

Educational Malfeasance: The Marginalization of Religion from the United States Social Studies Curriculum

Dr. James Moore

Cleveland State University
2121 Euclid Ave. JH 328.
Cleveland, Ohio 44115-2214.
United States of America

Abstract

Research demonstrates that many American social studies teachers are hesitant to teach about religion because of a lack of content knowledge; they fear charges of indoctrination and realize the controversial and emotional issues associated with religion and moral dilemmas, or they are not cognizant of the relevant First Amendment cases. Consequently, many students are ill-informed regarding the crucial role of religion in history, literature, law, the arts, and current affairs. This paper asserts teaching about religion is essential for a liberal arts education and examines the reasons why religion is absent or minimized from the social studies curriculum.

Key Words: religion, social studies, academic freedom, First Amendment, Constitution, censorship

1. The Rationale for Teaching about Religion in Social Studies

It is impossible for social studies educators to teach about history, geography, international relations, and contemporary global issues without offering a comprehensive examination of the world's most influential religions (Chapin, 2010; Haynes, Chaltain, Ferguson, Hudson, & Thomas, 2003; Nord; 1995). For example, students cannot comprehend the creation of the United States without a solid knowledge about Christianity and its influence on American culture, politics, capitalism, and law. The propagation of Protestant Christianity in the colonies, the evolution of democratic thought (with an emphasis on the idea that rights originate with God and not government), the abolition movement, efforts to ban alcohol, the creation of social welfare programs, and the civil rights movement were all deeply influenced by Christianity and its core tenets of equality, love, social justice, and compassion (Schweikart & Allen, 2004). In fact, an examination of colonial history shows that all thirteen original colonies were preoccupied with Christianity; the Charter of New England, the Mayflower Compact, and the Massachusetts Bay charter all advocated for the advancement of Christianity (Schweikart, 2009).

For many Americans, their religious beliefs inform their political positions and influence their voting patterns in local, state, and national elections. Thus, many contemporary issues – abortion, capital punishment, stem cell research, euthanasia, poverty, and war – are examined within a framework emanating from specific religious traditions that advocate a God-given moral order (Nord & Haynes, 1998). The development of virtues – honesty, courage, compassion, hard work, humility, social and personal responsibility, community service, respect, tolerance, and perseverance – is central to moral and democratic education. Of course, there are religious and secular traditions regarding moral education and the development of virtuous citizens; it is important that students be exposed to both traditions in the curriculum and given the intellectual tools to make reasoned and informed choices. Secularists and religious folk must understand each other's worldviews in order to engage in fruitful dialogues that can foster respect – not necessarily acceptance – and facilitate compromises that comport with American laws and traditions.

Nevertheless, an examination of American history textbooks reveals that religion is virtually ignored, distorted, or marginalized in many important historical events (Carter, 1994; Nord, 1995; Prothero, 2010; Schweikart, 2009). For instance, students exposed to many textbooks would not have any understanding of the importance of religion to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s (Prothero, 2010). The primary motivation for Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. and other leaders was their unshakeable faith in a loving and just God who would guide them in their difficult quest for equality and social justice.

This critically important fact is often absent from the social studies curriculum and leaves students woefully ignorant of historical truths. India, with a population of 1.2 billion people in 2012, is rapidly developing into a major economic and geopolitical power in a globalizing world (de Blij, Muller, & Nijman, 2012, p. 405). However, Hinduism (and its relationship to the caste system) remains the core centripetal force in a country teeming with religious, racial, ethnic, linguistic, and economic diversity. Furthermore, the 180 Muslims living in India constitute the world's largest cultural minority (de Blij, Muller, & Nijman, 2012) and have significant religious and geopolitical differences with the Hindu majority (roughly, 81% of the population). In addition, Islamic Pakistan and Hindu India have come close to war several times over the state of Jammu and Kashmir – a majority Muslim territory under Hindu rule. Thus, students must develop a sound knowledge about the world's oldest religion, as well as Islam, in order to understand India and the geopolitical conflicts in South Asia.

