

TRUTH DENIED

ACADEMIA'S ERROR IN KEEPING GOD OUT OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS: ITS ROLE IN HOW NOT TO TEACH ABOUT RELIGION BY EDUCATING TEACHERS TO BE RELUCTANT OR FEARFUL

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By

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*“What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer
Sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those
heaps of rubble—burned as they are?”* Nehemiah 4: 2 (NIV, 1995)

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Introduction

My Passion, Our Hope

Ten years have passed since that early morning voice, “I am coming by your way again, get it right this time.” We often fail to realize each day that “God has chosen and formed us and not we ourselves” (Psalms 100:3, NIV Study Bible, 1995), but when we do realize *His* presence and voice, courage and determination revives our spirit. “Men’s hearts are feeling a tremendous surge of God’s activity today” (Blackaby, 1999, p. ix).

Rick Warren’s (2002) first line in his nationally acclaimed novel, *The Purpose Driven Life*, says, “It’s not about you” (p. 17). Nothing has taken place for me or about me. “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God” (II Corinthians 3:5). God plan is to confirm *His* Word, not us. It was, has and always will be about the purposes and plan of God.

It has been ten years of blessings and trials. Each experience created a stronger, effective, more passionate faith. As Mark 16: 20b confirms, “The Lord working with them and confirming *His* Word.” As Jesus walked this earth, I find my experiences pattering *His* experiences. *His* words (every verse of the Bible) come alive with meaning; indeed God had given food to my soul even when I was unaware of *His* plans. “You prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies” (Psalms 23:5a), God’s keeping power amidst great opposition. As Jesus spoke and walked this earth 2,000 years ago, I hear the same sounds of sleeping, crying and stones singing—the sounds of complacency, unbelief and ungratefulness.

Truth is never too far away. Wisdom indeed calls out in the streets (Matthew 11: 17). Yet Christian educators sincerely believe—that what they are convinced of, respond to or proclaim as—is educationally correct. Is our knowledge complete? Is what we know truth? Are justice, humility and mercy found in our actions and words (Micah 6:8)? More and more I realize that many Christians are convinced by man the Jesus Christ is the Son of God but they are not convince by God that He is, or their lives (words, actions, motives and intelligent reasoning) would be different. In these treacherous times, what is important? How do we position ourselves to indeed be lights in a dark world? How can we know what is “truth applied” in every personal situation in these changing times?

Appropriate fearful knowledge is...will my labor be found worthy of God’s standard of recognition. Our concerned should not be about personal persecution, financially difficult times or even a world falling apart environmentally; but rather concern for a people that is lost in self-righteousness. What is about to come will come (Revelation 22:20). There is little need for the understanding of yesteryears, if we are to bring about a hopeful tomorrow. Everything will be shaken—nothing will be spared (Hebrews 12: 27)— nothing! Truth exposes lies, deception, fear—it creates a battlefield; it challenges the very intellectual freedoms we considered unmovable.

Knowledge that has worked in the past will no longer succeed. Leaders will elect not to lead. Science will struggle to make sense out of what is taking place. Today’s America’s Heart Association has determined that the number one killer of Americans is heart disease. “Men’s hearts failing them” (Luke 21:26) is affirmed every minute of each

day. End time scriptures are being fulfilled everywhere as we observe all levels of society. We can either determine our future through fear or hope. Lessons from the book, *Fearless*, by Tom Stephen and Hank Foto (2006) exemplifies this choice—to live or not to live in fear. We can help others or be so self-centered that every effort to better our circumstances will only end in utter failure.

I am reminded of the critical line in the movie, *Independence Day* (Emmerich, 1996), “Times up.” There comes a time for everyone to experience many of life’s lessons—“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven...” Ecclesiastes 3:1. If God is not honored and recognized in easy times, He will orchestrate world events in order to be acknowledged in ever increasing apocalyptic events.

The question each of us should be asking ourselves is—*how can I serve Christ passionately, effectively and unselfishly?* Is there a place of permanent and consistent personal revival in service to Christ? I believe there is. My desire is to enable the Body of Christ (and specifically educational communities) to serve in these uncertain days. To move from a life of lack, regret and denial to one of richness, joy and results.

