

Although Blenkinsopp takes the historicity of the events portrayed in Ezra-Nehemiah seriously, he feels that the books follow the approach of the Chronicler as a whole by retelling history "in such a way as to allow for a future" for God's people (p. 37). Unlike modern historians, the biblical writers did not worry about such details as keeping their chronology straight and their data consistent, but sought first of all "to sustain the life and energy of the community to which they belonged." (Cf., e.g., Blenkinsopp's discussion of the chronology of Ezra and Nehemiah [pp. 140-144]. Although he concludes that the evidence indicates that Ezra was first in chronological order over Nehemiah, he believes that the books were edited to place Ezra after Nehemiah because of the importance of his office as priest and mission as lawgiver [p. 144].) The narrative of events is always shaped by theological intent, and readers must always keep that in mind as they attempt to reconstruct those events.

In the commentary sections, Blenkinsopp seeks to refute such common assumptions as that post-exilic Judaism was a religion in decline and oriented inward rather than outward. Instead, he reminds us, post-exilic Judaism struggled with issues that would determine the form of NT Judaism and the Christianity that would emerge from it.

The author has both an extensive general bibliography and specialized bibliographies preceding each section of the commentary.

Blenkinsopp's work is a worthy contribution both to the Old Testament Library series and to scholarship on the too-often overlooked books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

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Boylan, Anne M. *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988. xii + 225 pp. \$26.50.

*Sunday School* is a revision of Anne Boylan's dissertation. The author rightly sees the Sunday school as a neglected piece of American history, one that stands close to the center of the mainstream of cultural transmission in the nineteenth century. "Like the common school," the author writes, "the Sunday school taught more than the lesson plans revealed" (p. 4). Along with specifically Christian knowledge, "students absorbed the values and precepts of evangelical Protestantism. More important, they imbibed their teachers' expectations and learned the behavioral manifestations of religious conversion" (p. 5).

Boylan claims that her work is not a history of the Sunday school. Despite that disclaimer, the book is packed with historical data and is

certainly historical, even if it does not give a step-by-step account of the rise and growth of the institution. The author presents her material within a sociological framework that views the Sunday school as "yet another example of how nineteenth-century Americans devised institutional solutions to the complex task of socializing the young" (p. 165). Thus the Sunday school's rise and popularity are treated in the context of the rise of revivalistic religion in the Second Great Awakening—the Sunday school being one of many institutions to set forth Protestant morality in an evangelical culture that linked the success of the republican experiment with the progress of religion. Rejecting a Marxist interpretation of social control that highlights the manipulation of the masses for the good of society, Boylan frames her findings in the more positive posture of the "dynamic, modernizing drive behind the reformer's programs and lives" (p. 3).

*Sunday School* takes its readers from the origin of the Sunday school in the 1790s as an agent of secular education for the lower classes on Sunday; up through its widespread adoption as an ecumenical, evangelical agent to bring about millennial fulfillment in the 1820s and 1830s; and into its mature status as an institutionalized and bureaucratized denominational entity emphasizing sectarian training later in the century. In parallel fashion, the purpose of the Sunday school is traced across time from the teaching of the ABCs, to the transmission of religious knowledge, to the goal of converting the young and leading them into church membership.

Boylan's book consists of five main chapters: (1) "The Origins of Evangelical Sunday Schools," (2) "Sunday Schools and American Education," (3) "Sunday School Organizations," (4) "Sunday School Teachers," and (5) "Conversion and Christian Nurture: Children and Childhood in Sunday Schools." The material within each of these topical chapters is generally set forth in a chronological pattern. The main disadvantage of such a design is redundancy—a disadvantage that Boylan has not escaped. In fact, her book seems to have more redundancy than one would expect—even in a topical treatment. Perhaps more careful editing could have streamlined the volume and made it more readable. Other shortcomings are that the book lacks human interest and tends to have a plodding style. In short, this revision of a doctoral dissertation still reads too much like a dissertation.

In spite of its literary shortcomings, *Sunday School* is a major contribution to the research literature on a neglected topic in American cultural and religious history. It not only sheds light on the history of the Sunday school as an institution, but it helps us to understand American social development better. As such, it makes a vital contribution to our understanding of the place and role of religion in American culture.