Multiculturalism and the Academic Study of Religion in the Schools

D. Keith Naylor, Associate Professor of Religious Studies, Occidental College

Multiculturalism remains a highly debated topic in academic circles, but much of that debate ignores religion as an important feature of the world’s cultures. However elusive and controversial, the definition of multiculturalism, as a curricular matter, involves at minimum the study of diverse cultures and their meaning in human history. Carol Geary Schneider, president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, noted recently in Diversity Digest that the academy is convinced, “that citizens now need to acquire significant knowledge both of cultures other than their own and of disparate cultures’ struggles for recognition and equity...” The academic study of religion is an integral part of such knowledge. My work assisting teachers in learning how to teach about religion in the schools has convinced me that the study of religion has much to contribute to the emphasis on multiculturalism throughout our educational system.

Over the last five years, I have worked with secondary school teachers in Southern California through the California 3Rs Project (Rights, Responsibilities, and Respect), a project helping teachers to teach about religion in a way that is constitutionally permissible and educationally sound. My role has been to offer workshops on teaching about American religious history, helping teachers to identify places in their established curricula where they can develop study units on religion. In the absence of inclination and space in most secondary programs to offer separate courses in religious studies, my goal has been to encourage teachers to pay attention to religion in American history.

In working with teachers, I have been concerned especially with noting the presence and influence of religion in America beyond the Puritan colonies, and the California missions, both of which seem to be stopping places, literally. For instance, to have teachers study the succession of the founders’ religious liberty generation by the 19th century evangelical benevolence empire with its agencies and reforms would be a break-through, to have them explore the efforts of the U.S. Roman Catholic leadership to establish parochial schools in answer to Protestantism in public schools in the same period would be a major success. An examination of the forging of independent black churches as touchstones of identity and power for blacks in that period would be a further advance in learning. As we study the presence and participation of the many cultural groups in American history, so too must we study religious traditions in plural, including the world’s religions that have “immigrated” to America.

The teachers I have worked with have been invariably bright, energetic, and committed to education, but few of them have had any formal exposure to the academic study of religion. Those who have responded to the state education standards mandating the study of religion can be considered as not only dedicated, but heroic. They operate under conditions of anxiety and are sometimes pressured by suspicion regarding religion from superintendents, principals, colleagues, parents, and students. They work in settings where religion is a highly charged subject even as it is largely absent as a curricular subject. Their classrooms reflect the great racial, ethnic, class, cultural, and religious diversity of Southern California, and indeed of the world. How can we press religious studies help to develop with secondary school teachers a multicultural curriculum, a curriculum as rich as the background of the students and teachers in the classroom?

Clearly, teachers need many resources to teach about religion. They need texts, such as the Oxford University Press series, Religion in American Life, to which our fellow professors have contributed. They need audio-visual materials, such as On Common Ground: World Religions in America by Diana Eck and...
Marcia Beuchamp

Marcia Beuchamp holds a master's degree in theological studies and secondary education from Harvard Divinity School and has experience teaching at both the high school and college levels. Most recently she has worked as Religious Freedom Programs Coordinator for The Forum Freedom First Amendment Center where her duties included coordination of the activities of the California 3 Rs Project (Rights, Responsibilities, Respect) and leadership of the state education projects sponsored by the First Amendment Center. She is a member of the AAR Religion in the Schools Task Force.

BEFORE SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, the need to address religion and religious perspectives in the curriculum and throughout the school day was not high on the educational agenda of many schools. Perhaps now that will change.

The tragic events of that day are a clear reminder that religion matters. It matters in a world torn by conflict over religious differences. And it matters in our efforts to maintain the most religiously diverse place on Earth. From the sublime examples of abiding faith found in the stories of suffering families to the ugly attacks on American Muslims (and others mistaken for Muslims), religion is suddenly front and center in America's public square.

Of course, it shouldn't take a national crisis or outbreak of hate and ignorance to get educators to notice how poorly religion is addressed in America's public and private schools. We have known about our failure to include religion in the curriculum for more than a decade through multiple textbook studies, and periodic reports from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the National Council for the Social Studies, and others. Only in the last few years have textbooks and schools even begun to address religion, while most schools of education continue to ignore it altogether. We have also known for some time that our diverse student populations have many religious needs and requirements that schools must do more to accommodate.

On December 17, 1999, President Clinton used his radio address to announce that the US Department of Education would send religious liberty guidelines to every public school in the nation.1 Although largely ignored by the media and action by the president is nothing less than historic. For the first time in American history, every school will have consensus guidelines on the religious-liberty rights of students, the appropriate role for religion in the curriculum, and partnerships between faith communities and public schools.

A Growing Concern

The packet of guidelines from the US Department of Education represented the culmination of 15 years of hard work by many religious and educational groups, representing a broad spectrum of religious views. It is the most important and comprehensive step to date in the effort to get beyond the controversy and conflict that has characterized the "religion and schools" debate for many years. Much of the confusion about these issues may be traced to a mis-understanding and misapplication of the Supreme Court's decisions of the early 1960s, striking down state-sponsored prayer and devotional Bible reading in public schools.2 The political rhetoric surrounding these decisions convinced many Americans, including many school administrators, that religion and religious expression had no place in public schools. Fear of controversy also led many textbook publishers to ignore the treatment of religion in history and other subjects.

By the mid-1980s, however, the tide began to turn. Textbook studies by both liberal and conservative groups, as well as textbook trials in Alabama and Tennessee, highlighted the need for schools to take religion more seriously. Lawsuits proliferated on both sides of the debate. From the right, conservative Christians challenged school policies they believed unconstitutionally banned student religious speech during the school day. From the left, civil liberties organizations and the American Civil Liberties Union and school practices (particularly in the rural South), saw as continuing to involve school officials in promoting religion.

Political pressure to address the problem of public schools as "religion-free zones" led to the passage of the Equal Access Act in 1984, which was upheld as constitutional by the US Supreme Court in 1990.3 For many conservatives, this legislation represents a major breakthrough in the effort to allow for student religious expression in public schools.4 While the Equal Access Act opened the door to student religious expression, it did not answer the many other questions about religious liberty rights of students, and it did nothing to address the question of religion in the curriculum.

Building A New Consensus

In the wake of the textbook studies and controversies, a collection of diverse religious and educational groups decided we could do better in our treatment of religion in the public schools. In an effort to move us beyond the fights of the past, this group of organizations met to develop guidelines regarding some unsettled issues.5

In an effort to demonstrate that consensus already existed on the many ways to address religion in the schools, several important pamphlets were produced by this coalition. These pamphlets include Religion in the Public School Curriculum: Questions and Answers6, Religious Holidays in the Public Schools7, and Equal Access and the Public Schools: Questions and Answers8 are all products of this diverse coalition's work together.