Simultaneously, citizens cannot grasp the complexities of Middle Eastern politics and history without a basic knowledge of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism; effective American foreign policies regarding the Middle East require that policy-makers possess a basic knowledge about the world's three major monotheistic religions. Radical Islam and its connections to terrorism (Brown, 2009; Huntington, 1996; Lewis & Churchill, 2009; Pipes, 2003) cannot be understood without knowledge of Islamic history, law, and theology. Competing interpretations or misinterpretations of the Qur'an, jihād, and the conscription of Islam by various groups with a political agenda is one of the central political issues in the twenty-first century.

Islam, particularly since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks by radicalized Islamists (this term denotes the very small percentage of Muslims who have a political agenda and support violence to further their goals; it is not reflective of the vast majority of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims), has become more controversial in society and classrooms (Morrison, 2006; Prothero, 2010). Moreover, the current political climate – saturated with accusations and counter accusations of racism, discrimination, Islamophobia, anti-Americanism, ignorance, naiveté, and misperceptions about the First Amendment – hinders efforts to teach about Islam, or any religion, in an objective, scholarly, and rational manner (Sewall, 2008).

Consequently, polls consistently show the vast majority of Americans know very little about Islam; this fact exacerbates creating viable foreign policies regarding Islamic countries and hinders improving relations between American Muslims and non-Muslims (Prothero, 2010). American national security is predicated on a vibrant economy and a powerful and modern military (of course, diplomacy, law, foreign aid, and other factors matter); however, religious literacy matters when deciding to become involved in foreign wars, business interactions, negotiating among competing religious groups, and establishing cultural arrangements. Religion remains a powerful, and growing, force in many developing countries and American policy-makers and citizens must account for religion when formulating foreign policies.

As these examples demonstrate, a liberal arts education requires that students possess a strong knowledge base regarding religion and its role in history and contemporary political affairs. The social studies curriculum, particularly history and geography, must include a comprehensive examination of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Not only do these religions play a critical role in history and contemporary world affairs, they have had an enormous influence on art, music, philosophy, law, literature, and other disciplines (Nord, 1995). Religious literacy should not be an after thought in an era of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), high-stakes testing, and accountability; it should be a central component of a well-rounded liberal education that facilitates understanding human experiences in all of their dimensions. Thus, religion should be taken seriously across the social studies curriculum and infused in all of the social studies – history, politics, geography, economics, and sociology.

Moreover, the pivotal role that religion has played in the arts – paintings, sculptures, literature, music, dance, and architecture – require that students develop a sound understanding of the dominant role of religion in all major civilizations throughout world history. For example, throughout American history, African-Americans found great solace in religiously-inspired music that affirmed the presence of a just and loving God who would provide a life-sustaining faith that slavery and racism would be abolished as America created a moral society in accordance with our stated ideals of equality, liberty, and social justice. Understanding Michelangelo's *La Pieta* (*The Pity*) – a 1498-99 sculpture of Mary holding Jesus' crucified body in her arms – helps to illuminate the central theme of Christianity: Jesus died in order to save Mankind.

Religious art, often developed prior to widespread literacy, tell the stories of specific religious traditions; stained glass windows in Christian churches tell the story of the Bible while Hindu sculptures of *Shiva the Destroyer* shed light on the Hindu concepts of reincarnation, maya, and karma. Likewise, understanding the Qurān as a work of great literature allows deep insights into Islamic cultures and countries.

2. The Status of Religion in Social Studies Education

However, despite the importance of religion in history, politics, and culture, it is ignored, minimized, distorted, or denigrated in public schools across the country (Carter, 1994; Nord, 1995; Prothero, 2007). Social studies textbooks are inadequate in describing the central place of religion in history and do not cover the major religions in depth. They fail to examine issues of morality, theology, human nature, and religious interpretations of history (Nord, 1995) and are characterized by significant errors, distortions, omissions (Sewall, 2008). Social studies methods courses, the primary course designed to educate pre-service teachers on the various methods, activities and curriculum choices inherent in teaching, omit or downplay teaching about religion. In fact, many social studies methods textbooks do not even mention religion or treat it as a small, relatively insignificant matter with little relevance to twenty-first century social issues and problems.

For example, many of these textbooks will discuss civic education – historically the primary function of social studies education – in purely secular terms but ignore major religious traditions and their profound impact on moral values and legal systems (Martorella, Beal, & Bolick, 2005). Likewise, social justice, a major theme in contemporary education, is taught from a secular worldview – one informed by the Enlightenment ideals of equality, liberty, reason, due process, and natural law – and seldom entertains religious conceptions of social justice, which is a central theme in Christianity and Islam (Nord, 1995). Religion, specifically Christianity, influenced many Americans to close the gap between our stated democratic ideals (often rooted, in part, in religion) and our discriminatory behaviors, laws, and policies.

