Teaching About Religion in Public Schools: Where do we go from here?

Sponsored by the First Amendment Center and the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life
Teaching about religion in public schools: Where do we go from here?

This question and others were considered at a conference sponsored by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life and the First Amendment Center on May 20-22, 2003.

Interior photos by Keith Barraclough
Jon Butler photo by Michael Marsland/Yale University
Teaching about religion in public schools: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Sponsored by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life and the First Amendment Center

May 20–22, 2003
A continuing conversation

[I]t 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 civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment.


The U.S. Supreme Court decision in Abington Township v. Schempp made it clear that public schools could not engage in devotional teaching of religion, but the Court also noted that academic teaching about religion was not only constitutional, but also desirable, within these same classrooms. On the 40th anniversary of the Schempp decision, teachers, administrators, policymakers and advocates gathered near the nation’s capital to consider the progress and potential for the movement to teach about religion in our nation’s public schools.

Convened by the First Amendment Center and the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, this conference was designed to take a close look at how religion is currently treated in the public-school curriculum and explore what should be done in the future to address the place of religious studies across the curriculum. In short, we asked: How well are public schools including study about religion? Today this question is more important than ever as the United States confronts expanding religious diversity — and an urgent need for understanding religious differences in the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001.

Since the Schempp decision, important strides have been made. In 1988, for example, 18 diverse religious and educational groups released “Religion and the Public School Curriculum,” the first consensus guidelines on study about religion in the public schools. The guidelines state in part:

Because religion plays a significant role in history and society, study about religion is essential to understanding both the nation and the world. Omission of facts about religion can give students the false impression that the religious life of humankind is insignificant or unimportant. . . . Study about religion is also important if students are to value religious liberty, the first freedom guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. Moreover, knowledge of the roles of religion in the past and present promotes cross-cultural understanding essential to democracy and world peace.
These guidelines have helped to spur further discussion of religion in history textbooks, state standards and classrooms in many parts of the nation.

But critics of the current curriculum argue that these modest changes do not add up to serious treatment of religion or religious diversity across the curriculum. These mere mentions of religion’s role in our history and culture do not constitute or necessarily lead to a fuller understanding of the significant role religion has played in shaping the ideas and institutions of society, these critics claim.

But if public schools are not doing enough to take religion seriously in the curriculum, what are the barriers to a fuller study of religion in the public school curriculum and what is necessary to overcome them? In short, what more can and should be done?

This conference involved people from a wide range of perspectives to consider these complex issues. The report that follows provides a glimpse of the conversation that occurred at the conference. We would like to thank Stephen Henderson for drafting this report and the staffs of the First Amendment Center and the Pew Forum for their editorial assistance. For further information, transcripts of the conference may be found at www.pewforum.org

The conference did not provide all the answers to these challenging questions, but we hope it helped to provide a snapshot of this movement, illustrations of the tensions that surround efforts to develop a more full treatment of religion in the public schools and some ideas for moving forward.

The United States is the most religiously diverse society on Earth and, among developed nations, the most religious. Nowhere is it more important — or more difficult — to address the role of religion in public life than in the public schools. That’s why we hope you will join us in the continuing conversation about how and where study about religion should take place in the curriculum.

Sincerely,

Charles C. Haynes
Senior Scholar
First Amendment Center

Melissa Rogers
Executive Director
Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life
Kimberly Plummer is an elementary school teacher in the San Diego Unified School District. An “old hand” after 17 years of teaching, she has learned to expect unexpected questions from her students. Yet, memories of her fledgling days as a teacher are still fresh in Plummer’s mind. Some of her most vivid recollections are of instances when religious topics suddenly came to the forefront of classroom discussions.

Plummer recalled a 6th-grade class history lesson about ancient Egypt. A textbook mentioned in passing that the Mesopotamians worshiped 3,000 different gods. “The kids went nuts,” she said. “I’m ready for this now. But the first year? I was blindsided by my students being unaware that some religious traditions weren’t monotheistic.”

Another time, there was a sudden flurry of questions about Buddhism. Plummer began describing the notion of “enlightenment” when she noticed that one of her students, Samantha (whom Plummer knew to be a Lutheran), was shifting about in her chair. “I said to her, ‘What’s wrong, Sam? You look troubled.’”

The student replied, “Why Miss Plummer, I’ll never reach enlightenment! It sounds too hard!”

“You’ve hit on something key, Sam,’ I said. ‘Being a good person is a lifelong mission.’ This somehow led to a discussion of reincarnation,” Plummer recalled. “Sometimes what we call ‘teachable moments’ arrive in layers.”

To many, it may come as a surprise that any public school teacher would dare address topics such as monotheism, Buddhism or what it takes to be a “good person.” No such illusions, however, were entertained by a group of nearly 150 educators and education specialists who gathered May 20-22, 2003, near Washington, D.C. They attended a conference titled “Teaching About Religion in Public Schools: Where Do We Go From Here?”, sponsored by the First Amendment Center and the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

The three-day meeting was designed to facilitate discussion among teachers, administrators, lawyers, state and federal officials, religious leaders, scholars and educational association leaders — all of whom know very well that religion, whether or not it is on the lesson plan, regularly shows up in America’s classrooms. A variety of panels were assembled and the overall focus wasn’t only on how best to educate schoolchildren on religion’s history, but also on how to make students aware of an ever-more religiously diverse society.

Charles C. Haynes, senior scholar at the First Amendment Center, noted that 2003 was the 40th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision on school prayer in Abington Township v. Schempp. Writing for the Court, Associate Justice Tom Clark had this to say concerning “teaching about religion” in public schools:

“[I]t 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 civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment.”

“This is our field’s most replicated quote,” Haynes said, explaining how the Court’s language helped create a movement to encourage study of religion in public schools that made inroads in the 1960s and 1970s. By the mid-1980s, this effort had largely faded. But 17
years ago, a series of studies revealed the neglect of religion in the curriculum. The publication of guidelines and statements on the importance of addressing religion in schools revived interest in teaching about religion. Haynes said from this revived interest, a new consensus emerged. “We now have a shared, civic framework based on First Amendment principles. We never had this before,” he said. “The question is no longer should we teach about religion, but how do we teach about religion?”

Melissa Rogers, executive director of the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, said that teaching about religion is a particularly challenging task for America’s educators. “It’s immediately evident to all of us who’ve been involved in these discussions for so many years that there are fears on many sides regarding teaching about religion in the public schools,” Rogers said. “On one side, people who don’t endorse or practice any religious faith themselves have legitimate fears about a misuse of teaching about religion. On another side, people who hold religious beliefs very fervently also fear what the state will do in terms of handling these very sensitive and delicate matters.”

A combination of fears created by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and school shootings in Columbine, Colo., and elsewhere, have made American schools seem unsafe. At the same time, school districts are struggling with budget cuts, have canceled athletic and cultural programs and shut down libraries. In Oregon, 84 of the state’s 198 districts were forced to close early in 2002.

The federal “No Child Left Behind” act, which was signed into law in early 2002, has strained some schools’ resources. The law calls for testing children in reading and math annually from the third grade to the eighth. Concerned about high-stakes testing, many educators have expressed concern about the neglect of history, civics and other core subjects.

Discussion about religious studies have taken a back seat to these concerns. When religion does come up, many schools find themselves in contentious situations.

E. J. Dionne, co-chair of the Pew Forum, said he was optimistic that solutions could be developed. “Bill Galston, the political philosopher, once said that the hardest choices are usually between one good and another, not between good and evil. I think in this area we are dealing with, at least in principle, goods that can be compatible with each other.”

Given the progress in recent years toward acceptance of teaching about religion in public schools — and in light of the challenges to actually carrying it out — the conference’s title question is timely: “Where do we go from here?”

