

## Précis

The Decline of Religion *in* Public Education  
and The Decline *of* Public Education

Oxford Round Table  
Religion, Education, Public Schools and Politics:  
Is There Common Ground?

Presented by Ronnie W. Rogers  
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A more comprehensive development  
of the ideas and documentation  
is contained in the paper.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper's objective is to demonstrate that unwarranted devaluing and displacement of religion<sup>1</sup> in public education occasioned the decline of education; moreover, the government has an ethical and constitutionally compatible obligation to accurately teach about religion and promote an appreciation of it in public education. The appropriateness of such a policy is supported by history, sociology, and epistemology.

Religion is defined as "a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe. . . . something one believes in and follows devotedly."<sup>2</sup> This encompasses both 'supernatural' and 'non-supernatural' religions like humanism<sup>3</sup> and naturalism.<sup>4</sup>

With a proper understanding of religion, it becomes clear that teaching religion in school is inevitable.<sup>5</sup> David Sant notes, "All education is undergirded by presuppositions about the origin of the universe, the origin of man, the purpose of man, ethics of governing relationships between men, and the continuing existence of the universe in an orderly and predictable manner. It is an inescapable fact that all of these basic assumptions are fundamentally religious."<sup>6</sup> Moreover, considering the religious features of psychology and its significance in modern education further substantiates the religious nature of modern education.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, what seems to be lacking in state education is, more

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### **<sup>1</sup>These are shortened references. See complete citations in the full paper.**

The obligation to value and teach 'supernatural religion' is the emphasis, recognizing that naturalistic religions e.g. naturalism, humanism, etc. are already present.

<sup>2</sup> Random House Webster's Unabridged Electronic Dictionary.

<sup>3</sup> "Humanist Manifesto I," first affirmation. This first appeared in *The New Humanist*, May/June 1933, and describes the adherents as "religious humanists," and it argues a great need "to establish such a religion" referring to the tenets of naturalism spelled out in the manifesto. The first affirmation of Humanist Manifesto II states, "In the best sense, religion may inspire dedication to the highest ethical ideals. The cultivation of moral devotion and creative imagination is an expression of genuine 'spiritual' experience and aspiration." Humanist Manifesto II, first affirmation, first appeared in *The Humanist*, September/October 1973. While the Humanist Manifesto III, 2000, does not use the word 'religion' to describe itself, it does extol the virtues of scientific naturalism to a place of peerless supremacy over all other worldviews. Scientific naturalism is seen to hold the key to advancing "happiness and freedom" which is precisely what religion claims to do.

<sup>4</sup> John Dewey, *A Common Faith*. He referred to a common faith as "the religious aspect of experience." 2. Concerning the term God, he said, "[the] active relation between ideal and actual to which I would give the name 'God'." 51. He said, "Genuine perspective is religious, not that religion is something that introduces it." 24.

<sup>5</sup> Either natural religion or supernatural religion will undergird education, and the absence of the supernatural from state education will teach that it is either not important or not 'real' knowledge.

<sup>6</sup> David Sant, "The Religious Nature of Education," 1.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Carl Jung said, "...psychotherapists must occupy ourselves with problems which strictly speaking belong to the Theologian." *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, 278. Abraham Maslow said, "If religion is defined only in social-behavioral terms, then these are all religious people, the atheist included." *Motivation and Personality*, chapter 11. Carl R. Rogers, "It seems to me that we have here a general hypothesis which offers exciting possibilities for the development of creative, adaptive, autonomous persons." *On Becoming a Person*, 38. In Albert Ellis's rational emotive therapy, the religiousness is unmistakable when he says, "*Humans are only human*, and are neither angels, nor devils, nor 'dumb'

precisely, accurate and substantive appreciation for and teaching concerning supernatural religion.<sup>8</sup>

## **THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR VALUING AND TEACHING RELIGION:**

### **It is constitutionally compatible**

The founders of America believed education must include religion since religion was essential for morality, and morality was essential for a republic form of government. President George Washington in his farewell address wrote, “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. . . . And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion.”<sup>9</sup>

“The very year the Constitution was written. . . and approved by Congress, that same body of Congress passed the famous Northwest Ordinance.”<sup>10</sup> Article 3 says, “Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.”<sup>11</sup> The founders believed in what Benjamin Franklin referred to as the “fundamental points in all sound religion.”<sup>12</sup> John Adams referred to these tenets as the “general principles” on which the American civilization had been founded.<sup>13</sup> Thomas Jefferson said of these, “in which God has united us all.”<sup>14</sup> Commenting on the moral teachings of Jesus Christ, Jefferson declared, “A more beautiful or precious morsel of ethics I have never seen.”<sup>15</sup>

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animals. . . . As far as is now known, all humans are mortal—we all die—and *there is no evidence of immortality or life after death.*” Louis E. Shilling, *Perspectives on Counseling Theories*, 95, italics added. Many would beg to differ with that conclusion. See books like *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, by Josh McDowell. Ellis is in fact concluding there is no evidence, meaning there is no physical evidence. This is a categorical fallacy since supernatural religions do not speak of the spirit as having a physical nature. Therefore, it is like concluding that there is no physical evidence of a non-physical reality, which is absurd.

