

The World as Seen by Students in Accelerated Christian Education Schools

Students in ACE schools study a curriculum that portrays events from "God's point of view." The authors examine some of these materials, which are used by some 5,000 schools throughout the U.S. An ACE official responds to their observations.

BY DAN B. FLEMING AND THOMAS C. HUNT

THE ROLE OF textbooks in the drive for educational "excellence" has been the subject of increasing attention. In 1984 education officials from 22 states formed a "cartel for excellence" to pressure publishers into improving instructional materials.¹ Political candidates made better textbooks for the public schools an issue in last year's campaigns. The quality of textbooks is clearly seen as one measure of the quality of schools.

Studies such as Project SPAN, sponsored by the National Science Foundation, have concluded that social studies teachers "like to use textbooks" and have a "heavy reliance on textbooks."² In fact, textbooks are probably the single most dominant factor in controlling the content of the curriculum in social studies. The influence of textbooks in the public schools, however, is not nearly as great as is the influence of the instructional materials produced by the

Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) Program in the private Christian schools in which they are used. The ACE Program was started in Texas by Dr. and Mrs. Donald R. Howard, who began their first Christian school using these programmed materials in 1970. Forty-five students used the materials in that school. By 1976, 1,450 schools were using the ACE materials, and today the ACE materials are used by some 5,000 schools throughout the United States.³

THE MISSION OF CHURCH-RELATED SCHOOLS

Churches in the U.S. have had a longstanding interest in the operation of schools. The transmission of a cultural heritage through the conduct of schooling has been an overriding goal of churches, as well as of governments.

The educational efforts of Catholics in the 19th century are well-documented.⁴ Catholics protested what they considered to be Protestant domination of the allegedly "nonsectarian" public schools and civil interference with their attempts to school their own young.⁵ Nor were Catholics alone in their fight. Lutherans, particularly those of German origin, held similar views and fought similar battles.⁶ The Catholics and

Lutherans were joined by lesser-known denominations, among them the Christian Reformed Church, which founded and maintained schools to preserve its heritage.⁷

The efforts of these churches, whose religious motives were often augmented by ethnic factors, resulted in the establishment of a number of church-affiliated schools that operated more or less outside the sphere of public control. They prepared and selected their own teachers, set up their own curricula and goals, chose their own textbooks, and attempted to inculcate in their young the values of their denomination.

Enrollment in Catholic schools (K-12) had reached approximately 5.6 million in 1965-66, when Catholics constituted 87% of nonpublic school enrollment. Then, for a number of reasons, decline set in.⁸ By 1982 the Catholic school population had declined to a little over three million, accounting for only 64% of the enrollment in nonpublic schools.⁹

The decline in Catholic education was marked by a corresponding growth in the schooling provided by several other denominations. Christian day schools (evangelical and fundamentalist) soared in number and in total enrollment. James Carper has estimated that by 1982 there were between 9,000 and 11,000 such schools with a pupil population of around one million.¹⁰ Bruce Cooper has noted that between 1965 and 1983 evangelical school enrollment (K-12) increased by an astounding 627%, and the number of such institutions increased by 223%.¹¹

Carper argues further that dissatisfaction with public schools over such matters as lack of discipline, the abandonment of God-centered education, and the espousal of a humanistic rationale —

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coupled with a revival of parental rights and "a crisis in the American civic faith" — have led to the founding of Christian day schools.¹² As with their Catholic and Lutheran predecessors, evangelicals and fundamentalists have established their schools in order to transmit their cultural heritage to their children. For some of these schools, the curricula and the goals set forth are embodied in the instructional materials provided by the ACE Program.

ACE GOALS

The goal of the ACE Program is to

provide learning materials that are "thoroughly Christian," from which a child can "learn truth from God's point of view."¹³ The ACE Program offers a complete, self-instructional curriculum for 12 grades that "supports and teaches the word of God"¹⁴ and that consists of PACEs (individual packets of self-instructional curriculum materials, which allow each student to work at his or her own speed). Each of the 12 levels is divided into 12 Self-Pacs per grade level in each subject. Materials for basic subjects are available, including mathematics, English, science, and social studies. In addition, materials for elective subjects

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are available in such areas as the Bible, language, business, art, and physical education.