One thing is clear. Even before they are taught about their First Amendment rights, America’s schoolchildren believe in free speech. Children, and especially those in the earliest grades, aren’t bound by concerns of what is or is not “appropriate.”

“All I can say for sure,” Plummer said, “is that there are no secrets with kids. The first day of class, they always want to know how old I am, how many brothers and sisters I have, and how many braids I have in my hair. I’m always honest with them, but when it comes to matters of religion and politics, I
also have to be extremely careful.”

This balancing act is all in a day’s work for a public school teacher, and the best educators learn to roll with the punches.

“One thing we can’t forget, though, is that kids can have a faith life that is much more important to them than their school life,” said Jennifer Norton, a high school teacher from Northern California.

Lessons from American history

Such religious enthusiasm, especially among schoolchildren, is a surprise, said Jon Butler, a chair in the Department of History and William Robertson Coe professor of American studies and history at Yale University.

“Actually, we shouldn’t even be here, because the 20th century was supposed to be the ‘century of secularization,’” Butler said.

The end of the 19th century saw an “erosion of Protestant authority,” caused in part by influential writers such as Max Weber and Sigmund Freud, Butler said. Weber was convinced that religion as a phenomenon would wither as the world became increasingly industrialized and modernized. Religion, Freud believed, depended on the cohesive nature of a community where people know each other personally. As societies changed around the world, becoming ever more synthetic and anonymous, both Weber and Freud predicted that religion wouldn’t survive.

Yet precisely the opposite has happened, at least in the United States, which is recognized as the most religiously diverse nation in the world — and one of the most religious. What’s less widely known, however, is that the greatest rise in U.S. religiosity happened after World War II. How is it that religion has survived and prospered given what are the hallmark realities of America’s modernity: anonymity and technology? This question has been made all the more difficult to answer given that many Americans shy away from discussion of religion, claiming that because it is so private it can’t be discussed politely. Such reticence is part of our national heritage, Butler said.

“Whether we like it or not, religion is a phenomenon that must be dealt with — it’s constitutive,” he said. “It’s a part of American life as shown in the ‘born again’ Jimmy Carter, the ‘faith-based initiatives’ of George W. Bush, and appropriation of Islam by the terrorists who attacked America on Sept. 11, 2001.” To take religion seriously, Butler said, we must see it as a crucial dimension of how people live their lives and understand how it shapes politics.

“We tend to think of religion as being an ‘up there, out there’ phenomenon,” Butler said. “Instead, we need to think imaginatively about religion, and study how it has been used to transform the civil rights movement or Republican politics. Religion, after all, can bring negative values into society. Look at the Salem witch trials. And religious conflicts are much more troublesome than economic or nationalistic conflicts, because they appeal to the transcendent. Religion can make existing conflicts much more difficult: witness the struggle over abortion.

“In America, we must ask, how politicized can religion become, or how secularized can politics become, before we get into real trouble as a nation?”

America, the beautifully diverse

Addressing Butler’s question, Haynes drew a corollary to what happened in the United States following the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center.

“After 9/11, three people were killed in this country,” he said. “The only reason they were murdered was because they looked like they were Muslims. The tragic irony is that only one was actually a Muslim. Another was a Coptic Christian and the third was a Sikh. But they had one thing in common — they were all Americans. Many of us don’t even
Comprehending a world ‘aflame in faith’

Americans have shied away from a discussion of religion in the abstract and from conversations about religion in particular. This is a part of our national heritage—the failure to discuss religion, the idea that religion is such a private phenomenon that it cannot be discussed in the classroom, that it’s inappropriate to discuss it in a high school assembly, that it’s inappropriate to discuss American religious traditions in an American history class, beyond the Puritans. This failure to deal intellectually and collectively, as well as individually, with the problem of religion is the major reason we are here at this kind of conference.

I’m going to make an argument that no reading of the 16 words in the First Amendment that deal with religion has ever or does now prohibit in the public school classroom an intellectual conversation about what religion is, how religions are practiced, what kinds of religions exist in the world, and what a difference religions do and don’t make to the men and women who do and don’t practice them.

We’re poorly prepared to comprehend a world that is aflame in faith. College students frequently know little about religion in the United States, much less about religion in the world. High school graduates, who overwhelmingly constitute the military in the United States, know almost nothing about Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism or those branches of Christianity they do not practice themselves. And yet they have been asked to fight wars in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq over the past 15 years in which religion has stood at the very center of each conflict. And they are equally poorly prepared to deal with the aftermath of the war.

Professional historians in and out of the academy have failed to explain, first, how religion could have survived so deeply and so aggressively in the 20th century; and secondly, how religion has survived and prospered and even changed given the nature of modernity. In what way have the conditions of modern life — anonymity, technology, the rise of the corporation, bureaucratization, the very factors that Weber thought would lead to the decline of religion — transformed the phenomena that we call religion? Have they? Shouldn’t we know that? Shouldn’t we know something about some kind of transformation, standing as we do amidst a world exploding with religious vitality as well as religious conflict?

— Jon Butler, Yale University
know who is here — what kind of a nation we have become.”

This question — what is an American? — provided a subtext for many of the comments made over the course of the conference. For unlike America at the dawn of the 20th century, today this country is no longer a place where assimilation is required. Immigrants no longer learn to adhere to a unified sense of nationalism. Instead, the image of a “melting pot” has been replaced by other metaphors — a fruit salad, a mosaic — in which individual religious groups and nationalities can assert their uniqueness. This development is apparent in public school.

“We practically define diversity in our classroom, and our teachers have to address a famously heterogeneous population,” said Judith Lessow-Hurley, a professor in the Elementary Education Department at San Jose University. Lessow-Hurley named common ethnic and religious groups represented in schools: Chinese, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Sikhs, Mexicans. But while these students may dress similarly and enjoy the same music, Lessow-Hurley said their religious differences can be a trip wire in the classroom.

“Many teachers say they are more comfortable talking about culture, not religion,” she said. “Yet, in San Jose, we just broke ground on a huge Sikh temple, 15,000 square feet. How can this not be mentioned? Or, I might have a class where the majority of students are Mexican, and I’m never going to talk about the Virgin of Guadalupe? That would be absurd.”

Esther Dunnegan, a high school social studies consultant to the Department of Public Instruction in North Carolina, sounded a similar note. “North Carolina is an extremely religiously diverse state,” she said. “Our demographics have changed dramatically. We have Muslims, Hindus, Hispanics and lots of Hmong. The perception of what a North Carolina classroom might look like — mostly white, with some African Americans — is not at all the reality.”

Figuring out how to meld different nationalities and outlooks in one classroom is “messy and complex,” said Evelyn Holman, superintendent of New York’s Bay Shore district on Long Island.

“Every day, we are trying very hard to find common ground. The bottom line is, we want students to respect each other. We want to give students an understanding of how life works, the capability to distinguish between right and wrong, and the thinking skills that can be applied to life and community,” Holman said. “With all these tasks, superintendents and teachers are already so busy, it’s easy for them to say ‘let’s just skip religion.’

So, what is the result? We had Frank McCourt come speak to us recently, and the children couldn’t understand his book, Angela’s Ashes. After all, how can you comprehend a writer like McCourt, or James Joyce, without some knowledge of Catholicism?

“So go the public schools, so goes the nation,” she said. “Ignorant and free — never was, never will be.”

Teacher Norton said that teaching about religion is equally important — and perhaps even more important — in school districts such as hers, where there is a cultural homogeneity.
“I teach in a place with no diversity. My school district votes overwhelmingly Republican, my students are 96% Caucasian,” she said. Norton said her students need even more exposure to ways of thinking outside their cultural norm. “Teaching about religion is important, because it sheds light on issues that are bigger than history or social studies.”