<sup>8</sup> The controversy concerning the government’s role is in teaching religion in state schools has resulted in the unfortunate reality that “Many educators (and textbook publishers) have tried to quell controversy by avoiding religion altogether. This strategy hasn’t worked. Ignoring religion only increases tension, builds distrust, and frequently culminates in lawsuits.” Charles C. Haynes, *Teaching about Religion in American Life*. This controversy has been exacerbated further when the debate is framed by those on either end of the spectrum—between those who only support teaching *their* particular religion and those who believe that schools should be religion-free zones.

<sup>9</sup> Mortimer J. Adler, et al., *The Annals of America*, 3:612.

<sup>10</sup> W. Cleon Skousen, *The Making of America*, 676.

<sup>11</sup> Henry F. Graff, *America The Glorious Republic*, 166. It is important to note that this was a governing document designed to assimilate the new states with the original states, and good government necessitated that religion, morality, and knowledge were taught in schools.

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Albert Henry Smyth, 10:84.

<sup>13</sup> Albert Ellery Bergh, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 13:290-294.

<sup>14</sup> Bergh, 14:198. Samuel Adams also referred to them as “the religion of America [which is] the religion of all mankind.” William V. Wells, *The Life and Public Services of Samuel Adams*, 23.

<sup>15</sup> In a letter to Charles Thompson in 1816. This is not to say that Jefferson was not also fond of the Classical Greek and Roman moral philosophers. Furthermore, this is not intended to define Jefferson as a Christian.

They wanted these religious fundamentals<sup>16</sup> “taught in the public schools along with morality and knowledge.”<sup>17</sup> Jefferson said, “Their minds [are] to be informed by education what is right and what is wrong, to be encouraged in habits of virtue...”<sup>18</sup> The prominence of religion in public education in the U.S. is further evidenced by the use of the Bible, which Jefferson understood as the basis for the religion of this country,<sup>19</sup> and the overtly Christian McGuffey’s Readers as textbooks.<sup>20</sup>

### **It is ethically demanded**

Ignoring or minimizing the role of religion in the development of the ideas of man, cultures, behaviors, and world progress distorts history. For example, while most have heard of the Pilgrims, they don’t know that they were actually a local church and took their name from the Bible (1 Peter 2:11) because they were “wanderers in search of a new homeland.”<sup>21</sup> After being persecuted by civil authorities, suffering robbery and imprisonment, they fled from England to Holland and finally headed “for the new world”<sup>22</sup> in quest of religious freedom. Before disembarking in New England, they drew up and signed what is known as the Mayflower Compact. It was the first governing document—constitution—of the settlers. It says in part, “We, whose names are underwritten...having undertaken for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith, and the honor of our King and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the

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<sup>16</sup> Skousen, 677. These fundamental religious beliefs which the founders referred to were: “Recognition and worship of a Creator who made all things. That the Creator has revealed a moral code of behavior for happy living which distinguishes right from wrong. That the Creator holds mankind responsible for the way they treat each other. That all mankind live beyond this life. That in the next life individuals are judged for their conduct in this one.

<sup>17</sup> Skousen, 677.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Paul Leicester Ford, 10:190.

Jefferson wrote a bill for Virginia schools that emphasized these principles, saying, “No religious reading, instruction or exercise shall be prescribed or practiced inconsistent with the tenets of any religious sect or denomination.” John William Randolph, *Early History of the University of Virginia*, 96-97.

<sup>19</sup> “Jefferson’s letter, in 1787, to his nephew Peter Carr, says, in discussing religion, “You will naturally examine first, the religion of your own country. Read the Bible, then...” (Padover, 1943, p. 1058). William F. Cox, Jr., *Tyranny Through Public Education*, (Fairfax, VA.: Allegiance Press, 2003), 112.

<sup>20</sup> [http://college.hmco.com/history/readerscomp/rcah/html/ah\\_058200\\_mcguffeysrea.htm](http://college.hmco.com/history/readerscomp/rcah/html/ah_058200_mcguffeysrea.htm). “This series of schoolbooks teaching reading and moral precepts, originally prepared by William Holmes McGuffey in 1836, had a profound influence on public education in the United States. McGuffey was a professor at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and a Presbyterian minister....As a young schoolmaster, McGuffey had used the eighteenth-century Puritans' *New England Primer*, Noah Webster's *American Spelling Book*, and the Bible. His *Eclectic First Reader* and *Eclectic Second Reader* were published in 1836, the *Third* and *Fourth* in 1837. They contained stories of widely varied subject matter appealing to youngsters and taught religious, moral, and ethical principles that reflected both McGuffey's personality and society at the time.... The books passed through a series of seven owners while their content evolved during almost a hundred years of publication....The revised texts issued in 1857...moved away from the Calvinist values of salvation, righteousness, and piety and reflected the morality and cultural values of a broader American society that had incorporated religion within the civil structure. The 1879 editions taught morality and good character to the emerging middle class and provided children with a common knowledge and worldview.... By 1879 more than 60 million had been sold, and by 1920 over 122 million. In 1978 they were still in use in some school systems.”

<sup>21</sup> Graff, 73, King James Version of the Bible.