The way in which these documents were created is as important as what they say. As Marcia Beuchamp 

G O O D  P R A C T I S E

Marcia Beuchamp

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G O O D  P R A C T I S E
Background

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HE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY (FSU) Religion Department became involved in the issue of teaching about the Bible in public schools in the Winter of 2000, when the Florida Department of Education asked us to review the guidelines for two courses that were part of the state curriculum: Bible History: Old Testament and Bible History: New Testament. There have been approved Bible courses in the Florida public schools for many years, but their constitutionality had been recently challenged by two events: a bitterly divisive battle in Lee County over the appropriate Bible curriculum to be adopted, and a report from the People for the American Way, The Good Book Taught Wrong: Bible History Classes in Florida Public Schools. This report claimed there were inappropriate connections between the Bible and science in the Lee County curriculum, and that the Bible courses in all the school districts in which they were being taught.

The Lee County Bible Curriculum

In March, 1996, the Lee County School Board (P. Myers) authorized the teaching of a two-semester Bible history sequence, Bible History: Old Testament, and Bible History: New Testament. Both courses were listed in the state curriculum as social studies elective courses. Since the state provided only brief general guidelines and specific curriculum decisions were left to local school boards, a 15 member “Bible Curriculum Committee” was formed to develop a curriculum to be submitted to a vote of the five member School Board.

After a year and a half of contentious committee meetings focusing on both legal and content issues, the school board voted 3-2 in August, 1997, to adopt a Bible History I (Old Testament) curriculum. A Bible History II (New Testament) curriculum was adopted by the same margin in October. The first course was scheduled to begin in January, 1998, and the second in March. Opponents of the two courses, among whom were the ACLU and the People for the American Way, then sued the school board in Federal District Court, seeking a preliminary injunction to keep the courses from being taught. Among those supporting the school board were the conservative American Center for Law and Justice, and the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools.

The Lee County Bible Curriculum

The judge ruled in January that the Old Testament course could be offered, but should be monitored closely (secularly) by the plaintiffs to insure that it “be taught in a permissibly objective manner” and not as a “veiled attempt to promote Christianity in the guise of teaching history.” She granted the injunction against the teaching of the New Testament course, which, against the advice of the school board’s attorney, was based entirely on the curriculum of the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools. The board agreed to settle the case by adopting a curriculum for both courses based on an introductory college-level textbook. The 15 member school district required that the board choose to teach the course to take an intensive course given by Mitchell Redditch, of Stetson University — one of the authors of the textbook.

People for the American Way: “The Good Book Taught Wrong”

The request to review the guidelines for the Bible History courses came to our department chair, John Kelsey, from the Florida Department of Education in January, 2000, shortly after the People for the American Way released a 60 page report severely critical of the way Bible History courses were being taught throughout the state.

The report, entitled The Good Book Taught Wrong: ‘Bible History’ Classes in Florida Public Schools, was based on instructional material and primary-source documents distributed by the Florida Public Records Act from 14 of the 15 school districts that had taught one or both of the Bible History courses during the academic years 1996-97, 1997-98, and 1998-1999. The report included, “lesson plans, exams, reading lists and assignments, as well as an index of all books, videos and similar instructional materials, and everything else given to or shown to students.”

The report argued that, “the courses are framed and taught from Christian perspectives”; “the Bible is used as a history textbook” and “students are assumed, where the Christian and the Bible is taught according to”; “the Bible is used to promote Christian belief identification and religious values and lessons”; and “Sunday school and other religious training exercises are used to indoctrinate students in Bible content.”

While recognizing the appropriateness of teaching about the Bible from a non-sectarian perspective, especially as a work of literature and in the context of comparative religion classes, the report recommended the removal of both Bible History courses from the state-approved course list.

Developing New Guidelines

Citing state statutes that permit school districts to offer courses dealing with the objective study of the Bible and religion, the General Council for the Department of Education asked the FSU Religion Department to review and make suggestions regarding “the title, subject area and substantive content” of the 1992 state course descriptions that serve as the guidelines for the courses developed by individual school districts.

The task was assigned to my colleague Shannon Burkes and me, the two members of the department who have the primary responsibility for teaching our introductory Bible courses. Robert Spivey, a former Religion Department chair, Dean of Arts and Sciences, and Executive Director of the American Academy of Religion, who had recently returned to the FSU administration, joined us. He brought his expertise as the co-author of a widely used New Testament textbook, and as a former director of a national project for teaching about religion in the public schools, which was developed at FSU in the early 70s.

At our first of several meetings with representatives from the Department of Education, there was general agreement that the 1992 curriculum frameworks needed revision. The guidelines for the two courses were brief and general, consisting of a single-sentence course description and short lists of contents and “intended outcomes.” The primary emphasis on “understanding the Bible as a historical document” demanded more training than the teachers were likely to have. To the extent that this was intended as evaluating the historical accuracy of the biblical accounts (“archaeological evidence and Biblical studies” is listed among the short list of topics for both courses), it introduced one of the most complex and debated aspects of contemporary biblical scholarship: one which could easily lead to attempts to prove or disprove particular religious claims.

We quickly agreed that emphasizing literary rather than historical issues made the most sense for high school teachers and students. Such a suggestion was also made in the report of the People for the American Way, and in The Bible and Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide, a pamphlet published by the National Bible Association, the First Amendment Center and endorsed by a wide range of organizations from a variety of perspectives, including the Islamic Education, Anti-Defamation League, National Association of Evangelicals, the Christian Legal Society, the People for the American Way Foundation. What neither of these documents points out, however, is that a focus on literary analysis of the Bible is not only a secular activity but also a very ancient one. While literary techniques are still relevant in the study of the biblical texts, they are quite definitely and intentionally do not include evaluation of the historicity of specific events, however.

In order to signal the move from a more historical to a more literary approach, we recommended that courses be designated as “Literature of Early Christianity,” or “Cultural Studies in the Bible,” or “History and Sanity,” and thought that placing them in the humanities area would suggest the interdisciplinary nature of such a course, which would bring in material and approaches from history and the fine arts as well as literature.

The name of the courses was controversial, as “Old Testament” and “New Testament” were clearly Christian categories. “Hebrew Bible,” or “Hebrew Scripture” was not precise enough, since the words include the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical Books. Our suggestion that courses be designated Bible I, Literature of Early Israel, and Bible II, Literature of Early Christianity, was evidently seen as too clumsy or pediatric, so the Department of Education decided to use simply Introduction to the Bible I, and Introduction to the Bible II.