In Norton’s experience, parents have no problem with their children learning about Hinduism or Buddhism. It’s when religions that are closer to their own religion come up that things seem to get sticky. “Many of my students have been taught at home that Mormons are a cult,” she said. “Issues come up in subtle ways on a daily basis. Uncomfortable things can happen.”

Live globally, teach locally

Susan Douglass, principal writer and researcher for the Council on Islamic Education, recently completed a survey on how religion is treated in state and national social studies standards. She presented her results while introducing a panel on teaching about religion in history.

“The good news is that so many state standards include religion, and that states say they want this to be taught. The bad news is that teaching about world history is often superficial,” Douglass said. “Teachers are not sufficiently trained to do what is now required of them. We’ve moved from the ‘flags and products’ model to a more nuanced, cultural look at world history, but the amount of content is still nearly overwhelming.”

Douglass compared current teaching about world religions to a “parade float.” “Beautiful and fascinating floats go by — some carrying the gods and goddesses of ancient Rome, others the Buddhas of China — and as each disappears around the corner, it is completely forgotten.” Douglass suggested a different model: teaching how religious traditions develop over time and in different places, rather than an approach that focuses on individual or national achievements. “After all,” she said, “religions became world religions because they jumped national boundaries.”

But such sophisticated thinking would be difficult for most teachers to grasp, much less explain to their students, said Rebecca Hayes, an assistant professor of education at the James Monroe Center for Graduate and Professional Studies at Mary Washington College.

“We are in a time when people think anyone can become a teacher,” Hayes said. “We tend to think of credentialing teachers, rather than educating them. We have to have a more liberal education before teachers can deal with complex and complicated religious issues.”

Bruce Grelle, a professor in the Department of Religious Studies and director of the Religion and Public Education Resource Center at California State University-Chico, said that training teachers to balance historical details with larger contextual issues is difficult. Nowhere is this more a challenge than in a “static” versus a “dynamic” approach to world religions. The danger, he said, is that by teaching the history of a religion, students will think this is how the religion is practiced today.

“Students get the idea that Islam is localized exclusively in the Middle East,” Grelle said. “I’ve actually heard a Christian kid ask a Jewish student why they sacrifice animals,” Grelle said. “There’s also a tension between unity and diversity. We tend to pretend that all Hindus, all Christians and all Jews are exactly the same.”

Don’t judge a book by its content

Exacerbating these problems, standard textbooks don’t present religion studies well, Yale professor Butler said. Religion just “pops up” in textbooks, jumping from the Pilgrims’ desire for religious freedom (“in itself a gross simplification,” Butler said) to the 1928
Scopes, or “Monkey,” trials. Then religion “pops up” again in the 1980s to explain how Ronald Reagan came to office with the help of something called the Moral Majority.

Because most American educators are comfortable treating religion as an antique phenomenon — “the ancient Romans did it, Mohammed did it, the Puritans did it” — they have trouble explaining the vitality of religion in modern times, Butler said.

Susan Mogull, a leader of California’s 3Rs Project, said textbooks also fail to distinguish between fact and faith. “It’s typical that textbooks will include statements such as ‘according to the New Testament,’ or ‘Buddhists believe this.’” While attribution is important, she said, such statements are not enough to make clear to students the difference between belief and fact.

Consulting with textbook publishers has been an eye-opening experience for teacher Plummer.

“The bottom line is money,” she said. “Publishers are more than willing to align the book’s content to meet local standards. From what I can see, they spend most of their time not thinking of what is educational, but how to make textbooks accessible to all students through pictures, charts and graphics. The design of the book seems to be more the focus than factual verifiability,” she said.

“Overall, there’s a lack of keeping up with current scholarship and trends, not to mention the changing faces in the classroom.”

Reverberations from 9/11

Two years after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, teachers are still trying to help students make sense of a changed world.

“The rest of the world is struggling to manage diversity. America has something to teach the world here,” said Joe Loconte of the Heritage Foundation. “It’s a scandal that most kids graduating from high school have no knowledge of how to explain this.”

Educators struggle to teach students about Islam in the wake of the attacks. Schools do not present accurate lessons on Islam, said Warren Nord, a professor of philosophy at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. (He, along with Charles C. Haynes, is the author of *Taking Religion Seriously Across the Curriculum*.) Nord said Islam is virtually ignored by most history books from its inception up to the late 1970s, when the Ayatollah Khomeini returned to power in Iran and American citizens were held hostage there.

“Religion still shapes much of the world’s thinking, yet it is left out of the curriculum,” Nord said. “We don’t understand Judaism if we filter it through Christianity. The same is true of Islam. It’s a moral notion to take people equally on their own terms. This isn’t easy. We should use primary sources: literature and art. Imagine if we treated the study of physics like we do religion and relegated it to three pages in the textbooks. Why do students get 12 years of mathematics and zero of religion?”

E.J. Dionne agreed. “Teaching distorts reality if it ignores the importance of religious

“We tend to pretend that all Hindus, all Christians and all Jews are exactly the same.”

— Bruce Grelle
Excluding religion: 
An educational ‘scandal’

We should not need 9/11 to tell us how important it is to understand Islam. It is striking that the multicultural movement, which has been so powerful in public education, has virtually ignored religion, but religion often is more important in defining people’s identities and values than are race, class and gender.

It’s not good enough to talk about religion only in the context of history. In spite of a century of social science, rumors of the impending death of religion have proven premature. Religion continues to be a live option for most people in the world, and if the majority of intellectuals are a pretty secular lot, there continues to be a respectable minority who draw on religion both in making sense of the world and in living their lives.

Indeed, religion continues to shape a good deal of our thinking about war and peace, politics and justice, good and evil, morality and sexuality, physical nature and human nature. And yet we leave religious voices out of the curricular discussion of all of these subjects, or almost all of them. I’ll not mince words: This is a scandal. Why? For a number of reasons, but for me, the big reason is because it’s illiberal. We shouldn’t need 9/11 to tell us that it’s important for students to understand Islam in not only the world’s history, but as a shaping force for how people now understand various aspects of their lives and the world.

A liberal education takes other peoples and cultures and religions seriously by enabling students to understand them as they understand themselves, not as we might understand them given our preconceptions and our values. Education isn’t just about having the truth, it’s about learning how to think critically about the world.

— Warren Nord, 
University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
commitments in institutions or in contempo-
rary life, or if it ignores the importance of reli-
gious commitments in the lives of tens of mil-
ions of Americans and literally billions of
people around the world.”

Yet Meera Sushila Viswanathan, a professor
of comparative literature and East Asian stud-
ies at Brown University, noted that the events
of Sept. 11 were not motivated solely by reli-

gion. “The attackers weren’t necessarily
protesting Christianity as much as America,”
she said. “They weren’t burning crosses, but
the American flag.”

Shabbir Mansuri, the founding director of
the Council on Islamic Education, took
Viswanathan’s point a step further. “We
assume that all the protests around the world
after 9/11 were anti-American, when they
often were a protest against a particular point
of American policy.”

Marjorie Green, director of educational pol-
icy and programs for the Anti-Defamation
League, said “the world’s oldest hatred” was
on the rise because of America’s strong
alliance with Israel. “There are cartoons in
Egypt right now, depicting Jews in ways that
you could have seen in Nazi Germany,” Green
said. Susan Mogull also expressed concern
that anti-Semitism has increased since 9/11,
but she said, “prejudiced misunderstandings of
the teachings of Islam are also troublesome
issues.”

Yet another danger, suggested Carol
Shields, a private school teacher, has been the
subsequent upsurge of patriotism in America.
Teachers should take care that the “war on ter-

rorism” won’t color efforts to teach about
Islam or other religions accurately and fairly.

“How to live with deep differences is a
core question for the future of the United
States,” Charles Haynes said. “Whatever barri-
ers or challenges we face, we have to make
sure schools help us learn about each other,
and protect liberty of conscience.”

