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Lauren Kerby

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Teaching for Tolerance: The Case for Religious Study in American Public Schools

By Lauren Kerby, Class of 2011

Introduction

When the average American student enters the classroom for the first time in a public school, he is greeted by classmates from an astonishing diversity of backgrounds. They may be from different economic classes. They may be of a different race. They may have been raised by parents with different political opinions. And they may be of different religions.

In the classroom, any discussion of those religious differences is avoided. Religion, when it is acknowledged at all, is treated as a historical phenomenon, and its relevance to the modern world is not usually discussed. Teachers, like most Americans, believe that religion is off-limits to the schools, thus they avoid the subject altogether for fear of controversy.

But when students graduate, they will enter a world where religion matters. The Arab-Israeli conflict makes little sense without an understanding of the religious motivations of both parties involved. Presidential candidates use religious rhetoric in their speeches, trying to win the support of religious groups. Debates over abortion and homosexuality divide communities, and one side always has religious reasons for its stance. Religion has been and continues to be at the heart of many of today’s most prominent conflicts, and to avoid the subject in the classroom is a disservice to the students.

Before graduating, students need to know that religion does matter in today’s world, and they need to be educated in order to negotiate it. This means that instead of skirting the edge of difficult religious issues, schools need to address them and make them a part of the curriculum. Religious studies should be made a mandatory course for high school students in all public schools, and courses at all levels should include religious subjects where they naturally arise in the curriculum. In addition to educating students about world religions, these courses should emphasize the need for religious tolerance and the means by which students can cultivate respect for the religious rights of others without compromising their own faiths. Though many Americans’ reluctance to discuss religion in the public schools stems from the widespread belief that doing so would violate the separation of church and state, the First Amendment has in fact never prohibited teaching about religion, and leaving students in ignorance about this important part of our world is no longer an option. We live in a religiously diverse nation and world, and religion is a necessary component of the curriculum, despite the challenges its inclusion will pose.
Legal Secularism and the Schools

As a rule, American public school teachers shy away from so much as mentioning religion while in the classroom, mistakenly believing that the separation of church and state prohibits it. A series of twentieth-century Supreme Court cases in which the Court outlawed school prayer and devotional Bible reading is largely responsible for this widespread misconception. However, the concept of a wall between church and state, though coined by Thomas Jefferson, is nowhere to be found in the religion clauses of the First Amendment: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of a religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” The clauses are open to interpretation, and their meaning has evolved considerably in the past half century.

In the wake of World War II and the Holocaust, the interpretation known as legal secularism began to take shape in the Court’s jurisprudence. Americans were becoming cognizant of the religious diversity in the United States, and the Supreme Court sought to protect religious minorities from the sort of persecution experienced by European Jews in the preceding year. The Court concluded in Everson v. Board of Education that the best way to avert potential conflicts caused by religious diversity was simply to eliminate any hint of religion from the public square. The government would take no side when it came to religion. The result, in theory, was that no religion would be privileged over another by any legal institution: citizens of all religious beliefs would be treated equally. This legal secularism was the Court’s way of overcoming the challenges posed by a religiously diverse society, and it provided the reasoning behind the “Lemon test,” the criteria by which the Court judges whether or not the government is violating the First Amendment through a particular action, so named for the 1971 case Lemon v. Kurtzman. Under the Lemon test, a government action violates the Establishment Clause if it does not have a clear secular purpose, if it has the primary effect of either advancing or inhibiting religion, or if it results in “excessive entanglement” between the government and religion. The goal, of course, is absolute neutrality on the part of the government so that America’s religious diversity does not result in inequality.

The schools were of particular concern to the Court, since students’ youth makes them particularly susceptible to feelings of inferiority on account of being different. If it appeared that one religion was preferred, students would be under significant pressure to go along with that majority, rather than remain an outsider. As Justice Frankfurter noted, “Nonconformity is not an outstanding characteristic of children.” By removing religion from the schools, the Court hoped to eliminate “divisive forces” and encourage a sense of unity. If religion were

24 Feldman, 178.
allowed in the schools, whether through Bible-reading, teacher-led prayer, or excusal to attend religious classes, students would inevitably be reminded of their religious differences. The justices wanted to avoid this wherever possible. Justice Frankfurter in particular wished to avoid any situation in which “the state chose to make religion into a defining feature of students’ experience.”

In order to allow students of different faiths to attend school together without conflict, religion became a personal matter that was not acknowledged in the classroom.

However, instead of resulting in the schools being neutral in the matter of religion, this tactic has lead to schools involuntarily sending students the message that religion is not cause for concern or serious academic study. In effect, they tell the students that religion doesn’t matter. This is not neutrality: this is taking a side, the side of irreligion, and that, too, is prohibited by the Supreme Court. Legal secularism is not nearly as neutral as it was once thought to be; a new approach to religion in the schools is needed.

Fortunately, at the same time as the Court was banishing the teaching of religion in schools, it was taking care to emphasize the importance of teaching about religion. In 1948, Justice Robert Jackson wrote that completely removing all religious references from the classroom would “leave public education in shreds...The fact is that, for good or ill, nearly everything in our culture worth transmitting, everything which gives meaning to life, is saturated with religious influences.”

Fifteen years later, in the same decision that outlawed Bible reading within the classroom, the Supreme Court gave its full support to teaching about religion. Writing for the majority in Abington School District v. Schempp, Justice Thomas Clark said “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 civilization.” Later rulings made the Court’s position even clearer. In Edwards v. Aguillard, Justice Lewis Powell wrote that “courses in religion of course are customary and constitutionally appropriate.” As Stephen Prothero notes, however, constitutional they may be, but courses in religion have become far from customary.

The Rationale for Religious Studies

The most common misunderstanding surrounding the issue of religion and public school education is that its purpose is to indoctrinate children into a certain faith. This is not without cause; America’s public schools have a long history of being a place where Protestant Christianity alone was taught as the truth. However, the reasons for instituting a religious studies program transcend merely sectarian concerns. No doubt there will be some religious parents and officials who harbor hopes that this is a backdoor through which prayer might reenter the schools,

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26 Ibid, 178.
29 Prothero, 129
but this reason is not one that can be considered in making a case for religious studies. Indeed, for this to be a motivating factor would make the program unconstitutional from the start. Nor can the program’s stated purpose be to teach a non-sectarian morality that is a watered-down version of mainstream religious principles. Americans tend to equate religion with morality, but a religious studies program is not intended to be a course through which students develop sound moral values. The opposition should not jump to conclusions about religious motivations behind such a program. It is easy to dismiss it as a religious ploy, but they should wait to draw any conclusions until they hear the legitimate—and secular—arguments in favor of a religious studies program.

