

The politics of born-again (part two)

In 1980 the publishers in North America sold over \$400 million worth of religious books. To date the readership shows no sign of decreasing.

Judith Haiven, editor of Alberta's Heritage magazine, has recently contributed to this market with her first book, *Faith, Hope, no Charity*. This book investigates the born-again Christian movement and takes a brutally honest but surprisingly fair look at the people behind the headlines and their motives for propagating this religion.

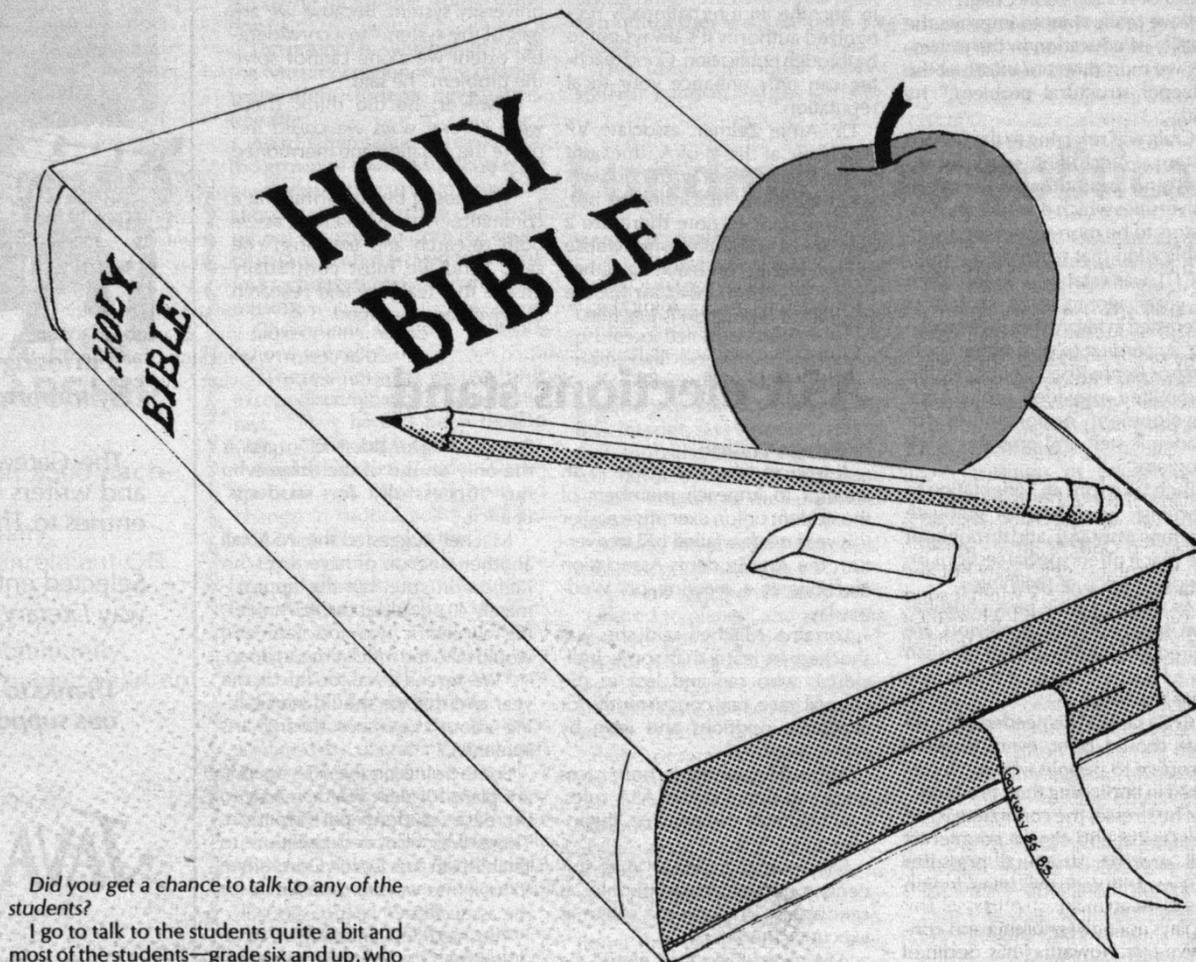
Haiven began her investigation several years ago while living in Toronto. And those investigations carried her across North America where she interviewed people of all walks of life — the young and the old, the famous and the nondescript as well as the religious fanatics and secular humanists.

