

Religious Education in United States' State Schools

Gabriel Moran

Two facts about the United States are widely acknowledged. First, on any scale of national religiosity (belief in God, prayer, attendance at religious services), the United States ranks near the top; second, there is a scandalous ignorance of religion, both a lack of knowledge of an individual's own religion and the religion of others. This combination is dangerous when a president can plunge the country into war under the cover of religious rhetoric. Carey McWilliams (2003) has written, "In an era when religion and morals are less a matter of habits and givens, religious education is a critical part of civic education; secularity calls for schooling in the sacred" (p. 154).

The Problem

A major part of the problem is that a comprehensive religious education does not exist. Furthermore, there is no discussion of religious education in the public arena. When religious education is referred to, it is assumed to be the task of church, synagogue, mosque, and temple, but those institutions do not use "religious education" for the formation of their members. Each of the religions has its own intramural language of education. This focus of religious groups on the beliefs and practices of their own members is understandable. But where then are the other key elements of education in religious matters that today's enlightened citizen needs? The logical answer would seem obvious: schools that are called public.

The immediate reaction to this suggestion is an objection based on the belief that religious education in state schools is unconstitutional. But the Supreme Court has never addressed the topic of religious education. While some elements of religious education do not belong in state schools, the same is true of education in most of the important areas of life. The public school cannot and should not try to be the sole educator in politics, sex, morals, economics, and much else. Cooperation between

G. Moran (✉)

Department of Humanities and the Social Sciences, New York University, New York, NY, USA
e-mail: GM1405@gmail.com

the school and other educational agencies, starting with the family, is indispensable. The classroom is only a part of education, but it is a crucial part for today's citizenry.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, many leading educators and politicians recognized the need for something new – religious education. It would encompass the several major religions of the United States. Equally important, it was to include public education along with education by religious institutions. The impressive gathering of 400 national leaders in 1903 included 45 university presidents, prominent politicians, many public school administrators, and religious officials. The ambitious project of the Religious Education Association was “to inspire the educational forces of our country with the religious ideal; to inspire the religious forces of our country with the educational ideal” (Harper, 1903, pp. 230–240).

For a variety of reasons this religious education remained an unrealized ideal. At its earliest stage of development, the Religious Education Association absorbed the assumptions of liberal Protestantism, something that tended to drive away Roman Catholics, Jews, and conservative Protestants. Later, it was the economic depression in the 1930s that undermined hopes for the “professionalization” of religious education in both church and public schools. And then the reaction against liberal theology which hit the United States after World War II all but ended the movement. For the past 60 years, as the need for a religiously intelligent citizenry has become increasingly evident, there simply has been no discussion of religious education within which the public school would have its appropriate role of academic instruction in religion.

Legal Issues: Church and State

Before I look at the legal decisions concerning religion and the public school, it is necessary to briefly mention a different topic that has obstructed discussion in this area. The doctrine that is called “separation of church and state” is invariably brought up when religion in the public school is discussed. I would argue that the language of church and state has always been an inappropriate metaphor for the United States. When applied to the teaching of religion, the doctrine is an irrelevant distraction. We do need some careful distinctions for what is legally and academically appropriate, but they will not be found within the language of church and state.

Despite its inappropriateness, separation of church and state has become deeply embedded in the national consciousness during the past 70 years. Even people who should know better refer to this doctrine as if it were in the US Constitution and as if it has always been the framework within which the country has operated. When church and state is referred to, it is usually within the phrase “wall of separation between church and state.” There is usually a recognition that “wall” is a metaphor. Arguments that then ensue are all about the wall: Can it be lowered or raised? Is the wall being breached? Should the wall be permeable? and other metaphorical questions. What gets lost in such discussions is that the governing metaphor is not “wall of separation” but “wall of separation between church and state.” A wall that separates makes no sense unless church and state make sense.