Announcement of New Guidelines

Tom Gallagher, the then Commissioner of Education, announced the new guidelines at a press conference on March, 16, 2000. Pointing to a large chart listing the concerns and the specific response by the Department of

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group of citizens to affirm American com- munity and to the other by the Department of Education (Call for Action), available online from the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association, and in Utah, with the Utah State Office of Education. The 3 Rs Projects are designed to help schools and communities find common ground on educational philo- sophy, school reform, and the meaning of reli- gion and values in public schools through workshops, institutes, and forums. Other communities, such as Richardson, Texas, Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Bay Shore, New York, have also embraced these principles and put them into policies, training for teachers, and model religious expression in schools. These efforts were aided when, in 1995, President Clinton directed Secretary of Education Richard Riley to develop and distribute every public school superintendent guidelines for religious expression in the public schools. The President’s guidelines were based upon the earlier Joint Statement of Current Law and consultation with experts in the field. With very slight alteration, these guidelines were re-released to superintendents again in 1998. Responding to a request by the Secretary of Education for a version of the President’s guidelines that would be suitable for parents, the First Amendment Center, in partnership with the National PTA, published A Parent’s Guide to Religion in the Public Schools. It was also released in 1995, and distributed widely by both organizations.

In December of 1999, when President Clinton asked the Secretary in public education to send out another mailing, a new strategy was employed. This time, the mailing would be a comprehensive set of guide- lines and would go to every principal in every public school in the nation. A com- plete packet of guidelines addressing many of the current issues in public education is now in the hands of every public school principal in the nation.

The five publications included in the mailing were:

- **Religious Expression in the Public Schools**

  Provides a statement of principles from the US Secretary of Education that addresses the extent to which religious expression and activity are permitted in US public schools.

- **A Parent’s Guide to Religion in the Public Schools**

  Provides general information based on the First Amendment concerning religious expression and practices in schools. This booklet uses a question and answer format to address topics such as how to find common ground, student religious expression, student prayer, teaching about religion, religious holidays, student religious clubs, and character education. It contains a list of resources to schools across the nation.

- **A Teacher’s Guide to Religion in the Public Schools**

  Provides general information for teachers and administrators on the subject of reli- gion in public schools. This guide answers questions such as, is it constitu- tional to teach about religion? May I pray or otherwise practice my faith while at school? and May students express reli- gious views in public schools?

### Remaining Challenges

While the broad-based consensus achieved is real, and the distribution of these mate- rials to schools across the nation is historic in its impact, there is still much to be done. Not every challenge faced by public schools is solved by the law, and courts have held that guidelines need to be supplemented with hands-on assistance.

On issues where we still have deep and abiding differences, such as creationism and evolution, and sexuality and sex education, developing positions for debating our dif- ferences with respect and finding some common ground is crucial. School districts struggling with these and other “hot issue- tons” should be encouraged to reach out to organizations like the ones listed at the back of the Department of Education’s guidelines for assistance (see List of Organizations on this page).

See GUIDELINES II, p.10

### List of organizations that can answer questions on religious expression in public schools

| Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism | Contact: Rabbi David Superstein | Address: 2027 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20036 | Phone: (202) 387-2800 | Fax: (202) 667-9070 | Web site: http://www.rj.org/rac/ |
| American Association of School Administrators | Contact: Andrew Rotherham | Address: 1801 N. Moore St., Arlington, VA 22209 | Phone: (703) 528-0790 | Fax: (703) 528-2146 | Web site: http://www.aasa.org |
| American Jewish Congress | Contact: Marc Stern | Address: 15 East 64th St., New York, NY 10028 | Phone: (212) 360-1545 | Fax: (212) 867-7015 | Web site: http://www.ajc.org |
| National PTA | Contact: Marabeth Oakes | Address: 4200 Evergreen Lane, #222, Annandale, VA 22003 | Phone: (202) 289-6790 | Fax: (202) 289-6791 | Web site: http://www.pta.org |
| National Association of Evangelicals | Contact: Forest Montgomery | Address: 1022 15th Street, NW #500, Washington, DC 20005 | Phone: (202) 789-1011 | Fax: (202) 842-0392 | Web site: http://www.nae.net |
| National School Boards Association | Contact: Laurie Westley | Address: 1660 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314 | Phone: (703) 548-5633 | Fax: (703) 548-5633 | Web site: http://www.nsba.org |
| Freedom Forum | Contact: Charles Haynes | Address: 1100 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, VA 22209 | Phone: (703) 528-0890 | Fax: (703) 284-2879 | Web site: http://www.freedomforum.org |

**Guidelines from p. 2**

They are consistent statements, providing schools with assurance that they represent a broad range of views coming to agree- ment. As a result, they have been widely disseminated by the organizations that participated in their creation. Many school districts across the country have adopted the language of the guidelines as they have created policies to address a range of issues related to religion in schools.

Simultaneously with these efforts to reach consensus, the Williamsburg Charter Foundation brought together a diverse

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**Spreading the Word**

In spite of the consensus that has developed, many school districts are still afraid to address the issues, and must have not taken the necessary active steps. They are still without effective policies, and in most every case the curriculum still largely ignores religion.

In various school districts however, there are now some very successful efforts to translate the new consensus into real change. Taking the principles of rights, responsibilities, and respect, articulated in the Williamsburg Charter, the First Amendment Center’s Religious Freedom Programs have partnered with state educa- tional organizations and departments to create 3 Rs Projects across the country.
Interview
A Teacher’s Perspective

Martha Ball is in her 26th year as a public school teacher, currently teaching ninth grade at Butler Middle School in Salt Lake City, Utah. In 2000, the Daughters of the American Revolution chose her as the Outstanding Utah History Teacher. Ms. Ball holds both a B.A. degree in history and an M.A. degree in Educational Studies from the University of Utah. She has studied religion and history at the National Humanities Center on an NEH Fellowship. In addition to studying in Poland as an exchange student and in Greece as an NEH Fellow, Ms. Ball studied Hinduism and world religions in India at a Hays-Fulbright Fellowship. She also spent time at the Ackerman Institute at Purdue University, studying how to teach about citizenship.

Ms. Ball is the Director of the Utah 3Rs (Rights, Responsibilities, and Respect) Project, which promotes a civic framework for protecting religious liberty, finding common ground, and teaching about religion in the public schools. Ms. Ball has conducted very successful fund-raising for the Utah 3Rs Project. The following are excerpts from a telephone interview with Martha Ball, conducted by D. Keith Naylor in March, 2001.

Naylor: How does the study of religion figure in your classroom?

Ball: I use the 3Rs model as a classroom management tool for teaching about religion. In approaching the study of deeply held beliefs and traditions, issues such as civil liberty, diversity, justice, and the common good, all come into play. I seek to develop responsible young people and to serve as a role model for them. On the second day of the term, we begin discussing fair treatment, lack of harassment, and we create together a Classroom Bill of Rights, which we all sign. This sets up our responsibilities to one another in the learning process. Before we get to religion, we discuss issues such as core democratic values and living with difference.

I teach a U.S. history unit on world religions—each class in which a large percentage of the students are associated with the Latter Day Saints Church. Starting with the Puritans and moving to the Mormons, we find that both had to leave their homes to achieve religious liberty. This becomes an ethics lesson and a civics lesson: we turn our questions of religious liberty and the Constitution. We broaden our study to the major world religions, their beliefs and practices, and we raise the issue of how those world religions experience religious liberty in the U.S. Students read excerpts from Supreme Court cases on religion in order to understand what is legally acceptable in studying religion. They take copies of these excerpts home and have their parents read and sign them. In this way parents and students acknowledge that we are teaching about religion, neither proselytizing, nor avoiding religion—which amounts to hostility.