Yet just as the secular side suspects its religious counterparts of having unconstitutional motives for implementing such a program, the religious side harbors its own suspicions, and they, too, are justified. Critics of religion may feel a certain horror at the thought of children being raised in the faith of their parents without any knowledge of other options, and they may wish to correct this by presenting religious alternatives through the religious studies curriculum. They feel strongly that children ought to learn of all the religious options before choosing the one that suits them best. In the United Kingdom, this is a stated goal of the well-established religious studies curriculum. The intention is that “students learn from religious traditions as they seek to develop their own religious perspectives.” However, just as indoctrination in one faith is not an acceptable reason for religious studies, encouraging children to consider breaking away from their own faith in favor of another—or none at all—is also unacceptable. A similar argument can be made for students understanding the discrepancies and shortcomings of religion before choosing to believe or not to believe. Nel Noddings argues in favor of this, claiming that blind faith should not be tolerated when there is the possibility of turning children into informed believers or nonbelievers. “To be an intelligent believer one needs to know the weak points as well as the strong points of a religion, the insights and the nonsense, the political and the spiritual.” But it is not and may not be the place of the public schools to point out the shortcomings of one faith or another so that the child can make an “informed decision.” Surely this would constitute inhibiting religion, making the program by default unconstitutional. Clearly it is not the task of the public schools to influence the faith of their students one way or the other. It is a fine line to walk between these two opposing camps, religious and secularist, in determining the purpose for a religious studies program. However, if the program is to have any chance at success, the middle ground allowed by the Constitution must be found at the start.

31 Noddings, Nel, Educating for Intelligent Belief or Unbelief (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993), 39.
and firmly held against opposition from both sides through the process.

And that middle ground provides an ample supply of reasons for including religious studies in the curriculum, all of them both secular and constitutional. The first, and most obvious, is that without the study of religion, a gaping hole is left in a child’s education. The hole encompasses not only the lack of understanding about religion’s role in history, literature, art, and other disciplines—though that is undoubtedly true and of concern as well—but a lack of understanding about how other people live their lives. “The purpose of a liberal education is to prepare students for living in the world, not for graduate work or professional school...Whatever continues to shape people’s lives and thinking in some profound way, should be taken seriously in the curriculum.”

As one leader of a California effort to teach about religion said, at least some knowledge about major religions is necessary for a person to be “considered truly civilized.” Religion cannot simply be ignored if educators wish to educate students thoroughly. Furthermore, to turn one’s back on religion and pretend it is so unimportant as not to merit a place in the curriculum is to ignore the fact that it is a powerful force in the world, despite academic assumptions to the contrary. It has been and still is an extraordinary force for both good and evil, and for that reason alone, we ought to study it.

The second reason is that a working knowledge of the world’s religions as well as respect for them is necessary if children are to be expected to exist in a religiously diverse society. Students need to face their differences and welcome them, even at an early age, if they are to be prepared for life outside the classroom. “If the United States is to survive and thrive in the twenty-first century, the nation’s schools must be places for embracing and building tolerance and love of diversity.” Where else can students learn to treat religious differences with respect? “When Americans succumb to name-calling and hyperbole in discussions about religion in the public square, their deliberative failures likely stem at least in part from the previous failure of schools to provide students with accurate information about religion and the failure to model civil discussions about religion.” It is the school’s responsibility to educate students about other faiths and to give them the opportunity to consider how they will relate to those who believe differently from themselves.

Likewise, in dealing with cultural debates that involve religious beliefs, students need to be educated about the different sides, but not forced to choose between them. In learning about such conflicts—the obvious examples are abortion and evolution—students should

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33 Lester, Emile, and Patrick S. Roberts. Learning about World Religions in Public Schools: The Impact on Student Attitudes and Community Acceptance in Modesto, California. (Nashville, Tenn.: First Amendment Center, 2006), 17.
35 Fraser, James W., Between Church and State: Religion and Public Education in a Multicultural America (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 4.
36 Lester and Roberts, 17.
learn what the issues are and what different positions are on them, including religious positions.\textsuperscript{37} They should not believe unconditionally in any side they are taught, nor should they dismiss any stance out of hand. As Gerald Graff says, “The best solution to today’s conflicts over culture is to teach the conflicts themselves, making them a part of our object of study and using them as a new kind of organizing principle to give the curriculum the clarity and focus that almost all sides now agree it lacks.”\textsuperscript{38} Such disputes are all too frequent in our society, and students must be able to understand the religious sides of the issue as well as the secular: “It is not enough to teach the truth as one party in the disagreement understands it; if we teach only that view, students will not have the critical resources to make educated judgments about it. It is one thing to believe (what one takes to be) the truth; it is another thing to be educated to make reasonable judgments about it.”\textsuperscript{39} Students need to be taught the religious positions on critical issues alongside the secular positions so that they will be willing to understand and respect the arguments of their opponents, even if they disagree.

Yet another reason that religion ought to be included in the curriculum is that the questions it confronts are addressed nowhere else in school. Questions of meaning or purpose—the “big” questions—are pushed to the side in the race to score highest on a test, to get into a good college, to obtain a high-paying job. Students ought to be allowed, or even encouraged, to consider these questions and how they and others might answer them. There is more to life than grades and paychecks, and students know it. Noddings, a professor of education and former high school teacher, writes, “We underestimate teenagers when we suppose [getting a good job] is all that matters to them. They are in fact intensely interested in the questions we have been considering, especially those concerning life and death: Does life have any meaning? Is life worth living? Is there life after death? What does the fact of death mean for life?”\textsuperscript{40} Those are daunting questions to ask, but students should be given the opportunity to learn that others have answered them in many different ways, and that the questions themselves are important. This was a stated goal of a highly successful program in Modesto, California: “The countless hours of corporate advertising to which children are exposed, and the tremendous emphasis that many schools place upon test scores, leave many students with the impression that competing for well-paying jobs and being able to afford valuable consumer goods is not only paramount, but should be the only important concern in their lives.”\textsuperscript{41} While results of the program showed that students’ overall attitude toward consumerism was unchanged by the program, at least they were made to think for a time about bigger concerns. “Public schools should help students think critically about the messages

\textsuperscript{37} Nord, 229.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, 235.
\textsuperscript{40} Haynes, Charles C. and Warren Nord, Taking Religion Seriously Across the Curriculum (Nashville: First Amendment Center, 1998), 43.
\textsuperscript{41} Noddings, 78.
\textsuperscript{41} Lester and Roberts, 18.
students receive in the marketplace and expose them to the moral and spiritual goals that are important to millions of people.”

