

= God 's Choice =

God 's Choice : The Total World of a Fundamentalist Christian School is a 1986 book written by Alan Peshkin and published by the University of Chicago Press . It is the product of his late 1970s 18 @-@ month ethnographic study of a 350 @-@ person Christian fundamentalist Baptist school in Illinois . He describes the K ? 12 day school 's function as a total institution that educates about a singular truth (God 's will) and subordination before God . The final chapter is a comparative analysis of the school and other schools , institutions , and social movements , wherein Peshkin concludes that the school is divisive in American society for promoting intolerance towards religious plurality , the very condition that permits the school 's existence .

Reviewers wrote that Peshkin 's account was fair , and praised his decision to let the participants speak for themselves through quotations . They also noted that the book filled a literary lacuna in scholarly understanding of the rapidly expanding and understudied fundamentalist Christian school .

= = Summary = =

God 's Choice : The Total World of a Fundamentalist Christian School is a 1986 book written by Alan Peshkin . It is a profile of an Illinois Christian fundamentalist school ? its policies , practices , and participants . Peshkin , then Professor of Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana ? Champaign , intended his account to be both impartial and " empathetic " . He presents the fundamentalists as disciplined , dedicated , and determined with " formulas for success " opposite " fragmented and defensive " detractors . They believe in " one Truth " ? God 's plan ? and reject philosophies of multiple truths . A teacher told Peshkin that their job is to prepare students for this " one pattern " of thought . In turn , the community 's constituents do not wish to leave , but appreciate conformity as an end in itself . Peshkin describes the school as a " total institution " : a place where many similar people live by their own formal rules apart from outside society , as based on Erving Goffman 's 1961 essay . Peshkin asserts that this was a natural conclusion from a school " based on absolute truth " . God 's Choice was the third book in his series of studies on school ? community relationships . It was published by the University of Chicago Press .

In 1978 , Peshkin moved to an Illinois community of 50 @,@ 000 people that he pseudonymically called Hartney , where he stayed and observed for 18 months . He lived in an apartment within the home of a family associated with what he called the Bethany Baptist church . Peshkin studied their 350 @-@ student K ? 12 Christian day school , Bethany Baptist Academy (also a pseudonym) . The school opened six years prior with 88 students and was one of over one thousand members of the American Association of Christian Schools . The study focuses on the 125 students in the junior ? senior high school . After a semester , Peshkin began to interview the community members , and used their quotes to let them " speak for themselves " . The book includes eight portraits of students ? four from faith and four " scorners " who " consciously deviate " ? as well as student and teacher survey data , displayed in 16 tables . An appendix includes course offerings and a bibliography .

Peshkin 's findings show a " total world " where the lessons of religion and education are intertwined into an " interrelated , interdependent " philosophy . The academy 's intent is to make Christian professionals as what Peshkin describes as " a vocational school directed to work in the Lord 's service " . When compared to the work of public schools , the private school 's instructors said both kinds of institutions impose a lifestyle and set of values as a kind of " brainwashing " . Peshkin notes that while students " largely identify with " and uphold the fundamentalist teachings , they permit themselves the option of having " individual interpretations " and minor beliefs . Some students either dissent against the academy 's rules or are regarded as too pious , but most students are moderate .

Students take classes to be effective Christian leaders , including " Bible study and ' soul @-@ winning ' , English , speech , drama , and music " , which are seen as important to " read and proclaim the Word " . Academy teachers establish their authority through discipline and teach " the truth " as established by " facts " from the Bible . Bible passages are associated with the subject

matter in a process called " integration " . The academy uses science books from Bob Jones University as an alternative to books that promote secular humanism , which is described as " the ' official religion ' of the public school system " . The Bob Jones science books associate the Bible with science , and often comment the relationship between God 's intelligence and the intricacies of nature . Classes like science , social studies , and math are viewed as less important for the goal of making Christian professionals apart from their training to do " everything a sinner can do , better " . Some classes are " memorization and recitation " -focused , reflecting an inelastic view of knowledge , which the academy believes to be fixed as based in biblical inerrancy . Their biggest external influence on curriculum is new books , which may affect how classes are taught , though the content (" the truth ") remains the same .

In a chapter on teacher selection and training , the task of socializing students with obedience and discipline takes precedence over the task of teaching content . Students are under constant supervision to uphold a pledge to avoid outside activities such as theater , fashion , dances , and certain television shows . They also avoid some activities altogether , such as sexualized contact , drugs , alcohol , and smoking . This pledge is to be upheld at home as well , and students are encouraged to report errancies . Teachers too pledge to prioritize " the pursuit of holiness " over all things in a " born again " activity where they " confess their sins and accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior " . The school is unapologetic in its insistence on " telling the kids what is right " and its according preference for lecture over discussion . Teachers are also afforded the option of corporal punishment , though it is rarely used .