<sup>22</sup> D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, *What if the Bible Had Never Been Written*, 82-83.

northern parts of Virginia; do by these presents, solemnly and mutually in the presence of God...covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic....”<sup>23</sup>

Dr. M.E. Bradford demonstrates that the vast majority of those who signed the Constitution of the United States were professing Christians<sup>24</sup> and “99.8 percent<sup>25</sup> of the people in America in 1776 claimed to be Christians.”<sup>26</sup> Additionally, the Bible was the most widely quoted source in their political writings...accounting for 34% of all quotations....<sup>27</sup>

In spite of the profound influence of Christianity upon the forging of the United States of America, William J. Bennett, former U.S. Secretary of Education, poignantly notes, “In too many places in American public education, religion has been ignored, banned, or shunned in ways that serve neither knowledge, nor the Constitution, nor sound public

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<sup>23</sup> Graff, 73.

<sup>24</sup> M.E. Bradford, *A Worthy Company*, v-vi. He identifies 28 as Episcopalians, 8 Presbyterians, 7 Congregationalists, 2 Lutherans, 2 Dutch Reformed, 2 Methodists, 2 Roman Catholics, and one whose religious affiliation is unknown today. He concludes that James Wilson of Pennsylvania, Hugh Williamson of North Carolina, and Benjamin Franklin were deists although he acknowledges Williamson’s deism is open to question.

<sup>25</sup> Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore dispute these statistics in their book *The Godless Constitution*. The basis for their rejection is their claim that “the highest estimates for the late eighteenth century make only about 10-15 percent of the population church members.” 17. They do not cite the reference for this statistic. In response to their assertions, let me say first, they mistakenly confuse statistics regarding ‘church membership’ with ‘claiming’ to be Christians, which are two entirely different issues. Second, concerning the same basic time frame, Winthrop S. Hudson points out, “The American people were not as ‘unchurched’ in 1800 as the statistics would seem to imply....The number of people attending Sunday morning worship in the 1830’s was usually three times the membership of a church. Furthermore, churches customarily computed their ‘constituency’ (those nominally related but not members) as approximately twice the number of attendants.” in his book *Religion in America*, 129 & 130. Third, denominations like Baptists do not include the children of members as members until they personally profess their faith in Jesus Christ and are baptized. Fourth, in *Religion and The Founding of the America Republic*, a Library of Congress Exhibition, it says, “Against a prevailing view that eighteenth-century Americans had not perpetuated the first settlers’ passionate commitment to their faith, scholars now identify a high level of religious energy in colonies after 1700. According to one expert, religion was in the “ascension rather than the declension”; another sees a “rising vitality in religious life” from 1700 onward; a third finds religion in many parts of the colonies in a state of “feverish growth.” Figures on church attendance and church formation support these opinions. Between 1700 and 1740, an estimated 75 to 80 percent of the population attended churches, which were being built at a headlong pace.” See “Religion in 18<sup>th</sup> Century America,” <http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel02.html>. Finally, the first Great Awakening took place from about 1725-1770, right up to the time of drafting the Constitution, and one of the historical effects was a rise in church attendance and building new churches, see Hudson, 77.

<sup>26</sup> Benjamin Hart, “The Wall That Protestantism Built” says the constituency of the United States in 1776 was composed accordingly, “98 percent of Americans were Protestant Christians; 1.8 percent were Catholic Christians; .2 percent, or two-tenths of 1 percent, were Jewish.”

<sup>27</sup> Donald S. Lutz, “The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought,” 78 *American Political Science Review* 189 (1984) 189-197. The writings of the time also demonstrate the influence of Christianity and the Bible upon their thinking. In a detailed study of the political writings of prominent Americans between 1760 and 1805 consisting of some 15,000 items, researchers identified “3,154 quotations therein. The most widely quoted source of all was the Bible, accounting for 34% of all quotations....The contemporary writers most commonly quoted were Baron Montesquieu of France and Sir William Blackstone of England, both orthodox Christians; third was John Locke, a Christian although not entirely orthodox.”

policy. There is no good curricular or constitutional reason for textbooks to ignore, as many do, the role of religion in the founding of this country or its prominent place in the lives of many of its citizens. We should acknowledge that religion—from the Pilgrims to the civil rights struggle—is an important part of our history, civics, literature, art, music, poetry, and politics, and we should insist that our schools tell the truth about it.”<sup>28</sup> Diane Ravitch, educational historian, notes that as a result of bias guidelines used by various publishers “reading passages must not contain even an ‘incidental reference’ to anyone’s religion.”<sup>29</sup>

“Dr. Paul Vitz, an educational psychologist, completed a study for the National Institute of Education to determine if public school textbooks were biased or censored. He concluded... ‘Religion... [has] been reliably excluded from children's textbooks.’ There was almost a total blackout on Christianity in America beyond the colonial period.... [He found] a text that had 30 pages on the Pilgrims, but not one word that even mentioned their religion...”<sup>30</sup>

## **THE SOCIOLOGICAL BASIS FOR VALUING AND TEACHING RELIGION**

Even though understanding religion is essential for comprehending contemporary society, religion is often marginalized, ignored, or explained reductively. Consider the following:

### **Sociological deconstruction of religious faith**

Robert Bellah, a social scientist, delineates the underlying assumptions of social scientists as, “...positivism, reductionism, relativism, and determinism.... Religion, being unscientific, could have no reality claim in any case, though as a private belief or practice it may by some be admitted to be psychologically helpful for certain people....”<sup>31</sup>

When sociology portrays religion as merely the “product of individual choices,”<sup>32</sup> the importance of religion in peoples’ lives, cultural shifts, and on the world stage becomes enshrouded in reductivism.

