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Jeynes, William, & Martinez, Enedina. (Eds.). (2007). *Christianity, Education, and Modern Society*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc.

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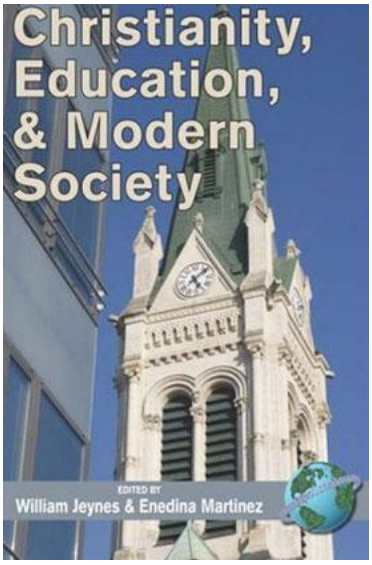
I feel compelled to begin with a disclaimer. I stopped attending evangelical churches when Jerry Falwell began using his "Moral Majority" to conflate evangelical Christianity with conservative political ideology. More than 20 years later I have been working with issues around religion in U.S. schools. When the chance came to review the book, *Christianity, Education, and Modern Society*, I jumped at it, hoping to find in its pages a balanced and considered examination of Christianity in modern society and schools.



After finishing the book, my reaction was such that I wondered if I should write the review. I decided to write because I believe this book would be of interest to those who seek some academic basis for conservative Christian views on modern society and to those who seek to better understand such views. And my identities as one who regularly attends church and as an academic interested in democratic citizenship may lend a particular salience to what I have to say.

The following quotation from the introduction sums up concisely *Christianity, Education, and Modern Society*: "The issues that these authors address in this book are some of the most salient in American society. It is imperative that Americans today address these issues and establish an appropriate worldview" (p. xi). The chapters in this text often address issues that are indeed important to life in the United States. And with a few exceptions the authors are set on convincing readers that there is a single, "appropriate" view on any given question.

The text is organized in four parts, 1) The need for education to return to its Christian roots, 2) Issues and practices confronting Christians in modern society, 3) Creationism and Darwinism, and 4) Christian solutions to social problems and

educational challenges. In this review I summarize each section before providing a general critique of the scholarship and arguments of the text.

William Jeynes

The first section of the book claims that America is going to hell in a hand basket and the solution lies in returning to the days when the hegemony of Protestant Christianity was unquestioned in public schools. In Chapter one, William Jeynes argues that social problems in America took off in 1963, the year that Bible reading and prayer in schools were declared unconstitutional. Jeynes contends that this relationship is causal—forbidding prayer and Bible reading brought about the removal of Christianity from the schools and that resulted in a removal of moral education, causing the increase in school shootings, violence against teachers, and a general moral decay of American society. He uses this cause and effect relationship to suggest that moral (i.e. religious) education and prayer need to be returned to the public schools.

In chapter two, Enedina Martinez examines the writings of 17th century Czech religious and education writer John Amos Comenius and 18th century Methodist founding figure, John Wesley. Martinez uses the philosophies of these religious leaders from the past to argue for a modern Christian education for all students—an education integrating "morals, virtues, and ethics across the curriculum" (p. 63). Based in the work of these thinkers, she asserts that the purpose of education is to remedy the sinful state in which individuals find themselves. Thus, education must be "founded on the grace of God" (p. viii).

Chapter three blames Dewey for the demise of the classical Christian model of education in the United States. The move away from religion is, according to this argument, a move away from morality in education. The author contends that the virtues of Christian education produced, "the kind of citizen envisioned by the American Founders. It is the kind of mind that created the best in Western culture" (p. 87). A return to a form of public Christian education is the way that American culture might be transformed.

Part Two tackles a variety of education-related issues. This section begins with a chapter examining Elk Grove Unified School District v. Newdow, the 2004 Supreme Court case that considered Michael Newdow's contention that the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance violate the establishment clause of the U.S. Constitution. After examining the arguments and the decision, the author reflects on the negative consequences of a "radical secularism" that would remove God entirely from the public square.