The European language of church and state was inadequate when the United States was coming to birth in the eighteenth century. It is patently inaccurate in the twenty-first century. However, there are thousands of people in influential positions whose work is described as church and state issues; I have no illusions about the phrase disappearing. But at the least, it should be kept out of discussion of the teaching of religion.

The United States in its founding document did attempt something new. It tried to remove the federal government from involvement in people's practice of religion. To do so, the First Amendment refers to religion with two phrases, both negative. First, there would be no "establishment of religion"; the federal government would not give support to a religious institution. Second, the government would not prohibit the "free exercise" of one's religious life. These two principles were in tension with one another and were bound to sometimes conflict. James Madison (2002) acknowledged "that it may not be easy, in every possible case, to trace the line of separation between the rights of religion and the civil authority, with such distinctions, as to avoid collisions and doubts on unessential points" (p. 88). The line between civil authority at the national level and religious institutions did not immediately apply to the states of the United States.

Several states continued practices such as paying the salaries of Protestant ministers. The Baptists of Danbury Connecticut asked Thomas Jefferson for his opinion. In a letter of 1801, Jefferson introduced the phrase "wall of separation between church and state." A scholar who has studied in detail the writing and content of the letter concludes that it was "a statement delimiting the legitimate jurisdiction of the federal and state governments on matters pertaining to religion" (Dreisbach, 2002, p. 60). Baptists of the nineteenth century stuck to their antiestablishment claims that government should not regulate worship, compel payment of taxes in support of religion, and discriminate among religions. If Jefferson's letter had supported them, they would have published the letter, but they never did so (Hamburger, 2004).

It was not until 1870 when the language of church and state emerged in discussion of bible reading in the public school and the beginning of the Catholic school system. The separation of church and state seemed readymade to keep the Catholic church from receiving aid for its schools while the doctrine did not touch bible reading which "the people" rather than a church put into the public school (Hamburger, 2004). This point was made explicit regarding the "Blaine Amendment," defeated at the national level but passed in several states, which prohibited aid to religious schools but had no prohibition of bible reading in the public school (Hamburger, 2004).

If the reference for "church" was not clear in the late nineteenth century, it certainly was in the 1940s when a national system of Catholic schools lobbied for various kinds of aid, including bus transportation for the students. At that point, the language of church and state entered into Supreme Court decisions. Opponents of the Catholic church, such as Paul Blanshard and Protestants and Others United for the Separation of Church and State, celebrated the limiting of the Catholic church's power (Blanshard, 1950).

Many of the people who were delighted by the separation of church and state were stunned in the 1960s when the Supreme Court interpreted the doctrine as prohibiting prayer and bible reading in the public school. Their surprise was understandable. History and logic were on their side. Of course, a metaphor can have indefinite extension, but the Court has continued to extend a metaphor that was inappropriate from the beginning.

What are supposedly separated are two entities: “state” and church. The term state in the United States has a built-in ambiguity. It would be clearer to refer to civil authorities or governments of various kinds. But the ambiguity of “state” is completely overshadowed by the misleading use of “church.” Obviously, “church” only includes Christian bodies; there are hundreds of religious institutions in the United States that are not included. Jews, for example, are content with talking about church and state; it does not affect them except by a metaphorical stretch.

Even among Christians, the reference for “church” is not always clear. Protestants most often use the term for a local congregation, which is not the locus for church–state talk. Jefferson did not write his letter to the Baptist church (there is no such state or national institution) but to a Baptist association. When right-wing religious groups have engaged in political lobbying, they have been accused of violating the separation of church and state. Their logical response has been: We are not a church.

During the past 40 years the Court has continued to try to extend the metaphor of church–state beyond all logic. The concerns of Jews, Muslim, or Buddhists cannot be addressed as “church–state” issues. Supreme Court Justice William Rehnquist (1985) made this point in no uncertain terms: “The ‘wall of separation between church and state’ is a metaphor based on bad history, a metaphor which has proved useless as a guide to judging. It should be frankly and explicitly abandoned” (pp. 106–107). It should be noted that Rehnquist properly refers to the whole metaphor, not the wall of separation but the wall of separation between church and state. It is also noteworthy that this firm assertion by a Chief Justice is seldom quoted compared to some seemingly casual statements by judges that are quoted as dogmas.