“Does he who teacher man lack knowledge” (Psalms 94:10). “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6). If we do not teach knowledge (truths) that is available to us, then we should reap the consequences of a decaying and ineffective educational community and even more frightening the absence of truth spoken in the public square.

What can stem this erosion from within? Permanent consistent personal revival is found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5: 3-10) where we become “*Blessed are...*” It is within these eight verses that passionate service began and continues to exist in my life today. God consistently reminds me and brings my spirit back to these simple but profoundly significant truths. These undeniable truths and their meanings bring forgiveness and life to my soul. I struggle at times to find appropriate words to explain what I know to be true but my soul is encouraged nevertheless.

If one wants to know and speak truth then one has to allow that same truth to live and find root in who we are—how we think, how we speak and how we confront truth denied.

Power of Knowledge

The Know How

How to teach about religious beliefs/themes, religious documents/materials, and historically religious facts/events/persons has been a slippery slope for many educators. Many guidelines have been develop over the past twenty-five years but none have defined for the educational instructor specifically *how* to address these issues while developing and conducting a lesson. Teachers are responsible for instructional learning and the implementation of daily lessons, thematic units, and student activities in our public schools. They are *mandated* to teach about specific historically religious values, events and themes in every grade level, yet most are fearful, lost or reluctant to teach about religion.

America’s Federal Court decisions in respect to curriculum content and

instructional methods in the history-social science curriculum area has given insight, authority and instructional opportunity for teachers as to how to teach about Judeo-Christian influences in American history. The justices of the Supreme Court discussed the significance and importance of learning about Judeo-Christian beliefs in the *Abington v. Schempp* (1963) case, which stated, “The vast portion of our people believe in and worship God and that many of our legal, political and personal values derive historically from religious teachings ... one’s education is not complete without a study of religion”. In support of Federal Court decisions, the most state curriculum frameworks and four national curriculum frameworks have opened the door for the study of and teaching about religious content. The recent *standard-based* educational approach is a result of these trends.

In order to be fair and balance, there has been some effort on the part of educators to remedy this problem through content base education. In America, some states and national educational groups have developed content standards to help guide teachers. However, standards alone only help tell educators *what* to teach, they do not instruct *how* to teach.

The Problem

Until recently there was no set of developmental guidelines designed specially to be a teacher’s lesson planning tool for assistance in the instructional planning and delivery relating to First Amendment issues for the sole purpose of showing how to teach about religion—religious and moral themes, documents, and events in the history-social science curriculum areas.

In the Supreme Court case *Abington School District v. Schempp* (1963), Justice Clark wrote the following opinion:

It might well be said that one’s education is not complete without a study of ... the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities ... the Bible or of religion ... (this is consistent) with the First Amendment. (p. 203)

The judicial system has given specific detailed instructions when First Amendment concepts are applied to (devotional) prayer in school, instruction of evolution versus creationism, graduation and baccalaureate services, religious symbols and holiday observances, and sex education classes (Dierenfield, 1986). However, Nord and Haynes (1998) state that the Supreme Court took a less restrictive attitude in defining how to teach about religion in public schools. Nord and Haynes believe the court has given schools liberty in where, when, and how the instruction of religious beliefs, content, and themes in the history-social science curriculum area are to be conducted. With detailed restrictions in some areas of public school life and freedom of instructional design in others, the educational community of teachers may seem confused and reluctant to do what has been requested of them when teaching about religion in the public school classroom (Harris-Ewing, 1999).

