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## Religion in the classroom

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RELIGION IN THE CLASSROOM

A Thesis

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Designation

University Honors with Distinction

Allison Kay Carey

University of Northern Iowa

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“The history of man is inseparable from the history of religion.”<sup>1</sup>

When I came to the University of Northern Iowa to become a teacher, I knew I would be getting the best education the state had to offer. One year ago I took a class that showed me that my education and that of public high schools have one major hole in their curriculum: religion. Looking back at my education in high school I was taught very little about religion. Most of my religious knowledge came from college, reading books, and other forms of media. After taking “Religions of the World”, a general overview of world religions, I decided to take a “Religion of America”. I went in thinking that it would be an overview of American religious history, but it proved to be so much more than that. It would end up being the best class I had ever taken at UNI. The class was set up with future teacher in mind. We learned about religions in America, civil religion and, most importantly, religion in public schools. As a class we reviewed some of the major Supreme Court cases that established the premises for religion in a public school setting. This class opened my eyes to the lack of religious education in high school and the lack of training given in college for social studies teachers, especially when it comes to understanding the laws around teaching about religion and how to do it correctly, since there is a lack of resources and pre-made lesson plans for teachers to reference and use within their classroom.

This lack of education about religion led to a decline in the nation’s religious literacy. Historian Stephan Prothero defined religious literacy as “the ability to understand and use...the basic building blocks of religious traditions—their key terms, symbols, doctrines, practices,

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<sup>1</sup> LexisNexis, “Engel ET. Al. v. Vitale ET.AL.”; available from [http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.lib.uni.edu/us/Inacademic/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21\\_T8897792083&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29\\_T8897792086&cisb=22\\_T8897792085&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=6443&docNo=1](http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.lib.uni.edu/us/Inacademic/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T8897792083&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T8897792086&cisb=22_T8897792085&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=6443&docNo=1); Internet; accessed 13 December 2009.

sayings, characters, metaphors, and narratives.”<sup>2</sup> Diane L. Moore, Director of Harvard’s Program in Religion and Secondary Education, sees religious literacy as the “ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses.”<sup>3</sup> Both of these definitions describe what the average person should know about religion, so why do most people not know these things about the major religions of the world? The answer is simple: lack of education.

### **Why Study Religion?**

When most people hear that one wants to increase the study of religions in a public high school most think that it will infringe on the constitutional rights of the students, but this is not the case. “Teaching about religion in the schools is often confused with the teaching of religion, or religious advocacy and indoctrination.”<sup>4</sup> This quotation describes why the study of religion has been left out, but it is imperative to understand why the study of religion is so important in a 21<sup>st</sup> century education. Diane L. Moore gave five main reasons why she felt students need to study religion. The first is that it is an important part of the human experience.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, it gets students to identify and question normal cultural assumptions since it will give them a new perspective and ideas. This will help arouse critical thinking and reflection.<sup>6</sup> The third reason is that ignorance of different religions promotes misunderstanding and decreases respect for those who are different.<sup>7</sup> The fourth reason is that it makes understanding much of human history and

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—And Doesn’t* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Diane L. Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach to the Study of Religion in Secondary Education*(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 56.

<sup>4</sup> Charles C. Haynes and Oliver Thomas, *Finding Common Ground: A Guide to Religious Liberty in Public Schools* (Nashville: First Amendment Center, 2002), 34.

<sup>5</sup> Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy*, 28.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

culture very difficult, since they do not have such an important element to both.<sup>8</sup> The last reason is that knowing about different religions is essential for the functioning of our democracy in an increasing pluralistic age.<sup>9</sup> Students will also increase their intelligence, critical thinking skills, and multiculturalism since they will be given new views and understandings of the world.<sup>10</sup> All of these reasons would help students increase their religious literacy and help them achieve success both inside and outside the classroom.

### **Background**

To fully understand how the lack of religion within the curriculum came about, it is important to study the evolution of religious education in America. This evolution has gone from a school system saturated with sectarian curriculum based on Protestant Christianity to one having no religion in public schools. It is important to see the evolution so we can push forward and bring religion back in the classroom without sectarian biases.

