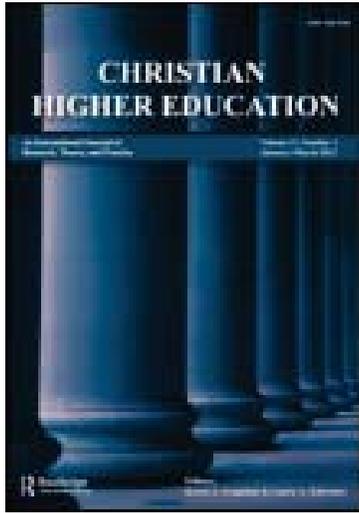


This article was downloaded by: [Messiah College]

On: 02 September 2015, At: 08:52

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London, SW1P 1WG



Christian Higher Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/uche20>

The Religious Roots of Ernest L. Boyer's Educational Vision: A Theology of Public Pietism

Douglas Jacobsen^a & Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen^a

^a Messiah College, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, USA

Published online: 18 Dec 2013.



CrossMark

[Click for updates](#)

To cite this article: Douglas Jacobsen & Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen (2014) The Religious Roots of Ernest L. Boyer's Educational Vision: A Theology of Public Pietism, *Christian Higher Education*, 13:1, 17-28, DOI: [10.1080/15363759.2014.856648](https://doi.org/10.1080/15363759.2014.856648)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15363759.2014.856648>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms &

Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

The Religious Roots of Ernest L. Boyer's Educational Vision: A Theology of Public Pietism

Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen
Messiah College, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, USA

The educational theories and policies promoted by Ernest L. Boyer (1928–1995), who served as chancellor of the SUNY system, U.S. Commissioner (Secretary) of Education, and president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, were significantly influenced by his affiliations with the Brethren in Christ Church and the Society of Friends (Quakers) even though he rarely spoke about his faith publicly. Drawing on Anabaptist, pietistic, and apophatic (silence-oriented) theological traditions, Boyer's public career demonstrated a service-focused convictional theology that could be termed "public pietism." Boyer's educational philosophy focused on human connectedness and called for all citizens to be active participants in improving their communities by living out nonsectarian "consensus virtues." While Boyer was a strong proponent of the separation of church and state, his public service was imbued with deeply held Christian values.

No one disputes that Ernest L. Boyer (1928–1995) was one of 20th-century America's premier educators. His career path was impressive. After brief teaching and administrative stints at Loyola University in Los Angeles, Upland College, and the University of California at Santa Barbara, he became, in 1965, the first executive dean of the State University of New York (SUNY) and five years later, at the age of 42, chancellor of the multicampus SUNY system. He was an educational advisor to President Richard Nixon and President Gerald Ford, and in 1977 President Jimmy Carter named him as the first Commissioner of Education, an office which later evolved into the U.S. Secretary of Education. In 1979, he became the president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the highly influential post he held until his death in 1995.

Boyer's legacy in the realm of educational policy and practice is perhaps even more impressive than his institutional accomplishments. Boyer's speeches and writings on teaching and learning changed the landscape of education in the United States at all levels from preschool to graduate school, and he gave voice to topics that continue to energize discussions of educational excellence: the notion that teachers and parents are partners in education, the helpfulness of having a clearly defined core curriculum, the necessity of good mentors, the importance of community service, the value of art, and the significance of globalization. Colleges and universities continue to be shaped by his redefinition of scholarship, a bold conceptualization that includes integrative thinking, applied reasoning, and reflection on the efficacy of various modes of teaching alongside more traditional discovery-oriented research.

While Boyer's accomplishments and influence are enumerated and analyzed in countless academic venues, one important aspect of his extraordinary life remains largely unexamined: his theological and religious perspectives. This void exists even though Boyer was a devout Christian whose faith deeply and directly influenced his thinking about education. Boyer's contributions were made during those decades when religion was most carefully sequestered from American public life, and the religiosity of a public official was assumed to be a matter of purely private concern as long as it fell within the general orb of safely Judeo-Christian values (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). Consequently, scant attention was given to Boyer's own religious roots and philosophical perspectives, even though he was charting an educational course for the entire American educational system that was going to have repercussions for decades to come.