Fred W. Beuttier's chapter considers civic education from a conservative Christian perspective, concluding that the Center for Civic Education's We the People curriculum has some minor but important errors when it comes to church-state issues. Beuttier would place a greater stress on limiting the state's "monopolies of truth" (p. 115) by emphasizing religious freedom and limited government to a greater degree. He would shift the current focus in We the People away from the need to separate religion from government.

James M. M. Hartwick's chapter examines the role of religion and prayer in the lives of public school teachers in his Wisconsin survey. The teachers in Hartwick's sample are quite religious and they view their religious beliefs as important and helpful in their professional lives. Hartwick suggests that voluntary spiritual education courses would be appropriate for both pre-service and in-service teachers as would educational retreats that focus on religion and spirituality. He advocates for the creation of sacred spaces inside of schools.

In Part Three, an evangelical Christian perspective on evolution is rendered. The three chapters in this part contend that 1) evolution cannot address the question of the origin of the universe because the question is a historical one, not a scientific (i.e., replicable) one; 2) evolutionary theories are inherently racist and contribute to institutionalized racism in American society; and 3) the scientific evidence about the earth's age may be a stumbling block to the acceptance of Christianity by some. But, the scientific evidence may not in fact conflict with literal teachings of the Bible.

Part Four makes the case for Christianity as a social good. In this section, the authors present a variety of research suggesting that religion reduces student participation in 'at risk' behavior and increases their chances of success in school. In these chapters we learn that students attending private and Christian schools report a slight reduction in some risk behavior but these reductions are rarely statistically significant. The research suggests that the family has a greater influence in this area than do schools. We learn that students who profess some measure of faith tend to commit fewer crimes, and that religiosity seemed to correlate positively with academic achievement among a sample of Puerto Rican students.

I found most credible the research included in parts two (Issues and practices confronting Christians in modern society) and four (Christian solutions to social problems and educational challenges). These sections tend to report research undertaken around issues of particular interest to conservative Christians (e.g. the impact of a private school education on the "at-risk behavior" of students). In general, the articles in these sections appear to report findings fully and are careful not to overreach as they consider the implications of their findings.

One interesting example is James M. M. Hartwick's chapter on the religious and prayer lives of public school teachers. Hartwick's sample is made up of public school teachers from Wisconsin, but he is careful to connect the findings of his survey to similar surveys of the general population. Hartwick's results suggest that teachers are far from irreverent, irreligious individuals working at cross purposes with religion. Instead, 88.3% of the teachers in Hartwick's study reported that they identify as Christian and 91.5% reported that they pray. The teachers report that prayer comforts them in difficult times, enhances their reflectivity, reduces their feelings of stress, and enhances their relationships with students. Hartwick calls for actions that are likely to be Constitutionally defensible (e.g., voluntary courses for teachers on the relationship between spirituality and education).

Many of the chapters in part four illustrate the good that come from students engaging in faith-based organizations outside of school. D. M. Carpenter II's chapter testing the influence of school type on risk behavior among Christian teens suggests that the type of school makes little difference in adolescent behavior. Johnson's chapter on youth crime and Antrop-González, Vélez, and Garrett's piece on religiosity and academic achievement among Puerto Rican students seem to mirror Shirley Brice-Heath's (Heath & McLaughlin, 1993)contention that voluntary programs outside of the school can have dramatic positive outcomes for youth. The research presented here tends to assume that positive findings come as a result of religion, failing to tease out how much of the positive can be attributed to the fact that the youth are engaged in voluntary programs beyond the school day.

Still, the articles in parts two and four appear generally more concerned with reporting their findings accurately than promoting a particular agenda. Sadly, this is not the case for many chapters in parts one and three.

Parts one and three contain chapters that are thoroughly agenda-driven. There is little question that the purpose of the editors is to challenge American culture from a conservative Christian perspective, especially as it relates to school prayer, evolution, and church-state separation. The editors write that no less is at stake than the "future of civilization" (p. xi). In their

acknowledgements the editors thank individuals and "our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (p. xiii). The religion in these chapters is always Christian (except when Islam is mentioned disparagingly as a religion of submission p. 118) and the Christianity is always conservative and evangelical. This emphasis on promoting a particular point of view (as opposed to considering multiple perspectives) enforces an ideology on each chapter that is unfortunate and unnecessary. That said, it is surprising (and refreshing) in this day and age of religious politics centered on attacking abortion and gay rights, that neither subject is even casually mentioned in the book.