The Supreme Court was undoubtedly correct in its 1960s decisions on religion. The government has no business sponsoring devotions in a multi-religious society. It also has no business deciding what subjects should be in the curriculum of schools. What is taught in the classroom and how it is taught should be decided by schoolteachers and school administrators not lawyers who are interested in church–state problems.

Legal Issues: Religious Education

The idea of religious education was still alive in the 1940s, as evidenced by a report from the American Council on Education. The Committee on Religion and Education was a distinguished group of educators that was chaired by F. Ernest Johnson. He was the primary author of the report, *The Relation of Religion to Public Education*. Published in 1947, the report formulated the issue quite well: “One must

either accept the patent inference that religious education is relatively unimportant and a marginal interest or assume that religion is a matter so remote from life that it admits of no integration with the general educational program" (p. 10). Referring to the emerging doctrine of church and state, the report insisted that "this doctrine may not be invoked to prevent public education from determining on its merits how the religious phases of the culture shall be recognized in the school program" (p. 25). Unfortunately, that is just what happened as legal jargon edged out genuine educational discussion.

A Supreme Court decision in 1948 forbade religious instruction that was given by various religious groups in public school buildings. In the decision and in two of the opinions, the term "religious education" is used to refer to this practice. Justice Robert Jackson admitted that the Supreme Court was in no position to solve the overall relation of religion and public education. He worried that the Court would become entangled in endless local disputes. While siding with the majority in this case, Jackson (1948) said, "One can hardly respect a system of education that would leave the student wholly ignorant of the currents of religious thought that move the world society for a part in which he is being prepared" (p. 203).

Jackson's rhetoric here seems to echo the report from the American Council of Education (1947, p. 19). As I discuss later, an even clearer connection to that report is found in the key decision of *Abington School District v. Schempp* in 1963. That decision, along with *Engel v. Vitale* in the previous year, set the direction for future discussions of religion and public education. *Engel* outlawed state-mandated prayer. *Abington* forbade reading the Bible and saying the Lord's Prayer in the public school. These two decisions angered many Protestant groups who had never dreamed that the separation of church and state could apply to the Our Father and the reading of scripture. A cartoon by Herb Block showed a man angrily throwing down a newspaper and shouting, "What do they expect us to do, pray at home"? Yes, that was pretty much the general idea.

In some regions of the United States, the Court's decisions were simply disregarded. In other places, there began an endless series of court cases concerning what does and does not count as a religious practice. Debate and controversy in this area are inevitable but lawyers rather than educators usually control the argument. That may have been predictable in this most litigious of countries. However, the courts, including the Supreme Court, do not have a clear idea of "religion" or any idea of religious education.

Efforts were made in the Congress to go around *Engel* and *Abington* with a Constitutional Prayer Amendment. It narrowly missed the needed two thirds majority in November, 1971. Interestingly, the opposition was led by Robert Drinan, a representative from Massachusetts and a Jesuit priest (as cited in Wood, 1984, p. 33). When the same issue resurfaced in 1984, the opposition was lead by another clergyman, Senator John Danforth, who said:

Prayer should not be cheapened. It must not be trivialized. . . .To many religious people God is not dependent on the Supreme Court or the Congress. Objects may be kept out of the classroom, chewing gum for example. God is not chewing gum. He is the Creator of Heaven and Earth. (As cited in DeFattore, 2004, p. 197)

