” (22), and when comparing Hammurabi’s law to the Mosaic law, praises Hammurabi for being better than other pagan leaders but ultimately faults him for being too works-based: “Hammurabi’s laws governed man’s conduct, but Moses said that the most important thing was man’s heart” (25). It praises the Egyptians’ Great Pyramid, calling it a tribute to their “genius,” but says that Egypt’s ultimate decline was a punishment from God (31-3). Its discussion of Joshua’s conquest and establishment of Israel is brief and does not discuss the bloodiness of the Biblical account (38). When introducing the Assyrians, it notes that they “did not acknowledge God” but says that Jonah was “a great example of God’s mercy” to them (40-1).

Its coverage of Greece and Roman is a mixture of praise for their achievements and criticism for their rejection of God. It is fairly positive about Homer, saying that he and the Greeks cherished “dignity, strength, valor, bravery, generosity, and wisdom”; however, it ultimately concludes that Greek polytheism was inferior to Hebrew monotheism (51-2). As it moves into later Greek history, it notes that Daniel predicted Alexander’s rise (63). It also says that Greek culture greatly effected Western civilization, but criticizes them for ignoring God:

The Greeks stressed the dignity and uniqueness of man. They assumed a great truth: man is the highest of created beings. However, they looked upon man’s uniqueness apart from God, glorifying the “creature more than the Creator”

(Rom. 1:25). As a result they perverted this noble truth into a form of humanism. (63-4)

Also, while strenuously defending the historicity of the Hebrews' tradition, the book states that the Greeks and Romans "developed legends to explain their early history" (74). It observes that Rome influenced America's current system of government (78) and praises Rome's judicial system (98), but it notes that Jesus—not the *Pax Romana*—brought the true peace (95). It also criticizes the gladiatorial contests' depravity (103), and ends its segment on Pompeii by saying that considering its hedonism and evil ways, "we can recognize the city's destruction for what it probably was: the judgment of God" (101). The book also briefly discusses the 1st Century Jews and notes that they "failed... to see the Old Testament distinction between the first and second comings (or advents) of the Messiah" and thus rejected Jesus because he did not come in glory the first time (106-7).

As the book then turns to Christian history, it sets the stage for what will be one of its strongest normative themes: the incorrectness of Roman Catholicism. While it accepts the rise of prominent early bishops, it also emphasizes the "very simple" structure of early Christianity (109-10). It criticizes Christianity's development into a state religion, and states that "Monasticism is not of Christian origin nor biblically based" (113). Calling Roman Catholicism "a perversion of biblical Christianity" (114), it says that Peter was never bishop of Rome (181-2), that the elevation of saints was among "the greatest errors" of Roman Catholicism (181), and that their focus on tradition over truth was wrong (179). In a section entitled "Medieval Superstitions," the book criticizes "the worship of Mary" and their emphasis on relics, which "blinded" the general public "to

the truth of God’s word.” Roman Catholicism ultimately made Europe “captive for almost a thousand years” (183). It also has sharp words for the Eastern Orthodox church, saying that while it “claims to teach correct doctrine, many of her beliefs are contrary to Scripture” (128), and it criticizes the Eastern Orthodox use of icons (131).

Meanwhile, while the book does acknowledge the sincerity of some Roman Catholics (184, 218), the Reformation receives the bulk of its praise. It speaks well of John Wycliffe, stating that his efforts gained momentum because the “flame of truth could not be extinguished” (282), and says that Martin Luther “providentially” caused great reform (286). In addition, “God raised up reformers in many lands who protested the abuses of Roman Catholicism and sought to restore biblical Christianity” (291). Nevertheless, it does criticize some Protestants. It says that some Anabaptists rejected *sola fide* on the grounds that good works are also important. However, they “did not understand, as most of the other reformers did, that the Bible teaches that justification—although by faith without works (Gal. 3:11; Eph. 2:8-9)—always *results* in good works in the life of the justified believer (Eph. 2:10)” (293). The Counter-Reformation meanwhile “failed to see that the root of their problems was doctrinal error,” and the Jesuits “believed it is perfectly proper to do wrong in order to accomplish something good” (302). Overall, the book’s coverage of the Reformation praises its spread and affirms that God was guiding the process. For instance, it says that to prevent England from returning to Roman Catholicism, God prevented Queen Mary I from having a child so that Elizabeth I could rule (298) and helped the English defeat the Spanish (298-9).