#### Religious Education in Colonial America

Education in America during the colonial period was centered in the home and focused on the Bible. The Bible served as the textbook from which children learned to read, learned how to be good Christians and citizens, learned morals and values, and most importantly learned the doctrine of their denomination. In the 1647, Massachusetts Bay Colony passed a law that would require towns of fifty households or more to appoint teachers who would instruct students in reading and writing, and towns of one hundred households were to establish grammar schools.<sup>11</sup> These laws were supposed to help “ward off the efforts of ‘that old deluder, Satan, to keep men

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>11</sup> Prothero, *Religious Literacy*, 87.

from the knowledge of the Scriptures.’’<sup>12</sup> By the 1870s, every colony except for Rhode Island had passed such laws.<sup>13</sup> Soon after these laws were passed, the main location of education shifted from the home to schools. These schools continued to use the Bible as their main teaching tool. Biblical examples were used for teaching math, reading, writing, and almost every other subject that would have been taught. This form of teaching, along with the education they were getting from the churches, allowed students to have a thorough understanding of biblical stories and their denominational doctrine. One example of this was the *New England Primer*. This early textbook was a huge success when it was first published in 1690. The *New England Primer* included lessons on spelling, scripture reading, and catechisms. This trend would continue until the mid-nineteenth century when the Bible wars would change the view of religion in education.

#### Religious Education after the Mid-Nineteenth Century

The mid-nineteenth century saw many new changes. Urbanization, massive immigration, and industrialization all changed America, including the education system. During this time, the Bible wars raged between Protestants and Catholics. This “war” started after Catholics began to oppose the Protestantism and anti-Catholicism that was being taught in public schools. Catholics were also upset by the use of only a Protestant Bible within the schools and not other Bibles, such as the Catholic one. These arguments would ignite into full-scale rioting, especially in Philadelphia. To calm the fighting going on in the streets over religion in education, many saw the only solution was to take out religion all together. In 1869 and 1870 Cincinnati’s board of education passed a bill that outlawed hymn singing, religious education, and Bible reading in its

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

public schools.<sup>14</sup> Almost all other public school districts would soon follow suit, which is how we are currently at a place where learning about religion in public schools is practically non-existent.<sup>15</sup>

### The Constitution and Court Cases

Two big factors that have played into religion's place in public high school curriculum are the Constitution and legal premises established through numerous key court cases. All of the court cases that had such a huge impact on religion in public schools derived from one part of the first amendment within the United States Constitution, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; . . ."<sup>16</sup> These two clauses, the establishment clause and the free exercise clause, have paved the way for religious freedom and maintaining the separation of church and state.

There have been numerous cases dealing with religion in schools that have been tried within the Supreme Court. These cases have established what is constitutional when it comes to religion in schools. Two such important cases, *Abington v. Schempp* and *Engel v. Vitale* will be highlighted here. These two cases have had a major impact on public schools and religion.

In 1962, Steven Engel and other parents who had children attending the public school in Hyde Park, New York, set in motion a case against the school. The case was based on a school prayer that was recited every day before classes began. This prayer was written by the New York Board of Regents who felt it was nondenominational and made it a voluntary action.

"Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee, and beg Thy blessings upon us,

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<sup>14</sup> Prothero, *Religious Literacy*, 123.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

<sup>16</sup> The Constitution of the United States of America, "First Amendment"; available from <http://www.usconstitution.net/const.html>; Internet; accessed 27<sup>th</sup> January 2010.



our teachers, and our country,” was the prayer in question.<sup>17</sup> The Court ruled in favor of Engel et. al and felt the prayer, even though it was voluntary, violated the Establishment Clause. This ruling was a first. The Supreme Court had never ruled the sponsorship of prayer in public schools as unconstitutional.

In 1963, another major case came to the Supreme Court. This case began when Edward Schempp took the Abington School District in Pennsylvania to court because he was against his children having to hear and read portions of the Bible during class. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of Schempp and saw this as a violation of the Establishment Clause. The Court decided that public schools can not favor one religion over another, in this case Protestant Christianity. Even though the Justices voted against Abington, they still affirmed teaching about religion within public schools was acceptable, but Justice Clark made it clear that “the exercises here do not fall into those categories. They are religious exercises....”<sup>18</sup> This case would have a major impact and set a premise for teaching religion over preaching religion.

After seeing court cases like these going to the Supreme Court, it would make sense that many would start to believe that religion has no place in a public school, even if it is for educational purposes. The fear of being involved in a trial like this could also make teachers shy away from even touching subjects that are religious in nature. Without proper training it can seem scary, but with the proper training social studies teachers could teach about religion within their classrooms and not worry about breaking the First Amendment.