The lessons are highly structured, and students work through their materials at their own pace. Then they take a test at the end of the lesson. Many of the schools using these materials have students raise little American flags to show when they have completed a lesson and are ready for their test to be graded. Students often dress in red, white, and blue uniforms because the program stresses American patriotism as well as Christian values. Students in these schools normally sing patriotic songs and read Bible passages as part of their school day.

For the personnel using their materials, the producers of the ACE materials provide background training, which usually consists of several days of preparation by the ACE national staff. Regional coordinators help local schools that have problems. Before examining in some detail what the ACE Program looks like, let us examine the scope and sequence of the ACE Basic Education Program for the grade levels used in this study.

Social Studies: Levels 7-11 Grade 7

This course is a study of American government and state history. The book gives a thorough background to the foundations of government, the *Constitution*, the branches of government, state and local government, citizenship, and foreign relations.

Grade 8

A study of American history from the times of the explorers to the 20th century.

Grade 9

A study of world history from creation through modern times, with special emphasis on missionary movements and Biblical history.

Grade 10

A study of American history starting with the discovery of the New World and ending with a hard look at the United Nations. This course is designed to give the student an appreciation for the Christian elements in America's past.

Grade 11

A study of American government beginning with a thorough examination of the foundations of government in the Bible, Ancient Greece, Rome, Europe, and the American Colonies. The student is acquainted with the workings of his government and with the principles upon which the government is founded.¹⁵

As we can readily see from the scope-

and-sequence examples from levels 7-11, part of the content comes from the Bible, with "Christian precepts built into the curriculum, not tacked on as a separate subject."¹⁶ Out of the 66 Self-Pac social studies units used in levels 7-11, we reviewed six units.

GRADE 7

Grade 7 materials provide a study of American government and state history. The introductory Self-Pac for this grade is 31 pages long and states as its objective: "When you have successfully completed this PACE, you should be able to recite the Ten Commandments and to recognize the facts related to the Biblical bases of government, the historical background of the American govern-

ment, and the fundamental philosophy of the American government." Following this objective, a list of 16 basic terms used in the Self-Pac are given with definitions. For example, "Democracy" is defined as "[a] government in which each citizen has an equal voice, and the decisions of the government are made in common meetings." And an "Evangelical" is defined as "[a] Bible-believing, Gospel-preaching Christian."

The unit on Biblical foundations begins with Genesis and Adam's sin and fall. Included in this section are the penalties for sin and how government carries out the justice of God.

The Ten Commandments are closely related to government, with attention given to religious freedom provided for in the Bill of Rights. For example, the

ACE Responds

BY RONALD E. JOHNSON

IN THEIR conclusions, Dan Fleming and Thomas Hunt make several observations with which we disagree.

The ACE curriculum, like all other curricula, reflects the basic philosophical beliefs of its executives, editors, and writers. This is where our greatest points of disagreement arise: our different philosophical beliefs. ACE does not necessarily embrace philosophical beliefs compatible with those of most contemporary secular writers of curriculum. The following are but a few of the relevant philosophical beliefs that separate the focus of the ACE curriculum from the humanistic-pluralistic curricula most often used in secular schools.

ACE views the universe and man as distinctive and separate creative acts of God. Therefore, both are subservient to His omnipotent will. Mankind is and always has been answerable to God. Whatever or whoever is anti-God (atheistic) is not considered reflective of man's true dignity and purpose. Communism and socialism are seen as antithetical to theism, and the two cannot coexist peacefully. Communism and socialism are viewed as the enslavers of the masses and not as benevolent benefactors of the poor and downtrodden.

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The autonomy of governments, national identification, and the loyalty of citizens are seen as rights and responsibilities of all men — including politicians, students, and educators. Observing historical cycles of civilization, ACE writers correlate subordination to God to the life spans of civilizations. ACE does not separate its curriculum into secular and sacred.

Another important factor contributing to our differences is the source of academic authority and references in the ACE materials. The ACE writers reference many standard publishers for basic facts and criticisms. Naturally, we rely more heavily on reputable conservative sources whose work and criticism reflect theistic philosophical beliefs. ACE does not subscribe to academic works simply because they are considered to be scholarly or critical. Sources for a distinctively Christian community must at least be pro-family, pro-life, pro-marriage, and pro-church in order to be considered "solid" references. Therefore, we find a limited amount of objective and accurate material published in the mainline American curricula to which we can refer as authoritative.