A practice that has concerned the courts during the last decade has been the “posting of the ten commandments” in public places, especially in public schools (Moran, 2000, pp. 6–14). The school shooting at Columbine gave impetus to this movement. Liberals pushed for stricter gun control laws; conservative Christian groups seemed to think that students seeing a list of ten commandments on school property would dissuade shooters. Both the local supporters of the postings and the American Civil Liberties Union, their regular opponent in court, assume remarkable educational effect from what is posted on a school wall. The Supreme Court has attempted to make distinctions regarding when and how the ten commandments may be posted (Trigg, 2007, p. 226). This legal hair-splitting might make sense within a clear framework of religion and religious education, but that is what is lacking. Congress has stayed up all night debating prayer in school. What it has never discussed and lacks the language to raise the question, is the school doing with religion what schools are for, namely, to teach it.

The Meanings of Religion

For a meaning of religious education that would include teaching religion in state schools, one has to recognize the ambiguity of the term “religion.” The problem cannot be cured by a definition. Nietzsche said that any word that has a history cannot be defined. That is, no definition can cover the historical shifts in meaning of ancient terms, often resulting in sharply divergent meanings in the present.

“Religion” is a term coined by Cicero who boasted of the Romans that “in religion and the worship of the gods we are pre-eminent” (pp. 7–9). The Christian church took over the term, reshaping Cicero’s meaning. Augustine (1959) describes religion as existing from the beginning of the world and finding fulfillment in the “true religion” of the Christian church. Religion as meaning genuine devotion held the field until the sixteenth century. Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin still used *religio* for practices directed toward God. (Aquinas treats religion under the practice of justice (*Summa Theologica*, n. 81)).

A different meaning of “religion” emerged when “the Christian religion” (true devotion) was rocked by division, and opposing groups claimed to be the possessors of true religion. The first hint of tolerance after the Reformation is found in references to the “Catholic and Protestant religions.” Rather quickly, these two religions were folded into the “Christian religion” but “religion” used this way was now available to refer to Judaism, Islam, and, more doubtfully, to other groups. “Religion” has a western (or even Christian) bias but it is the best available word to try to encompass the beliefs, rituals, and codes of the institutions studied by historians, anthropologists, and sociologists.

This second meaning of “religion” has obvious roots in the first but there are stark oppositions as well. In the ancient meaning, religion was singular; genuine devotion was opposed to false. The modern meaning necessarily implies diversity even when used in the singular. A reference to “the Christian religion” today,

unlike its use in the fifteenth century, carries comparison of one religion to others in its class. This sketch of the history of "religion" might be merely a curiosity except that the two meanings continue to appear in the present. As regularly happens with other important old words, the second meaning did not replace the first but instead created a word of rich ambiguity (Bossy, 1985, p. 170; Harrison, 1990, p. 185).

In discussions of religion and public education, the two meanings are regularly conflated leading to endless confusion. The ancient meaning of "religion" lives on in referring to devotions and practices in a generalized way, even though no one actually practices religion; they practice *a* religion. They follow the gospel, observe Passover, pray facing Mecca. "Religion" can also refer to the historical systems that have some but not all of the same characteristics. Religion(s) in this sense cries out for intellectual inquiry so as to relate religion(s) to other important aspects of the world.

The subject matter for academic curricula is any human phenomenon that has a tradition of rational inquiry and a universe of discourse. "Religion" in the second sense has better academic credentials than many other subjects in the school. "Sociology," for example, was coined in the 1840s; psychology, as an estranged relative of philosophy, is mainly a twentieth-century product. It is true that "religion" cannot shake off its ambiguity. That ambiguity in the meaning of religion as an academic subject is similar to other subjects that do not end in *-ology* (e.g., art, history, mathematics). "History," can be the name of actual events in the past. That does not prevent the word history from being used for the academic study of those events. Of course, "religion" raises suspicions that "history" does not.