This article pays attention to those religious roots, outlining the general theological and religious contours that were foundational to Boyer's educational vision. Our research on this subject has included the usual array of secondary resources, but it also relies heavily on primary sources. Boyer's religious faith first came to our attention by way of his association with Messiah College, where we have been teaching since 1984. Boyer attended Messiah College as an undergraduate, and he was the college roommate of D. Ray Hostetter, president of Messiah College from 1964 to 1994. For 22 years, from 1968 to 1995, Boyer was a member of Messiah College's Board of Trustees, including a term as chair (1982–1987). Our paths sometimes crossed on campus during those years, so we had the opportunity to get to know "Ernie," as everyone called him, as a colleague and not just as an author and educational leader. In the late 1980s, one of us (Rhonda) was among a group of about 15 educators and parachurch leaders who gathered at the behest of an Evangelical publishing group for a long weekend at a Colorado retreat center, where Ernie quarterbacked a wide-ranging conversation about educating the next generation of Christian leaders. After Boyer's untimely death at age 67, a research project undertaken by one of us (Jake) required a great deal of time in the college archives perusing official college documents, including those from the years when Boyer was a trustee, and also provided the opportunity to interview several members of the Boyer family about Ernie's religious views. Drawing on all of these sources, this article describes Boyer's childhood connections to familial and particular church traditions; explains his personal theological convictions from the perspective of historic Christian theology; argues that Boyer is an exemplar of *public pietism*, an orientation to public life that is currently gaining popularity; and, finally, identifies some of the educational implications of Boyer's theology.

BOYER'S PERSONAL STORY OF FAITH

Boyer said the person who taught him the most about faith was his grandfather, whom he repeatedly identified as the most important mentor in his life. Boyer's grandfather, William Boyer, was a saintly Brethren in Christ pastor who for 40 years ran a mission in the poorest section of Dayton, Ohio.¹ As a young person, Boyer attended his grandfather's mission church, and he knew his grandfather well. His descriptions of his grandfather always emphasized the

¹For more information about Ernest Boyer's grandfather, William H. Boyer, and the Dayton Mission, see Paul Boyer's 1987 book *Mission on Taylor Street: The Founding and Early Years of the Dayton Mission* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press). Paul Boyer (1935–2012) was Ernest Boyer's younger brother and a prominent cultural and intellectual historian from the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

same things: integrity, compassion, and service. Boyer said, “[Grandpa] taught me, as I observed his life, that to be truly human one must serve” (Boyer, 1997, p. 12). For Boyer, the kind of service exemplified by his grandfather was the heart of Christianity. True Christianity focused a person’s attention on others rather than self. When he wanted to make this point to educated audiences, he would often paraphrase Reinhold Niebuhr: “Man cannot be whole unless he be committed, he cannot find himself, unless he finds a purpose beyond himself” (Boyer, 1997, p. 115).

While service was at the core of Boyer’s faith, his understanding of service to others, and his own motivation for serving, always remained grounded in a specifically Christian sense of spirituality and salvation, which for Ernie encompassed all of God’s grace poured out on humanity and the rest of creation. His wife, Kay, said that Ernie almost always ended their daily prayers by thanking God for the “wonderful plan of salvation” made available through Christ’s death and asking God to increase their ability to trust God in everything (personal communication, May 20, 1999). She also identified Ernie’s favorite hymn—she called it his “all-purpose hymn” because it seemed so universally applicable to any occasion—as *Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us* (with lyrics written by Dorothy Thrupp in 1836). These are the four stanzas of that hymn, each of which was followed by the refrain, “Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, thou hast bought us, thine we are”:

Savior, like a shepherd lead us, much we need they tender care;
in thy pleasant pastures feed us, for thy use our folds prepare.

We are thine, do thou befriend us, be the guardian of our way;
keep thy folk from sin, defend us, seek us when we go astray.

Thou hast promised to receive us, poor and sinful though we be;
thou hast mercy to relieve us, grace to cleanse, and power to free.

Early let us seek they favor, early let us do thy will;
blessed Lord and only Savior, with thy love our bosoms fill.

While Boyer was raised in the Brethren in Christ Church, he was associated with the Society of Friends (Quakers) throughout most of his adult years. In one of his very rare public comments on his own personal religious affiliation, Boyer connected his Quaker membership with silence, saying in November 1991 simply that “as a Quaker, silence has a powerful religious significance to me” (Boyer, 1997, p. 121).