There is confusion on the part of educators (and the professors who teach

teachers) about what one can and cannot do with regard to First Amendment issues and the teaching process. Teachers rely, for the most part, on what is currently included in textbooks rather than venturing into an area where they might find themselves part of a lawsuit (Haynes, 1994). Through a lack of understanding and support, teachers have taken a more ineffective teaching style in designing daily lessons, instructional units or student activities because of possible litigation and loss of their job. “The fear factor and often exaggerated rhetoric surrounding this topic has resulted in teachers treating religion with benign neglect” (Haynes, 1994, p. 8). Teachers would rather allow a textbook to do the teaching, which allows for unquestionable bias and untruthful deceptive instruction. Instruction that operates solely from a textbook without student initiation, teacher-student interaction, or inquiry-discovery processes to motivate a lesson is never judged as an effective teaching model of instruction. Moreover, most textbooks virtually ignore religion, and “supplementary volumes [about religion] and curricula in these areas are rarely available ... [or] do not exist, thereby further complicates the teacher’s job” (Haynes, 1994, p. 9). Teachers feel they are caught in a *catch-22* instructional dilemma.

There are numerous books, manuals and legal assistance from a variety of sources stating their own particular spin (interpretation) to court rulings and appropriate instruction, but these have only aided in confusing the educator. Sharon M. Harris-Ewing (1999) in her dissertation at State University New York at Buffalo contends that teachers do not know how to teach about religion in the public school arena. She stated that teachers “are very uncertain about the legal parameters governing religion and believe they are unprepared [to teach about religion]” (p. xi). Her study of 225 teachers affirmed what Haynes (1994) believes—that teachers do not know how to teach about religion. Harris-Ewing states that teachers have a great deal of anxiety when asked to teach about religion:

Students from every school commented that this is a controversial issue, that “touchy,” “troubling,” even potentially “explosive.” One expressed fear “about getting fired” for saying the “wrong thing.” Another said, “I feel I am walking on eggshells in many respects in the classroom.” (p. 124)

The problem that teachers face within the public school arena is not-knowing how to teach about America’s religious historical significance and our foundation in Judeo-Christian values. They do not know how to bridge the gap between court rulings—legal decisions regarding the teaching about religion and current morality issues, daily instruction, the classroom’s student-teacher interaction, lesson plan design or delivery methods (Collie, 1982). This problem exists, in part, in the educational processes in our universities, and more specifically, the lack of proper, correct and sound intellectual instruction and exchange. We teach from the platform of ignorance, unaware to confront the absence of truth and therefore promote the status quo.

Many still believe that there is no guidelines (an instructional tools or programs) that can be easily referred to, which would assist teaching about Judeo-Christian values and beliefs or in the task of knowing how to design daily lessons and to decide which appropriate teaching methods to choose. This is, of course, not true. Instructional tools and methods of instruction have been developed and have been found to be helpful for teachers when constructing their lesson and in guiding the delivery of the lesson. Teaching about religion and value base education occurs most often in the history-social science curriculum areas where teaching about religious topics, themes, documents, facts,

and/or religious-moral beliefs is required in our public schools; therefore, a specific tool was designed to support a teacher in this area of instruction. J.L. Fortson, Ed.D. Director of Pepperdine's Teacher Education Program stated, "This tool is outstanding and should be used by every educator from the kindergarten teacher through doctoral studies professors" (J.L. Fortson, personal communication, March 11, 2006). The problem has been solved, there is a set of developmental guidelines designed specially to be a teacher's lesson planning tool for assistance in the instructional planning and delivery in how to teach about religious themes, documents, and events—in the history-social science curriculum, called the *8-Step Quick Reference Guide*®.

The Facts

Azusa Pacific University: Statistical Survey

A recent survey was conducted involving over 250 students at Azusa Pacific University in 2006-07. These are Christian students, the majority were seniors and were involved in some aspect of teacher training, working towards a degree in Liberal Studies. Over 90% of the students surveyed answered no to most questions. No—a teacher cannot pray in class with students, no—one cannot teach about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, no—to student learning about the journey's of the Apostle Paul, or no—ask K-12 students to memorize Bible verses or sing Christian songs.

However, the opposite is true yet higher education's teacher training courses would like us to believe that these assertions are false.

Even recent conversations with educational leaders (professors, department chairs, and deans) in America and Europe affirmed the acceptance of this ignorance and ultimately the denial of truth.

Do we accept the argument that Christians cannot be neutral in teaching about their own religious concepts? Do we avoid what we can do in order not to make individuals uncomfortable (fear of offense)? Are we going to find some reason to continue in our support for denial? Are we going to allow *deceptive philosophies* to continue their infiltration into the mainstream of teacher education (Colossians 4:2)?