The final and most compelling reason to include religious studies—and to make the subject mandatory—is that students need to learn about the First Amendment, the protection it offers them, and how they should behave so as not to infringe upon the rights of others. Living in a religiously diverse society poses significant challenges, not least of which is according others’ beliefs the same respect one expects for one’s own. To exhibit such respect requires education: “Full respect for the rights of believers requires at least a basic education in the complexity of a religious tradition. Increasing understanding through education is also the best practical means to increase mutual respect, as countless studies have shown.” This leads to safer, more inclusive schools and communities, while avoiding the pitfall of relativism. “The point...is not a dilution of belief or a slow movement toward a common faith. The goal is rather a common democratic culture in which a diversity of citizens, each holding their own creed with passion and wisdom, respects other citizens who hold other creeds, or no creed, with equal passion and—it is hoped—equal wisdom.” Such would be the ideal of a religiously free society, but if it is to be fully realized, each child needs to be taught respect for others’ rights from the earliest age possible.

Thus one goal for a student who has completed the program is a better understanding of and respect for religious rights, a goal which should be relatively easy to accomplish if the classroom is consistently a place where religious views may be expressed without fear of mockery or attack. A student who is respectful of others’ religious views will be able to enter a civil conversation about a controversial religious topic without dismissing an opponent’s viewpoint as superstition or ignorance, resulting in a more tolerant atmosphere between believers of different faiths or no faith.

In addition to this respect for the rights of others, students should also gain a substantial understanding both of what religion is and of how it is studied academically. This includes knowledge about specific religions as well as religion in the abstract. They should be able to appreciate the many different ways the “religious dimension of human life is manifested” Students should understand the complexity of the topic and the varied approaches to it, especially the method(s) that will be used in their particular course. They should be aware of the strengths and weakness of those approaches, and “the dimensions of religions which seem to elude analytic investigation.” They should also recognize that studying religion in the classroom is a far different

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42 Ibid.
43 Ibid, 4.
44 Fraser, 7.
46 Ibid
experienced from practicing it. This study need not be comprehensive, however; the students should gain a foundational knowledge that prepares them for more advanced study if they choose. The limitations imposed by the length of the course and the age of the students will determine how much depth is possible, but at the very least a broad foundation should be the result of the course, and, ideally, a desire to learn more.

Students should come away from the course with an increased respect for the impact of religion on history and society, which will translate into a willingness to take religion seriously in areas such as foreign policy. Religion’s role in American and world history cannot be overstated, and from studying its effects, students will understand the power of religion to shape civilizations. The smaller scale effects of religion should be noted as well: students should be able to appreciate the impact religion can have on an individual, and they should recognize the “meaning and significance” of making a commitment to a religion and living one’s life by it. This is possibly the most important thing students might learn, and that is just how vital religion is in many believers’ lives, which will again emphasize the need for them not to underestimate it.

Two Examples of Teaching about Religion

In recent years, the school district of Modesto, California, has received national attention for its groundbreaking religious studies program, a required nine-week course for all ninth grade students. It is the first of its kind—a religion course that is required in order to graduate. The response to it has been overwhelmingly positive, which bodes well for those who may attempt to follow Modesto’s lead. But it is worth paying attention not only to the results, but also to the process by which Modesto implemented this course.

Modesto’s course of action was triggered by a divisive debate over whether adding “sexual orientation” to the existing safe schools policy constituted an endorsement of homosexuality by the school. After months of unproductive arguments, an outside facilitator was brought in to assist a 115-member committee in finding common ground. The result was a realization that no acceptance of a particular religion or philosophy is required in order to accept that no student should be harassed or discriminated against for any reason, including race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. (Haynes 36) Their commitment to the safe schools policy led them to begin several new initiatives, one of which was the decision that religion should become a required portion of the ninth grade social studies curriculum. The first two weeks of the course were designed to be spent discussing religious liberty to ensure that

50 Lester and Roberts, 5.
51 Haynes, Charles C., Religious Liberty and the Public Schools (Bloomington, Ind.: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 2001), 35.
52 Ibid, 36.
53 Lester and Roberts, 22.
students understood how the course fit into the safe schools policy.\textsuperscript{54}

The committee proceeded to choose a textbook and outline the basics of the course, but then, rather than implementing it without further consideration, assembled an advisory council of religious leaders from the local community, including Protestant, Catholic, Islamic, Sikh, Jewish, and Greek Orthodox representatives. Others were invited, but chose not to participate.\textsuperscript{55} This council debated and eventually came to a resolution on how much time should be spent on each religion, and how certain controversial events should be treated, such as the split between the Catholic and Orthodox churches.\textsuperscript{56} The school board unanimously approved the course shortly thereafter, despite initial concerns from conservative board members. After the course’s goals were explained to these members, however, they no longer objected.\textsuperscript{57} It is incredibly important to note the steps that the administrators in Modesto took to win the support of the community. That support was “neither automatic nor spontaneous, but the product of careful cultivation.”\textsuperscript{58} Gary Lopez, president of the school board, advises other districts interested in a similar program to “bring all the stakeholders to the table at first...If you give [community members] ownership in it, you have a better chance to mitigate a lot of the controversy.”\textsuperscript{59} That openness to community input cannot be taken too far, however: Linda Erickson advises that having a solid outline of the course before inviting community opinion was key to success. If religious leaders are allowed to influence too much of the course, it could easily become controversial.\textsuperscript{60}