Boyer’s decision to associate with the local Quaker Meeting in various places where he and Kay lived was partly a function of the fact that there were no Brethren in Christ Churches in those areas. Kay said that she and Ernie saw the Quakers as a kindred church to the Brethren in Christ (personal communication, May 20, 1999). She also indicated, however, that the somewhat more inclusive spirituality of the Society of Friends had helped their children retain the most important values of the Brethren in Christ tradition. William Boyer, Ernie’s older brother, thought that Ernie was attracted to the Quakers because of their convictions about pacifism and service (personal communication, November 11, 1999).

While Boyer clearly inherited much of his convictional theology from his family and his church, he was not a person who merely absorbed what he was given. He consistently tried to pass whatever he learned on to others in a better and more humane form than he had received it. This commitment is evident in the story he told about his admission to membership in the Brethren in Christ Church. At the October 19, 1995, meeting of the Messiah College Board of Trustees, he explained that the congregation’s leaders had asked him only two questions and that

he was welcomed into fellowship as soon as he responded positively to both of them. He said the first question was whether he would be willing to forgive someone who had wronged him if that person asked for forgiveness, and the second question was whether he would be willing to seek forgiveness from another person if it became clear he had knowingly or unknowingly wronged that individual.

One of us (Jake) was in attendance when Boyer told this story and later looked up the membership requirements in the Brethren in Christ Church *Manual for Ministers* (1940) in use in Boyer's time. The official policy involved asking seven questions. The first queried the candidate about belief in the Bible as the Christian's "rule of faith and conduct." The second focused on belief in God as a Trinity and in the "soul-saving" work of Christ. The third dealt with personal holiness, the fourth with church attendance, and the fifth with issues of stewardship. The last two questions dealt with interpersonal relationships within the church. These last two questions are the ones Boyer had highlighted in his comments, but the actual wording of these questions differed considerably from Boyer's account: "Do you promise that if any of your brethren or sisters should trespass against you, you will go and tell them their faults between them and you alone, as taught in Matthew 18:15–16? Inasmuch as we are all fallible, if you should trespass against any of your brethren or sisters and they should come and tell you of your fault (according to Matthew 18) are you willing to receive it?"

The official membership questions of the Brethren in Christ are formulated to stress the negative, asking candidates if they are willing to confront sin in the lives of other church members and to confess their own sins if confronted by others. In his recounting, Boyer turned these questions on their heads so they stress reconciliation and mutual forgiveness rather than fault-finding. Perhaps Boyer believed mutual forgiveness was, deep down, the real goal of the Brethren in Christ Church, so he instinctively (and perhaps not consciously) corrected the language of the church to convey what the church really meant. His reformulation preserves tradition, but passes it along in improved form.

Boyer's focus with regard to matters of faith seems to have been almost unremittingly positive. He believed it was always better to nurture the good in others and in oneself (in that order) rather than denouncing one's own faults or the faults of others. In this regard, he stands in a line of Christian theologians that goes at least as far back as Augustine of Hippo (d. 430), who proposed at one point that evil has no substance or being in and of itself, but is merely a privation of the good. Still, Boyer was acutely aware that the world as it presently exists is full of suffering and other failures of goodness, and he thought those who are blessed with resources become responsible for doing what they can to alleviate the pain, loss, and injustices that exist in the world. As a teacher, he was also deeply concerned about the tragedy of unfulfilled potential. In speech after speech Boyer would quote the poet Vachel Lindsay (1915, p. 65):

It is the world's one crime its babes grow dull,
Not that they starve, but starve so dreamlessly;
Not that they sow, but that they seldom reap;
Not that they serve, but have no gods to serve;
Not that they die, but that they die like sheep.

After quoting the poem, Boyer would often add: "The tragedy is not death. The tragedy is to die with commitments undefined, convictions undeclared, and service unfulfilled" (Boyer, 1997, p. 116). In Boyer's view, evil is not an entity in itself, and it has no power of its own. Evil is a stunting

of the goodness that God has scattered in such wide and gloriously diverse ways throughout the world and that God expects us to nurture in ourselves, in others, and in all creation.

Boyer believed the ordinary could become part of the holy and a small act of care or kindness could transform a life from despair to hope. This theme defined almost all the stories of great teachers he liked to tell and retell. During a conversation with his son in the last weeks of his life, Boyer talked about the meaning of human existence: "I've always known how important what we do here can be, but recently I've come to see so plainly all the ways in which what we do here can also become what I can only describe as holy" (Messiah College, 1996, p. 4). Boyer's personal faith was a journey toward holiness, but that journey was never solitary. For Boyer, holiness was ultimately social. One grew in holiness only by helping others become both whole and holy. The straightest path to heaven was the path that took the most detours to serve others.