### **State school’s hostility toward religious faith**

These biases reduce religion to merely a human construct, thereby denigrating religion and religious people. Stephen L. Carter, Professor of Law at Yale University said, “On America’s elite campuses, today, it is perfectly acceptable for professors to use their classrooms to attack religion, to mock it, to trivialize it, and to refer to those to whom faith truly matters as dupes, and dangerous fanatics on top of it.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> William J. Bennett, *The De-valuing of America*, 205.

<sup>29</sup> Diane Ravitch, *The Language Police*, 22.

<sup>30</sup> K. Alan Snyder, “Who is Censoring Whom in Schools? Christians should be concerned about what’s in textbooks today” published in the editorial and opinion page of the Chronicle-Tribune, Marion, IN (5 Sep 1993)

<sup>31</sup> Huston Smith, *Why Religion Matters*, 84-86.

<sup>32</sup> Wolfe, 246.

<sup>33</sup> Stephen L. Carter, “*God’s Name in Vain*,” 187.

Huston Smith, retired professor at Berkley, commented, “This is the kind of misreading of science that...belittles art [and] religion...”<sup>34</sup> He further states, “The modern university is not agnostic toward religion; it is actively *hostile* to it”<sup>35</sup> (italics added). Sociologist Allan Wolfe admits, “I am not...a person of faith,”<sup>36</sup> but adds, “...nor do I write out of the kind of hostility to religion that has characterized so many academics....”<sup>37</sup>

### **Psychological misdiagnosis of religious faith**

David Larson of Duke University Medical School draws attention to similar biases in the mental health professions. “Consider The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual...third edition, *religious examples were used only as illustration in discussions of mental illness, such as delusions, incoherence, and illogical thinking*”<sup>38</sup> (italics added).

Another example is the *Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory* where “All the positive religion-connected traits...are weighted negatively...Conversely, several traits that religious people would regard as diminishing themselves...are weighted positively.”<sup>39</sup>

Religion viewed as illustrative of and leading to mental illness devalues religion to nothing more than a privatized preoccupation, devoid of objective reality as well as public, educational, cultural, or legal value, and thereby banished from intellectual and legal culture.

### **Legal curtailments of religious expression**

In 1947, *Everson v. Board of Education*, “the Supreme Court applied the establishment clause to the states for the first time<sup>40</sup>...imbued...with a firm separationist reading.”<sup>41</sup> Hugo Black unjustifiably elevated Jefferson’s ‘wall of separation’ “to [an] authoritative gloss on the First Amendment religion provisions.”<sup>42</sup> The de-historicizing of this metaphor has obscured its original meaning, and thereby reconceptualized the First Amendment. Jefferson used that phrase in a letter responding to the Danbury Baptist Association to assure them of his commitment to religious freedom. However, Roger Williams, a clergyman, staunch advocate of religious freedom, and the “founder of Rhode

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<sup>34</sup> Smith, 187.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, 96.

<sup>36</sup> Alan Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion*, vii.

<sup>37</sup> Wolfe, viii.

<sup>38</sup> Patrick F. Fagan, “Why Religion Matters: The Impact of Religious Practice on Social Stability,” 22. The quotation was from the Third Edition, published in 1980. The Fourth Edition, published in 1994, corrected this.

<sup>39</sup> David B. Larson and Susan S. Larson, “The Forgotten Factor in Physical and Mental Health.”

<sup>40</sup> The first time Jefferson was quoted in a Supreme Court case was in the 1878 case of *Reynolds v. United States*, stating that Jefferson’s term ‘wall of separation between church and state’ “may be accepted almost as an authoritative declaration of the scope and effect of the [First] Amendment.” However, this was the first time it was applied to states and expanded by the wording of the decision.

<sup>41</sup> By John Witte Jr., Professor of Law, Emory University, “Religious Liberty-Overview,” First Amendment Center. 9.

<sup>42</sup> Daniel L. Dreisbach, *Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of Separation between Church and State*, 4.

Island” used the phrase before Jefferson.<sup>43</sup> The theological basis for a ‘wall of separation’ grew out of his understanding of the church being based upon the New Testament rather than the Old Testament. “Drawing upon the analogy of Eden, he spoke of the church or community of the faithful as a garden. Beyond its bounds lay the wilderness of the sinful world from which the garden was preserved by a *wall of separation*. Should the *wall be breached, weeds from the wilderness would invade the garden and choke off its flowers*”<sup>44</sup> (italics added).