Naylor: What reactions have you had from parents and students?

Ball: We haven’t received any parent calls. We have had no name calling or ridiculing in the classroom. In setting up the classroom as a civil learning space on the 3Rs model, we have gained broad cooperation and support.

Naylor: What resources were available to you in teaching about religion?

Ball: We had no resources in the 1980’s. There was a Time-Life series on religion in the library. I began doing research on my own. I turned to the Oxford Series on Religions in American Life, the Pluralism Project CD-ROM with sounds of religious rituals, which really drew students in. There is also a Holt, Rinehart, and Winston video series. I use the religion curriculum materials of the First Amendment Center, such as First Common Ground, and the religion in American History—What to Teach and How. One of our current projects is charting the religious landscape of Utah, thereby creating another resource for students in our state.

Naylor: How did you get involved with the Utah 3Rs Project?

Ball: In 1992, I was looking for ways to connect with the State Office of Education. I went to an intensive workshop on teaching about religion in Salt Lake City, led by Charles Haynes of the First Amendment Center. By noon of the first day, I was hooked. I wanted to be involved in bringing this approach to the state. The George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation gave us $250,000 to bring 3Rs to all school districts in Utah. Mutrey began to flow, some of it going to pay teachers to attend workshops. This is another instance. This is a very important way of treating teachers as professionals, and of treating them with respect. Teachers are provided with materials from the First Amendment Center. Ten teachers, expert in teaching about religion, now meet regularly to discuss how to improve their skills. I use videotaping of teachers to train them in teaching about religion. Last June, we held a major workshop for teachers in northern Utah.

Naylor: What hurdles have you faced in recruiting teachers to include the academic study of religion in their classrooms?

Ball: No hurdles. Teachers are always looking for good classes, and they’re looking to re-certify.

Naylor: In what ways can college and university-based scholars of religion best contribute to teaching about religion in the public schools?

Ball: Well, we do not have religious studies courses at our state universities. That limits the understanding of diversity. I think religious studies should be part of the general education requirements for undergraduates and elective at high schools. Teachers could benefit from in-service training conducted by religious studies scholars. Our Middle East Center is great in helping teachers. We need what we get for university and public school educators to work as a team.

Naylor: Would you discuss your approach to getting administrators on board the 3Rs Project?

Ball: Ray Beisio, our first Director of the 3Rs project, started by getting...

Weighty Matters and the Teenage Reader

Jenna Weissman Joselit, Visiting Professor of American and Jewish Studies, Princeton University.

CONFESS: I’m no teenager, and haven’t been one for quite some time. I don’t know too many contemporary teenagers, either. To make matters worse, I’ve never even taught teenagers, unless you count the day and a half I once spent participating in a university program for gifted adolescents. When it comes to America’s teens, I’m clearly out of my element and clueless, to boot. Even so, when Oxford University Press invited me to write a history book on immigration and American religion for “young adults,” I had no reservations about signing on the dotted line.

I rationalized my decision to produce Immigrant and American Religion, one of 17 volumes in Oxford’s Religion in American Life series, by choosing to see the project as an extension of a role I have inhabited for many years as a public historian. Having actively shuttled between the academy and the museum world where I’ve consulted on and curated dozens of interpretive historical exhibitions, I am mindful of the manifold challenges of presenting history to audiences unfamiliar with and often bored by the past. I relish those challenges. Surely, I reasoned, writing a book for “young adults” could not be all that different.

In most respects, it wasn’t so very different. Like exhibitions, this enterprise, too, called for a special set of presentational skills and strategies: a strong sense of narrative, attentiveness to detail, and a willingness to take the most complex historiographic debates and theoretical arguments about equally complex phenomena like faith and ritual, and simplify them. More a matter of distillation than of dumbing down, the enterprise of creating another resource for teenagers and young adults, decades later, a Puerto Rican immigrant, decades later, a young immigrant. I told of Jewish Moravians, members of the Renewed Unity of Brethren, were forced to abandon their faith and home to survive. I prompted him to take, say, the voluminous literature on the Puritans or the growing literature on the post-1965 immigrant experience and to turn it over and over again to find the nub of the story.

What’s more, each story in this volume, much like objects in an exhibition, must stand on its own, without benefit of helping hands. It cannot rely on that descriptive footnoting to buttress its claims or on lengthy citations from leading historians of immigration or American religion to give voice to ideas. Everything must come from within; nothing can be mediated. The only voices that can in fact make many of the stories I tell here are those of the immigrants themselves. Consequently, memoir, autobiography, diary entries, and firsthand eyewitness accounts loomed large in this account. If they happened to be those of teenagers, so much the better.

I made a point, in fact, of drawing on sources that both captured the voices of teenage immigrants and reflected their youthful perspective on religion. I related how, in 18th century Pennsylvania, a young Moravian, members of the Renewed Unity of Brethren, were forced to abandon their faith and home to survive. In the 20th century New York, young Italian immigrants and German-Catholics in religious street festivals like the festa della Madonna di Monte Carmelo. In the new clothes they wore to meet the Madonna. I told of Jewish immigrant boys preparing for their bar mitzvahs in America in the early 1900s; of a Puerto Rican immigrant, decades later, lyrically recalling the cantos that kept him company in the dark of night; and of a 15 year old boy who moved to Arizona, getting ready for his quincenera in the 1990’s. Time and again, the voices and experiences of these young immigrants not only animated the text but framed its overarching narrative as well, helping to unify what might otherwise have been a parade of chapters, each devoted to a

See JOSELIT, p.10

SPOTLIGHT ON TEACHING

March 2002 AAR RSVN * 5
The Religion and Public Education Resource Center

Bruce Greller

T HE RELIGION and Public Education Resource Center (RPERC) at California State University, Chico, was established in 1995. It is the headquarters of the Religion and Secondary Education (NCRPE) Distribution Center (Indiana University, Pennsylvania). The RPERC seeks to foster a greater understanding of First Amendment guidelines for dealing with the topic of religion and public education, and provides resources for teaching about religions in public schools in ways that are constitutionally permissible and academically sound.

The RPERC serves both as a depository of existing materials and as a catalyst for the development and distribution of new materials relating to pedagogical and legal issues arising in connection with the topic of religion in public schools. For classroom teachers, the RPERC offers curriculum guides and sample lessons in several subject areas. For administrators, school board members, members of the legal profession and interested members of the public, the Center provides brochures, background statements, bibliographies of resources, and reprints of pertinent articles. The Center also lists resources available for purchase from other organizations and agencies.

