

AlbertMohler.com

Strange Signs in a Dark Sky: Troubling Developments

With increasing regularity, ominous glimpses of America's possible future appear on the cultural horizon. Like signal flares across the sky, these events and issues point to larger developments and fundamental shifts in the culture. They should not pass without notice.

Wednesday, September 29, 2004

With increasing regularity, ominous glimpses of America's possible future appear on the cultural horizon. Like signal flares across the sky, these events and issues point to larger developments and fundamental shifts in the culture. They should not pass without notice.

A seemingly innocuous event in Muskegon County, Michigan reveals the contours of blatant bias against America's homeschooling parents. According to press reports, the Muskegon Area Intermediate School District joined with Muskegon County Emergency Services in planning for a "mock terrorism drill" intended as a training exercise for the area's emergency personnel and community leaders.

The event included dozens of middle and high school students from area schools, as well as law enforcement officials, social service agencies, fire departments, and local hospitals. As the announcement for the event stated, "Between 200 and 300 people will observe the exercise, including school bus drivers, school administrators, emergency personnel and evaluators from agencies across the state who will provide feedback." Similar events have been scheduled all over the country, as municipal governments have responded to the challenge of homeland security. The drill in itself represented no cause for alarm. But an exercise designed to enhance homeland security became an unprovoked attack upon the nation's homeschoolers.

As is customarily the case, the drill included a scenario intended to explain the nature, cause, and strategy of a terrorist attack. Take a look at what Muskegon area officials cooked up as the scenario for this drill: "The exercise will simulate an attack by a fictitious radical group called Wackos Against Schools and Education who believe everyone should be homeschooled. Under the scenario, a bomb is placed on the bus and is detonated while the bus is traveling on Durham, causing the bus to land on its side and fill with smoke."

In other words, an official government drill, funded with taxpayer dollars, became a slanderous attack on homeschoolers, picturing "Wackos Against School and Education" as an extremist group ready to launch a terrorist attack upon innocent Americans.

According to the Detroit Free Press, the drill's scenario caused no small amount of controversy in Michigan. Beyond local concern, homeschooling advocates quickly protested the obvious bigotry in the fictitious scenario.

"Homeschoolers have never been accused of violence against any school," said Chris Klicka, senior counsel for the Home School Legal Defense Association, located in Purcellville, Virginia. Klicka described the decision to identify the fictitious terrorist group as an organization of homeschoolers as "outlandish." Mike Smith, also of the HSLDA, responded: "It's preposterous, basically. It's so beyond the pale of any credibility that it's very upsetting, but in some ways it's humorous."

The humor was lost on many homeschooling parents and advocates, who were outraged that a government-funded event could be designed at the expense of parents who educate their own children.

Daniel Stout, an official with Muskegon County Emergency Services, accepted responsibility for the scenario and

issued a letter of apology. Insisting that his fictional group of homeschoolers “was not meant to offend any home-school students,” he went on to argue that his fictional scenario “has nothing to do with any home-school population.” Scrambling to recover credibility for his department, Stout added, “Home-school students and former students are a very important part of our nation. This scenario will not be used again.”

In earlier reports, Stout had simply responded, “That’s just what I decided to use. It may have been a poor choice, but that’s what was used.”

In the end, officials went ahead with the drill and later judged the exercise a success. And of course the drill would have been commendable in virtually every way, had officials declined to use the event as an opportunity to slam homeschooling parents.

Imagine the outcry if Muskegon County Emergency Services had based its scenario on an attack by American Muslims. What if the fictitious terrorist organization had been identified as Buddhists, or a brigade of crazed public school teachers? Controversy would have flooded the airwaves, and school officials would have changed the character of the scenario before the event took place, rather than offering a too-little-too-late apology after the fact.

Homeschooling is one of America’s fastest-growing movements, with thousands of parents choosing to educate their own children in all fifty states. As a matter of fact, the homeschooling option has become very popular among Christian parents—a trend that is likely only to increase in years ahead.

The incident in Muskegon County, Michigan points to a larger social phenomenon. Homeschoolers have become a safe target for ridicule and hyperbolic fantasy. Should we be surprised?

Another bombshell development appeared in Tuesday’s edition of *The New York Times*. An advertisement placed by the liberal activist group MoveOn.org criticized what it claims are reports favoring conservatives released by the Gallup organization. The ad, headlined “Gallup-ing to the Right,” accused pollster George Gallup, Jr. of going “out on a limb with pro-Bush findings.”

MoveOn did not charge the Gallup organization with falsifying information, but only with “refusing to fix a longstanding problem with their likely voter methodology.” By basing their predictions on assumptions that Republican voter turnout will exceed that of the Democrats, the Gallup poll, charged MoveOn, misrepresents the current standing of the two major presidential candidates. As MoveOn.org claimed, “This is more than just a numbers game. Poll results profoundly affect a campaign’s news coverage as well as the public’s perception of the candidates.”

Criticism of the Gallup poll is hardly new, and competing political campaigns are likely to level their guns at polling organizations from time to time. What makes MoveOn.org’s attack significant is the advertisement’s attack on George Gallup, Jr.—simply for being a Christian.

Look carefully at the advertisement’s wording: “George Gallup, Jr., son of the poll’s founder, was the longtime head of the company and now directs its non-profit research center. Why hasn’t he pushed for an update of the company’s likely voter modeling, which his own father pioneered in the 1950s? Gallup, who is a devout evangelical Christian, has been quoted as calling his polling ‘a kind of ministry.’ And a few months ago, he said ‘the most profound purpose of polls is to see how people are responding to God.’”

The MoveOn.org advertisement is actually a breathtaking example of anti-Christian bias. This particular development also underlines the changed character of America’s political debate. Language like this would have been virtually inconceivable even in recent election cycles. Only now do we see a prominent political interest group of the Left criticizing a major figure with a polling organization for being “a devout evangelical Christian.” George Gallup, Jr. is lampooned for considering his work “a kind of ministry.”

Clearly, the authors of this advertisement expect members of the cultural elite to recoil in horror when Gallup is identified as an evangelical Christian. In a very real sense, this ad seeks to “out” George Gallup, Jr. as a believer in Christ. Armed with this information, MoveOn.org’s constituency will presumably discount anything George Gallup, Jr. or his organization may have to say. The very fact that he is an evangelical Christian, described as devout in his faith, is enough to brand him as an ideological zealot who has no business involving himself with the American political process.

America now faces an increasingly secular future, and incidents like these point to the gravity of the threat now faced by those who hold fast to evangelical Christianity, its worldview, and its system of truth. In due time, believers in various fields of service should expect to be “outed” by the secular elite. When the time comes, count it an honor. In the meantime, take a look at these incidents and gain a picture of what we are up against.

Content Copyright © 2002-2010, R. Albert Mohler, Jr.