BOYER'S FAITH IN THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Boyer's theology was rooted in a long association with the Brethren in Christ Church in which he was raised. Historically, Brethren in Christ theology has been defined as a merger of Anabaptist, Pietist, and Wesleyan concerns. These movements emerged at different points in history—Anabaptism in the 16th century, Pietism in the 17th, and Wesleyanism in the 18th—but they were all, to some degree, reactions against the overemphasis on ideas that characterized so much of early modern Protestantism in Europe. All three of these traditions emphasize the importance of lived faith over right doctrine, with Anabaptism tending to stress simple Christian morality (such as truth telling, peaceableness, service to others, and community) while Pietism and Wesleyanism place greater emphasis on specifically religious practices such as prayer, Bible reading, and evangelism. In all of these traditions, haggling over mere words was discouraged. Within the Pietist tradition, in particular, contention over doctrine was specifically denounced as unchristian. What was promoted instead was a form of faith that called for unity in the simple essentials of faith, freedom in nonessential matters, and charity in all things. This is the spiritual soil that nurtured Boyer's personal faith.

When we first began our formal research efforts on Boyer's theology, it often felt like shoveling water with a pitchfork. We would plunge the theological pitchfork of systematic theology into the ground of his writings, seeking to unearth some bit of dogma here or some confessional admission there, but time and again the pitchfork would come up empty. It eventually dawned on us that instead of being frustrated by this lack of doctrinal data, we should see the absence of traditional theological material as something meaningful in and of itself. The total absence of theological jargon was powerful evidence about Boyer's beliefs. With the dawning of that realization, it was easy to see that this was precisely what should be expected. Boyer was a pietist, not a creedalist, and accordingly his faith and theology were driven by practice and not by the disembodied claims of traditional theology. Being silent simply does not equate with being devoid of theology.

Silence is a theological category especially important in the Eastern Orthodox strand of Christianity, and Orthodoxy has roots dating back to the most ancient Christian traditions. Its emphasis on the importance of silence is sometimes called apophatic theology. This silence-infused style of Christian reflection is also called negative theology because of its sharp contrast to the wordy, enumerative style that is characteristic of traditional positive theology. Apophatic theology constantly reminds the Christian that God is beyond all words, that human conceptions

of God, even at their best, are woefully inadequate to describe the divine Source of all being. Words about God can easily misrepresent who God really is, and ideas about God can sometimes become idols displacing the true God from the center of affection and worship. Boyer spent his life far removed from the circle of professional theologians, and it is doubtful that he ever used the word “apophatic” to describe his own theology. Nonetheless, Boyer’s understanding of God was thoroughly in keeping with the majestic, transcendent, and wholly nonparochial vision of God that apophatic theology assumes. It lacked any scent of tribalism.

Boyer’s theology centered on human action and on the virtues that promote moral behavior. In the last chapter of *The Basic School*, “Living with Purpose,” Boyer (1995) wrote: “Virtues take on meaning when they are lived” (p. 191). He then quoted the famous line from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* that reads, “We become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts” (cited in Boyer, 1995, p. 191). Without trying to make Boyer into someone he was not, it is fair to note that his thinking on this subject aligns with classical Catholic theology. Boyer frequently stressed the importance of putting faith into action and of slowly growing in goodness by practicing right behaviors. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1995) describes a similar process: “Human virtues acquired by education, by deliberative acts and by a perseverance ever-renewed in repeated efforts are purified and elevated by divine grace. With God’s help, they forge character and give facility in the practice of the good. The virtuous man is happy to practice them. It is not easy for man, wounded by sin, to maintain moral balance. Christ’s gift of salvation offers us the grace necessary to persevere in the pursuit of the virtues” (pp. 497–498).

It would be wrongheaded to claim that Boyer at his core was really a good Catholic or a good Orthodox believer. However, clearly his views drew from the deepest and most practical currents of spirituality that inform all the Christian traditions. In addition, he was never concerned about credentialing as a good Anabaptist or Pietist. Boyer never abandoned the faith community into which he was born and by which he was nurtured, but his faith was not bounded by any one theological tradition.