Meanwhile, the book’s coverage of other religions may actually be more restrained than its coverage of non-Protestant Christianity. When introducing Islam, it

notes that God blessed Ishmael (135), and lists some of the positive values in the Koran (137). It also praises Islamic poetry and art (141-2). However, it says that “the god of the Koran is not the God of the Bible” (note the capitalization) because of the Koran’s non-Trinitarian theology, and it also suggests that Satan misled Muhammad (138). Also, in its only use of “jihad,” it defines the word as “holy war” (139). When discussing Hinduism and Buddhism, the book emphasizes their works-based beliefs (147-8), and it states that Confucianism ignores God (154). When looking at the East overall, it acknowledges Chinese innovations (157) but ultimately concludes that China, India, and Japan were all too traditionalistic and existed “apart from the knowledge of God and His truth” (162).

As it turns to the Western Hemisphere, it does praise some of the Indigenous technological innovations and scientific discoveries (317-8). It supports evangelism but nevertheless notes that “Unfortunately, most of the early explorers were Roman Catholics. Instead of leading people to Christ, they won converts to the Roman Catholic church” (309). It also says that God prevented Europeans from discovering the Western Hemisphere until the Reformation (313). However, it criticizes the conquistadors for being greedy and “often cruel to the Indians” (318), and makes a point of noting that evangelism through violence does not work: “the Indians, like many people today, were turned away from the gospel by the lives of people who claimed to be Christians but were not” (321-2).

The book also praises the Reformation and Renaissance as a time of innovation and progress and notes the Christian beliefs of some key early scientists. For instance, when discussing Robert Boyle, it observes that “Boyle, who was a sincere Christian, diligently studied the Bible” (366). However, it also objects to the more secular humanist

direction that the Enlightenment took, stating that some people “exalted reason as the highest authority, placing it above faith in God and His Word” (368). It also rejects Deism which “had little use for a personal God or His salvation” and “was built upon mere human wisdom” (371). Its coverage of the Founding Fathers is fairly restrained but it does note that during the U.S.’s early years, “the American people looked to God for guidance, deliverance, and strength” (393). This is in contrast to the French revolutionaries, whom it criticizes (403, 426).

Moving into more modern history, the book notes that “Victorian England was a place where God was honored and thanked for the great blessings that the nation enjoyed” (448), and it criticizes socialism (459-60). It discusses and criticizes the rise of liberal theology which argued “that the major purpose of Christianity is to change society, and that by changing society individuals will be made better. They rejected the New Testament teaching that the only gospel is the story of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (I Cor. 15:1-4)” (466). Nevertheless, God blessed America during the 19th Century (475). Meanwhile, European colonialism facilitated Christian evangelism but was not tarnished by it:

As European countries built overseas empires, Christians became acquainted with the spiritual needs of people in distant lands. In many lands, Western political and economic control opened the doors for missionary activity. Yet, although imperialism aided the spread of missions, Christian missionaries were not motivated by a desire to exploit or subject foreign peoples. (482)

As the book progresses through the 20th Century, it criticizes Adolf Hitler as “one of the most murderous and tyrannical dictators of modern history” (538) and called instances of Nazi belief incorporating Christianity “blasphemy” (542).