Another crucial step in the process that took place before the students even entered the classroom was the effort by the school district to prepare teachers for this course. Teachers were required to participate in thirty hours of in-service training the first year the course was taught. These hours were spent in workshops with history and religion professors from CSU Stanislaus, “meetings with local religious leaders and visits to local religious institutions and training sessions on how to teach major themes of religious liberty with First Amendment Center consultant Marcia Beauchamp.”\textsuperscript{61} Though this preparation seemed satisfactory to the teachers involved, unfortunately, it was not repeated in the subsequent years. New teachers of the course complained that their training was “pretty much only videos,” which supplemented credit they received for college courses dealing with world religions.\textsuperscript{62} The most regrettable change between teachers who underwent the original training and those who did not was that the newer teachers “were not particularly aware that the promotion of religious freedom was an essential purpose of the course” and spent less classroom time discussing it.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, 23.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, 58.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 59.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, 48.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, 49.
Though it only lasted nine weeks, the course covered a broad range of material, albeit in little depth. After the first two weeks, which were intended to be spent discussing religious liberty in the United States, seven major world religions were taught in order of their historical appearance: Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Sikhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Religion was approached descriptively, rather than comparatively, in an effort to be as neutral as possible. Sectarian differences within the traditions were not discussed because of the lack of time. “Discussion would focus on the historical development and major contemporary beliefs and practices of each religion.” Teachers were given strict guidelines and cautioned against entering any controversial discussions. The goal was ostensibly to prevent teachers’ biases from entering the classroom. Nonetheless, teachers managed to bring in current events, such as the Supreme Court case concerning the words “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance and an article about Sikh students wearing ceremonial daggers in school. Teachers also utilized their personal experiences with other religions, such as attendance at weddings, as concrete examples for students. The textbook used was the sixty-page Usborne Book of World Religions, chosen for its balanced treatment of the different religions, even distribution of pages between them, and numerous pictures. Despite this, however, the textbook was deemed unsatisfactory, and several teachers supplemented it with other materials. Modesto is not the only school district challenged by the lack of appropriate textbooks; as we shall see, the problem is nearly universal.

The results of the course were overwhelmingly positive, contradicting many of the traditional fears about religious studies. In addition to increasing knowledge about and interest in religious studies, the course did not lead students to abandon their own religious beliefs after studying those of others; indeed, many reported that their own faith had been strengthened by the course. Nor did students come to the relativistic conclusion that all faiths are the same, even as they did recognize and appreciate the “similarity of the moral foundations of the major world religions.” The most important result of the course was the effect it had on students’ “general respect for First Amendment and political rights overall and their general respect for the rights of religious liberty.” Both forms of respect significantly increased. Respect for religious liberty was measured by two categories in Lester and Roberts’ survey. The first was “students’ decreased willingness to express disrespectful opinions,” while the second was “students’ greater comfort with their religious identity.”

If Modesto were the rule, rather than the exception, there is little doubt

64 Ibid, 22.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid, 49.
67 Ibid, 50.
68 Ibid, 51.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid, 56.
71 Ibid.
73 Ibid, 27.
that far more religious studies programs
would have been implemented in the
United States in recent years. Unfortu-
nately, Modesto remains a
unique case in many ways, not least of
which is the lack of parental opposition
and community outrage that every
educator fears. Perhaps a more typical
case is that found at Excelsior Middle
School, only fifty miles from Modesto,
where in 2001 an Islamic studies unit in
seventh grade world history overstepped
what some parents thought was
appropriate. The state of California
requires a unit on Islamic history,
culture, and religion in seventh grade
world history classes.\textsuperscript{74} While the
standard textbook is \textit{Across the
Centuries}, teachers have the option of
supplementing the textbook with other
units, which the two teachers in question
chose to do with a role-playing module.\textsuperscript{75}

“Islam: A simulation of Islamic history
and culture” simulates the experience of
a Muslim believer through activities
representative of the Five Pillars of the
Islamic faith.\textsuperscript{76} The parents of Chase and
Samantha Eklund misunderstood the
module as an attempt to indoctrinate
their children into the Muslim faith, and,
naturally, sued the school district and
teachers.

The student guide to the module
begins with the controversial statement
“From the beginning, you and your

classmates will become Muslims.”\textsuperscript{77}

Brooke Carlin, Chase Eklund’s teacher,
distributed the guide to the students, but
says she was certain to clarify that the
students would be role-playing only; they
would not actually become Muslims.
Students had the option of choosing
Muslim names for themselves, though
Ms. Carlin did not use them when
addressing the students, and they were
also allowed to dress up in traditional
Arab costumes for their presentations if
they wished.\textsuperscript{78} During the module, Ms.
Carlin read prayers and passages from
the Qur’an to the class, required students
to recite selected lines from prayers, such
as “In the name of God, Most Gracious,
Most Merciful,” and asked them to make
banners with Arabic phrases praising
Allah, which certain students chose to
write in English as well. To simulate the
Muslim practice of fasting during
Ramadan, Ms. Carlin asked students to
give up something for a day, such as
eating candy or watching television. She
also required students to perform a
community service task in representation
of \textit{zakat}, the required charitable
donation.\textsuperscript{79} (Eklund 3-4). Finally, to
simulate the \textit{hajj}, or journey to Mecca
that every Muslim must make if
financially and physically able, Ms. Carlin
used a board game call “Race to Makkah”
in which students rolled dice, drew a
card, and, if they answered the card’s
trivia question correctly, moved their
camel game pieces ahead on the board.\textsuperscript{80}
The Eklunds objected to the board game
in particular because the questions on

\textsuperscript{74} Eklund v. Byron Union School District, No. C 02-
3004, United States District Court for the
Northern District of California. 5 December
2003
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid, 3.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, 3-5.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, 4-5.
the cards required answers that stated Muslim beliefs as fact or truth, rather than simply what Muslims believe. Ms. Carlin insisted that she prefaced the game by telling the students that the cards were representative only of what Muslims believe to be truth or fact.

The final point of contention was the exam on the unit. The essay question asked for a critique of certain elements of Islamic culture, but it came with this warning: “If you do not have anything positive to say, don’t say anything!!” Carlin intended the warning to serve as a reminder of her previous remarks to the class that racist remarks or criticism without supporting reasons would not be tolerated. Given that the exam was only a short time after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the warning seemed merited to avoid unwarranted expressions of racism or hostility. The Eklunds, however, saw the warning as an attempt to force students to see and say only good things about Islam if they hoped to pass the exam.