Generally, conservative scholars have held the same ideals as we do regarding free enterprise and loyalty to America. We, as well as they, recognize the very real threat of communism to our country and way of life.

It is interesting to note that, without citing specifics, Fleming and Hunt label our material as "skeletal . . . biased . . . distorted . . . inaccurate . . . paranoid . . . political," intimating that ACE

relies on unreliable sources. It is true that ACE does not depend on biased news media to form conclusions for us. We have printed the truth along with logical, sane, understandable analyses. The fact that we are of the Christian faith does not disqualify us from scholarship or holding political opinions. It is our commitment and responsibility as Christian educators to prepare future leaders with a more pro-American analysis of world events than they will gain in mainline liberal publications and textbooks.

If our curriculum is "skeletal," it is because we have omitted verbal adornments and embellishments in favor of our students' remembering the *facts* rather than a sea of words that hide the facts. Actually, "skeletal" is a matter of degree, since our curriculum provides what we believe to be adequate opinion-forming rhetoric.

We respect the right of Fleming and Hunt to disagree with us, but we ask that they evaluate our material from something other than the conventional viewpoint. Our material is *not* written with conventional viewpoints in mind. We do not believe that education should be nondirective or speculative, or that the final interpretation of facts and events should be left up to immature, inexperienced minds, as mainline secular curricula do.

Fleming and Hunt state, "If parents want their children to obtain a very limited and sometimes inaccurate view of the world — one that ignores thinking above the level of rote recall — then the ACE materials do the job very well."

fourth commandment, "Honor thy father and mother," is presented as "crucial to the effective operation of any government and particularly a free government." The unit points out that "sometimes, a Communist country will try to destroy family life."

A section on the New Testament emphasizes that we should obey our government and cites Jesus, Peter, and Paul as sources of authority. The exception to this obedience would be when the "government interferes with your obedience to God's word." After the first 14 pages of the unit, the student takes a test consisting of matching, true/false, completion, and listing items. If the student passes the test he or she moves on to the next section of the unit, "Historical Background." A checkup test is again

provided for this second section. The third part covers "Fundamental Philosophy" and introduces such terms as federalism and republicanism. It also briefly introduces various systems of government, including dictatorships and democracies. The unit ends with a test to be requested from the teacher when the student feels ready.

GRADE 8

For grade 8, we reviewed the last Self-Pac. This unit, titled "The World in Conflict," is a study of 20th-century conflicts and the "fight against Communism." The portrayal of communism as an evil force is interwoven throughout the entire social studies program. The unit opens with an overview of

communism, including its philosophy and method of operation:

There are Communists, dedicated to spreading this murderous dictatorship to the United States, still working in places like the government today. We as Christians should be aware that this anti-God conspiracy exists.

Free enterprise is also introduced here as having a Biblical foundation. The unit continues:

More and more America becomes socialistic. Government owns and controls more things and areas of life. As Christians we would be subject to the authority of the worst dictator because God tells us to be in Romans 13. The New Testament Christians

This statement reflects a biased preference for a humanistic, anti-Christian view of history and disregards ACE's theistic view of history. We must point out that there is *no* lack of "scholarship and critical thinking," as Fleming and Hunt allege. Their evaluation is based on expectations for another type of curriculum to which they are no doubt accustomed. They seem to equate Christianity with ignorance. If so, where does such a view place Isaac Newton, Johannes Kepler, Michael Faraday, George Washington Carver, Ronald Reagan? Surely they are not attempting to label these men as "biased and paranoid"? The dictionary defines *scholarship* as "learning" and *critical* as "exercising or involving careful or judicious evaluations." We submit that in the ACE curriculum *learning* does occur, and there are certainly *judicious evaluations*. Fleming and Hunt may not agree with *how much* "scholarship and critical thinking" is present, but can they fairly intimate that there is *no* scholarship and critical thinking?

The most astute and prestigious evaluations of our curriculum pale into insignificance when the light of ACE student accomplishment is shone on the issue. It would seem logical and consequential that impartial testing would reveal curriculum failure. But this is not so.