Social justice, for example, is hardly a new idea in education and society; the Social Gospel movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries was the application of Christian ethics – love, charity, equality, and fairness – to the major social problems associated with industrial capitalism and urbanization (Schweikart & Allen, 2004). Rampant urban poverty, crime, poor hygiene and health problems, child labor, poor schools, alcoholism, political corruption, and economic and social inequality were all targeted by Social Gospel reformers. Explicit in their reform efforts was the belief that the moral forces of Christianity could lead to social justice; this term is used by contemporary educators and others to combat the same social problems that continue to afflict urban communities, as well as others.

Few students are aware of the powerful influence the Social Gospel movement had on the development of social welfare programs (Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago helped immigrants and the poor), organized labor (the American Federation of Labor fought for fair wages and safe working conditions), and education (Mary McLeod Bethune was committed to improving schooling for African-Americans), and the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s (Nord, 1995). However, the marginalization or removal of teaching about religion ensures that students will have little or no understanding of Christian socialism (fusing Christian morals with socialist economic principles), liberation theology, the civil rights movement, or the religious origins of social justice. In short, students will be denied their rights to receive a liberal education that includes the critical role of Christianity in American history and politics. This is nothing short of educational malfeasance.

Similarly, controversial issues such as world hunger, capital punishment, human rights, terrorism, and abortion, may be absent from social studies courses or treated without a comprehensive examination of how the world's major religions view these issues. This is unfortunate because many Americans' political views on these topics are shaped by their deeply-held religious beliefs. Many teachers and textbook publishers will avoid controversial issues because they are potentially kryptonite to careers and book sales. Religion, and its correlated topics of morality, values, and politics, are extremely controversial and, in an astonishing act of educational malfeasance, removed from the curriculum for political reasons or given a superficial treatment that subtracts from students' knowledge and understanding. Therefore, to no one's surprise, research studies and surveys show American students are woefully ignorant about religion and its pivotal role in history, politics, international affairs, law, and culture (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2010; Prothero, 2007).

Moreover, many citizens are misinformed regarding judicial decisions on the proper role of religion in public schools. Many Americans continue to believe that the “separation between church and state” is absolute and that there is no role for education in public schools or public spaces (Nord & Haynes, 1998). The following section will examine the reasons why religion has been omitted, distorted, minimized, or removed from social studies courses, as well as other disciplines. In addition, the consequences of the marginalization of religion in education will be addressed.

3. Explaining the Absence of Religion from Social Studies Education

Some people may find the absence of religion from education and public life ironic given that the United States is, next to Poland, the most religious country in the Western world; 90% of Americans claim to believe in God, around 80% assert the importance of religion in their lives, and about 43% attend a weekly religious service (Nord & Haynes, 1998; Prothero, 2010; Putnam & Campbell, 2010). There are several reasons, with varying degrees of validity, explaining why public education has removed, distorted, or marginalized religion across the curriculum.

3.1 First, many educators, textbook publishers, curriculum developers, as well as school administrators and parents assert that religion – because it focuses on life and death, morality, the meaning and purposes of life, and highly divisive issues – is too controversial to be taught in K-12 students (Chapin, 2010; Nord & Haynes, 1998). These advocates argue that students are a captive audience and may not possess the maturity, knowledge, and skills to successfully handle religion and other controversial issues. Furthermore, students who hold competing religious beliefs, as well as atheists and agnostics, may be offended by religious discussions leading to charges of proselytizing or indoctrination against the teacher. And it is true that the differences among the world’s major religions are profound; they have competing conceptions on the existential questions, problems and solutions inherent in the human condition (Prothero, 2010).

For example, Confucianism views chaos, spawned by the absence of virtues among the masses, as the primary human problem that can be solved by establishing a highly structured society characterized by the core virtues of filial piety, law and order, discipline, education, hard work, duty, and responsibility to family and community (Prothero, 2010). The cultivation of *ren* (love, altruism, compassion, and humanity) and *li* (civility, propriety, etiquette, and manners) via education was central to Confucian thought. Confucius had nothing to say about the gods or the afterlife (Prothero, 2010).