The Eklunds were so upset by Chase’s experience with the Islam module that when their daughter Samantha entered seventh grade the following year, they requested that she be allowed to opt out of the unit. According to Samantha, however, when she presented the note from her parents asking for her to be excused from class, her teacher, Michelle Carr, appeared angry, intimidating both Samantha and another student intending to opt out. The Eklunds decided to sue both teachers, the principle, and the school district, claiming that students were being coerced into becoming Muslims and that the school was illegally advancing and endorsing Islam.

The U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California disagreed with the Eklunds. Judge Phyllis Hamilton ruled in favor of the school district, and her ruling was upheld by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. The case was taken to the Supreme Court, but the court declined to hear it, allowing the ruling to stand. Hamilton declared that the role-playing activities in the module did not constitute actual religious practices, making the Eklunds’ claim of coercion, as laid out in Lee v. Weisman, a moot point. The students did not truly perform the five pillars of the Muslim faith; rather, they performed activities that were “analogous” to those pillars. “Role-playing activities which are not in actuality the practice of a religion do not violate the Establishment Clause,” she said in the ruling, which cited Altman v. Bedford, and Elk Grove Unified School District v. Newdow, among other cases.

From Brown v. Woodland Joint Unified School District, a case concerning complaints that students were role-playing occult practices, she quoted the following: “Fantasy activities...that happen to resemble religious practices...are not overt religious exercises that raise Establishment Clause concerns.” Nor did the activities advance or endorse Islam, as would be prohibited by both Lemon v. Kurtzman and Lynch v.

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81 Ibid, 19.
82 Ibid, 6.
Donnelly, since, in Hamilton’s view, students wouldn’t have “reasonably” seen the role-playing activities as advancing Islam. The purpose was secular (educational), therefore the module would have been acceptable even if it had included a real religious ritual, so long as it was used for a secular, pedagogical purpose, according the Ninth Circuit in Brown. The purpose of Decalogues in classrooms, for instance, was religious and therefore unconstitutional; the purpose of the students’ banners in this class was secular and therefore permissible.

Though the Eklunds lost the case, it is worth taking note of their experience and their objections when considering religious studies programs in general. The chief objection to the Islam module, raised by the Eklunds and numerous conservative religious groups, is that while Islam can be taught in such a way, Christianity cannot. Legally, perhaps, one can teach about Christianity just as one can teach about Islam or any other religion as per Abington v. Schempp. But the Eklunds have a point: if Islam were replaced by Christianity in such an interactive module, chances are the outcry would be far greater. Richard Thompson, chief counsel for the Thomas More Law Center, which represented the Eklunds in this case, said, “Public schools would never tolerate teaching Christianity in this way. Just imagine the ACLU’s outcry if students were told that they had to pray the Lord’s Prayer, memorize the Ten Commandments, use such phrases as “Jesus is the Messiah,” and fast during Lent.” Clearly, if religious studies are to be made a part of the curriculum, painstakingly balanced treatment of the major world religions is necessary if schools want to avoid the appearance or even reality of a double standard. Tiffany Eklund summed it up: in teaching about religions, “it should be all or none.”

### Developing a Curriculum

The simplest way to avoid the appearance of preferring or endorsing one religion is to teach as many as possible in equal depth at some point during the child’s school years. Rather than spending an isolated three weeks on Islam, what is needed is a full course that teaches each religion in turn. This is no easy thing to accomplish, but it is what is necessary. As seen in Modesto’s examples, if schools can involve the community when planning the course or courses, a great deal of controversy can be avoided from the start. Then, if teachers are upfront with students about the controversial nature of the course, they can make use of it as an opportunity to explain the rights given by the First Amendment and the nature of religious tolerance.

Of course, it is important to realize that religion is already in the curriculum. As we saw in the example of

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87 Ibid, 16.
88 Ibid.
Excelsior Middle School’s 7th grade world history classes, religion is an inextricable part of many subjects, and it would be unwise to ignore those instances where religion is naturally included in the curriculum. Some even argue that limiting religious studies to these instances of “natural inclusion” is the best option for educating children about religion. However, this is an inadequate solution. Natural inclusion should continue, particularly in the lower grades, but separate courses about religion are needed as well. “What would we think if economics or biology were to be taught only by natural inclusion in history or literature courses by teachers who had done no course work in economics or biology? Obviously the importance and complexity of these fields warrants separate courses taught by faculty educated to teach them. So it should be with religion,” writes Warren Nord.91

The first thing to consider when planning a religion course is when to teach it. When will the students have the foundational knowledge and emotional and intellectual maturity to engage in an in-depth study the world’s religions? Certainly not in elementary school, or, judging from the Eklunds’ example, in middle school. This is not to say by any means that religion should be avoided in these early stages of education. Indeed, this is the time at which teachers ought to take advantage of the tool of natural inclusion, so that from the beginning, students see religion as a natural part of life and education. Religion studies in primary and secondary schools “ought to develop that modicum or more of knowledge as a basis for advanced (usually college or university) inquiry.”92 However, it should be a purely historical and factual study, as is appropriate at this age. Co-authors Suzanne Rosenblith and Beatrice Bailey do argue against teaching any religion in primary school, for fear of “inculcating the very young with a preference toward religious or non-religious life.”93 To be sure, separate courses in religion are inappropriate for young children; however, to ignore religion altogether would be to do that which Rosenblith and Bailey fear by giving preference to non-religious life. I argue that natural inclusion is necessary from the earliest stages of education in order to give a complete picture of the world, but critical thinking about religion should not be asked of a student until high school.

Furthermore, if we expect children to learn to be good citizens, their education in how to treat religious differences with respect should begin at the earliest possible age. They ought to learn the “Golden Rule for civic life” as stated in the Williamsburg charter: “Our rights are best protected when we guard the rights of others, even those with whom we disagree.”94 If students can learn to do this in elementary school, they will be well prepared not only for later critical study of religion, but also for life in a religiously diverse society.

High school, then, is the best option for introducing students to the complexities and controversies of religion. Courses should begin with particular and concrete religious

91 Nord, 211.
92 Piediscalzi, 36.
93 Rosenblith and Bailey, 157.
94 Haynes and Nord, 68.
traditions, then later, in the junior or senior year, explore “the universal and more abstract phenomena and forms of religious experience.” But how long should the courses be, particularly one that is mandatory for all students? And where, in the overcrowded curriculum, will space be found for it?