A story will illustrate this point. During the early 1990s, one of us (Jake) served as a member of a joint faculty-board committee charged with formulating a statement about the faith commitments guiding institutional and educational policies at Messiah College. Ernie was one of the trustees on the committee, and at one meeting he asked, with great sincerity and utmost seriousness, why the college needed a new statement of faith. Holding up a copy of the College’s *Statement of Foundational Values*, he said, “We already have our confession of faith.” The foundational values to which Boyer referred describe Christian faith as a personal relationship with Christ resulting in a “pattern of life and service” that celebrates learning and emphasizes the importance of the person, the significance of community, and the values of discipline, creativity, service, and reconciliation. What more, Boyer wondered out loud, could possibly be needed? For Boyer, theology was a performing art, not a cognitive science. Beliefs had their place, but faith could never be fully captured by beliefs alone. Instead, faith centered on convictions, which Boyer understood to be ideas embodied in life, ideas moving one’s hands and heart as well as one’s head. Convictions define a way of life, not merely a way of thinking. Boyer cared little about beliefs, but he cared enormously about convictions.

The kind of convictional theology Boyer favored was not his own invention but has a long history within the Christian tradition. The word “theology” is often now associated only with the detailed and philosophically inclined exploration of Christian ideas, but that was not always

the case. In fact, it can be argued that the oldest forms of Christian theology were convictional in nature, focusing on the entirety of Christian life rather than exclusively on Christian beliefs. Origen of Alexandria, who lived in the third century, is often identified as the first systematic theologian of the Christian tradition. His book *On First Principles* (ca. 225) is the earliest attempt at formulating a comprehensive explanation and defense for all the core doctrines of Christian faith. Ideas were very important for Origen, but Origen said the true end of theology was “training in virtue,” and his students said he “stimulated [them] by the deeds he did more than by the doctrines he taught” (McClendon, 1986, pp. 43–44). For Origen, as for Boyer, the purpose of theological education was training in virtue.

BOYER AS A PUBLIC PIETIST

Boyer's career was, in essence, a public performance of his personal faith. In Kay Boyer's words, his public career involved “putting Christian principles into action for everybody” (personal communication, May 20, 1999). The addition of the words “for everybody” is crucial. Boyer's public life involved a self-conscious, self-aware embodiment of his deepest religious convictions aimed toward producing the greatest good in the lives of everyone he influenced or affected. For Boyer, being a Christian in the public square necessarily meant being a person for others. Though Boyer surely would have considered evangelism to be an appropriate, even a required, activity of the church, his own publicly oriented Christian actions were about aiding the many.

Boyer's kind of public service seeks to give the greatest number of people the best possible chance of making their lives meaningful. In the most positive sense, it means providing people with the skills they need to flourish as individuals and as members of the communities to which they belong. In the tragic sense, it means reaching out in service to those whom Boyer described by using the words of Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children's Defense Fund, as being so in need of love that they will “grab the hand of anybody kind enough to hold it” (as cited in Boyer, 1997, p. 17). Public service requires making judgments about what is best and most effective in a given environment, and living as a Christian in the public arena always involves some degree of calculation. Life in the public square has to be *performed*. It has to be planned and practiced in advance. There is a role for spontaneity, for responding to events as they unfold in real time, but Christian public service cannot be a matter of simply doing whatever comes naturally. The considerations are too complex and the stakes are much too high.

For Boyer, the notion of “putting Christian principles into action for everybody” was never meant to be a threat or an imposition. Boyer had no interest whatsoever in imposing his own beliefs on anyone. Freedom from coercion in matters of faith was part of the long heritage of both denominations with which he associated, the Brethren in Christ and the Quakers. His personal commitment to the separation of church and state went deep, fueled by his own childhood experiences. He recalled how he felt ostracized during World War II when, month after month, his class lost the school's competition to sell war bonds because his family's pacifist principles excluded him from participation. His parents also received special permission to excuse him from being vaccinated against childhood diseases, because vaccinations were contrary to Brethren in Christ teaching that “faith in God was all that was needed to keep healthy” (Boyer, 1997, p. 120). It was an awkward request, one that could have been construed as putting the larger community at

risk, and it was his family alone that asked for the exception. In his school, Boyer was a minority of one on numerous matters where faith intersected with public life.

Boyer never forgot those experiences. As an educational leader, he was adamant about keeping the nation's classrooms "free of religious indoctrination or coercion" in any and all forms (Boyer, 1997, p. 120). He favored the elimination of things like the recitation of a nonsectarian prayer at the beginning of the school day, and he was even opposed to setting aside a moment of silence during a school's daily opening exercises. Actually, he said he was "appalled" when this alternative was suggested, because it assumes that a moment of silence is just a moment of "doing nothing" and thus immune from religious freedom objections. Boyer's own reaction, rooted in Quaker respect for the religious significance of silence, was that "silence that is intended to have a spiritual consequence is not a moment of doing nothing. It is a moment of doing something profoundly religious." He concluded that "simply stated, no public school should teach religion or impose religious ritual on its students. These are obligations that should be entrusted to the church and, above all, to parents" (Boyer, 1997, p. 121).