Example: California Content Standards

It is worth noting that all grade levels are required to teach aspects of the impact religion (its rights, values, and/or principles) has had on the cultures and governments of the world. An excellent example of such a standard is 6.3.1 "Describe the origins and significance of Judaism as the first monotheistic religion based on the concept of one God who sets down moral laws for humanity (Los Angeles County Office of Education, 2003, p. 124).

Furthermore, of the 95 content standards, 33 address First Amendment issues (such as 8.1, 8.2.5, 11.1.2, 11.10.2,) and 30 refer to religion, religious rights, or constitutional concepts that support/guarantee religious freedoms (such as 6.3, 7.9, 10.1.1, 11.3.5).

Consider the standard—

6.7.6 Note the origins of Christianity in the Jewish messianic prophecies, and the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth as described in the New Testament of the Bible, and the contribution of St. Paul the Apostle to the definition and spread of Christian beliefs (e.g., belief in the Trinity, resurrection, salvation). (p.133)

Once again, standards help tell educators *what* to teach yet they do not instruct *how* to teach. More needs to be accomplished in fulfilling our task to educate wisely and promoting truths.

National Standards for Civics and Government

The public classroom teacher may also want to refer to the *National Standards for Civics and Government* (Center for Civic Education, 2003), the *National Standards for History* (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996), and the *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* (National Council for the Social Studies, 1994) for student instruction and lesson plan development. National standards further support the teaching about religion in America's public schools.

The booklet *Teaching About Religion* (Council on Islamic Education and First Amendment Center, 2000) contains a summary of national standards that refer to religion. In the *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* (National Council for the Social Studies, 1994), there are, "21 direct references to teaching about religion; these are mandates to study either religious beliefs in general or specific traditions" (p. 10). In the *National Standards for History* (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996), "direct references to teaching about religion, both general and specific to each tradition, number 158 and are evenly distributed across the eras" (p. 10). In the *National Standards for Civics and Government* (Center for Civic Education, 2003) "45 general and specific references discuss religion in private life, cite laws concerning religious discrimination and the right to freedom of religion, and mention the benefits of diversity" (p. 13). Finally, *Building a History Curriculum* (The Bradley Commission Report on History in the Schools, 1998) states that there are, "56 general and specific references to religion, concentrated in the first four eras (cultures, intercommunication, developments, and global)" (p. 11). All of these documents (standards) together offer significant educational support and professional instructional reasons to teach about religion in the public school setting (Clayton, 1999).

What's Available?

The Tool(s)

8-Step Quick Reference Guide® (now being used by instructional leaders defining how to teach about religion and Judeo-Christian values) gives the instructor the processes and instructional insights into how to teach about religion without fear of litigation and criticism. Teachers can now *know how*, not just *know what* the courts have agreed to.

The *8-Step Quick Reference Guide*® is designed to tell the instructor how to teach about Judeo-Christian values, controversial themes and religious historical events. This systematic approach offers the instructor confidence, legal support and methodology for teaching controversial issues and topics of high moral/religious interest. The tool is

presently recommended and approved by many national litigation firms, educational groups and instructional leaders in America for use in a K-12 setting, as well as, in higher education classes.

The *8-Step Quick Reference Guide*® is an excellent tool not only for lesson plan design and implementation but, as well as, to use when conducting other educational programs, such as *Lest We Forget...In God We Trust In My America*® and the *Supplement Resource Guide* (stating the legal parameters and standards for teachers in each state in the nation) greatly enhances a teacher's ability and confidence to teach about religion. (A copy of the guide and program may be found at www.godwetrust.org).

Instructional Programs and Teacher Training

The California's *3R's Project* this summer offered training to public school teachers at two locations (one southern and one northern California) in their delivery of instructional materials about religion. It is free to all participants and each will receive a stipend of \$400.00 at completion of their training.

Freedom Forum, Charles Hayes non-profit organization, specializes in materials, instructional support and networking for educators to teach about religion.

Worldwide Christian Endeavors, a newly formed non-profit, will be marketing materials, DVD's, offering seminars, and assisting in training for the purpose of placing God back in the public school arena.