The agenda of returning American schools and society to another time can result in analytic leaps that caused me to dismiss, rather than sympathize with this point of view. In the first chapter, William Jeynes argues for a return of a more explicitly Christian moral framework to schools. Jeynes contends that 1963 was a turning point for changes in the kinds of issues with which schools must deal. He makes the claim that, "juvenile crime skyrocketed after the Supreme Court removed the expression of prayer and Bible readings in public schools" (p. 19). While this claim may in fact be true, Jeynes creates a causal argument that the Supreme Court decisions actually caused the skyrocketing of juvenile crime. The impossibility of this claim should be clear to the reader of any introductory textbook in the social sciences—that two events coincide cannot be taken to mean that one caused the other without considerably more evidence. Yet, reading Jeynes, one might believe that the only things of import in 1963 were two Supreme Court cases. From the Cold War and the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, to the assassination of President Kennedy, to the struggle for civil rights legislation, 1963 was a part of a decade of sweeping cultural change that goes unmentioned lest it complicate what is presented as a straightforward and obvious argument.

In the name of an agenda, John Dewey gets caricatured. Dewey is cast as someone who did not believe in the importance of subject matter, a philosophy that fathered, "a prevailing relativism and individualism that, on the one hand, claims to allow free thinking among individuals while, on the other demands that a students affirm every new attack upon traditional and Christian culture" (p. 68). There is no question that Dewey argued for learning that considered the child not just the subject matter (Dewey, 1900/1990). However, Dewey argued that subject matter was important and that it needed to be meaningful to the learner (Provenzo, 2005). As presented, Dewey makes a convenient scapegoat for what's wrong with American education. But, the attacks have little basis in fact. Conservative stereotypes of Dewey stand in for scholarship.

Darwin and his followers do not fare much better. An interesting and provocative case is made in chapter eight that Darwin's theories were evoked in racist ways as they were applied to explaining the various types of human beings. So far, so good. Yet, the author takes his case too far. The fact that Darwin and others used evolution in the service of racism is interpreted to indicate that evolutionary theories are "inherently racist" (p. 197). The author contends that teaching the theory of evolution in schools, means that, "racism will be highly institutionalized in the way that the nation's children are instructed. It is largely for this reason that so many people are convinced that Whites are superior to African Americans on an intellectual level and African Americans are superior to White (sic) athletically…" (p. 196). Claiming that a system of belief has been used to accomplish racist ends does not mean that the system cannot be used for more egalitarian means or that a given theory is inherently racist. If that were the case Christianity would not fare much better than evolution. As the author correctly notes, the Bible was a source of argument for the abolitionists. But, the author ignores the fact that abolitionist had to use the Bible carefully because the Bible was also used to justify slavery (Finkelman, 2003; McKivigan & Snay, 1998). Supporters of slavery were aware that nowhere in the Bible is slavery critiqued while the New Testament book of First Peter instructs slaves to obey their masters. More recently the South African system of apartheid was based in part on a particular reading of the Noah story in the Old Testament. The author's own reasoning condemns his case—if using a system of belief to promote racism makes that system inherently racist, then Christianity must also be inherently racist. The data in the chapter is interesting and could be used to illustrate how both science and religion can be manipulated to fit the prejudices of the day—this seems to be a logical implication of the data

as it is presented. But, the apparent need to forward the argument that conservative Christianity is the solution to America's problems seems to get in the way of careful scholarship.

In a chapter that relies totally on Bible passages, Christopher Ullman writes that, "[e]very believer is endowed with a capacity for certainty …" (p. 264). Ullman's sentiment seems to permeate and ultimately undermine *Christianity, Education and Modern Society*. The book, taken as a whole, is long on certainty and short on humility. Claims are made that are academically unsupported and unsupportable. That people from other religious traditions and Christians of various stripes might adamantly disagree with the perspectives offered here is never entertained. This kind of certainty without humility is likely to convince only those who seek to have their own opinions and prejudices validated.

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About the Reviewer

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