The good book, taught badly

In its opinion in Abington Township v.
Schempp, the Supreme Court indicated that
public schools might teach students about the

Bible, as long as such teaching is presented
“objectively as part of a secular program of
education.” By extension, the same might be
said of the Qur’an, and other religious texts.

But this is easier said by the Court than it is
done in the classroom, according to most edu-
cators. Moderator Melissa Rogers summed up
the problem: “Issues on the table when we
teach about the Bible include: ‘Are we talking
what is really more of a Sunday school curricu-
lum and importing it into public schools, and
thus not teaching the Bible in an academic and
neutral way?’”

“It is an educational oversight that the
Bible is not talked about and taught more in
the public school,” Christopher Thacker of the
Bible Literacy Project said. “This suggests that
the Bible is either worthless or it’s radioactive,
and too dangerous to even touch. Nonsense.
It is the most influential book in the world,
period.”

But People For the American Way
Foundation’s Judith Schaeffer was equally con-
vinced that Bible classes in public schools —
and particularly those taught in the South —
often are thinly disguised attempts at indoctri-
nation into the Christian faith. She cited, as
an example, People For the American Way
Foundation’s report, The Good Book Taught
Wrong, an investigation into the teaching of
“Bible history” classes in Florida’s public high
schools, that found the classes commonly taught in violation of the constitutional requirement that the Bible must be presented objectively if it is taught in public schools. The investigation found the Bible often was presented as factually true, and students were required to engage in lessons more appropriate for Sunday School. These included exercises that emphasized rote memorization of Bible verses rather than critical thinking or analysis.

“We think it’s important to teach about religion,” Schaeffer said. “But what are the facts that are being taught? To present the story of Adam and Eve as ‘the fall of man’ — a phrase that, by the way, never appears in the Bible — is an interpretation, not a fact.

“Oh, or present the Bible as having 66 books, 39 in the New Testament, 27 in the Old? This is so only with the Protestant Bible. This is bad education.”

David Levenson, a professor in the Department of Religion at Florida State University, said the education process could be improved.

“We need to move from the abstract to the very pragmatic,” he said. “What is Bible literacy? What is academic study of the Bible? If you don’t know that the early Christians were oppressed, you don’t have any idea what the Gospel of Mark means. You have to focus analysis on what texts would have meant to first century Christians.”

Schaeffer said this notion “is public school utopia, and not at all what we typically see. The problem is more, what is the impetus for the course? We try to discourage Bible-focused courses in high school, not only because very few are taught correctly, but also because we believe that, as students prepare for adulthood in our religiously diverse society, they would be better served by a course on world religions that is not limited to the faith documents of Christians and Jews.”

Barrett Duke Jr. said he had divided opinions about the issue. Duke is the vice president for research and director of the Research Institute of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, which is an agency of the Southern Baptist Convention.

“I recognize that what Judith (Schaeffer) is saying does go on,” he said. “They tried to do the same thing in Georgia, create a class that was on some level evangelistic. Yet, we tried to tell people that the course they imagined would be looked at by people like Judith. And, in fact, when they saw how their Bible course curriculum was ‘edited,’ they weren’t interested in seeing it taught anymore.”

Duke also said he was concerned that Christianity was being pushed off the public stage by more aggressive onslaughts in the popular media. “Eastern faith has invaded American culture,” he claimed. “I’ve seen ‘Matrix Reloaded’ twice, and it is the embodiment of Eastern thought.”

Meera Sushila Viswanathan disputed Duke’s opinion that Eastern thought is “invading” American culture.

“It’s a question of the barn door already being opened. The only way to understand Emerson or Thoreau is to be knowledgeable of the Vedas and Upanishads. Gandhi read Emerson, and Martin Luther King read Gandhi,” she said. “This has been going on for a long time before ‘Matrix Reloaded.’”

What is character?

Participants also discussed the role religion might play in “character development” — a phrase that Diane Berreth, deputy executive director for the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, suggested should be used cautiously. Berreth said the terms “character education” and “moral education” sometimes are used interchangeably or are not clearly defined.

Linda McKay, senior advisor to the deputy secretary of the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, which is part of the U.S. Department of Education, said character education is worthwhile, despite its inherent difficulties.
She cited her own experience as director of CHARACTERplus, a project that manages a school/home/business/community partnership that promotes character education in 87 public schools as well as private and parochial schools in Missouri and Illinois. Yet, she acknowledged that character education is a confusing notion to many people.

“We are not only losing kids to drugs, sex and alcohol, but to lack of values and no character development,” McKay said. “People in the service field are suspect of those in the character development field. Even at the federal level, where I work, there is suspicion about what I do.”

The first and most important job that teachers do — even more crucial than giving students an education — is to develop and nurture character, said Marvin Berkowitz, a professor of character education at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. “We need to create a context that promotes values all children should attain,” he said. “We need to find a moral agenda that all faiths and even non-religious world views can share.”

Matthew Spalding, director of the B. Kenneth Simon Center for American Studies at the Heritage Foundation, said the connection between religion and morality is strong. “What I don’t like is the idea of values by consensus,” Spalding said. “We need more character, not character development. Schools need to get out of the way. The real job of character development is done by churches, families, not by schools.”

But McKay said that Spalding’s statement assumed an idealistic view of the average American family. “Values and character development are things that happen 24 hours a day,” she said. “Kids sometimes need values to be contrasted with everything else they are exposed to outside of school.”

And, as Emile Lester, a professor of government at the College of William and Mary, said, “Parents may have primary responsibility to raise children, but this is also problematic. If fundamentalist Christian parents tell their gay child that he or she is going to Hell, the school has some responsibility to expose the child to another point of view.”

Lester’s comment sparked debate on the difference between “soft” and “hard” values — the former being attributes such as caring and empathy; the latter, persistence, punctuality and honesty, among others. Spalding said modern society focuses too much on soft values.

“This is Rousseau versus Aristotle,” Spalding said. “The problem with the Enlightenment was that it replaced virtues with values. Values aren’t founded on anything. Character formation demands a sense of hierarchy. Only with this can a student learn notions of courage, diligence, intelligence and loyalty.”

“Yes, but those are all words that could have been used of 9/11 terrorists,” Berkowitz said. “Loyalty and courage are only good if they are subordinate to other values like justice and compassion.”

This exchange led to a comment from Kent Greenawalt, a professor at Columbia University Law School: “Of course, the 9/11 terrorists thought they were acting in a way that was redressing justice as well. My sense is that things like loyalty or bravery — although
they can be done for bad causes — if they are done for neutral things, we do think they are positively good. Justice, it seems to me, is very open-ended as to how you fill it in, and one person’s idea of justice is another person’s idea of injustice. That raises the question as to how much teaching of values one can do without filling in what’s just or unjust; and, of course, the society disagrees about that.”

Moving beyond history

Several participants said study about religion should not be confined to the history classroom, said Marcia Beauchamp, an education consultant. “We haven’t talked very much about this because we have been focusing on the philosophical questions about how to include more religion in the curriculum, but there are some wonderful resources,” Beauchamp said. She suggested the Religion in American Life series from Oxford University Press and “On Common Ground,” a multimedia CD-Rom from Columbia University Press.

Other examples of people who took study about religion outside the confines of the history curriculum included Kathy Brownback, an instructor at Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire. She teaches a class called “The Religion of the Marketplace,” which includes on its syllabus such books as Nickel and Dimed by Barbara Ehrenreich, The Lexus and the Olive Tree by Thomas L. Friedman and Fast Food Nation by Eric Schlosser.

Each year, Brownback asks students to answer the question, “What is missing from our lives?” She said she wants them to understand not only their tremendous good fortune, but that great wealth is often the cause of great poverty. “If nothing else, I just want them to notice how they are bombarded with advertised images about how great life can be for those who have money,” she said.