Conversely, Christianity views sin as the ultimate problem of human existence and asserts that salvation is attained by accepting Jesus Christ as the Savior. One gains salvation by confessing his sins (defined as the human predisposition to doing wrong) and asking God for forgiveness, the afterlife is of central importance in this monotheistic religion that claims 2.2 billion followers (Prothero, 2010). These examples demonstrate that the world’s major religions, even though they have some important similarities, also have acute differences that continue to generate conflicts and violence.

Religion, because it is still a vital aspect of our culture, and because the United States is a pluralistic democracy committed to religious tolerance and expression, is controversial in public schools. For example, some students who abhor abortion or capital punishment do so because their core religious beliefs and values form the foundation of their political, social, and economic ideologies. And while they have every constitutional right to hold and express these views, other students will hold diametrically opposed perspectives that may generate enormous and passionate dissent. Some teachers welcome a lively discussion characterized by rational arguments, competing views, dissent, and a passionate commitment by students to defend their views. Other teachers fear, and do everything within their power to prevent, any controversial topics or disagreements in their classes (Chapin, 2010).

However, even though teaching about religion is controversial, this is not the major reason that it has been ignored or marginalized in the curriculum. After all, to many religious people and non-religious people, omitting religion from the curriculum is a heresy not required by the Constitution. They believe that public schools denigrate religion and do not take it seriously as required by the law; it is not the controversial nature of religion that caused its marginalization in schools but overt hostility towards religion by educators and policy-makers (Carter, 1994). Indeed, many controversial issues – sex education, war, gun control, multiculturalism, feminism, and others – are included in the curriculum.

Moreover, many social studies topics are inherently controversial; individuals hold a wide variety of values, attitudes, beliefs, and opinions about a plethora of complicated issues – the bitter disagreements among expert economists and politicians over the causes and remedies to the 2008 financial meltdown testifies to diversity in thought – that, inevitably, lead to dissent and political infighting. The “religion is too controversial to teach” thesis, while partially accurate, has serious flaws in explaining the absence of religion from the curriculum.

3.2 A second reason, one with much less plausibility, presented for the absence of religion in public education is the mistaken belief that the Constitution, specifically the First Amendment, prevents the study of religion in public schools. Some people believe that “the separation of church and state” (this phrase does not appear anywhere in the Constitution but was used by Thomas Jefferson in a letter to the Danbury Baptist Church in 1802; Justice Hugo Black used this clause in the 1947 *Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing Township* case that allowed public funds to transport students to parochial schools) prevents any discussion of religious issues (Nord, 1995; Schweikart & Allen, 2004). This is patently false. While many judicial decisions have removed the practice of religion in schools – devotional Bible reading, the posting of the Ten Commandments in classrooms, school sanctioned prayers, and celebrating religious holidays – based on First Amendment violations, numerous Supreme Court decisions have acknowledged the legal and educational legitimacy of teaching about religion (Nord, 1995). It is important to note that many of the Supreme Court decisions regarding religion (*Abington School District v. Schempp* (1963); *Engle v. Vitale* (1962); *Epperson v. Arkansas* (1968); and *West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette* (1943)) were very controversial and some scholars claim that the Founders would have detested the removal of prayer from public schools or prohibiting devotional Bible reading (Carter, 1994; Schweikart, 2009). They claim that many modern jurists have perverted the true intentions of the Founders who supported a strong role for Christianity in public education.

The relevant clauses in the First Amendment regarding religion – “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”.... – require schools to be neutral towards religion. Thus, public schools must protect the religious liberties of all students and, simultaneously, prevent the establishment of religion; this entails not favoring any religion over another or religion over atheism. Neutrality – not hostility towards religion or the removal of religion from the curriculum – must guide public education policies regarding religion (Carter, 1994; Haynes, et al., 2003; Nord, 1995). Thus, teaching about religion in public schools does not violate the Constitution and educators are free to fulfill their educational obligation of providing a comprehensive liberal education to all students. Of course, teachers must be aware of the guidelines and judicial decisions and ensure that their methods and class activities comport with the established laws. This can prevent a host of legal problems with parents, students, administrators, and the community.