It is negative about the Soviet Union and states that its implosion “signaled ‘a new birth of freedom’ for many oppressed peoples” (601) and describes the United Nations as weak but a body that “has enjoyed some limited success” in its early years (607-8). However, it criticizes George H. W. Bush for being too optimistic about creating global peace, a goal that cannot be attained in a sinful world (611-2). Its coverage of the civil rights movement is minimal although it does note that “African Americans made enormous gains in politics and society” (614). It also criticized the continued presence of liberal theology in contemporary Christianity, but it praised Vatican II for creating some openness between Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Eastern Orthodox although it says that such efforts did not address their fundamental theological differences (610-1). It is fairly positive about Ronald Reagan although it notes the deficit spending that occurred during his administration. It also says that “the Reagan-Bush years had not seen a remarkable improvement in American morals” (614) and notes that “The murder of unborn children through abortion has become socially acceptable. Homosexuals and lesbians militantly seek respectability. Many people seek to escape from their own problems and the problems of society around them by using alcohol and drugs” (634). Ending with the 1992 election, it does not discuss the Clinton Administration. In the final chapter “Lessons of History,” the book reiterates its basic viewpoint and stresses the importance of faith in Jesus for salvation. It concludes by asking, “When the book is closed on the history of the world, where will you be?” (641).

Lesha Myers: His California Story

My second textbook is a simpler text. *His California Story: In Christian Perspective* covers California history for grade school students.¹⁷ Lesha Myers, a homeschooling mother, administrator of an ISP in Concord, and someone whom I went to hear lecture when I was little, wrote the book informally through the help of friends and students.¹⁸ Its 282 pages are black and white with fairly large font, and the text was published privately through her ISP. It covers California from the indigenous people prior to European exploration up through the beginning of the 20th Century. Like the Bob Jones book, Myers speaks from an explicitly Evangelical view and regularly comments on how historical events hold up within that normative framework and sprinkles Bible verses throughout the book's margins to reinforce her points. She opens by calling history a "record of how God has dealt with people and nations in the past," laments the fact that history books are no longer Christian and that "educators have turned their backs on God," and explicitly distances herself from other current history books that "do not record a Christian world view." She also begins by saying that there are four main worldviews: "statism" (a belief that the "state determines what is right and what is wrong"); "humanism" (essentially moral relativism); "pantheism" (a belief that nature is God and thus "What is wrong is what changes nature"); and finally "Biblical," the "only correct" view. She periodically returns to this theme throughout the book to compare her view of history with these other groups.¹⁹

¹⁷ Lesha Myers, *His California Story: In Christian Perspective* (Concord, CA: Cameron Academy, 1995).

¹⁸ For more information on her ISP, Cameron Academy, go to its website at <<http://www.zwebpage.com/CameronAcademy/ourschool.htm>>.

¹⁹ All quotations in this paragraph have come from unnumbered pages at the beginning of the book.

She starts with a very critical assessment of Native Americans (whom she calls “Indians” throughout). The first chapter begins with Noah’s flood and the tower of Babel, from which some people came to California and became the Indians. The Indians stopped loving God and forgot about Noah. Since the “more they forgot God, the less civilized they became,” they lost Noah’s agricultural knowledge. However, they did remember some remnants of their origins since some of their myths somewhat parallel Genesis (3-5). She also explicitly distances herself from other textbooks by saying that “we are usually told that the Indians lived in harmony with their surroundings” and “exercised good stewardship over the land,” but she argues that they were instead simply primitive and underdeveloped (8). The reason for this is that since they were pantheists, they believed that they could not disrupt nature to make progress. Thus, the “Indians’ religion made innovation impossible” (24). Additionally, in Indians communities “old people and babies were routinely murdered and left to die so they would not have to be fed” (11). She also criticizes their rituals to “not offend” the spirits and observed that “How blessed we are to know that we do not have to appease our God” (15). The Indians were, in short, “a culture truly in need of the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ” (24).