Amanda Millay Hughes, assistant director of the Ackland Art Museum’s Five Faiths Project at the University of North Carolina, said that museums can play an important role in interfaith dialogue by presenting different religions through objects that provide a link between a religion’s history and the way it is practiced now.

“Tangible objects can be an important ‘third’ between students and teachers,” Hughes said. “You can ask an object a question you might be too shy to ask a human. Why does the Buddha have a bulge on top of his head? What is printed on the scroll above Jesus’ head in scenes of the Crucifixion? These inquiries can open up discussion about what are, still today, the core beliefs of Buddhism or Christianity.”

In museums, objects are not displayed in “splendid isolation,” Hughes said. Students see sacred objects from various religions lined up together and, thereby, equal in importance. Many museum curators take care with the terminology used to describe deities, to make sure one faith is not unintentionally privileged over another.

“We don’t say Lord Jesus Christ, nor do we say Lord Ganesha,” Hughes said. “Kids need to not only be critical thinkers, but critical readers and critical viewers of art and objects.”

Elementary education poses additional challenges, said Eric Holmes, principal of the Oak Hills Elementary School in Bountiful, Utah. Because the curriculum often integrates multiple subjects, educators must include religion wherever it occurs naturally.

For example, teachers can demonstrate diversity, especially religious diversity, in a number of ways. “You’re going to talk about family groups and, as kids maybe get a little bit older, you’re going to talk about neighborhoods and communities. Are there differences in those neighborhoods and communities? Are there differences among families? There are natural ways of pointing those things out, if the kids don’t do it already, even as simple as what kind of churches may be in the neighborhood, or what kind of organizations or entities. You’ve got the fire station over here,
you’ve got the police station over here and you’ve got a church or a temple over here. Pointing those things out to kids may be something they’ve never seen before or looked at in that way, or in fact they have looked at it, but they didn’t realize that there was a difference there.”

Theology in the laboratory

“The relationship between science and religion is one of the longest-running battles in public education,” said Haynes, introducing Kent Greenawalt, professor at Columbia University Law School.

Greenawalt talked about the difficulties of confronting conflicts between religion and scientific claims. “Much more troublesome . . . are instances in which the explanations that science provides, with a high degree of confidence, are at odds with religious explanations,” he said. “(Teachers) should certainly inform students that some people in this society credit religious sources over scientific ones. . . . texts and teachers should explain to some degree what the methodology of science aims to do and what questions reach beyond science.” For example, during lessons about the environment, “students should be made aware that there are crucial questions about human responsibility and intergenerational justice that science is not equipped to answer. . . . Various religious traditions address these questions,” he said.

The most commonly contentious issue involves questions about the age of the Earth, evolution and intelligent design, Greenawalt said. Was the universe fine-tuned to allow for the preeminence of human life? Should science be taught in a way that gives students an idea of the world’s richness and complexity, or gives them an absolute view of reality?

Authors Haynes and Nord wrote in *Taking Religion Seriously* that one purpose of a liberal education is to make sure students are in a position to make “all things considered” judgments, rather than accepting uncritically the conventional wisdom of any discipline. More than with any other subject on the curriculum, however, science students sometimes can’t distinguish between what the teacher says and what is the “authoritative” position. In practice, then, a real danger is that students have a tendency to think science has trumped religion.

“Students can easily get the impression that religion is outdated, outmoded and only held by nice, naïve people,” said Diane Moore, director of the Program in Religion and Secondary Education and a member of the faculty at Harvard Divinity School.

The inclusion of theological alternatives would be one way to prevent science from assuming a power that’s “absolute.” Yet, is it realistic to think that teachers would ever highlight questions that science can’t answer intrinsically? “While it’s absurd that only social studies teachers should ever address religion, making comments about the battles between theology and science necessitates a very sophisticated teacher, as well as a very sophisticated student,” Nord said.

Compounding the difficulties are constitutional problems which are “nearly insurmount-
Can educators teach ‘truth’?

If teachers can’t teach as true, all things considered, any proposition that conflicts with any religious views, they cannot teach that the earth is rounder than it is flat or that members of different races and genders should be treated equally, because there are religious groups that don’t believe these things. . . . Some religions reject these factual and ethical claims: Suppose some small sect holds it as a matter of religious truth that no Christian nation would kill millions of defenseless Jews. Would a teacher have to say that secular history tells us that the Holocaust occurred, but it may be wrong?

We do expect teachers to teach as true some ideas that are rejected by some people as a matter of religious faith. Indeed, if teachers consistently inserted the caution that an idea is true or sound only from a particular perspective, such language would be disingenuous many times when it was uttered, and I think it would soon be disregarded by students. If it weren’t disregarded, it would erode their belief that anything is true, all things considered, and might tend toward a post-modern skepticism about sources of truth, a position that I’m not particularly sympathetic with. . . .

One might say that the crucial determinate must be how many people in our society believe a proposition, so if you have a lot of people who don’t believe it, then it’s something that teachers have to be much more careful about. But what are we to do if many people believe something that’s evidently false?

It’s a very complicated question: When should teachers be making statements about the truth of something, all things considered? All this inclines me to think that science teachers, having explained something about the nature of science early on, should say relatively little about ideas that appear absurd from the perspective of science. Students will grasp what the teachers think is true overall, even if the teachers say, “I’m disclaiming any claim about certainty or truth overall.”

— Kent Greenawalt,
Columbia University Law School
“Can’t exposure to other religious beliefs undermine a student’s own belief?” a participant asked Norton.

“If parents are so concerned about that,” she answered, “it may be this child should not be in public school.”

Holmes, the Utah principal, said that education in the classroom happened both explicitly through the planned curriculum, and implicitly, through day-to-day events.

“Questions of age appropriateness, for me, really fell by the wayside during 9/11,” he concluded. “I had second graders asking me if this was the end of the world.”

The particular problem with elementary school students, however, said Lessow-Hurley, is that those children learn by doing. “How do you teach about religion at this age without being devotional?” she said.

At what age?

Given the complicated nature of teaching about religion, Joe Loconte from the Heritage Foundation asked, “Is there an age when it is inappropriate to have discussions of religion?”

Teacher Norton said she didn’t think so. “Even in the earliest ages, students can be sensitized to appreciating difference, and in giving respect to all viewpoints,” she said.

She then talked about her experience with the “December Dilemma,” a well-known minefield for public school teachers. The local fire department for years had donated Christmas trees for school classrooms. After much consideration, Norton decided the practice gave unfair emphasis to the Christian holiday tradition. But merely refusing the trees was not the best solution, she said, so she organized a party at which holiday customs and costumes from all faith traditions were included.

Teachers are the content; content is the teacher

Lessow-Hurley’s remarks seemed to resonate with many in the audience. For some teachers, the distinction between their personal and professional lives can be hazy at best.

Shabbir Mansuri, founding director of the Council on Islamic Education, said he was unaware of any problem with educating about religion until 10 years ago, when he read one of his daughter’s textbooks, and was shocked at its presentation of Islam.

Meera Viswanthan, from Brown University, spoke of her own sense of having moved into the mainstream. She said she has been surprised to find that her role today is to “underscore the marginal, the interstitial.”

“I am an immigrant. I always had to check ‘other’ boxes on religion and ethnicity sections of forms. The irony of our times is that the outsider has now come to the center place. As a Hindu, I can speak to the need for inclusive religious education in a way that an evangelical Christian probably couldn’t.”

Lessow-Hurley, who is Jewish, said she was motivated to get involved after her child was given an extra-credit question that read, “What do we do at Christmas time?”
“This hurt my child, and I wanted to make sure that other kids were not damaged in the same way,” she said. Lessow-Hurley now teaches a course for pre-service teachers.