Yet Boyer still believed—and believed strongly—that faith needed to be part of the public realm of society and, especially, that spiritual and moral values needed to be part of the nation's public schools. How could this happen without falling back into a pattern of inappropriate indoctrination? For Boyer the answer was to be found in "rediscovering that the sense of the sacred is inextricably interwoven with the most basic of human impulses" (Boyer, 1997, p. 119). This vision of life was part and parcel of Boyer's personal faith, but it took on a slightly different emphasis when translated into the public sphere. Rather than focusing on how the ordinary could become holy, Boyer's theology of public service focused on the ways the ordinary already was, in some sense, holy—because the sacred is embedded in basic human impulses. Boyer's theology simultaneously focused on the sacredness of individual human life while remaining thoroughly oriented toward the improvement of public life. An appropriate term for this theological orientation is "public pietism."

When the word "Pietist" is capitalized, it refers to a specific, historical group of 17th-century European Protestants who stressed heartfelt religious conversion and holiness of life. Many American denominations besides the Brethren in Christ share deep roots in that Pietist movement, including Nazarenes, the Church of God, the Evangelical Free Church, the Covenant Church, and numerous Baptists.

When the word "pietism" is not capitalized, it refers to a much more general sense of religiosity focusing on personal authenticity, moral fortitude, affective spirituality, and faith expressed through action. American religious history is chock full of pietists who retreat from the larger life of society in order to nurture their faith out of public view. Tucked in their homes, or among small groups of friends, or within their local congregations, these private pietists view participation in the public world as a threat to faith and seek to avoid encounters with all the moral dangers and powerful temptations that lurk there.

At the other extreme, the personal religious views of some pietists in America serve as the fuel for political aggressiveness. Political pietists want their own particular convictions to be adopted by society as a whole, and they see the political process—the power politics of 51% democracy—as a way to make that happen. Known as the Moral Majority or more recently as the New Religious Right, political pietism in America became ascendant in the later 20th century.

Among American Protestants, private pietism predominated for most of the 20th century, and Boyer's family and church would have been comfortable in their company. Boyer moved away

from private pietism when he entered public service, and he was vocal and persistent in his calls for all citizens, including Christians, to become active participants in the broader community. However, Boyer would never have associated himself with the political piety espoused by the Moral Majority. Coerced faith commitments and imposed religious practices would have been anathema to Boyer.

Boyer's own pietism—an orientation we are calling public pietism—has an entirely different feel than either of these other forms of pietism. In contrast to private pietism, it focuses on service rather than separatism. In contrast to political pietism, it focuses on public consensus rather than control. To a large extent, public pietism is synonymous with the term “faithful presence,” the political orientation heralded in James Davison Hunter's (2010) recent book titled *To Change the World*. Hunter argues, “To provide for the physical, aesthetic, intellectual, and social health of the community is a good in its own right and it is part and parcel of the covenant that believers have with the people that God has placed in their lives and the social and physical world in which God has placed them” (p. 266). Boyer would have added a hearty “Amen” at this point.

Since its publication in 2010, *To Change the World* sparked conversations on many church-related campuses and across the Evangelical community, and readers are intrigued by the new approach it recommends for Christians in the public square. Somewhat ironically, that “new” approach is a position that Boyer assumed long ago. The pressures to veer away from a posture of “faithful presence” toward more private or toward more political versions of pietism are enormous in American Christianity. Boyer's life and thought offer a third way, however, a pathway that combines deeply held personal faith with an equally devout commitment to serve and love others without imposing any views or values upon them.

THE EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF BOYER'S THEOLOGY

The implications of Boyer's theology for higher education can be discerned in his influence at Messiah College. The college was founded by the Brethren in Christ denomination that shaped Boyer, but it is a tiny group with a current American membership consisting of only about 30,000 people. By the time Boyer was on the college's board of trustees, students hailing from Brethren in Christ churches comprised only a small percentage of those attending the college and the percentage of faculty affiliated with the denomination was dwindling. Boyer was pivotal in helping the college transition intentionally and thoughtfully from being a narrowly denominational institution to being ecumenically Christian and welcoming of everyone. He was intimately involved in selecting its first non-Brethren in Christ president, Rodney Sawatsky, a Princeton-educated Mennonite, and Boyer supported Sawatsky when he led the campus through an extended period of reflection on institutional identity and mission.