However, while Bob Jones also emphasized intra-Christian division, Myers explicitly downplays it. When discussing Roman Catholic evangelism of the Indians, show notes that a “Protestant may cite the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism and wonder if the Indians were truly born again.” However, she responds that “Although they disagree on many teachings, Catholics and Protestants agree on the basic doctrines of Christianity as summarized in the Apostles’ Creed,” and thus Indians could be saved through Roman Catholicism. Nevertheless, while emphasizing Roman

Catholic-Protestant similarity, she takes the opportunity to contrast it with the liberal-conservative split within Christian churches: “Bible-believing Protestants have more in common with Catholics than they do with some Protestant groups who no longer teach” the tenets of the Apostles’ Creed (96-7).

As she turns to the explorers, she does offer some criticism of pre-Reformation Roman Catholicism, noting that the explorers and people at large did not have access to Bibles until “godly men, including Martin Luther, John Calvin, and William Tyndale, translated the Bible into [common] languages” (32). She then states that “Missionaries tried to protect the Indians from being mistreated” (37). She also is critical of the Aztecs for their brutality, and is generally positive about Hernando Cortes, stating that while “we cannot approve of all of Cortes’s deeds,” nevertheless, as with “Jonah at Nineveh, Cortes tried to persuade the Aztecs to repent of their sin” (38-9). She states that the numerous natural disasters that occurred during this time were God’s judgment on the Aztecs, and because of that and the Aztecs’ human sacrifice, the missionaries’ efforts washed away “the darkness that the Aztecs had brought to the land” (41).

She argues that sea voyages along California’s coast that did not notice the San Francisco Bay (52) and the Monterey Bay (72) were God’s will because he did not want them discovered yet. She also strongly praises the missions although she faults Spanish Roman Catholic culture for not instilling “the Christian principle of self-government according to God’s law” in the Indians due to the Spanish reliance on monarchy and Church hierarchy (126). Also, God “had not planned for [California] to remain a Spanish colony or a Mexican province” and guided it towards entering the United States (139).

He even prevented news of California's gold from spreading "until California was securely a territory of the freedom-loving Americans" (171-2).

In discussing the Gold Rush, Myers says that crime was low until "foreigners and other men arrived, who did not govern themselves according to the Bible" (185). In discussing the interaction between settlers and Indians, she said that there were four different views among the settlers. First, some people had "misplaced compassion" for them because of the collapse of their civilization. These people had a utopian view of the Indians and incorrectly thought that they had been prospering before the explorers came. Second was the federal government's view, which was that the Indians needed to be looked after and set up on reservations. Third was that of those who thought the Indians should be eliminated. "These men," she says, "were very, very wrong." The final and correct group, the Christians, thought that the Indians needed to repent so that their culture could be mended and thus flourish (214-5). She also notes that civilization especially helped the Indian women who were often "little more than drudges" in their own culture (218).

As she moves into the end of the book, she discusses early 20th Century environmental controversies, contrasting pantheistic "preservationism" (a belief that nature should not be changed) with Biblical "conservationism" (a belief that "God's gifts of nature are for man's benefit, to be used for God's glory; however, they should not be wasted or destroyed"). She criticizes both the early and current Sierra Club for holding the former view and thus worshiping nature rather than God (249-51). She also argues that pantheism is hurting current progress in California: "the pantheistic world view is preventing many changes from taking place" (269). At the end, she says that now that the

reader has learned about God’s work in California history, “My prayer for all of you who read this book is that your faith was increased.” She then says, “Help California to receive God’s blessing so that when another book is written about California history, many years from now, people will admire the faithfulness of the Christians (you!) who continued His California story” (271).

