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The Praeger Handbook of Faith-Based Schools in the United States, K-12

Thomas C. Hunt and James C. Carper, (Eds.)
Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 2012 (2 volumes)
583 pages, $173

Reviewed by Michael D. Waggoner, University of Northern Iowa

From the earliest settlements in 17th-century America, religion has been a significant aspect of schooling. Initially, schools were Protestant, though they evolved to accommodate the varying religious traditions of newer immigrants, mostly by establishing separately themed schools. There remains a thread of schooling in the United States that is specifically faith-based; its "market share" now hovers at approximately 8% of the school age population. This segment of the K–12 educational marketplace is heterogeneous, and data on it is sometimes difficult to find. For those reasons, this new two-volume work meets a need for anyone interested in the current landscape of faith-based education: from scholars of religion and education, to teachers, school administrators, board members, and parents.

In their 11th collaboration since 1984, Professors Thomas C. Hunt and James C. Carper give us a two-volume handbook reviewing the terrain of faith-based K–12 schools in the United States. This work comes just three years after their previous two-volume handbook, also from Praeger, on the broader subject of religion and education. The current offering is different in a few important respects. First, it focuses on K–12 religiously oriented schools. Second, it does not address higher education or religion and public schools, both of which receive attention in the prior two-volume work. Third, *The Praeger Handbook of Faith-Based Schools* addresses a wide range of topics in chapter form—49 in all, each with excellent references for further study—whereas the prior religion and education volumes were encyclopedic. The fourth and most important difference, in my view, is the concluding section, which comprises seven essays on major issues related to faith-based education. Regrettably, no such section existed in the prior religion and education volumes.

As suggested above, the literature in this area is fugitive, so it is rare to find such a range of topics in one place: everything from Amish schools to

the Zelman v. Simmons-Harris case of 2002 is represented in the *Handbook*. The editors have assembled an array of scholars for individual chapter contributions in their respective areas of expertise. Professors Hunt and Carper, both experienced scholars in this field, limit themselves to one chapter each and together provide an extensive and helpful introductory essay. Part I is 40% of the work—22 chapters devoted to Protestant schools including Amish, Mennonite, Calvinist, Episcopal, Evangelical, Lutheran, Seventh Day Adventist, and the Society of Friends. Part II reviews Jewish education in eight chapters that complete volume one. The second volume opens with Part III, nine chapters on Catholic education, with Part IV addressing Islamic Schools and Part V on Orthodox Schools. Part VI contains aforementioned seven essays addressing issues in faith-based schooling. A brief overview for each section would have been helpful in contextualizing the chapters that readers encounter therein. A list of contributors and a thorough index may be found at the end of volume two.

My scholarly interests range widely in the field of religion and education. I am not, however, Catholic and I am an advocate for public education. Consequently, I was expecting some "preaching to the choir" in these two volumes. There is, indeed, much here that will be well received by friends of faith-based education and helpful to furthering their aims. These volumes, however, are exceedingly even-handed in their treatment of the schools discussed and the issues that face them. These are well-told stories and carefully developed analyses of major religious traditions in the United States working to keep alive the visions they have for educating faithfully. As such, these volumes would be a valuable resource for any fair-minded reader, college or university library, or organization committed to keeping abreast of the issues in faith-based education.

Beyond the individual chapters detailing the specific experiences of Protestant, Jewish, Catholic, Muslim, or Orthodox schooling, a concluding section analyzes the issues facing faith-based education. The reader who works through the two volumes and brings that knowledge to bear on reading these concluding essays will be rewarded with having the data to illustrate the arguments in Part VI.

These seven essays provide a comprehensive analysis of the force field within which faith-based education must work: state and federal policy, politics, charter schools, school choice, and emphasis on outcomes—all underpinned by legal analyses at the federal and state levels (see the essay and appendices by Charles Russo and John Witte)—and considered in international

comparison in the essay by Charles Glenn. Although there is much of value in all the essays, I particularly appreciated two of these chapters. The first was Steven L. Jones's "Politics of Faith-Based Schooling," which analyzes Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant school contexts, identifying critics of faith-based schooling and their arguments in a fair manner that requires answers. The main long-standing criticism discussed is thus: How do faith-based schools contribute to the requirements of a liberal social order rather than foster a spirit of separatism? More recently, some legal theorists have explored yet another aspect of the equation: To what extent should the rights of children be recognized in relation to parental rights so that children may have a say in their own formation? Jones deftly addresses such criticisms in a nondefensive way that warrants consideration.

Similar in tone is David Sikkink's chapter on outcomes of faith-based schools." His role as principal investigator of the national Cardus Education Study of Catholic and Protestant Schools affords him special insight into this topic. Again, like Steven Jones, Professor Sikkink takes pains to present two sides of the argument about the value of faith-based schools as seen in outcomes in two sections of his chapter: "Why Faith-Based Schools Matter" and "Why Faith-Based Schools May Not Matter." He does carefully assert, however:

> [T]he weight of the evidence remains in favor of some religious school advantage in academic achievement, at least for some subjects and for most types of faith-based schools" and that "faith-based schools have neutral to positive effects on most dimensions of civic virtue and engagement. (p. 500)

Charles Glenn's concluding essay on faith-based education in international perspective offers a provocative comparison of the US context to other liberal democracies that point to the perennial complaint of disparity in funding public versus faith-based schools.

The mostly even-handed tone of these essays is a welcome counterpoint to more shrill screeds that can be heard at both political extremes. There is little question whether faith-based education will continue into the future; it has a long history and enduring champions. What form it will take in the future, however, remains a unknown. Homeschooling is on the rise. New charter schools are being formed in previously religious facilities (an increasing alternative to closing Catholic schools). Islamic schools are growing in

number. And the courts continue to hear cases related to faith-based education as issues are litigated. Hunt and Carper's latest contribution to the literature on religion and education can contribute a depth of knowledge and understanding regarding issues surrounding faith-based schools. It is well worth the study.

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