That the wall was to protect the church and man’s conscience from the government rather than the government from influence of religion is further demonstrated by the following: Williams served as the President of Rhode Island for three years beginning in 1654.<sup>45</sup> He believed the Quaker’s pacifism would make them poor governors.<sup>46</sup> “Williams himself linked religion to morals, and he expected magistrates in Rhode Island to enforce the second table of the Ten Commandments.”<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the whole debate between Williams and John Cotton concerning the relationship of the church and state was theological;<sup>48</sup> therefore, the influence of religious values upon government was never the intent of the metaphor.<sup>49</sup> Williams never believed that a Christian left his morals or Christianity in the garden when he went into the wilderness. (Matthew 5:13-16; 28:18-20). Although, Christianity is very personal, it is remarkably public as well (Matthew 10:16).

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<sup>43</sup> Stow Persons, *American Minds, A History of Ideas*, 53.

<sup>44</sup> Persons, 54. Roger Williams also said in reference to this, “So far as the natural man was corrupt and sinful, the power of the magistrate must be the power of Satan. How could the protection of the church safely be entrusted to such a power?” Persons, 57. Williams did believe there was an appropriate responsibility for the civil government—bodies and goods—and the church—souls and spiritual.

<sup>45</sup> Kramnick and Moore, 53.

<sup>46</sup> Kramnick and Moore, 58.

<sup>47</sup> Kramnick and Moore, 60.

<sup>48</sup> Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience*, Richard Groves, ed. This book contains the arguments between Roger Williams and John Cotton.

<sup>49</sup> Kramnick and Moore, 60-61. Williams bringing his religious views into the political arena seems to confuse the authors, but their confusion actually arises out of concluding that Williams gave a “prescription for a godless politics.” I believe this is a misreading of Williams. He did not seek to create a secular square where religious input, morals, ideas, and accommodation were not welcome. They do acknowledge that when people take religion seriously “religion can never be private, in the sense of irrelevant to public issues.” Williams clearly did bring his religious views into the public square. There is a categorical difference in having the government establish official required religious obedience and government being influenced by the views of the people whether religious or non-religious. There are some beliefs that religions hold to that they believe are good for society and they should vote and encourage others to vote accordingly e.g. marriage between a man and a woman, against murder, stealing, etc. This is not promoting religion, but rather recognizing the right to allow religious people the same public right as non-religious people. Even if a person will only vote for a person of a certain religious or non-religious persuasion, that has no bearing on violating the principle of the church and state being separate.



Since Williams believed that the second table of the Ten Commandments<sup>50</sup> was appropriate for civil law, but the first table was not, it seems that his message was that, the ‘wall of separation’ would be breached if the church and state were to become so intertwined that the state passes laws regarding the first tablet, which required observance or punishment by the state. For Williams, this would be the bloody persecution of conscience; whereas Jefferson’s ‘wall,’ in light of his practice as governor, communication with the Baptists, and his second inaugural address clearly symbolized a jurisdictional understanding based on federalism and freedom of conscience. Thus, whether one looks at Williams, the Baptists, or Jefferson, the theist is free to follow God both privately and publicly, and the atheist is free to not acknowledge God.

### **Cultural hostility is unwarranted**

The current hostility seems to be unjustified in light of religion’s prevalence in and benefits to culture. For example, Gallup Polls indicate that 83% of Americans identify themselves as Christian, 2% as Jewish and 10% say, “they have no religious preference.”<sup>51</sup> Research suggests that “intrinsic”<sup>52</sup> religion has positive results in the

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<sup>50</sup> Roger Williams referred to the second table as “the doctrine of the civil state” and the first table as “the spiritual doctrine of Christianity,” in his book *The Bloody [Bloody] Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience*, 146. Therefore, the commandments dealing with men’s bodies, relationships, and things, e.g. adultery, lying, stealing, could become civil laws, but the first four commandments dealing with a person’s relationship and worship of God or no worship of God or worship of a different God than the state or everyone else, could not become civil law. This division between the first and second tablet can be seen in John Leland, a Baptist preacher, who ‘emerged a leader among the Commonwealth’s Baptists. He was instrumental in allying the Baptists with Jefferson and Madison in the bitter Virginia struggle to disestablish the Anglican Church and to secure *freedom for religious dissenters*.” Dreisbach, 13, (italics added). According to L.H. Butterfield, Leland “was as courageous and resourceful a champion of the rights of *conscience* as America has produced.” from his book “Elder John Leland, Jeffersonian Itinerant,” 157 (italics added). Leland and the Baptists supported Jefferson because of his commitment to “the rights of *conscience*.” Herbert M. Morais, “Life and Words of Elder John Leleand,” 44-50, (italics added). This did not refer to separating religious beliefs from politics. For example, Leland supported Jefferson from his pulpit. (Dreisbach, 10), and He preached in a congressional church service 1/3/1802, which Jefferson attended. It seems that both Leland and Jefferson agreed with Williams view that the conscience referred to the first table of the Ten Commandments. In addition, Jefferson and the Danbury Baptists used the term ‘opinions’ to refer to conscience in their correspondence. Jefferson said, “The legitimate powers of government reach actions only and not opinions.” The Baptists said, “The legitimate power of civil government extends no further than to punish the man who works ill to his neighbor.” These statements are consistent with Williams understanding of the appropriateness of the second tablet becoming law but not the first. Another example of this distinction can be seen in Jefferson’s words, “The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others...that the opinions of men are not the object of civil government nor under its jurisdiction.” From Jefferson’s papers, as quoted by Dreisbach, 182; see also complete bill for establishing religious freedom, Dreisbach, 133-135. Tablet one dealt with worship and opinions, and the second with relations toward other men, which was appropriate for civil law as distinguished by Williams. Leland said, “Government has no more to do with the religious opinions of men, than it has with the principles of mathematics. Let every man speak freely without fear, maintain the principles that he believes, worship according to this own faith, either one God, three Gods, no God or twenty Gods; and let government protect him in so doing, i.e., see that he meets with no personal abuse, or loss of property, for his religious opinions.” John Leland, *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable*.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph Carroll, “American Public Opinion About Religion,” Tuesday March 2, 2004.