The pro-life movement, the build-up of nuclear arms and even education are discussed in *Faith, Hope, no Charity*.

In this second part of a two part feature, Haiven concentrates on education and the nuclear arms build-up.

On other aspect of the book that interested me was Millwoods Christian School. What were your first impressions of the school and the children?

The children were like normal children to me, except they seemed quite subdued. Patrolled is the word I would use to describe the classroom situation. It was a startling thing to see 60 children around the perimeter of the room, each at their own little cubicles facing a wall, each working on their own for hours at a time on little workbooks. These 60 children are of all different age groups so you'd have kids as young as kindergarten or grade one kids all the way up to grade 12 in this room. There'd be very little stimulation in the room. There are no particular signs or wall hangings or extra books to look at, but there are an awful lot of religious slogans on the wall; sort of in the form of banners. The children work alone in these sort of exercise books. After they've done that they'll ask the teacher—she's not a teacher: she's called a "supervisor"—to check their answers against a book of corrections. If there are any errors they have to do the exercise again. But there seems to be very little interaction between the students, except at lunchtime, and discussion in the class was almost non-existent.



Did you get a chance to talk to any of the students?

I go to talk to the students quite a bit and most of the students—grade six and up, who were sort of more vocal—said that they really enjoyed going to the school and that they'd had a terrible time in the public education system. They said their parents had withdrawn them from the public education system because they were behind, and that this system is really helping them improve. All of them seem to like it. And all of them seemed to be fairly well behaved and polite. It wasn't as if they were automatons. But I really wonder. I know that a lot of parents put their children in this kind of school because they public school system does not offer the kinds of solutions they want to their children's education problems. So sometimes as a last resort parents will put their children in this kind of system, but in my view the system seems to have its drawbacks.

second half of an interview by
Anna Borowiecki
 graphics and photo by Bill St. John

If a student graduated from grade 12, could they walk into a university setting and pick up the work on the level of the first year university student?

The people who run Millwoods Christian School and the principal think that it can be done. But in point of fact here in Edmonton and Alberta, there hasn't been anyone who graduated (at the time I wrote my book) from grade 12 at this school and had entered first year university. Some of the grade 12 graduates just went off into the work force and some of the others went to the various Bible Colleges here or in the States. There hasn't been an example yet in this province of somebody who went into university having gone through the high school curriculum. The other thing is that, because the courses are fairly new and have only been in Canada for the last ten years, and strongly for the last five years, there haven't been a lot of people who have received their entire education in the ACE curriculum. Many have transferred from grade six or grade nine and are doing the last few years of their schooling in the ACE curriculum. So we haven't had a situation where we've had kids from grade one to grade 12 graduating out of that system. I'm not an educator and I couldn't even begin to evaluate if this program could accidentally thwart people from entering a post-secondary institution. But the program first of all was American-based, which I disagreed with. Everything except a small component of the social studies curriculum is American in orientation. There's virtually no concentration on literature or historical novels or any of the other things the public school system allows children to do. The

libraries in these schools are woefully small and inadequate, and are mostly stacked with bible tracts, bible interpretation books and novels of a so-called Christian nature. The teachers are generally people who didn't particularly like the public school system because they didn't have a lot of control in it, which I understand, and they have gone in this system because it allows them to be more in control of the students and of the curriculum.

What were the greatest concerns you had about this system?

I wonder what kind of student is going to come out of it. This system doesn't question the values that our society puts on things now. It doesn't make people question why it is that some people are poor and some people are rich. It doesn't make people wonder why there's a threat of nuclear war, which countries are contributing to a nuclear arms buildup and which aren't. It doesn't allow the children to be actively involved in current affairs discussions. It doesn't allow a lot of cultural exchange between the children. I'm worried that it may not produce well-rounded and thinking individuals, and that concerns me.

Is a school such as Millwoods Christian School such a negative school?

No. For the duration of the time the children are at school from whatever grade they start to whatever grade they leave, probably they're in a fairly sheltered, warm environment. The difficulty is how they deal with all the different factors when they get out? How do they deal with the fact that 50% of the people in Canada say they don't have a reli-



Children at an Edmonton Public Library art class: children in public schools will have access to libraries and education in literature and history, unlike children in private Christian schools.