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Ten practicing high school social studies teachers who self-identified as Christian answered an

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The Light to the Left: Conceptions of Social Justice Among Christian Social Studies Teachers

Paul Orlowski

Abstract

This article describes a study that took place in Saskatchewan, Canada, during 2013-2014. Ten practicing high school social studies teachers who self-identified as Christian answered an unsolicited invitation to participate in a qualitative study about the ways in which they think about social justice. Almost evenly split between Catholic and Protestant, female and male, and urban and rural, most participants were very progressive in their thinking about important economic and social issues. For example, all supported paying taxes and the social welfare state, and almost all supported gay rights and feminism. As well, an important emergent theme arose: The majority spoke about breaking from the teachings of their church if the teachings did not fit with contemporary society. All of them claimed that their faith influenced their thinking about social justice. The study challenges some secular notions about the values held by Christian social studies teachers. Situated in Canada, the study challenges American research findings about the political ideology and values of Christian social studies teachers.

Keywords: social studies education; teaching for social justice; controversial issues; teacher beliefs; Christian teaching

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