The discussion of religion in state schools continues to be a confusing mess. The periodic headline "Does God belong in the classroom?" is a silly if not blasphemous question. As Danforth said in the above quotation, a discussion based on that question trivializes both meanings of religion. In a Supreme Court decision of 2004, allowing "under God" to remain in the pledge of allegiance, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor defended the phrase on the basis that it is "ceremonial Deism" which "cannot be seen as a serious invocation of God" (*Newdow v. U.S. Congress*, 2000, p. 597; 2004, pp. 2321–2327). We do not need ceremonial deism in the classroom; we do need serious intellectual encounter with religion(s).

A Comprehensive Religious Education

Religious education today would have to include two distinct parts: formation in the practice of a particular religion (or a personal choice to abstain from such practice) and some minimum competence in understanding the phenomenon of religion, comparing the religion closest to home with other religions. The first element of religious education does not belong in the state school; the second element is needed there. Without a language of religious education, including recognition of religion as a subject for intellectual inquiry, the discussion of religion in state schools becomes

bogged down either in fighting over devotional practices or by including religion in ways that avoid trying to teach an understanding of it.

In recent years there has been considerable enthusiasm for “religious literacy.” There is little opposition to the idea but little success in achieving literacy. Even Richard Dawkins in his assault on religion bemoans the fact that students cannot recognize biblical references in Shakespeare (Dawkins, 2006, pp. 340–344). Stephen Prothero (2007) in *Religious Literacy* has 90 pages of religious references that citizens should be able to recognize. Such factual knowledge might be desirable but it is not likely to come from piling up facts about religion. Surveying all the religions of the world can be a way to avoid actually inquiring into the complexity of the logic and the history of any one religion or, for example, understanding the Christian religion in relation to Islam. Prothero, like other writers on the topic, repeatedly says that the Supreme Court has pronounced the teaching of religion in state schools to be unconstitutional. That assumption has been the unchallenged legal dogma that prevents an educational discussion of teaching religion in state schools.

Teach and Teach About

The supposed proscription of teaching religion is derived from the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Abington v. Schempp* (1963). Two statements from that ruling – one by Justice Arthur Goldberg and one by Justice Tom Clarke – are cited in almost every discussion of religion and public education. The combination of the two passages results in a confusion based on the call to put religion into the curriculum together with the insistence that religion cannot be taught. It is no wonder that only a small group of people feel at home in the convoluted language that is used.

Stephen Prothero’s book, *Religious Literacy*, embodies the logical conflict. He says that “many states and school districts now have standards and policies that at least in theory carve out a place for religion in public school curricula” (2007, p. 131). At the same time, he insists that the teacher cannot legally teach this curricular subject. There is confusion, he says, “about the crucial distinction between theology and religious studies – between what the Supreme Court Justice Arthur Goldberg called the “teaching of religion” (which is unconstitutional) and the “teaching about religion (which is not)” (p. 53). Prothero here equates teaching religion and teaching theology, which would be news to professors of religion in universities. What one must do with religion, according to Prothero, is “teach about” it, but not teach it. Not surprisingly, most school administrators and school teachers find this contrast an unworkable puzzle which they prefer to avoid. As Martin Marty has said, “instead of teaching about religion, they teach around it.” I think that is exactly what should be expected.

The strange dichotomy of teach religion versus teach about religion is lifted from a comment in Justice Goldberg’s concurring opinion in *Abington v. Schempp* (1963). What Goldberg said was: “It seems clear to me that the court would recognize the propriety of teaching about religion as distinguished from the teaching

of religion in the public school.” That statement is not exactly a firm and definitive ruling by the Supreme Court. This one justice says that he thinks the “court would recognize the propriety” of one but not the other of what he contrasts. Goldberg expresses a tentative opinion that the court would find propriety in teaching about religion. He need not have been so tentative on that point. A teacher can teach about anything that happens to show up in the course of teaching his or her subject in the curriculum. One can teach about mass murder in sociology, sadomasochism in psychology, or cannibalism in anthropology. Religion shows up in all those places and many others, and then, obviously, one has to teach about it or around it.