A Beka: Creation Science

My third textbook is from A Beka Book, the publishing arm of the conservative Florida school Pensacola Christian College.²⁰ The book, *Science: Order & Reality*, is a Seventh Grade science book.²¹ The 508-page text has fairly large font (probably around twelve points) and is regularly interspersed with color illustrations, including diagrams, charts, pictures, and quotations. It also comes from an explicitly Evangelical perspective. However, more so than in the previous books, the presence of Christianity is very modular. The large majority of the book is effectively secular, teaching about botany, human biology, chemistry, physics, weather, and other standard scientific areas and questions. Periodically, the text emphasizes God’s role as Creator by pointing out useful mechanisms that he built into physical reality. For instance, it notes that God creatively made seeds (37), “designed your body to automatically repair itself without having to ‘shut down’ any of its vital functions” (79), and made ice form on the top of lakes instead

²⁰ For more information on A Beka Book see <<http://www.abeka.com>>. To see their section on homeschooling resources, go to <<http://www.abeka.com/OurHomeSchoolOptions.html>>. They also sell to larger Christian schools. The College’s website is <<http://www.pcci.edu>>. It states that they affirm “that God created the universe in six literal days” and also, presumably to distance themselves from the high-profile charismatic Christian movement also occurring in Pensacola, request “that students who are a part of the modern-day tongues movement should seek their college education elsewhere as they would not be allowed to participate in or promote any charismatic activities.” They also do “not believe that God pre-lects persons to heaven or hell” and use the KJV in their instruction. See <<http://www.pcci.edu/GeneralInfo/ArticlesofFaith.html>>.

²¹ Laurel Kicks et al., *Science: Order & Reality* (Pensacola, FL: A Beka Book, 1993).

of the bottom so that fish would not die (132). Also, when discussing destructive insects, it notes that someday “nature will be restored to its original condition. Christians all around the world, as well as all of nature, eagerly await that day” (465). However, other than such remarks and a rejection of global warming (166-7), the bulk of the book is non-controversial.

The main exception to this is human origins, which comprises a section toward the book’s end. It sets the stage by describing the Reformation as a critical time of scientific progress because the “main reason for the increased development of science was the return to the Bible” in the 16th Century (354). The book argues that establishing the Bible as the center of scientific research is critical and notes several instances in which the Bible stated a scientific fact that was only proven much later. For instance, Job said that God “hangeth the earth upon nothing” in Job 26:7 while Greeks believed that Atlas held the earth and Hindus believed that it was supported by giant elephants. Thus, while “Job was clearly not in step with the accepted science of his time, his inspired description of the earth was scientifically correct” (355). It also provides a chart of over a dozen similar passages, including a revelation that “Ocean currents flow through the sea” from Psalms 8:8 and “Stars differ in magnitude” from 1 Corinthians 15:41 (357). In addition to these revealed scientific truths, people “found in the Bible a reasonable God Who set up a reasonable, orderly universe” that lent itself to rational scientific inquiry (356-9). Thus, with its emphasis on reason and God, “Modern science is built on Biblical principles” (356).²² Unlike the Bob Jones book, this text restrains itself from strong anti-Roman Catholic remarks although it does note that as the Reformation and subsequent scientific discoveries spread, “the false ideas of medieval leaders were put aside” (358).

²² As in other quotations from this book, I have removed the original bold and italics.

However, the book argues that the great scientific advancements of the Reformation were curtailed as it lost the real meaning of life by rejecting God and turning to “materialism,” the belief that there are “no spiritual forces at work” and thus humans are “simply a machine” (368-9). This view, it argues, leads to purposelessness and decay. The book is particularly critical of Charles Darwin, whose life it describes in some detail. It notes that while as a child he was “well liked,” he “was often scolded for telling lies and for daydreaming.” Darwin “did not... possess the intellectual gifts that characterized the founders of modern science” and did poorly in college. They quote him as saying that as a youth, “I was considered by all my masters and by my father as a very ordinary boy... rather below the common standard in intellect” and that the “three years which I spent at Cambridge were wasted.” Thus Darwin was not good at mathematics, making him “lacking in the chief tool of the great scientists.” It does note, however, that “he was well equipped” as “a naturalist” and that some of his non-evolutionary discoveries “alone probably would have made him famous” (370).