<sup>52</sup> Social scientists are now distinguishing between ‘intrinsic’ and ‘extrinsic’ religion. “Intrinsic practice is God-oriented and based on beliefs which transcend the person’s own existence. Research shows this form of religious practice to be beneficial. Extrinsic practice is self-oriented and characterized by outward observance, not internalized as a guide to behavior or attitudes. The evidence suggests this form of

areas of happiness, sense of well-being, lowering stress, better personal relationships, greater sexual satisfaction for women, lower risk of cardiovascular diseases, longer life for the poor; it affects blood pressure, and different cancers; decreases illegitimacy, crime, delinquency, welfare dependency, alcohol and drug abuse, depression, suicide and enhances general overall mental, physical and social well-being.<sup>53</sup>

## THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL BASIS FOR VALUING AND TEACHING RELIGION

Epistemology answers the questions of what we can know and how can we know. If our epistemic approach to education is inadequate, learning will be unnecessarily deficient. Several ideas appear to have negatively impacted valuing and teaching religion in public education.

First, **emphasizing pedagogy more than content.** “The percentage of teachers with an undergraduate degree in a subject area fell from 28 percent to 23 percent between 1983 and 2003.... Only 16 percent of eighth-grade teachers in their first ten years of teaching say they evaluate students on whether or not the student gets the right answer.”<sup>54</sup> This hinders intellectual development<sup>55</sup> and concomitantly minimizes teaching about religion.<sup>56</sup> Rousseau’s *Emile* has served as the classic exemplar of this non-directive approach.<sup>57</sup> Diane Ravitch remarks, “The flight from knowledge and content in the past generation has harmed our children and diminished our culture....”<sup>58</sup>

Second, **expanding science beyond its domanical authority.** Science as the exclusive arbitrator of truth creates what Huston Smith refers to as ‘scientism.’ “Scientism adds to science two corollaries: first, that the scientific method is, if not the *only* reliable method of getting at truth, then at least the *most* reliable method; and second, that the things science deals with—material entities—are the most fundamental things that exist....

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religious practice is actually more harmful than no religion.” Some of the positive psychological effects of intrinsic religion are characteristics like greater sense of responsibility, self-motivated, perform better in their studies, more sensitive to others; in contrast to ‘extrinsics’ which are more likely to be dogmatic, authoritarian, less responsible, perform less well in their studies, more self-indulgent, indolent and less dependable, more prejudiced, as quoted by Fagan, 20-21.

<sup>53</sup> Fagan, pages 5-20, sources numerous studies that corroborate the benefit of religion in a person’s life. Some of them deal specifically with the positive impact on areas of life from church attendance.

<sup>54</sup> William J. Bennett, “Twenty Facts about American Education (2003),” 3.

<sup>55</sup> Diane Ravitch, *Left Back*, 459-462.

<sup>56</sup> Bennett, Twenty Facts, “In a ranking of students in 21 industrialized countries, American 12<sup>th</sup> graders ranked 19<sup>th</sup> in math and 16<sup>th</sup> in science in 1995. In physics, American students ranked dead last in the industrialized world.... On a test of general knowledge, 2002 college seniors scored 17.5 percent lower than college seniors in 1955, while outscoring high school seniors from 1955 by a mere 3.2 percent.... Nearly two out of every three black children (60 percent) in the fourth grade scored ‘below basic’ in reading on the 2002 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).” 1. Quotation is from items 1, 3, and 4 in his list on Student Performance.

<sup>57</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*. Rousseau was born 1712 and died 1778; this book was written in 1762, and outlines his theory of education.

<sup>58</sup> Ravitch, *Language Police*, 164.

Unsupported by facts, they are at best philosophical assumptions and at worst merely opinions.”<sup>59</sup> This domanian transgression stealthily transforms science into naturalism.