The U.S. Department of Justice is conducting seminars throughout the nation on the topic: *Protecting the Religious Freedom of All—Enforcement of Laws Protecting Religious Freedoms*. One may contact Special Counsel for Religious discrimination Eric Treene at the U.S. Department of Justice or go to the website www.FirstFreedom.org.

However the most significant and powerful program that places prayer, Bible reading and religious expression back in public school classroom is being implemented in 2007-08 school year. *Lest We Forget...In God We Trust In My America*® is a student competition that utilizes student presentations of historical events to enrich the history-social science curriculum for all grade levels in America's schools. It has either been endorsed or given a *stamp of approval* by ACLJ, ACLU, NEA, and many other national education organizations, as well as, most national litigation and religious groups.

Its purpose is to enable students to recognize First Amendment influences in American political, social, cultural, and historical life, and allow students to understand and demonstrate the importance and significance religion has played in American history.

It focuses on the protection of religious freedoms and their impact on American literature, historical/social events, musical expressions, and the personal lives of its citizens, as well as the importance and significance religion has contributed to these factors in America history.

The competition involves students choosing an historical event and then developing a presentation to address the historical content of the event. All student presentations must be presented in the same context, manner of delivery, and purpose of expression originally portrayed by the player(s), writer(s), or presenter(s). Students may present an historical drama or dance, produce a documentary, deliver a speech or prayer, sing or play a song, replicate religious architecture/symbolism, write a research paper or enact a debate, but all entrees must be historically accurate and demonstrated the same

expressed meaning as originally intended by the historical figure(s). Students must be sensitive and honorable to the context and original purpose, the style of delivery and historical setting, and the political impact and religious content (and its significance) intended by these Americans and their personal belief in *Lest We Forget...In God We Trust In My America*®. Each presentation must acknowledge the existence of God.

America's Battle of the Books® is another program that is gaining momentum in recent years. It is a voluntary reading incentive program for students in grades 4-12. The purpose is simply to encourage students to read good books and have fun while reading books. Students read books and come together to demonstrate their abilities and test their knowledge of the books they have read. The competitions are similar in style to the TV series *Family Feud*, but the structure and format of the competitions may vary depending on the needs, resources and personal preferences at various school sites or at the regional/state competition levels.

Students are given 30 books to read. Books are selected according to time proven great literature (classical award winning titles/authors) that contains moral values, interesting themes and high interest stories. Bible and other religious books are included in the lists each year.

A typical *Battle* is a full day tournament or game, like the *College Bowl*, in which students' teams earn points by answering questions about the books on the book list. Students are assigned to a team, given a mascot, and sent to their first round of the *Battle*. They play several rounds, each against a different team. At the end of the day, points are totaled and the two teams with the most points are invited to a *Grand Battle* with the other teams as their audience.

(When conducting a historical lesson, preparing students for a competition, or reading classical literature the *8-Step Quick Reference Guide*® is a tool that will guide the instructor in proper methodology while conducting an instructional learning process.)

Conclusion

Teachers can now (with confidence) teach about religion. Teachers may pray in front of their students, read portions of the Bible and require students to do the same, as well as, learn verses for tests. Teachers can state the importance and significance of religion in America—this can all be done with the approval of religious, educational and litigation groups. The teacher is not alone or venerable, however, courage and correctness is required.

What is important is a teacher, mentor, professor or instructional aide can now know how to address religious themes and Judeo-Christian values; navigate controversial subjects and Christian thought; and apply key historical issues and conservative religious philosophy to current trends. They can do this, feeling confident that students will now have the opportunity to learn and grow in moral judgment, discover critical thought processes, and find support in knowing that *doing the right thing* has and will always be good for themselves and others—all within the context of teaching about Judeo-Christian values.

What is the truth and our rationale for advancing this critical change? Our religious freedom is at stake. It is our religious freedoms; they are the reason for teaching about religion. If we not vigilant, intelligent and supportive of each other's effort, then

truth will continue to be denied and deception allowed to rein in our classrooms, schools and universities.

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