The Religion and Education, and Public Policy

Diane L. Moore, Director

The Program in Religion and Secondary Education at Harvard Divinity School

The Program in Religion and Secondary Education (PRSE) at Harvard Divinity School is designed for people who wish to pursue a secondary school teaching career in conjunction with their theological studies. The PRSE is available for the study of religion within the context of either of the Master of Theological Studies or the Master of Divinity degree program, in partnership with cooperating secondary schools. In addition to earning their master's degree, PRSE students earn middle or secondary school teacher licensure in English, history, or political science/political philosophy from the Massachusetts Department of Education. The certification obtained is valid in nearly forty states, and represents the closest equivalency available today to a national teaching certificate.

In addition to their education toward licensure, the 1 students in the PRSE are systematically prepared to teach the study of religion and to develop curriculum resources that incorporate religion and religious worldviews within their fields of expertise. Students may also study constitutional issues, including what is and is not legal to teach in public school settings. In this regard, the PRSE is a specialized training program. It provides the explicit opportunity for teachers to explore the ways in which the study of religion can contribute to and enhance policy and content discourses across the educational spectrum.

Foundations

At the core of the PRSE is the notion of education as vocation: the conviction that one teaches because partnership in the shaping of young lives is work that matters. From this perspective, the qualities emphasized in the preparation for teaching available through PRSE are passion for a subject, a genuine concern for youth, competence, and personal commitment.

Through courses at the Divinity School and the 1 students in the Divinity Graduate School of Religion, students study adolescent development and explore a wide variety of educational theories, methodologies, and pedagogies. They formulate their own understanding of education as vocation and the frameworks that best represent that articulation. They also have the opportunity to strengthen their subject area expertise in English, history, or political science/political philosophy.

Standards and Curriculum Development to Integrate the Study of Religion

Religion and religious worldviews are woven into the fabric of world civilizations in both the historical and contemporary manifestations. Though it is impossible to understand the human endeavor without considering religious dimensions, misrepresentations of the First Amendment have led to the virtual absence of religion in public education. The tacit acceptance of religious illiteracy promotes an inaccurate, partial view of civilizations, and fuels the false assumption that religion is a private endeavor and therefore irrelevant to the public domain. Consequently, citizens of the United States are not only ignorant of the world’s religious traditions (all of which are practiced here in the U.S. in growing numbers), but they are also left without adequate tools to view and understand their role that religion plays in contemporary cultures and conflicts.

Through the PRSE program, students study the religious liberty clauses of the First Amendment and develop curricula and programs that incorporate the study of religion and religious worldviews in secondary schools within First Amendment guidelines. The program also sponsors professional development opportunities for educators in the field who wish to enhance their knowledge in this arena.

Religion, Education, and Public Policy

Debates regarding public education have been at the forefront of the national agenda for decades. Educational reform efforts have been advanced to address a wide range of challenges, including inadequate funding, poverty, poverty-related expenditures, and poor teacher salaries. Though there are differing opinions about what the nature, scope, and purpose of public education should be, the role of religious education and religious worldviews in secondary schools is one of the most controversial aspects of public education. The lack of uniform standards and concomitant lack of uniformity in the teaching of religion in public schools, and the form imposition of secularism can itself be understood as a problem. In many classrooms, the experience of religion is a private endeavor and therefore not legal to teach in public school settings. In other words, writing this book was far from easy. It was hard to avoid the temptation to dig the narrative with interpretive asides, to pile on detail, to lead with theory rather than incident and, above all, to footnote. Finding the right phrasing, the right balance between the language of the academic and the language of the street, striking the right note (neither lofty nor overly familiar), and knowing when to step in and when to step out also took quite a lot of work and rewriting.

Eventually, after many false starts and long hours spent staring at the screen, I found my bearings, much as the subjects of this book— the Bradfords and the Freys, the Kellys and the Cohens, the Hongs and the Cohen, and the Bradfords and the Freys, the Kellys and the Cohens, the Hongs and the Iros, the Rodrigues and the Kassans—all ultimately found their voices, transforming the United States in the process.
The Good Book

The last of the four major concerns listed was "teaching the Bible." The report has taken steps to ensure that right.

One teacher was evidently on the grounds that this assumes the historical accuracy of the text. Similarly, course materials that contain such "Sunday school type texts" as asking students to list the 27 books of the New Testament in correct order are cited. This is a part of a general criticism that runs throughout the report, that the methods that emphasize rote memorization rather than critical thinking or analysis skills are indicative of a Sunday school approach and are therefore inappropriate.

While the report sometimes does go too far in pressing its case, it should not be forgotten that the People for the American Way Foundation has played an invaluable role in actually pointing out specific inappropriate and unconstitutional materials and practices, and supplying the legal resources to prevent abuses. The interpretation of the data in the report should not, of course, be accepted uncritically. At the same time, without the report, it is not clear how long it would have taken before the state of Florida recognized the problems with the way Bible History classes were being taught.

As soon as the teachers and administrators realized that there were problems, they gathered together rather than gather evidence against them. They opened up computers. Throughout the second day, they remained interested and asked many questions. By the end of the week, most of the teachers seemed to understand the distinctive literary techniques and religious themes of each gospel.

While the Department of Education first raised the issue of what the Bible courses, we have for many years been thinking about how to introduce non-sectarian analysis of the Bible to students from a variety of backgrounds in public schools. It is significant that the Florida Way Foundation has been actually engaged in teaching about the Bible in public institutions, programmatic statements of the Florida Way Foundation about the Bible should or should not be taught are of limited value. The immediate questions are not how to teach the Bible in general but how to present specific topics in an interesting and appropriate way. It is here that biblical scholars are uniquely qualified and well trained in dealing with and by their teaching experience, to contribute to the discussion.

The following concluding reflections on several key questions addressed in both The Bible in Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide and The Bible and the Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide are worth mentioning. The Bible and the Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide provides a wonderfully clear and useful guide for teachers who wish to teach about the Bible in public schools.

Which Bible?

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God, gods, and Godot: Thoughts on Teaching about Religion in Secondary Education

Matthew Hicks

Matthew Hicks earned a master's degree in theological studies from Emory University and a master's degree in religious studies with a minor in education from the University of Georgia. He has taught in both high school and college settings. He recently developed a curriculum on the Hebrew Scriptures for public secondary schools (available spring 2002), and is now writing a volume on Christian New Testament (available summer 2002).

A
n adolescent’s understanding of faith is deceptively simple. Ask almost any 15 year old to define his or her faith system, and you will likely hear a long-held, tacitly accepted, stock answer. Teenagers filter their encountered world through a simplistically understood system. Daily interactions with new people, ideas, cultures, and other faith traditions strain at the fragile fabric of the web. Furthermore, in today’s schools students hang suspended between an Enlightenment identity and a God, gods, and Godot: thoughts on teaching about religion in secondary education.

