

## Resources for Teaching about Religion

Charles C. Haynes

of the Curriculum Task Force of the National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools (1989) suggests yet another approach.

### Obtaining Better Texts

In study after study (for example, Beck and McKeown 1988, Davis et al. 1986, Gagnon 1987, Larkins et al. 1987, Sewall 1987, and Vitz 1986), reviewers have found textbooks for elementary and junior high school social studies wanting. They have deplored their sameness and mediocrity and their violations of basic features of organization and writing that cognitive psychologists demonstrate are essential for learning. High school texts are more varied, but many are also marred by superficial and trivialized content, bland writing, lack of vivid and stirring historical narratives that would grip students' attention and bring history alive, avoidance of controversial issues, and lack of balanced and sound historiography.

A number of resources can help teachers in their review and selection of texts. *Social Studies Review*, a new journal of the American Textbook Council, provides a continuing program of textbook reviews by authorities qualified to judge both the content and the teaching merit of texts. The National Center for History in the Schools is presently compiling authoritative reviews from recent years and will undertake a review of widely used texts over the next two years.

**Textbooks can and will improve, but only if schools withhold their purchase of inadequate texts presently on the market.**

Silence about religion is being broken in classrooms throughout the United States. As more and more states mandate study about religions, particularly in the social studies, supervisors and teachers now have support for including religion in the curriculum.

Accompanying this new opportunity, however, is an urgent need for resources and for teacher education. Though much more needs to be done to meet the growing demand, a number of good resources are already available for teaching about religion in ways that are constitutionally permissible and educationally sound. For example, although most social studies textbooks have seriously neglected the role of religion in history and culture, three new publications will help teachers fill this gap:

1. *Living With Our Deepest Differences: Religious Liberty in a Pluralistic Society* is a new curriculum from the Williamsburg Charter Foundation, a non-partisan, nonsectarian, nonprofit project concerned with the place of religion in public life. The material is being written for three separate school levels—upper elementary, junior high, and senior high. The lessons address the history and significance of the First Amendment Religious Liberty clauses and their decisive contribution to individual and communal liberty and to American democracy. The curriculum seeks to deepen each student's appreciation of the principles of religious liberty for peoples of all faiths or none, and to establish a strong civic commitment to the ground rules by which all citizens can contend robustly but civilly over religious differences in public life. The curriculum, now being tested, will be ready for distribution in 1990. For more information, write:

Williamsburg Charter Foundation  
1250 24th St., N.W., Suite 270  
Washington, DC 20037.

2. *Religion in American History: What to Teach and How* by Charles Haynes (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development 1990) contains facsimiles of original source documents pertaining to religious influences in American history, with background information and teaching suggestions. Part one describes the major religious influences in U.S. history, based on the scholarship of Professor Timothy Smith of the Johns Hopkins University and an ASCD panel of teachers and historians. Part two offers guidelines and methods for teaching about religion and religious liberty, using historical documents.

3. *Pathways to Pluralism: Religious Issues in American Culture* by Robert Spivey, Edwin Gaustad, and Rodney Allen (Addison-Wesley 1989), which comes with a teacher's guide, is designed as a supplement for high school courses in social studies, humanities, or religion. In discussing the role of religion in American history and culture, the text makes extensive use of primary sources.

For more information about other excellent resources for teaching about religion in the public schools, write:

National Council on Religion  
and Public Education (NCRPE)  
Attention: Charles Kniker  
N155 Lagomarcino Hall  
Iowa State University  
Ames, IA 50011.

In addition to teachers' resources, NCRPE also publishes *Religion and Public Education*, a journal reporting the latest information about curriculum materials, teacher education, and public policy on religion and public education.

Americans United Research Foundation publishes an instructional guide for teaching about religious freedom in U.S. history and offers a summer institute and regional workshops for teachers and supervisors on the history and significance of religious liberty and on teaching about religions in public schools. Free copies of "Religion in the Public School Curriculum: Questions and Answers," a brochure sponsored by 16 major educational and religious organizations, are available from the foundation. For information, write:

Religious Freedom Education Project  
Americans United Research Foundation (AURF)  
900 Silver Spring Ave.  
Silver Spring, MD 20910.

World Religions Curriculum Development Center offers workshops for teaching about religions in secondary schools and has developed "Religion in Human Culture," a comprehensive curriculum on the major world religions. For information, write:

World Religions Curriculum Development Center  
Wes Bodin and Lee Smith, Co-Directors  
St. Louis Park Public Schools  
Minneapolis, MN 55426.

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