3.3 Another major reason articulating the decline of religion in public education is centered on the competence of teachers to discuss religion in social studies and other disciplines. One significant and valid concern is that the majority of teachers are not prepared to teach about religions in social studies classes; generally, all of their content courses focus on history, political science/civics, economics, and geography with possible courses in sociology/anthropology (Nord & Haynes, 1998). The vast majority of university social studies degree programs do not require a single course in religion for teacher certification. Students, in both undergraduate and graduate programs, will take a plethora of courses in pedagogy, multicultural education, educational technology, and other educational courses.

Hence, it is reasonable to contend that teachers do not possess adequate content knowledge about world religions; this is an untenable situation, particularly in world history, geography, and global politics courses where knowledge about Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism are vital to understanding historical and contemporary affairs. For example, teaching about Western Civilization without possessing a fundamental understanding of Christianity – its core theological tenets, emphasis on monotheism, internal and external conflicts ethics, and its influence on the political and legal development of Western countries – would not be possible.

It is not only the social studies education that is adversely impacted by a lack of qualified teachers. For, example humanities (art, architecture, music, dancing, drama, and literature) teachers must have a solid knowledge about religion because religious themes, values, rituals, and individuals have been the principal subjects of the fine arts in Western and Nonwestern societies for thousands of years.

For example, art, particularly before widespread literacy, was the primary means to teach the story of Christianity in paintings, prints, stained glass, mosaics, and sculptures (Nord & Haynes, 1998). The Bible, the most influential book in Western history, can be read as a great work of literature – with a strong caveat by the teacher that the only purpose of reading any religious work in a public school is educational – that can teach students about metaphors, symbols, allegories, criticism, and other literary devices. A student would have great difficulty in understanding music, art, literature, great architecture, and Biblical references without knowing about Christianity. Regardless if one is devoutly religious or an atheist, religious knowledge is essential to producing a culturally literate citizen.

Colleges of education, in conjunction with religion departments, can help remedy this glaring flaw by requiring one or two survey courses in religion, and incorporating teaching about religion in social studies methods courses. However, this may be a difficult task because – for reasons that will be discussed later – most colleges and schools of education do not take religion seriously (Nord & Haynes, 1998). Actually, some scholars assert that university professors and teacher educators are hostile to religion and do not believe it is relevant to modern education or society (Carter, 1994; Nord, 1995; Nord & Haynes, 1998). This point may be contentious, but the fact remains that the vast majority of teachers know very little about religion and its absence from the curriculum does a major disservice to our students and country.

3.4 The fourth, and most powerful, argument accounting for the marginalization of religion in public schools can be attributed to this powerful historical fact: The Western world has become incredibly secular over the past several centuries owing to the dramatic rise of modern science and technology, liberalism, the primacy of individual conscience and rights, pluralism, and the social sciences (Nord, 1995). Since public schools reflect the most powerful ideas, values, and goals of the dominant culture, the secularization of American culture has resulted in the secularization of K-12 and university education.

Historically, all major civilizations were dominated by religious traditions – Hinduism in India, Islam in the North Africa and Southwest Asia, Confucianism in China, Buddhism in much of East Asia, Christianity in the West (including Latin America), and Orthodox Christianity in Russia – and the answers to all of life's great questions, problems, and mysteries were to be found in religion (Nord, 1995). For example, for Buddhists the great problem of human suffering can be alleviated by enlightenment, defined as renouncing the greed and desire that causes suffering (Prothero, 2010). Each religious tradition developed its own beliefs, rituals, and practices to explain all human experiences in a comforting and satisfying manner. To pre-modern humans, a world without some form of God was utterly terrifying and impenetrable.

The sixteenth and seventeenth century's Scientific Revolution and The Enlightenment transformed human thought and began shattering religious traditions and explanations. Eventually, the development of science and mathematics replaced religion in explaining the origins and workings of the universe, the causes and treatments of diseases, and the enormous diversity that characterized all living things. Modern humans depend on science, technology, and medicine to explain the universe, improve their material well-being, and keep them healthy. Even though many Americans believe in God, the vast majority have privatized their religious beliefs in a world dominated by secularism. Modernity is characterized by reason, science, technology and a powerful belief in human potential to answer life's most profound questions (of course, many religious people, including Christians and Muslims, argue that God will always remain sovereign in human affairs and that the absence of God will bring ruin to a human race teeming with pride and immorality).