The results of that process are evident in the book *Gracious Christianity* (2006) which Sawatsky coauthored, a book used in the college's core course for entering students. Its theological perspective is explicit: “While we draw from the broad history of Christianity (including Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox perspectives), we freely admit that our own spiritual roots are Anabaptist, Pietist, and Wesleyan. This means, among other things, that we are committed to peace as a gospel imperative, to faith as necessarily lived in community, to the importance of a personal relationship with Christ, and to a spirituality that emphasizes justice and ethical decision making” (Jacobsen & Sawatsky, 2006, p. 25). The book then goes on to make a very Boyer-like claim that “the church is called to be a community of the never-satisfied-until-all-are-satisfied, a community

with hope that the power of God's love can remake both our own lives and the shared life of the entire planet" (Jacobsen & Sawatsky, 2006, p. 97).

Messiah College is a private, religious college, so Boyer felt free to lend his personal, enthusiastic support to its very specific identity and mission. Different rules apply in the public sphere, and Boyer would never have tried to move other campuses in the same direction. However, his educational vision for the broader world was based on well-developed metaphysical underpinnings. The most important faith assumption in his public educational philosophy was the fundamental connectedness of all things. He believed everything was in some sense ultimately connected with everything else; connectedness was a brute fact of life, not merely an opinion or theory. He liked to quote his friend, the Nobel Prize-winning biologist Barbara McClintock, on this point, repeating her dictum that "everything is one" (as cited in Boyer, 1997, p. 60). Focusing much more specifically on the human dimensions of the world's interconnectedness, he would cite another biologist, Mary Clark, to the effect that "social embeddedness is the essence of our nature" (as cited in Boyer, 1997, p. 134). Boyer's favorite comment on connectedness, however, came from the literary scholar Mark Van Doren and, not surprisingly, it emphasizes the role of educators: "The connectedness of things is what the educator contemplates to the limit of his [or her] capacity" (as cited in Boyer, 1997, p. 25).

While Boyer believed connectedness was a fundamental fact of life, connectedness is also something that can never be taken for granted. The connectedness of the world has a living quality to it, simultaneously tenacious and fragile. Connectedness, despite its status as a fundamental fact of the natural and human worlds, constantly needs to be nurtured and cultivated, or it will wither. Within the human community, especially, connectedness is both an irreducible fact of life and a mandate for living. In the language of philosophical ethics, Boyer's notion of connectedness contains both an "is" (a description of reality) and an "ought" (a prescription concerning how people should live within that reality). The fact of connectedness contains within itself a required ethic of connectedness.

In light of human connectedness, Boyer articulated "eight universal human experiences that bind us all together" (Boyer, 1997, p. 125). These are (a) the life cycle, "the imperative of birth and growth and death"; (b) the ability to communicate through symbols; (c) a sense of the aesthetic, that is, the ability to appreciate beauty; that all people are (d) members of groups; (e) embedded in the natural world; (f) consciously embedded in time, with an ability to recall the past and to anticipate the future; (g) produce and consume; and (h) seek "ultimate meaning and purpose in our lives" (pp. 125–126).

For Boyer, the eight facts of human connectedness naturally and necessarily impose certain moral mandates on humanity. If Boyer had been forced to summarize this natural morality in one word, he undoubtedly would have called it service. He constantly repeated the wisdom he learned as a child from his grandfather, "that to be truly human one must serve." Service was fundamental for Boyer because service, understood in the broadest sense, is nothing other than the practice of acknowledging and positively responding to humanity's inherent connectedness. But Boyer did not limit himself to just one word when seeking to explain the moral requirements of our empirical connectedness. Instead he developed a list of seven "basic virtues" together defining the natural moral responsibilities we inherit as soon as we become part of the human race. As articulated in the last section of his book *The Basic School*, these seven virtues are: (a) honesty, (b) respect, (c) responsibility, (d) compassion, (e) self-discipline, (f) perseverance, and (g) giving (Boyer, 1995, pp. 183–185). It was

this framework that defined the moral core of Boyer's character and his virtue-oriented public theology.

