




2-1987

Review of S.A. Ashraf, *New Horizons in Muslim Education*

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Recommended Citation

Wagner, Daniel A., "Review of S.A. Ashraf, *New Horizons in Muslim Education*" (1987). *Journal Articles (Literacy.org)*. 12.
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Abstract

Between 1977 and 1982, a series of four world conferences on Muslim education were held in various Muslim countries that all dealt with aspects of how contemporary Muslims can maintain Islamic values in the modern educational world. Ashraf was one of the principal organizers of these conferences and contributed a key-note address for each one. The present small volume is a collection of these papers, which range from the general nature of the Islamic education to the development of curricula, new textbooks, and new teaching methods.

Disciplines

Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education | Curriculum and Instruction | Education | Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research | Educational Methods | Educational Psychology | International and Comparative Education | Language and Literacy Education

interested in getting a quick introduction to the main themes and fields of relevance for contemporary educationists and social scientists who are occupied with the study of higher education.

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New Horizons in Muslim Education by S. A. Ashraf. Cambridge: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985. 137 pp.

Between 1977 and 1982, a series of four world conferences on Muslim education were held in various Muslim countries that all dealt with aspects of how contemporary Muslims can maintain Islamic values in the modern educational world. Ashraf was one of the principal organizers of these conferences and contributed a key-note address for each one. The present small volume is a collection of these papers, which range from the general nature of the Islamic education to the development of curricula, new textbooks, and new teaching methods.

Ashraf has chosen to tackle the difficult problem of distinguishing and explicating the difference between Islamic religious education and what he terms modern "technical" education. He makes copious use of Koranic citations to reinforce his perspective on the importance of Islamic education for Muslims of all ages. Through a rather sparse reference to Western educators (Dewey, Plato, and Aristotle are favorite choices), the author attempts to contrast the Western "secularist-modernist" idea of "acquired knowledge" with the religiously revealed "perennial knowledge" of Islam. He argues in all four papers and in the conclusion that Muslims must take back education from the hands of Western "educationists": "in nearly all Muslim countries technical know-how is in the hands of people trained in the West, brainwashed by western education and its style of living. . . . A belief in technical reason reduces man's faith in God as the supreme authority and reduces God to a hypothesis which the technocrats or the technical elite do not consider necessary. This false notion generates in man a kind of arrogance" (p. 15).

This perspective shares much in common with the rise in religious fundamentalism among various Christian sects in the United States. The idea, of course, is that God gets lost in the radical rationalism of Western secularist education. What distinguishes the movement toward fundamentalist Muslim education from other contemporary religious movements is the support the former receives from national political forces (and governments), which is clearly on the rise not only in the Middle East but also in Islamic Africa and as far east as Indonesia. Indeed representatives from a wide range of countries attended and hosted this series of conferences.

This book is an attempt to justify a plan of action primarily at the level of philosophical argumentation. The primary target for the book seems to be the Islamic power structure, as Ashraf wants to convince the reader that the time

has come to do something about implementing a truly Islamic form of education (and not just a few courses on religion) from primary school to the university level. The book also contains (in its appendices) recommendations for, among other things, the complete sexual separation of education, the mandatory teaching of Arabic in all Muslim countries, and the “scrutiny” of all textbooks by appropriate religious authorities (p. 128). It would be a mistake, however, not to recognize the sincerity of the author’s purpose. While religious education—and this book itself—may strike many Western readers as at least anachronistic (if not retrograde), there is no doubt that it will strike a chord within the Muslim community. While the author is upset that more action has not yet taken place, it seems likely that Islamic education as well as this small book will be taken very seriously by key individuals who determine educational policy in Islamic countries.

This reviewer found it somewhat surprising that the author made virtually no reference to the nature and the extent of Islamic education as it is currently practiced in many parts of the Muslim world. The author has little to say about Koranic learning, rote memorization, and the acquisition of Arabic through the Koran, all of which are key aspects of Koranic education for young children. This is unfortunate, as it seems increasingly clear that early (and, in many cases, preschool) education is the form of Islamic education that is growing the most rapidly in the Muslim world.¹ The importance of Islamic education for success in subsequent public schooling is a potentially important subject but one that has yet to be recognized in the writing of Muslims concerned with religious education.

In sum, this is a book that will have only limited appeal among a Western readership but that is yet another example of what has been termed the Islamic “revival” aimed at Muslims living at home and abroad. Such revivals can have a considerable impact, and the tensions and conflicts generated between secularists and religionists have a way of persisting over long periods of time.

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Education in the Third Reich: Race and History in Nazi Textbooks by Gilmer W. Blackburn. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985. 216 pp. \$34.50 (cloth); \$14.95 (paper).

In his study of race and history in Nazi textbooks, Gilmer W. Blackburn tells us both more and less than he advertises in the title of his work. His book is not a study of education in the Third Reich, which his main title claims, and it is significantly more than a description of race and history in Nazi textbooks. His early chapters, for example, provide an excellent summary of both Nazi ideology and Hitler’s *weltanschauung*. Blackburn examines how Hitler’s own educational

¹ Compare D. A. Wagner and A. Lotfi, “Traditional Islamic Education in Morocco: Sociohistorical and Psychological Perspectives,” *Comparative Education Review* 24, no. 2, pt. 1 (June 1980): 238–51.