



Circling the Wagons: Conceptions of Middle Adolescents Regarding Science and Religion and Implications for Critical Thinking

Dr Carolyn Hanna Murphy

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Circling the Wagons is an ethnographic doctoral dissertation that investigates conceptions of science and religion held by evangelical Christian middle adolescents in South Carolina. It describes students' religious conceptions including: God/Jesus, heaven and hell, salvation, sin, Satan and evil, angels, the Return of Christ and the end of the world, predestination, the role of women, and the status of non-Christian faiths. It investigates the reasons for the perceived grave conflicts between science and religion held by the participants. It also investigates the role of Christian and secular educational systems, the opinions of clergy and of parents, and the religious and educational sources of these conceptions. It analyzes the impact of the evangelical culture on the capacity of these youth to thoughtfully engage in scientific, critical thinking by investigating the impact of fundamentalist religious dogma on their beliefs, which include the denial of many of the processes and content of modern science, including evolution, big bang cosmology, and climate change. It uses feminist critical theory to analyze the patriarchal structures held by and promoted by the churches to which the youth belonged. Lastly, this dissertation proposes needed changes in America's educational institutions, both religious and secular, if young people are to better fulfill their intellectual and spiritual potential; for, if one of the major goals of education is to enable habits of mind that can further science, coherent religion and a democratic way of life, then both systems, in the opinion of the writer, are failing our youth and the larger society and need urgent reformation.

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