In secondary schools, students inevitably reflect on their own faith systems vis-à-vis the encounter of other traditions. The study of religion provides a unique forum in which students can thoughtfully express their thoughts and hopes while developing an appreciation for other worldviews. This need is not new, however, that basic beliefs should be scrutinized in secondary schools. Simply put, there is enough to be gained by exposure to alien traditions without asking adolescents to evaluate critically the arguments of their own faith traditions.

Not everyone agrees with this position. For example, Neil Noddings, after providing some beneficial ideas for teaching about existential issues, writes:

You [fundamentalists, and here she means Christians, fundamentalists] are free to practice your religion as you seem fit, but when you enter the public arena, your commitment and recommendations must be held to the standards of intelligence. The public school is committed to these methods, and your children will necessarily encounter them.

While Noddings tempts this ethic at other places in her work, taking such an approach will only alienate a large segment of American parents. It is, in my opinion, an inescapable and unavoidable view of how to teach fundamentalists — Christian or other.

Noddings might consider that, whether students worship God, gods, or are Waiting for Godot, every student is, essentially, a "fundamentalist!

The premise that all adolescents have a "unchanging need for an unshakable God" (however they might define "God"), delimits the curriculum and pedagogical means of religious studies instruction. A useful methodology for engaging the topic of religion is to stratify lessons into three different, but related layers: historical, philosophical, and hermeneutical. In the first layer, students explore questions of historical context. For example, if teaching about the biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah, teachers might discuss that the Cyrus Edict was issued ca. 559 BCE, that power shifted from the Babylonians to the Persians, that the returning Israelites eventually built a new temple, and that they forged a tight-knit community out of their fear of religious assimilation. Teachers must exercise caution when explaining this layer, differentiating between historical context (who, what, when, and where), and history (whether something really did happen). The majority of instructional time and effort is devoted to familiarizing students with the type of background knowledge. Note, of course, that teachers must not overemphasize role learning of facts, or intellectualizing the subject matter. Engaging the emotional side of religion and of religious adherents is an enormously important facet of teaching this subject.

In the second layer, questions of meaning are discussed. For example, what do Zen Buddhists believe about meditation, or why do Sufis practice dhikr, the act of remember- ing Allah? Or, contrasting with our example from Ezra and Nehemiah, why do some Jews and Christians believe that they must live apart from peoples of other faiths? Philosophical questions are concerned with current existential meaning. Teachers should address these discussions through attribution, argumentation, analyses of first-person laterals, or the effects of Zen, Christians, Muslims, do Sufis practice Allah, and how does God, gods, or Godot: thoughts on teaching about religion in secondary education.

The third portion, the hermeneutical layer, addresses issues of modern-day relevancy. How are the ideas, topics, and readings applicable to and extendable to the 21st century. The result is that teachers can select from a rich diversity of ideas representing all manner of faiths, with an emphasis on religious assimilation. There have been few attempts to develop appropriate religious studies materials for public secondary schools.

Admittedly, writing religious studies curricula for secondary schools is enormously challenging. Creating appropriate materials for adole- scents’ academic and ethical tasks is not as straightforward as compiling a college textbook. The concepts, ideas, topics, and methods of instruction all have to be shaped into a format suitable for teenagers. Also, unlike college students, all that does not flash and glitter is soporific in the world of teens. Due to the absence of materialistic elements, many teachers, myself included, spend 

God, gods, and Godot: thoughts on teaching about religion in secondary education.
Religious Literacy and Democratic Citizenship

The relationship between democratic citizenship and knowledge about the world's religions was the topic of a guest commentary by high-school student, Chana Schoenberger, published in Newsweek a few years ago and reprinted in Finding Common Ground. In her essay, "Getting to Know About You and Me," Chana describes her experience as one of twenty teens who spent five weeks during the summer studying acid rain at the University of Wisconsin at Superior as part of a National Science Foundation Young Scholars program. Represented among the students were eight religious traditions: Jewish, Roman Catholic, Muslim, Hindu, Methodist, Mormon, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Lutheran. Chana was amazed at the degree of ignorance about other people's religions in contrast to this otherwise outstanding group of students:

On the first day, one girl mentioned that she had two brothers and sisters. "Oh, are you Mormon?" asked another girl, who I knew was a Mormon herself. The first girl, should have replied, "No, I don't know. She thought Mormon was the same as Mennonite, and the only thing she knew about other religions was that Mennonites don't, in their opinion, 'dress normal.'"

My friends, ever curious about Judaism, asked me about everything from our theology to food preferences. "How come, if Jesus was a Jew, aren't Christians?" My Catholic roommates asked me in all seriousness. Brought up in a small Wisconsin town, she had never met a Jew before, nor had she met people from most other "strange" religions, such as the Unitarian, the Church of Christ, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Salvation Army. She was amazed at the ignorance of her fellow students.

Recently, I administered an informal multiple-choice questionnaire to students at the beginning of the semester in order to assess their familiarity with some basic facts about the world's religions. Among students enrolled in one section of my Teaching About Religion course, 37% thought that Confucius had originated more recently than Islam, and 40.7% defined the Qur'an as "the continuing cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth in many differing forms and conditions of existence." Fully 37% thought that Muslims believe Muhammad to be the incarnation of Allah (25.9% correctly identified the Muslim view of Muhammad as the last and greatest of God's prophets). In another section of the same course, 38.7% of the students thought that Christianity had originated earlier than Hinduism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, 35.4% identified the Qur'an as a religious scripture most closely associated with Hinduism, and 29% thought that the orthodox Jewish and Catholic rituals associated with the Jewish holiday of Passover are based on the war of rebellion led by Judas Maccabeus (compared to the 19.3% who correctly identified Passover with the story of liberation from slavery in Egypt). One can only imagine how these students might have responded to the question, "Who was Judas Maccabeus?"

Not only does this raise questions about the degree of cultural and historical illiteracy among university students in general and among future teachers in particular, it also raises questions about how well these individuals will be able to function as citizens in a religiously diverse society.

A FEW YEARS AGO, one of my students stayed behind to speak with me after class. We had just spent several sessions reviewing some of the main outlines of classic stories from the Hebrew Bible. These included stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs of the Israelite tribes, stories of Moses, the Exoduses, and the Ten Commandments, and stories of King David, the prophets, and the Babylonian exile, among others. My student said that she had recently enrolled in the summer program. She told me about the project he was working on. He said that they had to make a report on the biodiversity of California and the parts of the state that were fit for human habitation. She asked another girl, who I knew was a Mormon herself. "Do you still practice animal sacrifices?" a girl from a small town in Minnesota asked me once. I said no, and pointed out that this was the twentieth century, but she had been absolutely serious. The only Jews she knew were the ones from the Bible.