Boyer sometimes referred to these seven basic virtues as "consensus virtues" because they are naturally derivable from the human situation and agreeable to essentially all persons of good will. He believed these basic moral values were largely ideologically neutral, so they could be advocated by persons across the full spectrum of political opinion in America. To support this perspective, he cited survey data indicating that "almost 70 percent of the American public thinks it would be possible to get people in their community to agree on a set of basic values that would be taught in public schools" (Boyer, 1995, pp. 244–245).

In both his personal faith and his public faith, Boyer never tired of emphasizing that life itself was the goal of being human—that good practice was to be more highly valued than mere words or ideas—but Boyer's primary emphasis on practice should not be construed as undermining the importance he placed on language. Boyer's original scholarly discipline was speech communication, and he carried a concern for language with him throughout his life. He believed language was crucial because human beings literally live in the world they create with their language. He cited Malcolm Bradbury's dictum that "if we do not have mastery over language, language itself will master us" (as cited in Boyer, 1997, p. 123) and he frequently followed that up by repeating Wayne Booth's admonition that human communication had the power to spiral human relations either healingly upward or viciously downward (p. 66).

Boyer wanted language to spiral the conversation upward. Accordingly, he affirmed "good communication means not just cleverness, not just clarity; it means integrity as well." He felt very strongly about this, arguing "the teaching of language is teaching about truth, and that every language class must be an ethics class, since communication without honesty is one of life's most dangerous and destructive weapons" (Boyer, 1997, p. 124). Human values, he said, "are sustained on campus by the honesty of our words, and by the confidence we have in the words of others" (Boyer, 1997, p. 66).

Words mattered for Boyer, but his educational goal was about daily living. He liked to quote Abraham Joshua Heschel's advice to young people: "Let them remember that every little deed counts, that every word has power, and that we can—every one—do our share to redeem the world in spite of all absurdities and all frustrations and all disappointments. And above all, remember that the meaning of life is to build a life as if it were a work of art" (as cited in Boyer, 1995, pp. 193–194). Boyer cherished this hope for all the children of the world, his own and others: that they would grow up and flourish as individuals and as caring members of society; that the life of each child would be a unique work of art enriching the world by its beauty; that all people would learn to respect the miracle of life; and that everyone would "grow up knowing deep down inside that they are truly members of the same human family, the family to which we are all inextricably connected" (Boyer, 1997, p. 117). In essence, Boyer believed "the sense of the sacred" was interwoven into the most basic impulses of life (p. 119). This conviction was at the heart of Boyer's public faith and theology.

Boyer's views are rooted in a deeply Christian understanding of the world as God's creation: God had created the world and declared it good. The present world obviously does not reflect the intended perfection of creation, but the fundamental goodness God infused into the world is still there. That goodness needs to be rediscovered and nurtured, and that is not a task for Christians alone. Instead, the process of rediscovering and nurturing a sense of the sacred in creation requires everyone to be involved, Christian or not. Boyer felt no tension in taking this

stand between his own Christianity and the spiritual aspirations of humankind in general. He believed the one true God who Christians worship is the God of all creation and all humanity, not some kind of tribal deity who cares only or even especially for Christians. The theological core of Boyer's educational vision is the same as the one presented by the Apostle Paul in the New Testament (Ephesians 5:22–23). The fruit produced by the Holy Spirit at work in individual lives consists of love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are self-evident virtues to be honored and nurtured by all people.

REFERENCES

- Boyer, E. L. (1995). *The basic school: A community for learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Boyer, E. L. (1997). *Selected speeches, 1979–1995*. Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Brethren in Christ Church. (1940). *A manual for ministers authorized by the General Conference of the Brethren in Christ Church*. Nappanee, IN: Evangelical Visitor.
- Hunter, J. D. (2010). *To change the world: The irony, tragedy, and possibility of Christianity in the late modern world*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Jacobsen, D., & Sawatsky, R. J. (2006). *Gracious Christianity: Living the love we profess*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Jacobsen, D., & Jacobsen, R. H. (2012). *No longer invisible: Religion in university education*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Lindsay, V. (1915). The leaden-eyed. In *Congo and other poems* (p. 65). New York, NY: Macmillan.
- McClendon, J. W., Jr. (1986). *Systematic theology: Vol. 1. Ethics*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.
- Messiah College. (1996). *The Bridge: Messiah College Magazine*, 87, 4.
- U.S. Catholic Church Staff. (1995). *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. New York, NY: Doubleday.