The problem is not an approval of teaching about religion. It is that Goldberg contrasted it to the teaching of religion. The affirming of the first was connected to the negating of the second. Ever since then, it has usually been assumed that this distinction is a neat and clear dichotomy. Instead of challenging or at least questioning this legal formula, educators set out to put religion into the curriculum while avoiding teaching it. Pennsylvania and Florida worked at early projects that soon met with obstacles. States continue to work within impossible restrictions and with nervous insistence on words such as secular, neutral, objective, and equal.

In California, “Guidelines for Teaching about Religion” say that a teacher can instruct about religion but can emphasize no particular religion. Apparently, every time a teacher mentions one religion he or she must refer to every other religion. But a teacher cannot seriously examine religion without examining a particular religion. A course on sixteenth-century European history would presumably have to emphasize what happened to and within the Christian religion. In one California case, the teacher, Stephen Williams, used disputed material that highlighted the role of Christians in the nation’s founding. The lawyer from the Alliance Defense Fund reasonably noted that “You’re not going to find a lot of Muslim Founding Fathers” (Boyer, 2005, p. 71).

From what was published about this California case, I think that the teacher was in fact proselytizing. He made some good points about the illogic of the state’s guidelines but that does not prove that his own position was academically sound. As a recently converted Evangelical Christian, Williams’ “supplementary material” was skewed toward making the case for Christianity. Some people inclined to be evangelical preachers are attracted to programs for “teaching about religion.” They figure that they can get their message across while going about and around religion. If states exclude on principle teachers professionally prepared to teach religion in an academically sound manner, the field is left open to people who see the classroom as a pulpit.

Where did Goldberg’s strange contrast come from? Most likely it was directly or indirectly from F. Ernest Johnson. In the 1947 report, “The Relation of Religion to Public Education,” Johnson made reference to teaching about religion. *Time Magazine* (1947) summarized that document as saying, “The committee proposed to teach about religion, but not to teach religion itself in the schools.” Actually, that contrast is not explicit in the document but was deduced by *Time*. Their insertion of the word “itself” is to make clear that religion should not be the subject of inquiry. In 1951, a report from the Educational Policies Commission, *Moral and Spiritual*

Values in the Public Schools, says, “The public school can teach objectively about religion without advocating or teaching any religious creed” (see Johnson’s comments in Johnson, 1951). What “teaching objectively” means can be debated at length but one cannot quarrel with the prohibition of “advocating a religious creed” in the public schools.

Johnson used the distinction of “teach” and “teach about” in other essays and books. In responding to the question of whether “studying about religion is not studying religion, he says that is true but “studying about is the beginning of study” (1940, p. 188). That is, Johnson made a distinction within a single process: the way into understanding something is to become acquainted with some external facts about it. Unintentionally, Johnson’s description of steps in the process of understanding may have helped to create a dichotomy of teach religion versus teach about religion.

Johnson bears more responsibility for a related contrast that shows up in the *Abington* opinion. In addition to confusion about the meaning of religion, the misunderstanding of “teach religion” is based on a stereotype of teaching. In this country, learning and studying are effusively praised but teaching is suspect. Not many people go so far as Ivan Illich’s (1971) formula that to teach is to corrupt. But there are authors who, while having no experience in academic teaching, assume that school teachers are big people telling little people what to think. The Hollywood image of an ideal school teacher is a man standing on a desk and giving an impassioned sermon on the meaning of life to students who are rapt in attention. The actual work of classroom teaching is more prosaic, trying to provoke people to think carefully about something they have read for that day’s meeting.

The insistence on “teach about” instead of “teach” is to keep school teachers from telling students what to believe. “Teach” when applied to religion is assumed to mean indoctrinating children into the particular beliefs of the teacher. That makes one wonder what people assume is done when teachers teach history, economics, or literature? Statements that are routinely made about teaching religion are a slander on the profession of school teaching.