If “education should prepare students for civic life, pluralism has got to be the basis for education,” Diane Moore said. “We have to train teachers to be adept at dealing with real diversity.”

“Deep differences arise from the diversity that is the best thing about America, yet how do we address this without dissolving into simple relativism? If we can’t figure out how to do this in the classroom, our students are not going to get this in the general culture, where I see our country moving into polemic and absolutism in a frightening way.”

Teacher training can help, said Marjorie Green, director of Educational Policy and Programs for the Anti-Defamation League. “We need to improve teacher’s pre-serving training so they can be motivated to see the importance of their role in forming new citizens,” Green said. “We must make sure that they have some ability not only to teach, but to empathize with others — especially with students that don’t come from the ‘dominant group.’”

But adequate training is difficult to achieve, said Axel Ramirez, an instructor at Utah Valley State College. “Unless (training is) done system wide, we are going to have some problems,” he said. “In Utah, because we have a lot of the infrastructure in place, teachers who will come out with this kind of training will have a support system out there.”

But the problems won’t end with getting education students to take religion seriously, said Sam Swofford, executive director of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

California accepts undergraduate courses in religious studies as part of the credentialing requirements to teach in the state. But federal requirements, such as those found in No Child Left Behind, create priorities that may be a barrier to expanding study of religion. “It’s very difficult in this environment to include other issues within the content areas that are not very specific to those subjects,” he said.

**Don’t forget the non-religious**

“Atheism is the deepest difference of all,” said Mynga Futrell, who works with a Sacramento, California-based organization called Objectivity, Accuracy and Balance in Teaching about Religion. “It’s a real cultural taboo, such that many people feel it’s OK to be prejudiced against atheists.”

Even the concept of being “non-religious” is troubling and confusing to many. “When you use the word ‘religion,’ you are excluding those that aren’t religious,” she said. “Whenever you teach about religion, there is a linguistic problem. How do you include religious dissenters and other non-conforming perspectives?”

“Remember, too, that a lot of our (founding fathers) were Deists, who believed that God created the world, but thereafter assumed no control over it or the lives of people,” she said. “Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine . . . all Deists, yet this is rarely mentioned in textbooks.”
Futrell cited the American Religious Identification Study, a survey by the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Respondents were asked, “What is your religious preference, if any?” The count of those who identified themselves as atheist or agnostic surpassed the combined count of Hindus and Buddhists. Adding the atheists and agnostics together with those uninterested in religion, the total came in third after Catholics and Baptists — a sizeable contingent, Futrell noted. “Not to mention that many atheists don’t ‘fess up because it has social consequences,” she said. “In my understanding, agnostics are probably ‘pragmatic atheists.’”

Futrell said atheism has its own leaders and institutions, such as the variety of atheist schools and care societies in India. “Are we not going to teach kids that there are nice, functioning atheists?” she asked. “If not, are we indirectly suggesting that in order to be moral you have to be religious? Educators have a responsibility to be neutral.”

Mary Ellen Sikes, associate director of the Institute for Humanist Studies, also cautioned against what she said was “the ‘easy’ use of the word religion.”

“Religion is such a broadly used word — it is used as if we all have shared understanding of what it means,” she said. “Not everyone has a religion.”

Lessons learned

Haynes said he was encouraged by Harvard Divinity School’s Diane Moore, who planned to expand Harvard’s Program in Religion and Secondary Education, and remarked that the American Academy of Religion was “back in the game.” The best framework for carrying this work forward, he said, is found in the religious-liberty principles of the First Amendment. “Within our shared commitment to religious liberty, we can find common ground on how to discuss religious traditions in the classroom — and how to protect the liberty of conscience of students of all faiths and none,” Haynes said.

A lot of works lies ahead, Kimberly Plummer said.

“There are so many people who don’t even know this is a topic. I do a workshop, and every time it is standing-room only. I tell people you can talk about religion in the classroom and not lose your job, and people come up to me afterwards and say, ‘Thank you, I didn’t know.’”

Unexpected problems will arise, said August Bullock, a teacher at Prince William County School in Manassas, Va. “The main problems occur when a teacher unintentionally trips a wire. A teacher gets a request, say, for a test to be postponed because of Ramadan. Or, they don’t have the proper understanding about head scarves. Rituals and customs are the problem areas.”

“We’ve spent a lot of time at this conference talking about issues, not methods,” Lessow-Hurley said. “Teachers want to know, what do I do tomorrow?”

A number of conferees stood in line to pick up a copy of Kathy Brownback’s syllabus for “Ethics of the Marketplace,” the course she teaches at Phillips Exeter Academy.

School superintendent Evelyn Holman well understands the hunger some teachers expressed for lesson plans and one-size-fits-all solutions. “Unfortunately, no one will ever hold up a school system as a shining example. It’s too complicated,” she said.

Asked “where do we go from here?”, Holman said, “It’s a slow process. Perhaps the best we can hope for is to avoid intolerance and miseducation.

“Our best hope, and the reason I am so loyal to the work that Charles (Haynes) and Warren (Nord) are doing, is that I truly believe we need to focus more on the First Amendment,” she continued. “In so doing, I hope children can learn what they most value about being Americans.”
Panelists

Marcia Beauchamp, education consultant
Marvin Berkowitz, University of Missouri-St. Louis
Diane Berreth, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Kathy Brownback, Phillips Exeter Academy
Jon Butler, Yale University
E.J. Dionne Jr., Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life
Susan Douglass, Council on Islamic Education
Barrett Duke Jr., Southern Baptist Convention
Mynga Futrell, Objectivity, Accuracy, and Balance in Teaching about Religion
Marjorie Green, Anti-Defamation League
Kent Greenawalt, Columbia University Law School
Bruce Grelle, California State University-Chico
Rebecca Hayes, Mary Washington College
Charles C. Haynes, First Amendment Center
Evelyn Holman, Bay Shore Union Free School District
Eric Holmes, Oak Hill Elementary School
Amanda Millay Hughes, Ackland Art Museum
Judith Lessow-Hurley, San Jose State University
David Levenson, Florida State University
Joe Loconte, Heritage Foundation
Shabbir Mansuri, Council on Islamic Education
Linda McKay, U.S. Department of Education
Diane Moore, Harvard University
Warren Nord, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
Jennifer Norton, Argonaut High School
Kimberly Plummer, San Diego Unified School District
Axel Ramirez, Utah Valley State College
Melissa Rogers, Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life
Judith Schaeffer, People For the American Way Foundation
Mary Ellen Sikes, Institute for Humanist Studies
Matthew Spalding, Heritage Foundation
Sam Swofford, California Commission on Teacher Credentialing
Christopher Thacker, Bible Literacy Project
Meera Sushila Viswanathan, Brown University
Jay Wexler, Boston University School of Law
Larry Witham, journalist and author
Participants