Third, **discounting the place of faith in education.** While religious faith is often summarily dismissed in light of ‘real knowledge,’ faith in naturalism is welcomed. For example, the U.S. National Association of Biology Teachers statement reads “the diversity of life on earth is the outcome of evolution: an *unsupervised, impersonal*...and natural process...”<sup>60</sup> (italics added). Of course it is impossible for science to declare that evolution is *unsupervised* and *impersonal*. Further, almost all learning requires faith. Until one has stood in Harris Manchester College, he accepts its existence by faith. As Robert Bork points out, “A belief that science will ultimately explain everything, however, also requires a leap of faith. Faith in science requires the unproven assumption that all reality is material, that there is nothing beyond or outside the material universe. Perhaps that is right...but it cannot be proven and therefore rests on an untested and untestable assumption. That being the case, there is no logical reason why science should be hostile to or displace religion.”<sup>61</sup> Steven Jay Gould noted, “Facts are not pure and unsullied bits of information; culture also influences what we see and how we see it.”<sup>62</sup>

Fourth, **overestimating the possibility of value-neutral education.** Ronald Nash remarks, “There is a sense in which education is an activity that is religious at its roots. Any effort to remove religion from education is merely the substitution of one set of ultimate religious commitments for another.”<sup>63</sup> With regard to values clarification, Paul Vitz notes that while the theorists do not allow for one value to be better than another

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<sup>59</sup> Smith, 59-60. He gives as an example Freud’s statement; “Our science is not illusion, but an illusion it would be to suppose that what science cannot give us we can get elsewhere.” This goes far beyond the realm of science into ‘epistemic naturalism’ or ‘scientism.’ Smith notes on page 62 that not all scientists accept the “epistemological privilege of science”, like the French microbiologist Francois Jacob and others. Scientism is not the belief that science will be able to “predict everything’ page 63, which would make it held by only a few.

<sup>60</sup> Phillip Johnson, *Objections Sustained*, 85. The 1995 U.S. National Association of Biology Teachers ‘Statement on teaching Evolution’ to guide high-school teachers demonstrates, “the diversity of life on earth is the outcome of evolution: an *unsupervised, impersonal*, unpredictable and natural process of temporal descent with genetic modification that is affected by natural selection, chance, historical contingencies and changing environments” (italics added). Later the words ‘unsupervised’ and ‘impersonal’ were removed after considerable pressure, see pages 85-90.

<sup>61</sup> Robert Bork, *Slouching Toward Gomorrah*, 281-282. It appears to me that he is referring to what Smith calls ‘scientism’ and/or naturalism.

<sup>62</sup> Nigel Brush, *The Limitations of Scientific Truth: Why Science Can’t Answer Life’s Ultimate Questions*, (Grand Rapids, MI:, Kregel Publications, 2005) 267.

Nigel Brush concurs, saying “Facts are given significance only by our hypotheses and theories....Any given body of facts, though, can be arranged and interpreted in a great many ways.” Brush, *Limitations*, 38. See also Thomas Kuhn’s 1962 work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, where Kuhn basically argues that scientists work within a paradigm, which includes several theories that seem to best explain the world. Eventually, anomalies within the current paradigm become so numerous that science goes through a revolution, altering the way they view the same facts, thus allowing them to resolve many of the anomalies. At some point, this cycle repeats itself, e.g. from Newton to Einstein or by explaining the development of the earth by uniformitarianism and then changing in the early 1980s to catastrophism: these are paradigm shifts—different ways of looking at the same facts and arriving at different answers.

<sup>63</sup> Ronald H. Nash, “The Myth of a Value-Free Education,” *Religion & Liberty*, 2.

they certainly believe their way of determining values is better than others, “that is, relativity aside, students *should* prize their model of how to clarify values.”<sup>64</sup>

Fifth, **underestimating the biases in science.** Science is not without its biases and breaches of ethics. Alexander Kohn, professor of Virology at Tel Aviv Medical School points out, “Breaches of ethics as encountered in scientific research cover a whole spectrum ranging from outright fraud... to...negligence”<sup>65</sup> [and] “experimenter bias.”<sup>66</sup> Ruth Hubbard states, “The pretense that science is objective, apolitical and value-neutral is profoundly political.”<sup>67</sup> Kohn notes at times, “Dubious evidence is strengthened by strong *hope*; anomalies are fitted into a coherent picture with the help of cultural *bias*”<sup>68</sup> (italics added). The harsh reality is that we are all biased, and if we are not objective about our biases, we can have no hope of objectivity elsewhere.

## **SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR VALUING AND TEACHING RELIGION IN STATE SCHOOLS**

### **The emphasis should be to respect and teach the *facts of religion not faith in religion.***

A joint statement by a diverse group including the NEA, the Christian Coalition and 22 other education associations and religious groups stated, “Public schools... must be places where religion and religious conviction are treated with fairness and respect... [and] ensure that the curriculum includes study about religion, where appropriate, as an important part of a complete education.”<sup>69</sup>

This must include substantive teaching concerning dissimilarities as well as similarities. The National Council for Social Studies Curriculum Standards declares: “Knowledge about religions is not only a characteristic of an educated person but is absolutely necessary for understanding and living in a world of diversity. Knowledge of religious *differences* and the role of religion in the contemporary world can help promote understanding and alleviate prejudice”<sup>70</sup> (italics added).

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<sup>64</sup> Paul C. Vitz, *Psychology As Religion*, 72.

<sup>65</sup> Alexander Kohn, *False Prophets*, vii.

<sup>66</sup> Kohn, 6.

<sup>67</sup> “Science, Facts and Feminism”, in *Feminism & Science*, ed. Nancy Tuana 125, 126, 128.

<sup>68</sup> Kohn, 140.

<sup>69</sup> Krista Kafer, “How To Teach Religion in Public Schools,” 2.