In answer to the first question, at least one semester must be devoted to the study of religion. Modesto’s program lasted only nine weeks, and students complained at the lack of time. Ideally, the course could take more than one semester, but at the very least, one should be mandatory, and others might be offered as electives. The length also depends on what will be taught, which will be discussed later. As to the second question, there is a simple answer: something else must go. Surely one semester of something else can be sacrificed so that students may learn about this vitally important aspect of human life that has been neglected in the development of curriculum until now. Warren Nord makes an eloquent point: “How can anyone believe that a college-bound student should take twelve years of mathematics and no religion rather than eleven years of mathematics and one year of religion? Why require the study of trigonometry or calculus, which the great majority of students will never use or need, and ignore religion, a matter of profound and universal significance?” Aside from the debate over what students will ever actually “use” in the real world, Nord is right. This is a matter of profound importance, worth knocking off a semester of mathematics (or, better yet, physical education) in order to fit it in. According to Prothero, “There is no getting around the fact that a student ignorant of the Bible and the world’s religions cannot be said to be ready for either college or citizenship.”

As to the matter of what topics to include in the curriculum itself, there are no bad suggestions, only unbalanced or unrealistic ones. There is a fairly broad consensus that as many world religions as possible should be taught, given the time constraints inherent in the school year. However, there are numerous other topics to address, ranging from the relationship of religion and modernity to religious tolerance. Most scholars require more than one semester to accomplish the goals they set for their curricula. Nord wants a series of three high school courses: world religions, religion and modernity, and moral philosophy (Nord 287); at least one course covering all these areas must be required, with appropriate exemptions. Rosenblith and Bailey want four high school semesters, focused mostly on religious experience in America. Prothero wants a mandatory semester of Bible study and another of world religions.

There are different drawbacks to all of these that are likely to make the plans unworkable. Nord presents a balanced, well-planned curriculum, but his expectation of three full semesters is unrealistic, particularly in the earliest stages of religious studies programs. Nor

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95 Piediscalzi, 36.
96 Lester and Roberts, 43.
97 Nord, 212.
is it likely that the full scope of the material he wants to include can be more than superficially addressed in a condensed, single semester version of the course. Rosenblith and Bailey, on the other hand, have insufficient breadth in their planned courses, focusing almost entirely on the American religious experience rather than including religions in other parts of the world as well. While knowledge about American religious life is important, globalization is one of the reasons students need to learn about religions, so to limit studies to American religion would be counterproductive in equipping them to handle worldwide religious diversity. Prothero’s design differs from the previous two in that the content is sound and the time required for the program is reasonable. However, his insistence upon giving over an entire semester to the Bible would have a good chance of holding the program back from ever being started. Undoubtedly, the Bible is the most influential book of all time, and deserves an in-depth study, but it is simply not feasible in the early stages of religious studies. I would argue that a reasonable high school observer, with or without the benefit of a world religions course, might see a full semester spent on the Bible as an endorsement of Christianity. Unfortunately, appearances are everything in this endeavor, and until religious studies are accepted as a natural part of the curriculum, care must be taken to avoid any appearance of preferential treatment. Perhaps, in time, a Bible course could be made mandatory, but it would only set efforts back if it was implemented first.

A mandatory religion course at the high school level might look something like the following. It would be taught in the sophomore year, in order to allow interested students to choose religious studies electives during their junior and senior years. As a single semester course, it would give a reasonable amount of time to teach a brief survey of major world religions as well as certain other selected topics. In future years, depending on the success of the program, the course might be expanded to take a full year.

The course should, like that in Modesto, begin with a discussion of the First Amendment, religious tolerance, and how religion may and may not be taught in the public schools. Students should know what to expect and where the lines are before venturing any further into the course. After these boundaries have been clarified, the course can progress into a study of selected major world religions as well a local minority religion, and, perhaps, the worldview of atheism. It is unfortunate that not every major religion can be covered in a single semester, so the community will have to use its best judgment in deciding which are to be included. The three Abrahamic faiths should be included, as well as at least one Eastern religion, though two would be preferable. The local minority religion might be represented by study of American Indian traditions, or Sikhism, or others, depending on the local population. Atheism may seem out of place in a religion class, but it can be included to demonstrate how people make sense of the world without religion, so that it does not appear that religion is preferable or necessary and neutrality
can be preserved. Atheism is an accepted part of the British religious studies curriculum, and communities would do well to consider including it in new American religious studies courses. However, it would be preferable not to end the semester with a study of atheism, since studying the negative view of religion at the end of the course could be misconstrued as the point of the course itself having been to display the faults of religion. The middle of the semester would be a better place for this particular topic.

**Attitudes and Approaches**

One of the most crucial aspects of the course to consider is the overall opinion it conveys about religion. The title of the 2005 book co-authored by Warren Nord and Charles Haynes says it all: Taking Religion Seriously. Religion is a subject that has all too frequently been dismissed as not being worthy of serious academic study. We have already discussed the many reasons to make religion part of the curriculum. But simply adding a course on religion will do little to change students’ outlook if the course treats religion as a throwback to the days before science, a mere superstition that does not hold any influence today. Not only would this be profoundly inaccurate, but also it would instantly alienate any religious student in the class. Students must learn from the start that dismissing any religious belief as nonsense is unacceptable, whether it is one found in the textbook or one expressed by a classmate. A sort of golden rule needs to govern any classroom discussion: “I want you to take me and my ideas seriously and I don’t think you can understand me without listening to what I have to say about my beliefs and actions; therefore I must (morally) take you and your ideas seriously.” This is a courtesy that students need to learn, and it can and should be extended to the study of any other way of life. Warren Nord cites John Dixon’s approach: “We are not free to treat others as less than ourselves, to be explained by our wisdom...We must do them the courtesy of taking them seriously...To treat them otherwise is to reduce them to an it. Explanation is an act of power inflicted on an it. True interpretation is an attempt to grasp the other as “thou.” This is a difficult attitude to ask students to take at the outset of the course, but at the very least it can be required of teachers and of the curriculum, and students can be encouraged to adopt it so that by the end of the semester, it is second nature to them take seriously the religious views of others. This is not to say that students must accept that those views could be or are right or wrong, but they must accept that those views have value for the believers and thus should not be disrespected.