William Aiken, Soka Gakkai International- USA
Debbie Armentrot, Representative Robert Wexler’s Office
Virginia Aycock-Burr, Christian Science Practitioner
James Baxley, D.C. Department of Education
Vicki Bennett, Spotsylvania County Schools
William Brazier, Loudoun County Public Schools
Brian Brunius, Thirteen/WNET
August Bullock, Prince William County School
Ralph Burr, Christian Science Committee on Publication
Peter Cobb, Council for Spiritual and Ethical Education
Lori Crouch, Education Writers Association
Missy Daniel, Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly
Bob Destro, Catholic University Columbus School of Law
Esther Dunnegan, Department of Public Instruction
Carol Eliot, National Cathedral School
Patrick Fagan, Heritage Foundation
John Farina, Georgetown University
Maura Farrelly, Voice of America
John Ferguson, First Amendment Center
Richard Foltin, American Jewish Committee
Hillel Fradkin, Ethics and Public Policy Center
Jim Fraser, Northeastern University
Maggie Gallagher, The Bible Literacy Project
Susan Griffin, National Council for the Social Studies
Stephen Henderson, Freel-ance writer
Michael Hill, National Association of State Boards of Education
Charles Hokanson, Jr, U.S. Department of Education
Hollyn Hollman, Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs
Jess Hordes, Anti-Defamation League
Thomas Hutton, National School Boards Association
Stanley Jones, Caroline County Public Schools
Tamera Jones, American Association of Christian Schools
George Kersey Jr., Phi Delta Kappa International
Jay Lamb, Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology
Emile Lester, College of William and Mary
Julie Levine, Anti-Defamation League
Clark Lobensteine, Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington
Kristen Loschert, NEA Today
Robert Marus, Associated Baptist Press
Verleter Mazyck, D.C. Department of Education
Jim Miller, American Association for the Advancement of Science
Rebecca Mills, Spotsylvania County Schools
Alan Mittleman, Muhlenberg College
Susan Mogull, California 3Rs Project
Ann Mulligan, Americans United
Mark O’Keefe, Newhouse News Service
Erik Owens, The University of Chicago Divinity School
Russ Phipps, Fairfax County Public Schools
Reva Price, Jewish Council for Public Affairs
James D. Redington, Georgetown University
Alice Reilly, Fairfax County Public Schools
Chuck Roman, Office of Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner
Brajendra Sharma, D.C. Public Schools
Sara Shoob, Fairfax County Public Schools
Breet Singh, Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force
Manjit Singh, Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force
Grant Smith, Unitarian Universalist Association
Ann St. Ledger, Pennsylvania Department of Education
Michael Timpane, Aspen Institute
Eliezer Valentin-Castanon, General Board of Church & Society of The United Methodist Church
Respicio Vazquez, Illinois Department of Education
Pat Zapor, Catholic News Service
The following resources offer background material for understanding not only how religion has influenced the past, but also how it continues to influence society today.

Taking religion seriously in the curriculum will require a commitment by schools to give teachers more exposure to the study of religious influences and appropriate resources for teaching about these influences in the public school setting.

Finding Common Ground:
A Guide to Religious Liberty in Public Schools
Finding Common Ground by Charles C. Haynes and Oliver Thomas is a First Amendment guide and sourcebook for anyone interested in protecting religious liberty in public schools. This resource contains guidance on how to resolve contentious First Amendment issues in schools, what legal boundaries exist when teaching about or otherwise addressing religion in the classroom, samples policies, and much more. Used by First Amendment Center staff at in-service trainings around the country, this is one of the most widely distributed and referenced practical resources for schools on these topics.

The book can be ordered for $19.95 from Amazon.com. An education discount of $10.00 per copy is available for orders of 10 books or more. For discount, contact Euraine Brooks at 703/284-2809.

Religion in American Life
Religion in American Life, a series of scholarly works on religion written for young readers, has been produced by Yale University professors Jon Butler and Harry Stout and published by Oxford University Press. Religion in American Life is a 17-volume series authored by some of the nation’s leading scholars in the field of religious studies.

The series is an invaluable resource for teachers of junior and senior high school students. Teachers of U.S. history will find all of the volumes most useful, but world history, government and literature teachers will also be able to use many of the volumes in a variety of ways. Three chronological volumes give the religious history of the United States from the colonial period to the present. Nine volumes cover significant religious groups in America, including Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Native Americans and Eastern faiths. Four volumes address specific topics — women, church-state issues, African-American religion and immigration — that are of special importance in understanding the role of religion in American life.

A teacher’s guide, prepared by the First Amendment Center, suggests ways to use the volumes for supplemental reading and research projects in history and other courses.

For more information, visit Oxford University Press at www.oup-usa.org.

Orders can be placed at 800/451-7556 or fax to 919/677-1303, or Oxford University Press, Order Department, 2001 Evans Rd., Cary, NC, 27515.

On Common Ground (CD-ROM)
Another groundbreaking resource for students and teachers is On Common Ground: World Religions in America, a CD-ROM published in 1997 by Columbia University Press. This multimedia resource uses text, primary sources, photographs, music, film and the spoken word to bring alive the extraordinary religious diversity in the United States. Prepared by Harvard Divinity School professor Diana Eck, the CD-ROM draws on the Pluralism Project, a Harvard-based study that has documented America’s religious landscape.

For more information, visit www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/catalog/electronic/idx_cd.html.

Orders can be placed at: 800/944-8648 (phone); 800/944-1844 (fax); or Columbia University Press Order Department, 136 South Broadway, Irvington, NY 10533.

Taking Religion Seriously Across the Curriculum
In Taking Religion Seriously Across the Curriculum, Warren A. Nord and Charles C. Haynes chart a middle course in the culture wars over religion and public education — one that builds on a developing national consensus among educational and religious leaders.

In Part One, Nord and Haynes explain why schools should take religion seriously, and they outline the civic, constitutional and educational frameworks that should shape the treatment of religion in the curriculum and classroom. In Part Two, they explore the major issues relating to religion in different domains of the curriculum — in elementary education and in middle- and high-school courses in history, civics, economics, literature and the sciences. They also discuss Bible courses and world religions courses, and they explore the relationship of religion to moral education and sex education.
For more information, visit www.ascd.org.

This book is available from: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1703 N. Beauregard St., Alexandria, VA, 22311-1714.

The Bible & Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide
The First Amendment Center and the Bible Literacy Project jointly published these First Amendment guidelines for teachers on the appropriate role of the Bible in the public school curriculum. This guide is endorsed by a wide array of organizations, ranging from the People For the American Way Foundation and the American Jewish Congress to the Christian Legal Society and the National Association of Evangelicals. The guide is based on a question-and-answer format addressing such issues as whether the Bible can be taught in public schools, methods and approaches that are constitutional, and what the courts have said about the subject.

This guide is available online at www.firstamendmentcenter.org, or by calling 800/830-3733 and requesting publication No. 99-F03.

America’s Religions: An Educator’s Guide to Beliefs and Practices
Teacher Ideas Press presents a guide by Benjamin Hubbard, John Hatfield and James Santucci to the beliefs and practices of a number of the world’s religions. Designed for teachers, the guide examines each religious group in terms of its origins, beliefs, sacred scriptures, practices, main subgroups, common misunderstandings and stereotypes, and classroom concerns.

This book is available from Teacher Ideas Press, Dept. B40, P.O. Box 6633, Englewood, CO 80155-6633; by phone at 800/237-6124, ext.1; or at www.lu.com/tip.

Organizations That Provide Classroom Resources

First Amendment Schools
c/o Freedom Forum
1101 Wilson Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22209
www.firstamendmentschools.org
E-mail: schaltain@freedomforum.org or mmccloskey@ascd.org

This multiyear collaboration between the First Amendment Center and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) is designed to transform how schools teach and apply the guiding principles of the First Amendment. The initiative will develop model schools throughout the nation to encourage all schools to become laboratories of democratic freedom.

Council on Islamic Education
P.O. Box 20186
Fountain Valley
CA 92728-0186
714/839-2929
www.cie.org
E-mail: info@cie.org

The Council on Islamic Education is a national, nonprofit resource organization dedicated to providing information on Islam and Muslim history to K-12 textbook publishers, education officials, curriculum developers, teachers and other education professionals. CIE is comprised of scholars and academicians associated with major universities and institutions throughout the United States. CIE produces resource materials, conducts workshops, attends education conferences, and convenes events in its efforts towards accurate, balanced, and sensitive coverage of Islam in the context of a global approach to world history.

Religion and Public Education Resource Center
Director: Bruce Grelle, Ph.D.
Department of Religious Studies
California State University-Chico
Chico, CA 95929-0740
(530) 898-4739
e-mail: bgrelle@csuchico.edu
The Religion and Public Education Resource Center (RPERC) provides resources for teaching about religions in public schools in ways that are constitutionally permissible and academically sound. The center 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 that arise in connection with teaching about religion in public schools. RPERC offers curriculum guides and sample lessons in several subject areas for classroom teachers.