According to Chana, "Nobody was deliberately rude or anti-Semitic, but I got the feeling that I was representing a whole community of Jews to the rest of the world through my actions. She winced at the thought that many of her new friends would go home to their small towns believing all Jews were like her. Chana describes her experience as one of twenty teens who spent five weeks during the summer studying acid rain at the University of Wisconsin at Superior as part of a National Science Foundation Young Scholars program. Represented among the students were eight religious traditions: Jewish, Roman Catholic, Muslim, Hindu, Methodist, Mormon, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Lutheran. Chana was amazed at the degree of ignorance about other people's religions in contrast to this otherwise outstanding group of students:

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LEVENSON B. from p.7

interesting class projects, for which there are abundant and inexpensive video and Web resources.

The question of which translation to use need not be as controversial as most of those writing on this subject seem to think. Comparison of a variety of translations is an obvious and essential class project, simplified considerably by Web resources. As long as students have discussed questions of canon and text, have understood the fact that the content and order of the books differ among various communities, and have compared the same selections from different translations, there need not be a great problem if one particular translation is used by most students. After all, it is differences in translation philosophy (e.g. "dynaminc equivalency" versus "formal equivalent" translations), rather than in theology that account for all but a very few of the differences among modern translations.

The Bible and Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide suggests that, "a biblical sequence that treats each of the major Bibles or an anthology of various translations" might be better than another on a particular Bible. While such a book would be a valuable resource, the selection process, in effect, creates another canon. Perhaps more significantly, it also limits the possibility of the sort of wide-ranging comparison among texts from different parts of the Bible that is essential for any literary or historiographic analysis. It is easier to recognize the problem with the use of the term, "Old Testament," than it is to come up with a convenient alternative. "Hebrew Bible," "Jewish Scriptures," and "Tanakh" are all problematic in that they immediately invoke the Deuterocanonical books. The important point to explain is the introduction and incorporation of the terms used by the different communities, rather than to insist that only one term be used.

Whose Interpretation?

The Bible in Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide will make it clear that, "[b]ecause there are many ways to interpret the Bible — religious and secular — public school teachers should expose stu-

ents to a variety of interpretations. Introducing students to the diversity of religious text might have meant to first-century Christians is one way of providing equal interpretive access to Christian and non-

Christian students alike.

While discussion of the historicity of par-

ticular events might easily be avoided by focusing on literary structures and the range of opinions, the text might have had far more particular meaning at some point questions of date, authorship, and sources are bound to arise. Here it is important to provide students with a range of opinions and some sense of the evidence on which they are based. Dogmatic assertions should be avoided, not only because they might offend the religious sensibilities of some students, but also because the evidence for most of these questions is hardly conclusive, and the methods of interpreting the evidence are not easily accessible to high school students or their teachers.

Literture and Historical Approaches

While historical background, history of interpretation and the role the Bible has played in Western culture should be dis-

cussed at some point, surely the main goal of a Bible course should be to read the text closely and carefully. For this, literary and historical approaches are the best approach.

Discussions of plot, characterization, generic conventions, and so on, can provide critical distance that allows students from a number of different religious or non-religious perspectives to read the text together. The introduction of some histori-

ical context, however, is particularly helpful in encouraging students to imagine how ancient Israelites or early Christians might have read the text. Such criti-

cal reading also offers the possibility of a critical distance that does not demand or privilege specific religious commitments. Asking what a particular New Testament text might have meant to first-century Christians is one way of providing equal interpretive access to Christian and non-

Christian students alike.

As we the people are represented by public school employees. Their role carries with it a responsibility to be neu-

tral in religious matters, and to protect the freedom of conscience of each student in the school.

These issues still present challenges to us that are only magnified by our increasing pluralism. We now have an unprecedented opportunity to ring the challenge of applying fairly and fairly the principles and ideals in our Constitution and Bill of Rights. Not to some Americans, but to all. Our public schools are the obvious place to begin.

An earlier version of this essay appeared in Religion and Education:27(1), Fall, 2000.

GUIDELINES II, from p.4

If religion and religious conviction are to be treated fairly and with respect in our public schools, then teaching about reli-

gion must be taken more seriously.

If public schools “may not inculcate nor inhibit” religion, if they are to remain neutral concerning religion, then the cur-

riculum must include religion as well as secular ways of understanding the world.

In order to teach about religion in an objective way, appropriate to a public school education, teachers must them-

selves learn about religion. They must know something about the world’s religions generally, and something about the religious traditions of their own area of expertise. This is not currently a part of what teachers are expected to know when they complete their teacher training pro-

gram, but it must be included if students are to receive a complete education.

Similarly, in order to promote a civil envi-

ronment in our schools where all the members of the public school are treated with respect, teachers must under-

stand the role as representatives of our com-

munity compact as Americans. In a signifi-

cant way, “we the people” are represented by public school employees. Their role carries with it a responsibility to be neu-

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4 Ibid., 4-11.

5 Ibid., 8.

6 Ibid., 9.

7 Ibid., 12-13.

8 233:0612. F.S. and 233:062. F.S.


10 For more detailed and related information about the document, see www.teachaboutthebible.org.

11 The complete course descriptions and guidelines are available at www.firstamendmentcenter.org/resources/docs/act2012a0120hr02030409.htm [Introduction to the Bible] and www.firstamendmentcenter.org/resources/docs/act2012a0120hr02030410.htm [Introduction to the Bible].

12 This volume includes the chapters: Religious Neutrality and Free Exercise of Religion.


14 Ibid., 1, If 11-12. Another area where the report seems problematic is in its criticism of courses of study books published with some religious con-

15 creations that are not purely secular. I Hendrickson, and Erdman, but HarpurSanFrancisco, which it is often true that a particular group of books are a religious school. Asking what a particular New Testament text might have meant to first-century Christianity is one way of providing equal interpretive access to Christian and non

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Ball from p.5

approval from the State Office of Education to bring Charles Haynes and Oliver Thomas (of the First Amendment Center) into meet with school superintendents. They spent a whole day raising awareness about the First Amendment Act, the school curriculum, and the civic framework. Then we brought in principals and assistant principals, other district officials, and school parents. After two months, we did a follow up meeting with all involved. It is always important to involve adminis-

trators: they’re the ones who get the phone call!

Naylor: What are the most press-

ing opportunities and obstacles you face in teaching about religion in the public schools?

Ball: Time is the primary issue. For many teachers, finding time to incorporate one more new thing into the curriculum is a problem. The desire is strong, but it seems that the pressures are too much to do so. Probably the greatest challenge is getting teachers and administrators to overcome their fear of offending students or our religions. Finding the money is key; finding money to reduce classroom size and raise teacher salaries, thus improving morale, is important. Social conditions can have a strange effect. For instance, the recent school shootings have actually resulted in more money for the schools.

Naylor: How has your work with religion in the schools affected your career as an educator?