<sup>70</sup> Kafer, 3. The Modesto, California, public school district has offered workshops on the First Amendment to equip teachers to teach religion in class. The California County Superintendents Educational Services Association and the First Amendment Center jointly sponsor a statewide program called the California 3Rs Project, which conducts seminars, forums, and workshops on teaching about religions and student religious liberties. The project supports constitutional and educationally beneficial practices and promotes the ‘three Rs’: rights, responsibilities, and respect in California’s diverse school environments. “The program has been introduced in all of California’s 58 counties. It has been endorsed by groups as diverse as the Anti-Defamation League, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Christian Educators Association International, and the California Teachers Association. And a growing number of states—including Georgia, Pennsylvania, New Mexico, New York, Texas and Utah—are moving ahead with the initiative.”

**The amount of teaching on religion should be based on *proportionality* not *equality*.** Mentioning a certain religion, or group within a religion, should be proportional to: the significance it played in the event or lives of people under consideration; the need for the specific subject being taught; and the grade level of the students. This is in contrast to the multiculturalism<sup>71</sup> and political correctness emphasis on equal portrayal rather than factual proportionality. Ravitch asserts, “The textbooks published in the late 1990s...[are] a story of cultural equivalence.”<sup>72</sup> This leaves students with a distorted idea that religion played a minimal role, no role, or that many religions played an equal role in events and cultural development.<sup>73</sup>

**The context for respecting and teaching religion should be one of *accommodation* not *separation*.**

The question of teaching about religion is no longer “Should I teach about religion” but rather “How do I teach about religion?” This proposal would replace the tendency toward separation and devaluing with a conscious objective to appropriately respect and include the teaching of religion in public education. The fear that accommodation results in promotion is unjustified.<sup>74</sup>

**The approach should be one of *constructiveness* not *destructiveness*.** Constructivism gives due respect to religious adherents and attention to what the religion’s adherents believe their religion to be. This does not mean that weakness or abuses are not taught, but rather that they are explained in a manner befitting of education without being used to reduce religion to a cultural construct or an antiquated belief superceded by scientific naturalism. In addition, the problems associated with a religion are dealt with in

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<sup>71</sup> I am not using the term ‘multiculturalism’ to mean multicultural education which evaluates and highlights the practices and contributions of different cultures in a factual way, but rather I use it to refer to the ideology that “sees all cultures, their mores and institutions, as essentially equal.” Of course this usually excludes Euro-American cultures with Judeo-Christian underpinnings, which are often condemned. In addition, they seek to highlight and maintain cultural differences and therefore destroy our shared story and unity. In addition I mean the multicultural methods which emphasize the sins of Euro-Americans and magnify any contribution from minority groups. See Alvin J. Schmidt, *The Menace of Multiculturalism*, 3, 11, and 57. See also *The Multicultural Guidelines*, published by Scott Foresman-Addison Wesley. Ethnocentrism includes avoiding contributions by Judeo Christian culture to art or literature, and cultural equivalence Ravitch, *Language Police*, 141. See also Ravitch, *Left Back*, on multiculturalism being ethnocentric or particularistic—focusing on accomplishments of one’s own ethnic group, which Ravitch says is actually “inverted racism”, 421.

<sup>72</sup> Ravitch, *Language Police*, 140, this equivalence results in things like “the once traditional emphasis...on the growth of democratic institutions has nearly vanished.”

<sup>73</sup> Consider these examples: two-thirds of the abolition movement in the U.S. were Christian ministers, not counting all of the lay-Christians involved; *Liberty* (Sept/Oct 1984); the influence of Christianity in eliminating slavery from the ancient world, Kennedy and Newcombe, *What if Jesus*, 18-22; and men like John Newton who became Christians and turned from slave trading in order to help slaves, *ibid.*, 193-194, or William Wilberforce’s Christianity which caused him to lead the battle for 45 years in England to abolish slavery and free all slaves, Kennedy and Newcombe, *What if the Bible*, 72-77. The Civil Rights movement was spawned out of religious faith. It is true that religious people were on both sides of each issue; however, that, in no way, minimizes the Christian influence upon the changing culture.

<sup>74</sup> For these are two very different ideas. This can be illustrated by surveying how many churches, synagogue, or mosques would be content to merely seek to ‘accommodate’ their respective faiths instead of promoting them. By accommodating, state schools make an appropriate place for teaching about religion without promoting a religion.

proportion to the history of the religion as well as in light of the historical setting and their primary documents.<sup>75</sup>

Therefore, the state has a professional and ethical obligation to include proportional esteem of and teaching on religion in state schools.

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<sup>75</sup> Religious Liberty in Public Schools, teaching about Religion, [www.firstamendmentcenter.org](http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org). There are some excellent resources available like *Religion in American Life*, a 17- volume series written by leading scholars for young readers, the first work of this nature and magnitude for young readers. Published by Oxford University Press, “The series includes three chronological volumes of the religious history of the U.S., nine volumes covering significant religious groups (Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Orthodox Christians, Mormons, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Native Americans and others), and four volumes addressing specific topics of special importance for understanding the role of religion in American life (women and religion, church-state issues, African-American religion, and immigration). (For more information on the series call 800-451-7556) Columbia University press has published a CD-Rom called “On Common Ground: World Religions in America.” Fifteen religions in various regions of America are represented.