**Council for Spiritual and Ethical Education**

1465 Northside Dr., Suite 220
Atlanta, GA 30318-4225
800/298-4599
Fax: (404) 355-4435
E-mail: info@csee.org
www.csee.org

The Council for Spiritual and Ethical Education is a membership organization that serves as a national resource for schools to encourage the moral, ethical, and spiritual development of young people. CSEE promotes community service, provides resources and a network for schools’ involvement in community service and service learning. CSEE also supports instruction in world religions and ethics as essential components of a complete education.

**Religious Studies in Secondary Schools**

7735 SW 87th Ave.
Portland, OR 97223
E-mail: info@rsiss.org
www.rsiss.org

RSISS is a growing coalition of public and private secondary school teachers committed to the idea that education is not complete without the academic study of the world’s religious traditions and the ethical values, literatures and cultures so inextricably linked to them. There are no membership dues, just people in the field willing to help.

**Religion and Education**

Mike Waggoner, editor
University of Northern Iowa
508 Schindler Education Center
Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0604
319273-2605
E-mail: jrae@uni.edu
www.uni.edu/jrae

*Religion and Education* is a journal devoted to news, reviews of books and curricular materials, and essays relating to interactions of religion and education. Religion and Education’s mission is to facilitate informed, constitutionally appropriate teaching about religions in history and culture that enables students to participate in a pluralistic and religiously diverse world.

**Internet Resources**

The Internet has become a valuable tool for exploring religious liberty issues in education and the role of religion in the curriculum. Below is a list of resources relating to various religious information sites that can be found on the Internet. Some of these sites target the academic community, and as such are more useful to the teacher who is trying to better understand a variety of faith traditions. As the Internet is an ever-changing entity, the content of the sites mentioned is also changing. Whenever students are using the Internet, they should be monitored. In fact, we encourage teachers to preview these sites before students are allowed to access them. While we have attempted to choose sites that are well established, their addresses and locations can change frequently. Also, please remember that these sites are not endorsed by the First Amendment Center or the Pew Forum but are merely areas that might provide valuable information for the classroom.

**First Amendment Center Online**

www.firstamendmentcenter.org

The First Amendment Center Online offers one-stop access to information about the First Amendment. For journalists, teachers and students, it’s the Web site of first choice for research, FAQs and daily First Amendment news. Among the site’s features:

- Wide array of First Amendment topics: arts, school prayer, campus free speech, Internet, media violence, FOI, libel, much more.
- Analysis of First Amendment rulings by the U.S. Supreme Court.
- Commentary, overview, trends.
- The First Amendment Library — the only comprehensive online compilation of all First Amendment Supreme Court cases, arranged by categories.
**Resources**

**Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life**

www.pewforum.org

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life seeks to promote a deeper understanding of how religion shapes the ideas and institutions of American society.

At a time of heightened interest in religion’s public roles and responsibilities, the Forum bridges the worlds of scholarship, public policy and journalism by creating a platform for research and discussion of issues at the intersection of religion and public affairs.

**Ackland Art Museum’s Five Faiths Project**

www.ackland.org/fivefaiths/

The Five Faiths Project introduces, with original works of art from the Ackland’s multicultural permanent collection, the beliefs and practices of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism - religious traditions that have a strong presence in North Carolina and generally in American society today. It is with the idea of assisting communication between these new faith communities and the established Protestant community that the Project came into being. The Five Faiths Project is founded on the conviction that centering conversations about faith traditions on works of art originally used in worship promotes objective and thoughtful consideration of those traditions, while also inhibiting unproductive ideological debates that impede tolerant understanding and learning.

**APS Guide to Resources in Theology**

www.utoronto.ca/stmikes/theobook.htm

This University of Toronto site is a list of links to other sites, primarily those dealing with Christian resources. It is of interest because it links to sites that provide primary materials (papyri, manuscripts, etc.) Most of the linked sites are fairly sophisticated and would be most useful as resources for teachers seeking a deeper understanding of some of the various Christian denominations and early source materials in Christian studies.

**Interfaith Calendar by Mall Area Religious Council**

www.interfaithcalendar.org

This site is a listing of the religious holidays observed by various religious groups.

**Teaching About Religion In Public Schools: Worldview Education**

www.teachingaboutreligion.org

This Web site is designed to assist teachers of middle grades and secondary level history and social science programs in their handling of religion as curricular subject matter. It contains resource material, guidelines, and lesson plans, including the “Different Drummers” curriculum. The “Religious Neutrality: Teaching in a Pluralistic Classroom” online mini-course aides educators in dealing more comfortably with the task of preparing youngsters to handle the religious diversity they will encounter as citizens of an increasingly diverse nation.

**Academic Information on Religion**

www.academicinfo.net/religindex.html

This site lists various religions according to their presence in various geographic locations. This site also links to the art and literature of the various belief systems, a useful feature for teachers seeking visual aids. This site links to college- and graduate-level sites and is too complex for younger children.

**Pluralism Project**

www.fas.harvard.edu/~pluralsm/

The Pluralism Project at Harvard University is filled with such resources as pictures of various U.S. worship centers, links to other sites with content related to various faiths, syllabi from college courses on the topic of religious pluralism, and archives of news articles reporting on recent faith traditions in the United States.

**National Humanities Center**

www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/tserv/tserve.htm

The National Humanities Center TeacherServ is designed to provide practical planning helps for teaching topics in the liberal arts. Instructional guides and resource materials are provided to assist teachers with secondary-school humanities topics, particularly as related to teaching about religion. The current guide, Divining America, is an invaluable resource for teachers attempting to achieve a deeper understanding of religion’s place in American history.
Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

— First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution
First Amendment Center

The First Amendment Center works to preserve and protect First Amendment freedoms through information and education. The center serves as a forum for the study and exploration of free-expression issues, including freedom of speech, of the press and of religion, the right to assemble and petition the government.

The First Amendment Center, with offices at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., and Arlington, Va., is an operating program of the Freedom Forum and is associated with the Newseum. Its affiliation with Vanderbilt University is through the Vanderbilt Institute for Public Policy Studies.

Through its education programs, the First Amendment Center works with schools and communities throughout the nation. The center’s school-reform initiative, consensus guidelines and conflict-mediation efforts are designed to promote strong public support for First Amendment principles and ideas. The center’s religious-freedom programs educate Americans about the history, meaning and significance of the First Amendment’s religious-liberty clauses. The programs help Americans find common ground across religious differences using the guiding principles of religious freedom.

Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life seeks to promote a deeper understanding of how religion shapes the ideas and institutions of American society.

At a time of heightened interest in religion’s public roles and responsibilities, the Forum bridges the worlds of scholarship, public policy and journalism by creating a platform for research and discussion of issues at the intersection of religion and public affairs.

People of good will and sincere faith sometimes differ in their politics and policy positions, and there is a wide range of views about how and when religion should participate in public life. It is essential that these issues be engaged in an environment of candor, respect and reflection. Toward this end, the Forum serves as a place for informed discussion and new research about the ways in which faith and public affairs intersect, functioning both as a clearinghouse and a town hall.

Through its clearinghouse function, the Forum reports on the role of religion in public affairs and on the role of public affairs in religion. It initiates new survey work, and commissions and publishes new scholarship in this field.

In its capacity as a town hall, the Forum creates an open environment for fruitful dialogue on the intersecting worlds of religion and public affairs. We convene issue summits both inside and outside Washington around topics relating to religion and public policy, religion and academia, and the role of values in politics and public discourse. The Forum also organizes rapid response events to address relevant issues as critical debates arise.