Study But Not Teach

The uneasiness with “teach” leads authors to talk about “studying religion” instead of “teaching religion.” Students are allowed to study religion but teachers are not allowed to teach religion. This way of speaking shows up in Supreme Court decisions and in the literature of the last 40 years. The use of “study” to avoid “teach” is found in this widely quoted passage in *Abington* by Justice Tom Clarke: “Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education may not be effected consistently with the first amendment” (1963, p. 203).

If he is talking about presenting religion objectively, that sounds like he is talking about teaching. But he studiously avoids the term teaching and refers to the

study of religion. It is easy enough to imagine students studying religion or anything else they fancy. The question is whether teachers can teach religion. On that point, Justice Clarke slides around the issue, leaving to Justice Goldberg the opinion that the teachers cannot teach religion. The *Abington* opinion of the Supreme Court, therefore, is that in state schools studying religion is constitutional but teaching religion is not. Religion should be in the curriculum, presented objectively, but it cannot be taught.

As was true of these two Supreme Court statements, it is common practice elsewhere to praise the study of religion while avoiding references to the teaching of religion. The American Council on Education report was one source but not the sole source of the Clarke–Goldberg contrast. However, what is noteworthy about the report on this point was that the authors were clearly aware of why people say “study” rather than “teach.” They address directly the nature of academic teaching, something actually rare in educational literature. Their advocacy of religion in the curriculum clearly entails that the teacher would teach it. But in the end they back away from defending what they know to be the correct position.

A paragraph in the Conclusion of the document embodies their inconsistency. The first sentence reads, “Fundamental to the proposals we have set forth is an interpreting of ‘teaching’ which distinguishes it from indoctrination in the ordinary sense of that word” (Committee on Religious Education, 1947, p. 51). Their distinction between “teach” and “indoctrinate” is certainly acceptable, although to some people not obvious. But if the Committee’s use of “teaching” is fundamental to what they are proposing, they should have vigorously defended it. Indeed, in defense of every school teacher in the public and private schools of this country, their distinction should have been insisted upon. However, the last sentence of the same paragraph says, “We have frequently used the phrase ‘the study of religion’ instead of ‘teaching religion’ because the latter so commonly implies indoctrination.” That is precisely why they should have insisted on what they have said in the first sentence.

Using “study of religion” for “teaching of religion” is not the substitution of a synonym; it is giving in to the stereotype which they know is the obstacle to their proposals being heard. The committee failed to stand by their convictions and became part of the confusion that swirls about the issue of teaching religion to this day.

Conclusion

Any attempt to revivify the twentieth-century project of religious education may seem to be a hopeless undertaking. However, just as the term was falling out of a public use in the United States, it was being given a legal meaning in the United Kingdom. Religious education in England and Wales was to include religious instruction in every state and county school (Wedderspoon, 1964). For reasons quite different from those in the United States, religious education in the United Kingdom

has not lived up to the hopes of those who adopted the term in 1944. Nevertheless, it has retained its meaning to include state schools and there is a substantial body of literature on religious education in the state school.

Today there is some fairly serious discussion of religious education within the European Union and especially within the Council of Europe. One of England's leading religious educators writes:

Issues about the study of religion in public education are being discussed internationally as never before. The discussions include specialists in religion, but also many outside the professional field of religious education – politicians, civil servants, NGOs and other groups within civil society as well as educators concerned with fields such as citizenship and intercultural education. (Jackson, 2006)

In other words, the Council of Europe is engaged in a project similar to what the United States started in 1903.

British usage of “religious education” had tended to place the whole of it within the state school. The result was that the work of church, synagogue, mosque, and temple was excluded from the meaning of religious education. The British way of speaking is now challenged by assumptions in the usage of other European nations (Jackson, Miedema, Weisse, & Willaime, 2007). The United States, given its religious diversity and its commitment to schools, should be a leading participant in these discussions but it is absent. The United Nations has expressed concern with religious education, a worldwide religious education that is still in its formative stage (*International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, 1966; see also Moran, 2006).