Children who use the ACE Program are *learning* and *excelling*. A national achievement testing survey (using McGraw-Hill's 1977 norms for the California Achievement Tests) of 7,428 students in 40 states using the ACE Program verifies that students who learn on

the ACE Program consistently score from two to four grade levels higher on achievement tests than do students enrolled in government schools. In fact, after completion of the ninth-grade-level ACE materials, the standardized tests *do not even measure* academic achievement of ACE curriculum students because level 12.9 is the maximum attainable and our ninth-grade students are "maxing out." Moreover, hundreds of ACE graduates have been accepted into colleges and universities.

Response to Criticism of Grade 9 Unit

- The UN troops deserve the documented reporting of their barbaric conduct in Katanga.

- Mentioning the Geneva meetings would serve no real historical value since actual "peace" meetings occurred in Paris.

- Juan Perón hardly "comes off fairly well," if the text is read as facts nonsupportive of his years as Argentina's president/dictator. In fact, Perón came off nearly as poorly as did Fidel Castro. Little comment is needed on Castro, since history has shown us the type of man he really is, if we see him outside the facade provided by some liberal western presses.

- Our 1974 copyright date may be misleading since we are allowed to make a certain percentage of updates or changes without a new copyright date. The small hyphenated number (3-4, 1-5, etc.) following the copyright statement indicates the quarter and year of reprinting with updates and changes.

- There is no implication that President Kennedy was actually slain as a result of a Communist conspiracy, but the known facts do lead to the suspicion of the *possibility* of a Communist-inspired crime. Lee Harvey Oswald definitely was not of the Christian philosophical persuasion.

Response to Criticism of Grade 10 Unit

- Repeating of important material is done *purposely* for the following reasons: 1) the learning spiral operates on this principle, and reviewing previously covered material strengthens learning and gives an emphasis to the connection some events have worldwide; 2) many students enter the ACE Program at the 10th level and have never seen the material in ninth-level ACE world history; and 3) repeating avoids referring students to material they no longer have in their possession.

Response to Criticism of Grade 11 Unit

- The last two units of each level are usually devoted to enrichment material and do not continue covering the material in the same way as preceding Self-Pacs. It does not seem at all inconsistent to point out *some* good things in which certain UN organizations are involved. To praise the UN as being mankind's benefactor would be inconsistent with the facts about the origin and general history of that organization.

Fleming and Hunt suggest that ACE presents a "paranoid," "inaccurate," or "incomplete" view of subject matter. Our writers reflect truth as the evidence substantiates. [K]

were subject to the crazy Emperor Nero — who killed Christians. But, as long as we are free citizens, we should do our part to support and elect leaders who believe in the Bible principles of free enterprise and private property.

Next, the unit describes the advances of the Christian church in opposing "Satan's forces in the world, such as humanism and its political side, collectivism."

GRADE 9

For grade 9, we examined the first Self-Pac, "a study of world history from creation through modern times." It is a "study of creation and the earliest recorded history of Mesopotamia and Egypt." By the completion of the unit, students are to be able to "recount God's Creation of the Universe and man's earliest history." The unit presents the theory of evolution as being "directly opposed to what the Bible says concerning the creation of the earth."

We also examined a second ninth-grade unit that dealt with the period from the 1950s to the 1980s. Part I of this unit focuses on wars, with particular attention given to the "Mau Mau Rebellion" in Kenya, headed by Jomo Kenyatta. The image it portrays of the followers of Kenyatta can be seen in this description:

When Kenyatta returned to Africa, he and five other men organized a secret society known as the Mau Mau or hidden ones. Membership in the Mau Mau was limited to the Kikuyu tribe. Each member was initiated into the movement by means of a blood oath both terrible and utterly degrading. Once a person took the oath, he was bound to Mau Mau forever. Each initiate was trained to commit bestial acts of torture and murder.

No discussion is given about why the Africans might want to revolt, except that there was discontent over being ruled by a white minority. International communism "fanned" this spark of discontent into a "raging flame." The section goes on to describe how Kenyatta did a turnaround and became a good ruler.

Africa is also a center of attention in an overview of the Congo after it received independence from Belgium in 1960. The United Nations is walloped

for its role in forcing Katanga to become part of the "Communist dominated Congo." The unit states: "What happened here is hard to believe. The United Nations troops committed acts of cruelty and barbarity that were equal to those of Ghengis Khan." Turning away from Africa, the next few paragraphs cover "Vietnam: America's Longest War." Unfortunately, they leave out such key points as the Geneva Conference.