In order for students to appreciate fully the dedication of adherents to a particular religion, Nord, among others, has suggested that religion courses should be taught “from the inside.” It is not enough to study religion from the outside, removed a safe distance from the students. Rather, students must be engaged in actively trying to think as a religious person might.

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102 Nord, 215.
103 Ibid.
Nord suggests four different ways for the teacher to take the students inside the religion being studied. Students can perform or observe religious actions, such as participating in a ritual. They may read literature or poetry that has been written from a religious perspective, such as scripture, apologetics, autobiography, or theology. They also might read or hear third-person accounts of a religious experience. Finally, they might hear personal accounts from teachers or guest lecturers. All are valuable pedagogical tools, but caution is needed particularly in this last case. Nord and Haynes suggest several guidelines worth repeating for a situation in which a guest lecturer speaks to the class. The guest ought to have a suitable academic background to handle a classroom discussion, and he or she must understand that the First Amendment requires teaching about the religion, not proselytizing on its behalf. The teacher also ought to take care to explain to the class that the speaker represents only one of multiple points of view from within his or her religious tradition. In addition, regardless of their personal experience, students should never function as guest speakers about their own faith, nor should the teacher ask a student of a particular tradition to clarify points of that tradition.

Some might question the wisdom of allowing students to participate in religious activities, which brings us to the fine line that the teachers in Eklund v. Byron were forced to walk. If students are to be expected to understand religion from the inside, surely there is no better way to teach them than to allow them inside the religion by having them participate in religious activities. After all, they both study and practice music and drama—why not religion? “If students only read about the beliefs of musicians, or scanned sheets of musical notation, or learned acoustics, it is safe to say they would develop neither an understanding of, nor an appreciation for, music. It is only in listening to it, or better yet, in performing or composing it, that any full understanding becomes possible,” writes Nord. Many students will have practiced a religion at home, but that is typically only a single tradition. Students should, argues Nord, be given the opportunity to participate in religious activities and “open [their] hearts to religious experience,” just as they participate in music and drama, and, for that matter, science. The key phrase is “given the opportunity”—care must be taken to ensure that no student feels pressure to participate. He suggests that taking students of a sufficiently mature age to a worship service is possible without fear of controversy if enough precautions are taken. Students should be seated at the back of the room, with the service leader’s permission, so that they feel no compulsion to participate, but may simply observe. The teacher should make sure everyone—students, parents, and religious leaders—understand that the purpose is purely education, and there should be an excusal policy for any student whose religious convictions still

104 Ibid, 220.
105 Haynes and Nord, 74.
106 Nord, 217.
108 Ibid.
cause him to object to the experience.\textsuperscript{109} If teachers are unable to take students to a service, a high-quality multimedia presentation might provide an acceptable alternative.\textsuperscript{110}

Care should certainly be taken in making the decision to allow students to experience a religion first-hand, regardless of the numerous court decisions supporting student participation that were quoted in the Eklund v. Byron ruling. In the case of role-playing, though, it is probably best not to use it as a teaching tool. Particularly in the lower grades, there is too great a chance of students misunderstanding. “No matter how carefully planned or well intentioned, role-playing religious ceremonies risks undermining the integrity of the faith involved...In all cases, the possibility that a moment or ritual considered sacred might be trivialized or mocked, even unwittingly, is too great to risk.”\textsuperscript{111} Useful as it may be pedagogically, role-playing invites controversy, so in the interest of continuing and strengthening a new religious studies class, the best choice may be not to use it.

**Training and Preparation**

Undoubtedly, one of the greatest challenges that will be encountered in a religious studies program is the challenge to the teacher to remain neutral even while leading discussions about controversial issues about which the teacher himself may hold strong convictions. This, therefore, should be a key component of the preparation to teach religious studies. Regardless of their own private beliefs, when acting in their professional capacities as educators, teachers are required to be “pedagogically neutral,” as Nel Noddings says, fulfilling their “obligation to present all significant sides of an issue in their full passion and best reasoning.”\textsuperscript{112} The teacher’s goal should never be to convince a student as to the rightness or truth of any particular religious belief, or, for that matter, of its wrongness or inaccuracy. Rather, “they should always help students to see why an issue is controversial.”\textsuperscript{113} One of the goals for a religious studies program is, after all, for students to understand what controversies are about and what the different sides of the argument are. Teachers need not take sides to do this: “They need only refer to beliefs clearly stated by others and let students weigh the evidence or decide consciously to reject it in favor of faith.”\textsuperscript{114} The question is whether they will be able to keep themselves from doing so.

The ability of teachers to remain neutral is at the heart of many objections to religious studies programs. These objections have their roots in fear of two different things. The first is the fear of teachers who are deeply religious, and whose faith prevents them from teaching objectively about beliefs that differ from their own. This applies, too, to irreligious teachers who are hostile to religion in general. “If teachers have dogmatic views or even views that are opposed to all religious beliefs, they may teach about

\begin{thebibliography}{114}
\bibitem{109} Ibid, 217-219.
\bibitem{110} Rosenblith and Bailey, 155.
\bibitem{111} Haynes and Nord, 73.
\bibitem{112} Noddings, 122.
\bibitem{113} Ibid, 123.
\bibitem{114} Ibid, 134.
\end{thebibliography}
This may well be true—teachers with dogmatic views would indeed have difficulty being objective. However, one must remember that teachers will choose to specialize in religious studies. Would a teacher who holds such intolerant views really choose to teach religious studies, or, perhaps more to the point, pass a certification program that consistently requires the objective presentation of information? Unless there is a vast conspiracy of undercover believers infiltrating the ranks of religious studies teachers, teacher bias is cause for concern, but not for dismissal of the idea of a religious studies curriculum.

The other common fear is of teachers with good intentions, who nonetheless teach the religion course badly and only reinforce students’ prejudices. This would be a direct result of the lack of preparation available to prospective teachers of religion. "We can safely assume that many secondary school teachers did not receive an education in the world’s religions as part of their own schooling. Their ignorance could cause them to inadvertently make the unfamiliar traditions sound bizarre and contemptible." This is true—there is a deplorable lack of training available to teachers of religious studies—but it is no reason to simply give up on the program. "They haven't been exposed to the academic study of religion so they often don’t have the content knowledge or the methodological tools to think about how you integrate religion responsibly," said Diane Moore, head of the Program in Religion and Secondary Education at Harvard, but those skills can and should be taught. Teachers are perfectly capable of teaching about religion, but only if they are given the proper preparation, by means of a certification program. Instead of fighting the introduction of religious studies in the curriculum because teachers are unprepared, we should be focusing on giving teachers the preparation they need to make the programs a success.