Ironically, a strong impetus for European discussion of religious education was the attack on the United States in September, 2001. The question now is whether the United States will join the rest of the world in developing adequate programs of religious education. For religious institutions, the need should be obvious. And for the country as a whole, if it is to confront its political, ecological, and economic problems, the academic examination of religion is a needed part of education.

References

- Abington School District v. Schempp*. (1963). 374 U.S. 203.
- Aquinas, T. (1265–1274). *Summa Theologica*, 2a, 2ae, 81. 4; 2a, 2a, 49–55.
- Augustine. (1959). *Of true religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Blanshard, P. (1950). *American freedom and catholic power*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Bossy, J. (1985). *Christianity in the West*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Boyer, P. (2005, March 21). *Jesus in the classroom* (p. 71). New Yorker.
- Cicero, M. T. (n.d.). *The nature of the gods*. Book II. Retrieved October, 2008, from <http://thriceholly.net/Texts/Cicero2.html>
- Committee on Religion and Education. (1947). *The relation of religion to public education*. Washington: American Council on Education.
- Dawkins, R. (2006). *The god delusion*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Delfattore, J. (2004). *The fourth R: Conflicts over religion in America's public schools*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Dreisbach, D. (2002). *Thomas Jefferson and the wall of separation between church and state*. New York: New York University Press.
- Educational Policies Commission. (1951). *Moral and spiritual values in the public schools*. Washington: Educational Policies Commission.
- Engel v. Vitale*. (1962). 370 U.S. 421.
- Hamburger, P. (2004). *Separation of church and state*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Harper, W. R. (1903). The scope and purpose of the new organization. In *Proceedings of the First Convention* (pp. 230–240). Chicago: Religious Education Association.
- Harrison, P. (1990). *'Religion' and the religions in the English enlightenment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Illich, I. (1971). *Deschooling society*. New York: Harper and Row.
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. (1966). Retrieved October, 2008, from OHCHR Website: http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_ccpr.htm
- Jackson, R. (1948). *McCullum v. Board of Education*. 333 U.S. 203.
- Jackson, R. (2006). European institutions and the contribution of studies of religious diversity to education for democratic citizenship. *International Seminar on Religious Education and Values*. Amsterdam: ISREV.
- Jackson, R., Miedema, S., Weisse, W., & Willaime, J.-P. (Eds.). (2007). *Religion and education in Europe: Developments, contexts and debates*. Münster: Waxmann.
- Johnson, F. E. (1940). *The social gospel reexamined*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Johnson, F. E. (1951). Moral and spiritual values in the public schools. *Religious Education*, 46(4), 199.
- McWilliams, C. (2003). American democracy and the politics of faith. In H. Hecl and W. McClay (Eds.), *Religion returns to the public square*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Moran, G. (2000). Politicizing the ten commandments. *Living Light*, 36(Summer), 6–14.
- Moran, G. (2006). Religious education and international understanding. In D. Bates (Ed.), *Religion, education and society* (pp. 38–48). London: Routledge.
- Newdow v. U.S. Congress*. (2000). 292 F. 3D 597 (9th Cir.).
- O'Connor, S. Day. (2004). *Newdow v. U.S. Congress*. 124 S. Ct. at 2321–2327.
- Prothero, S. (2007). *Religious literacy*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Rehnquist, W. (1985). *Wallace v. Jaffree*. 472 U.S. 38, 92, 106–107.
- Through the Wall of Ignorance. (1947, April 21). *Time Magazine*. Retrieved October 2008, from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,853119-1,00.html>
- Trigg, R. (2007). *Religion in public life*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wedderspoon, A. G. (1964). *Religious education 1944–1984*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Wood, J. (1984). Religion and education in American church-state relations. In *Religion, the state and education*. Waco: Baylor University Press.