Ball: It has kept me in education; I was ready to leave. I was sick of the disinterest. I had been offered money to administer a grant. Then I went to Charles Haynes’ conference. He said teachers are our hope and our heroes. This work has restored my vision of the commitment to edu-

cation. Teaching about religion helps me remember why I went into edu-
cating young people, and it is something important, for I am helping to develop strong citizens.
The Equal Access Act, passed by Congress in 1984, and upheld by the Supreme Court in 1990, safeguards the religious liberty rights of public school students, and is a clear indication of the constitutionality of the Act, the Court noted that there is a “critical difference between government endorsement of religion, which the Establishment clause forbids, and private speech endorsing religion, which the Free Speech and Free Exercise clauses protect.” Under the terms of The Equal Access Act, secondary school students have the right to pray individually and in groups, to read the Bible and other types of religious literature, and to form religious clubs. These activities must be initiated and led by students, not by school officials, and there is no subject to the prayer “in school and manner” restrictions that school officials apply to other student activities. So long as schools allow other non-curriculum-related student activities, however, they must not discriminate against student religious groups.

Moreover, the courts have acknowledged the important role played by religion in history, society, and culture, and they have made it quite clear that learning and teaching about religion in the public schools is perfectly consistent with the Establishment clause of the Constitution. Indeed, as Justice Tom Clark wrote in Abington School District v. Schempp: “...it might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of humanity. It is certainly the case that learning and teaching about religion in the public schools is perfectly consistent with the Establishment clause of the Constitution.”

So, Marcia Beaucamp's article in this issue of Spotlight on Teaching makes clear, schools have been slow to integrate the topic of religion into the curriculum.

If public schools have shown little interest in religious studies, it is also true that scholars have been guilty of ‘intellectual amnesia.’ This is particularly the case in religious studies, philosophy, and classics (as Nicholas Piedicasi and his associates), who have shown little inclination to become involved in teacher education or in efforts to introduce religion into the curriculum of elementary and secondary schools. Most scholars have not been socialized into a profession that has a vested interest in teacher education and that encourages collaboration with teachers and teacher educators, and such work has not been recognized and rewarded by the tenure and promotion systems of most departments, colleges, and universities.

There are signs that things are changing, however, both in the schools and in the profession. In California, for example, the State Board of Education has passed a history-social science curriculum that explicitly calls for more attention to be given to the study of religion and ethics. This document stresses the importance of religion in human history and states, “students must become familiar with the basic ideas and values of major religions and the ethical traditions of each time and place.”

Religion Scholars as Public Intellectuals in Teacher Education and the Schools

Among the ways in which religion scholars can contribute to the responsible integration of the academic study of religion into the public schools is through the role of the public intellectual. Religion scholars can play an important role in helping teachers, administrators, school boards, and students themselves with the historical background and First Amendment principles that provide the framework for thinking about religion and public education. Important venues for introducing religion scholars to the public are conferences, such as the 3Rs project, and public writing, such as the “Guide to Beliefs and Practices” project, which is sponsored by the 3Rs Institute and published by Oxford University Press,9 which is an answer to Kysar's influential book, The Supreme Court's Role in Religion and Public Life.

3. Developing curriculum materials that are useful to teachers and accessible to elementary and secondary school students. Notable recent accomplishments in this area include the new Religion in America series which was published by Oxford University Press,9 and America's Religion: An Educator's Guide to Belief and Practice.10 In addition to introducing students to the sacred texts and audio-visual resources on the world's religions, there is a special need for self-contained lesson plans or "religion modules" that can be integrated into other larger units in the history, social studies, and language arts curricula.

Why have religion scholars not been more willing to play a role in "public intellectual" endeavors in teacher education and in the schools? Russell Jacoby's well-known account of intellectual life in the "age of academy" provides part of the answer. According to Jacoby and other critics of over-specialization in contemporary intellectual life, academics have become accustomed to writing, thinking, and speaking about and to one another rather than for a broader audience of fellow citizens.

What is needed, therefore, is a professionalization of academic life and its accompanying conceptions of scholarship, other than the professionalization of religious scholars in teacher education and in the schools. In addition to the ongoing work of religion scholars in teacher education and in the schools, there are two new developments that may provide opportunities for religion scholars in teacher education and in the schools. First, the Equal Access Act has provided a legal framework for the inclusion of religion in the public schools. The newly adopted 3Rs project provides part of the answer. Second, there are several recent developments that may provide legal and constitutional frameworks for the inclusion of religion in the public schools. For example, the newly adopted 3Rs project provides part of the answer. Second, there are several recent developments that may provide legal and constitutional frameworks for the inclusion of religion in the public schools.

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countless hours preparing new lessons on an old subject. Others who would like to teach about religion do not because of the lack of available, age-appropriate materials.

Those best suited to write curricula and to teach about religion are, naturally, teachers who have a strong command of the subject matter. A course survey of college of education reveals, however, that religious studies courses do not usually count toward teacher certification.9 Herinn lies the paradox: many people agree that religion is a vital subject, but those who are trained have little appropriate teaching experience in that field. This should be no surprise, given that unnecessary litigation arises from the well-intended, but uninformed method of teaching religion. Colleges of education and departments of religious studies must begin to dialogue if advancements in this area are to be made.

While noticeable challenges face secondary religious studies teachers, the final rewards far surpass the obstacles. Knowing that you fostered a new sense of awareness and empathy in a student is a satisfying accomplishment. When students state, “I understand, but I disagree,” dragging program advocates for democratic citizenship is taking place.

When, in the same class, an Islamic student identifies you as a Muslim, and you say, “Baptist is certain of your Christian faith, a Buddhist is certain of your Buddhist faith, and a Hindu is certain of your Hindu faith,” a point of departure. Dr. Sarah Caldwell explains this concept to students, I use the words “religion” and “religion” are often used interchangeably in the public schools; and ways that local communities and students can find common ground on issues that divide them. This is another way that religion scholars intersect. By attending these academic agendas and civic responsibilities that flow from International Studies Education), the second institute was entitled, Religion, Culture, and Religion in American Life, 17 volumes. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999-2002.

7 Again, the point is that all students share a common core of knowledge that must be communicated as a negative term, at least when applied to religious scholars.

8 3 Rs Projects promote and encourage the religious experiences of students; however, connections with other subjects must be made in every course and the information, if it is to be learned at all, must be linked to a specific area of subject study. See James W. Frat, “Beaches Church and State: Religion and Public Education in a Multicultural Nation,” in Donald K. Farley, Jr., Understanding Church and State (Valle Forge: Trinity Press International, 1998), 92-97.

9 History textbooks have increased coverage of ethnic religions during the past ten years, however, some still rely on narrow, outdated perspectives. There is also opportunity to contribute to the consolidation of the standing of religious studies as an academic discipline both in the university and in American public life more generally.

Conclusion

More than any other single American institution, the public schools are places where people of all different faiths have the chance to learn about other religions. The concept of religious liberty is a fundamental constitutional guarantee that protects the right to religious freedom. The “Freedom of Religion” is the right of individuals to worship according to their own beliefs. The “Freedom of Religion” is the right of individuals to worship according to their own beliefs. This right is guaranteed by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

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