Currently, there are a handful programs in the United States that serve to train teachers to teach about religion, but they are all too few. The oldest, which is still relatively unknown, is found at Harvard Divinity School. The Program in Religion and Secondary Education (PRSE) has existed since 1972, giving graduate students the opportunity to earn a teaching certificate in one of eight subjects along with their Master of Divinity or Master of Theological Studies. In addition to their student teaching and the usual coursework required for the master's degree, PRSE students take a course in adolescent psychology and a course taught by Diane Moore, entitled “Religion, Values, and Education.”

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116 Ibid.
119 Brustman, 1.
California State University at Chico, where the religious studies department offers prospective teachers a course that deals with the First Amendment and world religions in the context of the classroom. In both California and Utah, religious studies departments at colleges and universities have worked with their local school districts to assist in training and certifying teachers in the area of religion. These efforts, however, are not enough.

All teachers need some preparation for when they inevitably encounter religion in their courses. Nord and Haynes suggest that teachers should take an elective concerning religion and their field, such as Religion and Science, Religion and History, etc. For science teachers, such a course might entail study of the religious opposition to the teaching of evolution and how teachers can respect the religious beliefs of their students while remaining true to scientific principles. For history teachers, the course might prepare them to give a balanced account of religion’s role in history, so that they can avoid focusing solely on the good or bad aspects of it, or glossing over it without acknowledging its importance. Literature teachers might learn ways of explaining religious references in texts so that students better understand the work as a whole, rather than avoiding mentioning such references for fear of offending a student. To be frank, "teachers already teach about religion," says Moore. "What we do is give them better tools to do so more explicitly and responsibly by helping them understand more about religious traditions themselves, as well as how religion and religious worldviews are embedded in social, cultural, and political life.

Scholars are unanimous in one area: teachers of religion need to be certified. The subject is too complex to be taught without a solid education not just in religion itself, but in how to teach it. "There is no way that one can study religion and then just teach it; a whole raft of constitutional, political, moral, and epistemological considerations must be weighed in the pedagogical balance." Furthermore, schools must not phase in courses in religion until there are competent teachers. Nor are teachers the only ones who need preparation. Teachers need to feel safe teaching religion, which means administrators need to be educated about First Amendment concerns in the classroom. Administrators should be required to take courses or workshops about religion and education to clarify what the ground rules are. School boards need to adopt policies explaining that religion is a part of the curriculum and how it must be treated. These policies should make it very clear that religion is to be taught for educational, not devotional, purposes. Defining the boundaries should be a project undertaken by the community as a whole. "The development of these policies should be exercises in defining common ground in which

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120 Prothero, 131.
121 Ibid.
122 Haynes and Nord, 56-57.
123 Brustman, 1.
124 Haynes, 42; Nord, 318; Piediscalzi, 6; Nord and Haynes, 56-57; Rosenblith and Bailey, 157.
125 Nord, 317.
126 Nord and Haynes, 56-57.
Representatives of various local constituencies work together to establish ground rules within the constraints of the Constitution.\textsuperscript{127}

A final consideration in implementing a new religious studies program is that parents need to be educated as well. Communication is obviously important so that parents are well informed and aware of the programs’ goals and methods, but I argue that schools should go further and offer at least one evening workshop or lecture that is open to parents. This would give parents the opportunity to hear about the program first-hand, and to ask any questions they might have. The complexity of the program makes it difficult to explain it fully in a letter sent home with students, and if parents had a chance to experience an example of the sort of class their children will be taking, they would be reassured and far more supportive.

Of course, parents will also be involved in the development of the program, since the ideal religious studies curriculum would be developed by educators in close collaboration with the community. However, it is simply not feasible for every parent to be involved in that stage of the process, and in future years, new parents will need to be informed of the goals and history of the program. For this program to succeed, everyone needs to know the ground rules, including parents, and that goal would be accomplished best by giving parents a forum each year in which to ask questions and state their concerns.

**Conclusion**

In the years since Abington v. Schempp, academia’s support for religious studies has grown significantly as religion has been recognized as an important factor in American life. Warren Nord, Charles Haynes, and Stephen Prothero are only the latest in a long line of scholars who have seen the benefits of educating American students about religion in preparation for life in a religiously diverse society. And Americans are not the only ones in need of this education. In a globalized world, students everywhere are in need of education about the religious beliefs of the citizens of other nations as well as their own. To this end, the Tony Blair Faith Foundation has developed “Face to Faith,” a program designed to supplement existing curricula and improve students’ religious literacy in countries all over the world.\textsuperscript{128} Through facilitated video-conferencing between schools and an online community, students are able to discuss their beliefs directly with students of different faiths and discover their similarities, differences, and goals they can accomplish together.\textsuperscript{129} Though the program is nowhere near the length of a full course, it is a step in the right direction, and its success in the United States could lead to increased support for longer, permanent courses in religion.

The process of developing and implementing religious studies courses

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid, 57.


\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
will inevitably be a long and difficult one, but sincere efforts need to be made toward making them a reality. Religious issues are everywhere today—in the media, in politics, in the courts, and in the schools. Instead of remaining silent and hoping to avoid controversy, schools need to meet the challenges posed by religious diversity by educating students and giving them the tools to understand it, instead of telling them religion does not matter. Religion does matter to billions of people, and it matters to those students now and will matter to them for the rest of their lives, whether they are religious or not. James Fraser notes, “Prior to the 1960’s, many school leaders took this same approach [silence] to issues of race and sex. They seemed to say, ‘Maybe if we never mention the subject we will be ok.’ This continues to be the approach to religion in far too many schools at the end of the twentieth century. Yet this approach is not helpful.” Students need to be taught about religion just as much as they need to be taught about science, or history, or mathematics, and with properly trained teachers, there is no reason this course would intrude upon the religious rights of students. It is time for the public schools to make a point of preparing students for life in a world where religion matters by allowing the study of religion to matter in the schools.

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130 Fraser, 6.