

BOOKS BOOKS BOOKS BOOKS

SCHOOLING CHRISTIANS: "HOLY EXPERIMENTS" IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

Stanley Hauerwas and John J.
Westerhoff, eds.

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans,
1992. Paper, xii + 281 pages, \$22.95.

Schooling Christians represents a developing genre of books by evangelicals that challenge many of the basic presuppositions that undergird modern culture. These books have as their aim the revitalizing of Christian schooling. This volume, along with one edited by George M. Marsden and Bradley J. Longfield (*The Secularization of the Academy*, Oxford, 1992), contends that the Enlightenment vision of neutrality in the academic marketplace is "an illusion" (p. 28). It also states forcefully that "what is really dangerous about liberalism and other forms of post-traditionalism is that they have no critical awareness of their presumptions and no sense of the power . . . of those presumptions" (p. 125). In effect, the argument runs, Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment presuppositions have crowded Christianity out of modern schooling by asserting that it is not ideologically neutral, while failing to see that neither liberalism nor any other perspective is neutral.

A second building block undergirding *Schooling Christians* and other books of its genre is that pluralism is a reality that modern culture still has not faced. Nicolas Wolterstorff in the volume's first chapter argues that we need to move beyond the melting pot model of modern American culture to a model built upon the conception of a "nation of nations" (p. 28).

The authors believe that even though ideological pluralism is a cultural reality, its positive potential is not being realized because one element (i.e., liberalism) has gained con-

trol of schooling, based on the illusions of neutrality and the melting pot.

The problem inherent in that situation for Christian schooling, the general drift of the book argues, is that "secularized" schooling has led to the lowest common denominator in teaching belief and moral value. The result has been not only a lessening of the nation's moral fiber, but also an actual discrimination against Christianity and its values and insights in the academic marketplace.

The point of *Christian Schooling*, of course, is not merely to identify the problem, but to suggest solutions. In that area the authors agree that the total educational environment needs to become more Christian in order to nurture young Christians. However, the authors suggest different ways to solve the problem. The options run from equal support of Christian alternatives within the public system to the establishment of parochial schools that would not withdraw from the larger culture.

The significance of *Christian Schooling* lies not as much in its solutions as in its informed and sophisticated discussion of the multiple issues that must be faced by Christians in modern culture. As such, the book makes a major contribution to the church as it struggles with one of its most important tasks—transmitting its conception of truth, reality, and values to the coming generations.—
George R. Knight.

Dr. George R. Knight is Professor of Church History at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. He has authored or edited a number of books and articles on Adventist education.

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BECOMING A CATECHIST: WAYS TO OUT- FOX TEENAGE SKEPTICISM

William J.
O'Malley

Mahwah, New
Jersey: Paulist
Press, 1992.

Paper, 189 pages,
\$9.95.

Targeted for high school Bible teachers, O'Malley's latest book treats the reader to a private journey into the cumulative experiences of a seasoned religious educator (catechist). Realism permeates the book as O'Malley knowingly slices through the best defenses conjured by adolescents who refuse conversion. Key insights for teachers include lowering one's expectations, preparing the soil rather than naively thinking students are eager to drink from your well, challenging and maintaining epistemology, and arguing from reason rather than church authority.

"Understanding" forms the reference point for the chapters, beginning with "Understanding Understanding" and moving to understanding God, oneself, Scripture, Jesus, suffering, morality, love, the church, praying, and the sacraments. The author's unique perspectives stream through each chapter, creating a prism virtually any reader can appreciate, selecting the hues most needed for his or her own situation. Examples that make the book a bargain include a basic reasoning process, an explanation of the evolution/creation choice, morality in contrast to Christianity, and the religious educator's role as a salesperson.

The writing style is straight-forward, engaging, one-to-one with a sprinkling of choice words that zing the reader. O'Malley doesn't mind being crass occasionally if it gets the

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point across, a technique no doubt mastered through the years with teens.

Any beginning Bible teacher could save at least a decade from the school of hard knocks by reading this work. Although the author's beliefs and perspectives may not completely resonate with each religious educator, they are well thought out and refined through the crucible of two-plus decades of teaching adolescents.

Any rose-tinted glasses will be thoroughly smashed after this realistic appraisal of adolescent religious education,

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especially for those who assume that students are as eager as teachers to engage in the educational process, or for those who assume that students in a Christian school are converted or even religious. But this realism is also the Achilles' heel of the book. Idealism may be naive, but realism rarely engenders hope.

It's natural for the distance between teacher and student to increase not only because of age, but with a teacher's continued development in contrast to another batch of freshmen each year. At times the author seems frustrated that adolescents don't think along the same lines as graduate students. It's true that the media hardly encourage literacy or reasoned thought, but Piaget's descriptions of cognitive development suggest a freshness for even the ability to utilize rational thought during the high school years. And students often seek independence by challenging authority rather than learning information.

For some reason O'Malley presents Kohlberg's stages of moral development from a Freudian perspective when presenting "Understanding Oneself," but Kohlberg goes unmentioned in the chapter "Understanding Morality," as the author suggests beating fear-based morality with relational-based morality. That's quite a leap in contrast to the stage development presented by Kohlberg.

Regardless of these minor items, any Bible teacher who goes without imbibing this volume will learn how to reach religiously hardened young people the old-fashioned way—lots of time and hard knocks—when significant experience was available in less than 200 pages.—Steve Case. ✉

Dr. Steve Case has been a religious educator in both school and church settings. Currently he is president of Piece of the Pie Ministries, and speaks for youth events and training seminars. He writes from Sacramento, California.

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