Religion began to disappear from the curriculum by the late nineteenth century as the educational system began responding to the needs of a rapidly industrializing and urbanizing society committed to the intellectual ideals of modernity. In addition, as the United States became an increasingly diverse nation, the primary goal of public education became civic education: inculcate the common values of democracy into students in order to create a stable American national identity rooted in liberty, individualism, pluralism, science, progress, and materialism. The secularization of American education did not begin in the 1960s when the Supreme Court abolished sectarian practices in schools, nor does responsibility lie with modern liberals (Nord, 1995). The secularization of American society and education was a long process forged by powerful historical developments. Thus, modern American education, including the social studies curriculum, is committed to secularism and very little attention is given to incorporating religion into an educational system that views religion as an archaic relic of an unenlightened and primitive past (Nord, 1995).

3.5 Furthermore, the secularization of American education can be attributed to university professors and intellectuals who write history and social science textbooks, develop curricula, and prepare teachers for K-12 employment (Carter, 1994; Nord, 1995; Schweikart, 2009). Modern intellectuals and scholars are considerably less religious than the general public and they view religion as irrelevant to their disciplines (Gross & Simmons, 2007). Some scholars view all religion as an anti-intellectual, irrational, and dangerous anachronism that must be obliterated from the human experience (Dawkins, 2006; Harris, 2004; Hitchens (2007). They assert that religion is responsible for a host of horrors – slavery, genocide, war, the forced indoctrination of faith into children, and delayed intellectual and scientific progress – that have done incalculable harm to humanity. (Of course, some critics would correctly argue that non-theistic political ideologies, such as Nazism, Marxism, and nationalism, have produced these same horrors).

Nevertheless, as American universities, reflecting crucial scientific, technological, and economic changes in society, became secular institutions in the late nineteenth century, the role of the professor shifted from teaching the classics, moral philosophy, and theology to that of objective scholars and scientists whose task was to seek truth (Gross & Simmons, 2007). Thus, religious and political dogma was targets for professors seeking empirical and scientific truths. The hiring of committed leftists – individuals highly distrustful of religion, particularly Christianity –by universities in the 1970s and 1980s accelerated the rate of secularization throughout academia (Gross & Simmons, 2007). Thus, as historian George Marsden (1994) asserted, universities are now “a haven freed from religious perspectives (p.430). This is particularly true at elite universities – the ones that have a major impact on educational thought, textbooks, and curriculum – where professors are much less religious than their peers in other institutions. 36.6% of professors at elite universities described themselves as atheists or agnostics, as compared to 15.2% in community colleges, and 22.7% of professors in BA granting colleges (Gross & Simmons, 2007, p. 4). Generally, the division between secular and religious viewpoints is correlated with political ideology; secularists are more likely to describe themselves as liberal and religious traditionalists are more likely to describe themselves as conservative (Dye, 2011, p. 42).

Concerns, often unfounded, over the constitutionality of teaching about religion in public schools, the controversial nature of religion, the secularization of society and education (particularly universities), and the irrelevance of religion to many academics and intellectuals have all contributed, in uneven ways, to the removal or marginalization of religion in K-12 education. The consequences of this have been devastating on students; they know very little about religion and its critical role in history, the arts, law and politics, and contemporary international affairs. It has hindered the development of their critical thinking skills and exacerbates the task of teaching tolerance for dissenting views, including views that are derived from deeply-held religious values and beliefs.

Thus, there are a variety of reasons why the United States needs to improve citizens’ knowledge about religion and its role in public life and education. In fact, Prothero (2010) asserts “But even if religion makes no sense to you, you need to make sense of religion to make sense of the world” (p.8). One’s own religious beliefs are irrelevant to the academic study of religion as an indispensable component of a liberal education. Religion for better or/and worse, will remain a major factor in domestic and international politics; it will continue to influence all aspects of culture – art, music, literature, diets, customs, social norms, and law – across the globe and must be treated with academic seriousness. Religious illiteracy, especially if a ubiquitous national trait, can do harm to our national security and understanding of human behavior. Thus, religious education – conducted in accordance with the First Amendment – should be a central part of the curriculum, especially in social studies and the humanities.

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