Part II of this grade 9 unit deals with "Problems in the Western Hemisphere." These include: "The Fall and Rise of Juan Perón," "Cuba Goes Communist," "The Bay of Pigs Invasion," "The Cuban Missile Crisis," "The U.S.S. Pueblo Incident," and "The Rise and Fall of Salvador Allende."

While Juan Perón comes off fairly well, Castro is portrayed as very bad. "Fulgencio Batista was one such dictator, but the man that overthrew him was many times worse." Likewise, Chile's Allende is vilified, and the downfall of his regime is described as follows: "A military junta now rules Chile, and many of the people's freedoms have been returned to them."

Part III of the grade 9 unit, titled "An Era of Unrest," covers: "The Search for Adolf Eichmann," "Political Assassinations in the United States," "Rhodesian Independence and After," "Cracks in the Iron Curtain," "Red China," "Anti-Israeli Terrorism," and "The Civil War in Ulster." Although the unit has a 1974 publication date, the attempted assassination of President Reagan in 1981 is included. The text implies that the assassination of President Kennedy was the result of a Communist conspiracy. The same theory is applied to Sirhan Sirhan's assassination of Robert Kennedy.

The segment on Rhodesia describes how "little Rhodesia stood against the world." The unit states:

Rhodesia was accused repeatedly of being an all-white racist regime, which was totally false. The franchise in Rhodesia was mainly non-racial. All sixty-five seats in the Rhodesian parliament were open to anyone of any race.

This section ends as "Robert Mugabe, a dedicated Black Marxist, was duly elected prime minister, and the once-stable Rhodesia degenerated further into socialism and intertribal warfare."

In the section on "The Civil War in Ulster," the text states that "Communist agitators began to stir up trouble among Ulster's Catholic minority." Also, the ACE text states:

[T]he Communists and the I.R.A. continue to commit acts of terrorism in the weary six counties. Good men like born-again Christian Rev. Ian Paisley are villified [sic] by their Communist enemies.

On a more positive note, Part IV of the grade 9 material, titled "Three Decades of Achievement," covers "The Conquest of Everest," "Heart Transplants," "The Voyage of Ra II," and "Man in Space." Part V, titled "Recent Events in the United States," ends the unit. Included in Part V are "Energy and Economic Crises," "The Watergate Crisis," "Ford Becomes President," "The Post-Watergate Era," and "The Hostage Crisis." The section on "The Post-Watergate Era" contains the following comment:

It is also sad to note that under President Carter, a man who publicly proclaimed himself to be a born-again Christian, government attacks on Christian schools, Christian children's homes, Christian day care centers, and churches rose astonishingly.

GRADE 10

For 10th-grade U.S. history, we examined the last unit, titled "The Post World War II Period." It described itself as a "study of America's foreign and domestic relations after World War II: the U.S., the Cold War, civil rights, space exploration, and Watergate."

The unit reviews the formation of the United Nations and points out how the UN "helped to enslave" millions of people. Among the interesting claims made in this unit is the following:

The United Nations was created by Communists and has always been used by the Communists to further Communist goals. Even most of the United States delegates to the San Francisco Convention to found the UN were later discovered to be members of the Communist party.

The 14 pages devoted to the UN primarily describe the evils associated with that organization and conclude: "Satan is the real force behind man's ef-

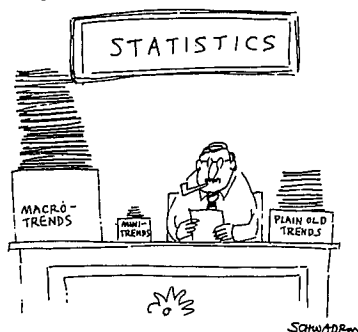
The ACE view of history seems at times less affected by religious considerations than by political ones.

forts to achieve world government." Then two world crises are examined in which the UN played a major role: the Korean War and the crisis in the Congo. The latter section duplicates, word for word, the section on "The Congo Crisis" in ninth-grade world history. Even the follow-up questions are identical.

Following the section on the UN, the Cold War is described, along with an overview of Communist ideology and historical development. Case studies of the Cold War are provided that sport such titles as "Hungarian Revolution" and "Cuba Goes Communist." The section on Cuba is identical to the section in the ninth-grade text that included the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban missile crisis. Also repeated from grade 9 were the Pueblo incident and the Vietnam war.

