

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The New Religious Right: Piety, Patriotism, and Politics* by Walter H. Capps

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The New Religious Right: Piety, Patriotism, and Politics. By Walter H. Capps. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1990. 217 pp. \$27.95.

After a dozen or more years of televised political evangelism, it is difficult to say just what is still "new" about the Religious Right. More interesting is the movement's current status after several years of scandal and retrenchment. Walter Capps has set out to tell the first kind of story with only modest success, but in so doing provides a descriptive account useful for scholars interested in the latter question.

Capps' book begins with a chapter entitled "Thinking About the Religious Right," a meditation on research identifying many of the problems of fairness and detachment that any student of this movement will encounter. There follow five chapters recounting his travels through the world of the Religious Right, and his conversations with key figures in the movement; featured are Jerry Falwell, the late theologian Francis Schaeffer, the legal wrangling over Bob Jones University's tax-exempt status, the travails of Jim and Tammy Bakker, and evangelist-politician Pat Robertson. A concluding chapter seeks to place the movement in the context of American political history.

Capps is an extraordinarily fair-minded scholar. Indeed, Chapter 1 is fair almost to a fault; so thoroughly does he disavow hidden agendas that it becomes difficult to see what agenda the book *will* have. Capps come close here to justifying the term "new" in his title, arguing that this movement, unlike its historical predecessors, both craves intellectual respectability and is not in the least ambivalent about seeking political power. But it is left to the reader to trace this theme and others—such as a tantalizing discussion of Eliade—once we get into the case studies, and they do not receive the emphasis they deserve at the end.

The case studies are captives of Capps' excessively detached approach. The method is first-person journalistic description of people and events, with little scholarly analysis; they thus amount to an updated version of the sort of portrait drawn by Frances Fitzgerald in her well-known *New Yorker* article of 1981. They provide a description of the movement's current state and prospects, and as such are the most useful part of the book; but readers seeking a deeper analysis of the people and events recorded here are more or less on their own.

In his conclusion Capps portrays the Religious Right as both an alternative civil religion and a "revitalization movement," both plausible ideas. But his command of religious nuance is considerably more sure than his grasp of politics. The citations of political research are not extensive (and at times are inaccurate); the summation of the movement as a response to a "crisis in the land regarding the status of religious freedom," galvanized by President Reagan, is neither penetrating nor convincing. Both Reagan and the movement had earlier, and separate, political lives, and their marriage in the early 1980s was

one of convenience, particularly when viewed from the political side. It would have been better to build the book around the disparate origins of religious and Reaganite conservatism, to examine the ways they came to be intertwined, and then to use the case studies to explore the prospects for the 1990s. Scholars interested in such an analysis will not find it here, but they will find some useful raw material with which to begin.

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Caring for the Commonweal: Education for Religious Life. Edited by Parker J. Palmer, Barbara G. Wheeler, and James W. Fowler. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1990. 262 pp. \$30.00 cloth.

This volume is a tribute to the work of Robert Wood Lynn upon his retirement as president of the Lilly Foundation, Inc. Lynn has served as professor of religion and education at Union Theological Seminary and Dean of Auburn Theological Seminary. The themes of religion, education, and public life that were interwoven in Lynn's life as a scholar, teacher, and philanthropist are explored in this collection of essays.

First, each essay portrays a crisis state in American social and religious life because older images of common purpose have lost their power and new compelling images have not arisen to take their place. Second, each essay draws from the Judeo-Christian tradition and other rich sources as a means to reform and renew the common life.

The first section of the book focuses on the character and quality of public life and the part that religion should play in its formation. John Wilson explores the concept of "public," and its misinterpretation in writings on religion in America. Robert Handy urges caution in using the dyad "church/state" since church and state in the United States have so many facets. Robin Lovin broadens the examination of public life to include the Enlightenment ideas about individualism and freedom. James Fowler presents a full-scale model for a *paideia* for public education by offering an understanding of the mistaken ideas about reason and conscience that have impoverished public education. Fowler's article is of particular interest to this reviewer and other academicians in theology and education.

The second group of essays focus on religious communities and the *paideia* that is required for their reform and renewal. Henri Nouwen argues that Christian theology is properly understood as doxology. He describes features of theological education in which "the Word" is "lived in the form of studying." A similar concern is expressed in Neil