Nevertheless, the book affirms that his evolutionary theory was wrong and led to decay because of its rejection of God. His belief “was joyfully received by people who preferred to keep the Bible from controlling their lives” (371), and it notes that Darwin himself

lost all interest in the higher things of life—the things about man that can only be explained by his being a creature made in the image of God. He lost his love for poetry, music, and literature, and, having separated himself from God, he could not enjoy a personal relationship with his Creator. (373)

To emphasize its message of life’s meaninglessness without God, the book has cartoons throughout this section that contrast creationism and evolutionism. For instance, on one

fossils date the rocks? That sounds like thinking in a circle to me!” The professor meanwhile is depicted with crossed arms, steam coming out of his head, and saying “Hmph!” (388). The book concludes the subsection by arguing that our knowledge of genetics and reproduction shows that species cannot change into other species (391-2).

In contrast to evolutionism, it argues that many major scientists have been creationists. It even provides a two-page chart of such scientists, including Louis Pasteur, Isaac Newton, Francis Bacon, Samuel F. B. Morse, Robert Boyle, Leonardo da Vinci, Johannes Kepler, and numerous others (366-7). It also says that the Bible has been substantiated as much as science can substantiate it and is necessary for the scientist since it “contains information that he cannot learn from studying nature” since only God was around when he created the world (368). Thus, it “is important to understand that evolution is not a science; it is a faith.” However, the “Bible confirms what is already obvious from the design we see in the world around us: the God of eternal power created the universe” (368-9).

Section 3: Interviews with Local Homeschoolers

With these textbooks as a backdrop depicting some of the belief and argumentation that circulates in (at least) the Protestant homeschooling circles with which I am familiar, I turn now to five interviews that I conducted with people connected to Live Oak Academy, my family’s cooperative that I discussed above. While Live Oak is largely Protestant (including everyone I interviewed), it states in its Confession of Faith that it “is not our goal, as a classical co-operative school, to further the doctrinal conflicts

that divide Protestant from Roman Catholic, or Eastern Orthodox from Western Christians” and thus simply uses the Nicene Creed as its doctrinal statement. Instructors must support the Creed but students are only encouraged to do so.²³ Everyone I interviewed either I already knew or someone in my immediate family knew. I interviewed them all over the phone after receiving their consent to do so, and my questions focused on inter- and intra-faith issues and the human origins debate including their own beliefs, what they taught, what curricula they liked, and how they perceived the current state of these issues.

Libby Mayer is both a mother and a literature and American history teacher at Live Oak for fifth and sixth graders. She stressed that she tries to convey major historical events and leaves more nuanced issues (like the historical tension between religious groups or current religious conflict) for more advanced classes. She does emphasize the First and Second Great Awakening and discusses evangelism to the Native Americans and Mayan human sacrifice, yet she also presents immigration and America’s multicultural fabric positively. One of her textbooks is from A Beka, but she also uses a secular one and feels that it is inappropriate to seek out opportunities to criticize other religious groups. She would welcome Roman Catholics joining Live Oak and was unsure why they do not. However, she did recall ordering Roman Catholic curriculum once and being surprised to see that in an accompanying pamphlet, the publisher stressed the need to have exclusively Roman Catholic schools. She thus wondered if some Roman Catholic homeschoolers were reluctant to integrate with Protestants.

Jean Cherniss is also a mother and history teacher to pre-high schoolers. Her classes include world history for second, third, and part of fourth grade; California

²³ For the full Confession of Faith, see <<http://liveoakacademy.org/about/confessionoffaith.html>>.

history for the remaining half of fourth; American history in fifth and sixth; and world history in seventh and eighth. She also said that she keeps to the basics and does not get into extremely nuanced material. On the subject of religious dialogue, she said that she discusses the conquistadors but expresses that they were motivated more by conquest than evangelism. In class, she ties the conquistadors' behavior into the daily lives of her students to show that they are much better off to evangelize through friendship than through force. She also said that it is important to be critical of some historical events, including elements of Roman Catholicism prior to the Reformation. In class, she discusses the difference between a "cultural" and a "devout" Roman Catholic, the former going to church as part of family tradition and the later doing so from the heart. She said that she thinks that the Roman Catholic sacramental system makes them more susceptible to having "cultural" members, but she also felt that there can be "cultural" Protestants too. She said that she would welcome more Roman Catholics to Live Oak and noted that there are some Orthodox there. However, she thought that the reason that Live Oak is fairly segregated is that families come to it through their larger social network of church or other homeschooling groups, like the NCFCA, and thus are already fairly segregated. For her textbooks, she uses A Beka for fifth and sixth grade but secular books for the other years. She noted that all textbooks have a bias, and she tries to make her students realize this.