The last two chapters feature Peshkin 's commentary on the school in society , its tradeoffs and comparison with other total institutions and larger social movements , like the New Religious Right . He also compares the academy to public and parochial schools , wherein he finds public school students more politically tolerant and acceptant of religious pluralism . Peshkin 's final reflections are written as a " cost @-@ benefit analysis " of these Christian schools in the larger American society . In the last chapter , Peshkin contemplates how his Jewish identity is insulated within a pluralistic and secular society , and how he is fearful of absolutist " imperious , implacable logic " and " zeal for conversion and exclusivism " . He recounted that while the school spoke derogatorily of non @-@ fundamentalists and non @-@ Christians , no one spoke of the American religious plurality that permitted this . In response to the encroaching state , fundamentalists feel that their political conviction should mirror that of their religion . Peshkin views the school as schismatic in a larger society for promoting intolerance towards fellow Americans . He also praised traits of the schools including its community , dedicated teachers , and attractive image . At the time of print , Christian schools like Bethany were outpacing the growth of other schools . In 1989 , Christian schools comprised about 20 % of private school enrollment ? around 700 @,@ 000 students .

= = Reception = =

Reviewers wrote that Peshkin 's account was fair in its presentation , and that his choice to let individuals " speak for themselves " through abundant quotations was a strength . They also noted how the book filled a gap in the field and that his final chapter was too moralistic .

R. Scott Appleby (American Journal of Education) wrote that Peshkin succeeded at his attempt to be impartial , and that his presentation of fundamentalist culture is made both " understandable " and , in part , " admirable " . He reflected that this Christian pedagogy was closer to indoctrination than education in that it did not develop " critical skills and ... human capacities " in " open @-@ ended " learning but professed a fixed chain of knowledge " from on high " where humans are errant and need authoritarian guidance . Appleby added that fundamentalism blames public schools and its associated state apparatus as both a manufacturer enemy needed to feed its " sense of crisis " and for creating " unsafe " areas unregulated by " Christian truth " . Sociologist Susan Rose " broadens the base " of God 's Choice in her 1988 Keeping Them Out of the Hands of Satan , and Appleby writes that the two books compliment each other 's lacunae . While God 's Choice has an " engaging , sometimes riveting narrative " with vivid characters but little outside information apart from statistics , Keeping Them Out of the Hands of Satan includes extra detail on how

fundamentalist groups interact and share a larger societal milieu . For example , Rose explains the difference in " born @-@ again experiences " of evangelicals and fundamentalists , which Peshkin glosses over .

In her own review of Peshkin 's book , Rose (Contemporary Sociology) praised its " clear and detailed " contribution to the field but wished for more overview material on the Christian School Movement 's rise , proponents , philosophical consistency , and " sociohistorical context " . She wrote that few had studied Christian schools , the " fastest growing sector of private education in the United States " . In commending Peshkin 's even @-@ handedness , she wrote that his forthrightness about declaring his own biases and effort to present participant voices through direct quotation were strong elements , though he described more than he analyzed . Rose felt that the " interesting " final chapters of analysis and comparison with public schools " grounded " the overall ethnography , though she wished for more comparison of the adolescent student experience between the academy and other kinds of American schools . She considers Peshkin 's " discussion of the politics of pluralism " , that Christian schools both add to American religious pluralism while advocating against it , possibly his best contribution .

Jean Holm (The Times Higher Education Supplement) too noted the fast growth of conservative Christian schools but added that the book was also relevant in Britain , which was experiencing similar growth . She found the first few chapters somewhat repetitive as it expressed the uniformity of the school 's practices . Richard V. Pierard (Christian Century) felt that Peshkin wrote with " deeply respect " for the school and its community , but Pierard , himself an evangelical , was " disturbed " by the community 's " indoctrinated " values ? " biblical absolutes " that are " part of a conservative program that has been read into Scripture " . Paul F. Parsons (Christianity Today) noted that Peshkin found the school successful by traditional terms , with standardized tests , orderly climate , and " fun @-@ loving " students , but lacking free exchange of ideas , as education is seen more as a transfer than a quest , and students do not learn " choice , doubt , suspended judgment , [or] dissent " . Parsons affirmed Peshkin 's findings as " remarkably representative " based on his own visits to " Christian schools in 60 cities " , though others are less absolutist . And while Julian McAllister Groves (Journal of Contemporary Ethnography) described the text as " beautifully written " and " poetic " , he doubted whether the school 's students were as converted as they said , and felt that Peshkin might have seen more " role distance " and examples of playing along simply for community acceptance had he stayed for lunch and other informal observations .