GRADE 11

The topic for grade 11 is a study of the American government, including its foundations in the Bible and in ancient Greece and Rome. The student is to become "acquainted with the workings of his government and the principles upon which the government is founded." The final unit for this level examines the United States in the world community, foreign policy, and the United Nations. The objective of this unit is to "explain



the history and present condition of American foreign policy and to explain and critically evaluate the purposes, organization, and work of the United Nations."

Part I of this unit covers the history of U.S. foreign policy from George Washington to the present, with particular attention given to the Monroe Doctrine. Also included are regional defense agreements, such as NATO, and a section on the making of foreign policy. This part of the unit is much more balanced, though it remains very sketchy and, unlike earlier units in the series, seldom mentions a Christian religious position as it relates to foreign policy.

Part II, "The United Nations," expands on the coverage given to the history of the UN in the U.S. history materials from the preceding year. However, most of this section is identical to the 10th-grade overview of UN purposes and world government. Once again, "Satan is the real force" behind efforts to establish a world government. However, the section on "The Work of the United Nations" is much more positive than the negative approach to the UN taken in the 10th-grade U.S. history unit under the title "The Failures of the UN." This second version includes mention of UN efforts to achieve disarmament and UN attempts to "alleviate suffering and despair of so many of the world's people." In fact, reading only certain parts of these two views of the UN, one could come away with two different views of the same institution. This was the only major instance of lack of consistency in the presentation of the same topic throughout the units we reviewed.

The ACE materials focus heavily on basic vocabulary and information in history and government. Unfortunately, the information provided is so skeletal that real understanding of the cause and effect of events seems impossible in most cases. Where a few more details are provided, as in the description of the Rhodesian struggle for independence, the bias of the author takes over, and the facts are distorted or inaccurate. Running throughout the units we examined was an almost paranoid fear of the Communist conspiracy in all aspects of modern life. The units often duplicated previously studied material.

Although the materials are designed for a special audience of Christian

school students, even these students seem to be entitled to a more scholarly view of historical events. Indeed, the view of history presented in the ACE materials seems at times less affected by religious considerations than by political ones. In a number of places, the materials appear to distort the truth to fit a particular political/religious belief. Although the brochure promoting the ACE materials talks about learning "truth from God's point of view,"¹⁷ one wonders how the interpreters for God came to the conclusions they reached, particularly those related to political events since World War II. If parents want their children to obtain a very limited and sometimes inaccurate view of the world — one that ignores thinking above the level of rote recall — then the ACE materials do the job very well. The world of the ACE materials is quite a different one from that of scholarship and critical thinking.

1. "States to Work on Improving Text Selection, Adoption Policies," *Education Week*, 28 March 1984, p. 1.
2. "Project SPAN," *Social Education*, November/December 1980, p. 563.
3. *Facts About Accelerated Christian Education* (Lewisville, Tex.: Accelerated Christian Education, Inc., 1979), p. 8.
4. See, for instance, Harold A. Buetow, *Of Singular Benefit: The Story of U.S. Catholic Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 112.
5. Examples of these two conflicts are contained in Thomas C. Hunt, "The Edgerton Bible Decision: The End of an Era," *Catholic Historical Review*, October 1981, pp. 589-619; and idem, "The Bennett Law of 1980: Focus of Conflict Between Church and State," *Journal of Church and State*, Winter 1981, pp. 69-94.
6. See Jon Diefenthaler, "Lutheran Schools in America," in James C. Carper and Thomas C. Hunt, eds., *Religious Schooling in America* (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1984), pp. 35-57.
7. See Donald Oppewal and Peter DeBoer, "Calvinist Day Schools: Roots and Branches," in Carper and Hunt, eds., pp. 85-109.
8. *U.S. News & World Report*, 18 August 1975, p. 55; and *Education Week*, 30 March 1983, p. 14.
9. *Education Week*, 30 March 1983, p. 14.
10. James C. Carper, "Christian Day Schools in America," in Carper and Hunt, eds., pp. 114-15.
11. Bruce Cooper, "The Changing Demography of Private Schools: Trends and Implications," *Education and Urban Society*, August 1984, p. 432.
12. Carper, p. 122.
13. Ibid., p. 10.
14. Ibid.
15. "Basic Education: Basic Self-Text Scope and Sequence," ACE, Inc., 1983, pp. 6-8.
16. *Facts*, . . . , p. 8.
17. Ibid., p. 4.

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