Another history instructor is John Rose, a father of several Live Oak students, who teaches a two-year course on Western civilization entitled "Intellectual History" to high schoolers at Live Oak. His goal is to open the students' minds and develop their critical thinking skills and thus exposes them to diverse authors and views. His readings

include Plato, Augustine, Athanasius, Boethius, Benedict, Dante, C. S. Lewis, T. S. Eliot, and several others. He noted that if you stacked all of his course's books for both years, they would be several feet high. There are about eight students in his class at any given time, and while some of them have come from an Eastern Orthodox or strong Calvinist background, he has never really seen much conflict between the students in class along denominational lines although he said that students certainly bring their family influences into class. Some of his students have told him that the course has helped to mold their theological views, but he said that he has never known any of his students to become significantly more liberal as a result.

He also teaches an earth science course. He personally believes that Genesis 1 need not be viewed literally, believes that an old earth is likely, and is open to the idea of pre-human entities that God ensouled although he also believes that the Fall was in some sense a distinct historical event. He believes that intelligent design has some strength and feels that academia has rushed too quickly to explain biological complexity. Overall, he believes that God is behind both the Bible and the natural world and that apparent discrepancies between them merely indicate a shortcoming in man's knowledge. He also feels that the debate between creationism, intelligent design, and full evolutionism has become incredibly bitter and personal. In all, he devotes about four weeks of the thirty-week course to human origins issues. He uses a Bob Jones textbook because he thinks that they do a good job overall, but he finds the book too caustic and has to supplement it with evolutionist readings. He also said that he has never run into any trouble because of their interracial dating controversy. The class size is about sixteen, and he said that while some students come from a full creationist family background, there have generally not

been problems with presenting other beliefs. Like in his Western civilization course, he tries to introduce multiple viewpoints and develop their critical thinking skills.

Another science instructor, Jacintha Kompella, teaches a physical science course for ninth through twelfth graders. The only person whom I interviewed who does not homeschool her own children, she grew up as a Roman Catholic in India and then moved to the United States where she married and now has two children. She converted to Protestantism and was asked to teach at Live Oak through a friend at her church. An engineer who has taught at community colleges and San Diego State, she believes in the historical Adam and Eve but is inclined to believe in an old earth. She also pointed out that she was surprised when she came to the United States to see how significant of an issue human origins was among American Christians. Christians in India, she said, had not discussed it as much. She uses secular textbooks at Live Oak and tries to keep her students open minded and welcomes multiple points of view. Since Live Oak meets at a church, there are posters on the walls in the classrooms, and she recalled one time when a student pointed out a poster that criticized the big bang. This triggered a debate in class. She also thought that people should not be too polemical, and she especially worries about doing so around children during their formative years. However, she said that she admires homeschooled students and thinks that while they will need to grow as they enter college and interact with new people, most will do so successfully.

Stacy Landgraf, a human biology major from Stanford who has children at Live Oak, believes that all animal species alive today are distinct and do not share a common ancestry and believes in the historical Adam and Eve. She uses A Beka books for some of her science classes at home because she likes the way they organize their material and

also because they explicitly revere God. She observed that historically many scientists have been Christians, and she views evolutionism as a departure from sound scientific methods. She became a Christian during her senior year at Stanford and then started to reevaluate evolution, and she looks back with amazement at how close-minded some of her professors were. Evolutionism, she now thinks, itself was treated as a type of religion that was too quickly adopted by its supporters.

Overall, a couple themes stand out to me from these interviews. First, everyone emphasized their Christianity over their additional sub-Christian affiliations. While I only fully discussed intra-faith issues with the history instructors, no one expressed a desire for Like Oak to be exclusively Protestant. Meanwhile, there was also some diversity on the human origins issue. Nevertheless, I think it does speak to a real phenomenon in Protestant homeschooling (and Evangelicalism as a whole): people are very committed to their overarching Christian faith and emphasize it, but when one gets into the details of their relationship with non-Protestant Christians and specific views about human origins, there is more diversity than one might think.

Conclusion

This has not been an account of the merits of Protestant homeschooling or the overall views of Protestant homeschoolers. If you ever perform field research on them, remember to look for their other sides too: their emphasis on family values, commitment to education, concern for a morally strong society, and so forth. Many of these families are good, strong families that face a lot of outside pressure and have found a way that

they feel lets them cope with it. Whether they have chosen wisely is sometimes difficult to say. After years as a part of the homeschooling and Evangelical communities, I have come away with a nuanced perspective, and I encourage you to develop one too.

Nevertheless, the views expressed in this report are certainly ones quite different from any that we commonly hear in a classroom here at Santa Clara. To anyone who has had minimal exposure to Evangelicalism, some of the statements surely seemed offensive and bizarre. Still, I can say from experience that many of them are powerful and appealing from an insider's perspective. However, as the textbooks and interviews themselves show, even insiders come to different personal conclusions and add their own nuances. Homeschoolers, like everyone else, are individual people with their own unique views.

Finally, as I conclude, I want to make a few general observations based on my own experience and my analysis above. First, the wounds and the legacy of the Reformation are still very real for some Protestants. The current emphasis on a homogenous Religious Right can be misplaced. As conservative Protestants emphasize biblical inerrancy, they are not just combating secular forces but also very consciously other Christians such as Roman Catholics, even (and perhaps especially) conservative Roman Catholics. The concept of works verses faith is also very real for conservative Protestants. While they may have a reputation for pushing “works”—chastity, abstention from non-heterosexual practices, etc.—from their perspective, they are doing just the opposite: they are opposed to overly formulaic and ritualistic expressions of religion, excessively iconic practices, and any attitude that elevates the doing of good deeds above the faith that should be behind them. Whether or not these beliefs seems consistent with

their actual practice, for them salvation by faith alone and not works remains a critical issue.

Second, conservative Protestants greatly fear anti-religious secularism. Whether justified or not (and I personally tend to think they are justified), they believe that if a society functionally rejects God, that society will demonstrably decay. Thus they create enclaves for themselves where God is still valued so that they themselves can live in security. Hence the sectarian spirit of these Protestant colleges and publishing houses described above and of these Protestant textbooks seeking to instill a distinctly Protestant history, culture, and identity in students. Hence also, I would argue, homeschooling itself.

Third, the biology of human origins has been caught in the middle of a much larger battle. This debate is fundamentally not about biology; it is about the Bible. Full creationists are not interested in creationism because, say, evolutionists are preventing a key development in heart transplant surgery or cancer research. As the textbooks above very explicitly said over and over again, the real threat of evolution is to the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy. To declare a portion of the Bible to be in error (no matter how small the portion) is a red line that if breached would leave some in the Evangelical community absolutely devastated.

Fourth and finally, the good news in all of this is that at the individual level, there is more nuance than these texts may show. Homeschoolers may buy Bob Jones or A Beka because they feel more comfortable using Protestant textbooks, but they do not necessarily accept or even pay attention to all of the rhetoric. I should reiterate that the homeschoolers whom I know also value having critical thinking skills, being well read, and participating in a comprehensive education. That, after all, is a major reason why

many of them are going to so much trouble to take their children out of conventional education. Thus, because they value learning, there is hope for dialogue, understanding, and maybe even compromise if both sides come together without polemics and with a willingness to be educated by each other.