### **The Problem**

The major problem I have decided to explore, and to which I offer possible solutions, has two parts. The first is the lack of religious education in public high schools. The second is the

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<sup>17</sup> LexisNexis, “Engel ET. Al. v. Vitale ET.AL.”.

<sup>18</sup> LexisNexis, “School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania, ET AL. v. Schempp ET AL.”

lack of training given to current and future teachers so they are able to teach religion in a public school and still abide by the Constitution. This includes a lack of education about religion in the social studies and history education programs and little to no help for current educators to become trained to teach religious subjects in school in a constitutional way. It is important to look further into both areas where the problem exists.

### High School

To get a better understanding of how many high schools in Iowa offer courses in religion, I decided to randomly pick twenty schools to see what kind of courses they offered in religion or that taught an aspect of it.<sup>19</sup> I found of the twenty schools, five had classes that dealt with religion and one of the five had offered a “Religions of the World” course. The courses that only included religion in their description were mainly world history courses, current event courses, and sociology courses. I was unable to find out how intensively or thoroughly these courses dealt with religion and religious issues.

“This course is an introduction to the academic study of the major religions of the world (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Indian, Islam, and Judaism). This class explores what religion is and what it means to different people. Topics include such things as religious institutions and their social context, historical development, and a comparative analysis of religious organizations and behaviors.”<sup>20</sup>

I feel it is important for students to become better educated in world religions in order to succeed in an increasingly multicultural world in which they will be forced to deal with people of other

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<sup>19</sup> The twenty schools I researched were: Muscatine High School, Cedar Rapids Prairie High School, Spencer High School, Ankeny High School, Baxter High School, Clear-Creek Amana High School, Decorah High School, English Valleys High School, Forest City High School, Grundy Center High School, HLV High School, Indianola High School, Postville High School, Abraham Lincoln(Council Bluffs) High School, Lone Tree High School, Aplington-Parkersburg High School, Roland-Story High School, Boyden-Hull High School, Villisca High School, and Albia High School.

<sup>20</sup> Council Bluffs Community School District Webpage, “Council Bluffs Community School District High School Program of Studies 2009-2010”; available from [http://www.cbcsd.org/schools/alhs/files/CBCSD-program\\_of\\_studies2009-10.pdf](http://www.cbcsd.org/schools/alhs/files/CBCSD-program_of_studies2009-10.pdf); Internet; accessed 14 February 2010.

faiths. Associate Supreme Court Justice Judge Tom Clark felt the same way in his majority opinion on *Abington v. Schempp*(1963).

“...one’s education is not complete without a study in comparative religion or 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....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.”<sup>21</sup>

It seems that a major factor in the lack of religious education in public high schools in Iowa might be due to lack of training for teachers that are currently teaching within the school and the lack of pre-made lesson plans that are constitutional and legal. Most, if not all, social studies teachers within a public school system have had little or no religion training in the academic study of religion. Future social studies teachers are not trained on the laws, religious education and the Constitution, and the religions of the world that would enable to them to better teach it to their students. As mentioned before, few received this type of training while they are in college, which leaves no one to teach them these things except themselves. This lack of training may play a big part in why so few schools include religion in their curriculum. Teachers who do try to include religion into their curriculum often tend to fall back on their own religious background and whatever they have learned through popular culture and other media outlets.<sup>22</sup> This can create sectarian viewpoints and not an objective overview of religions. Some teachers also look for pre-made lesson plans to use, but find that there are few available that are legal and

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<sup>21</sup> LexisNexis, “School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania, ET AL. v. Schempp ET AL.”; available from [http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.lib.uni.edu/us/lnacademic/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=1T8897279542&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29\\_T8897279545&cisb=22\\_T8897279544&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=6443&docNo=1](http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.lib.uni.edu/us/lnacademic/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=1T8897279542&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T8897279545&cisb=22_T8897279544&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=6443&docNo=1); Internet; accessed 13 December 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Mark A. Chancey, *Reading, Writing, & Religion: Teaching the Bible in Texas Public Schools* (Austin: Texas Freedom Network Education Fund, 2006), 13.

constitutional. The lack of training and the inability to create lesson plans that do not infringe on the constitutional rights of students spawns from problems within the education of future teachers while they are still in college.

### University

Within the universities and college (especially public), there is a problem with preparing social studies teachers to understand the world religions and how religion and public education fit together in a constitutional way. This is due to the lack of requirement for social studies majors to take an overview religions course, a course to teach the major controversies and cases that surround religion in public schools, and a course on how to properly create and implement a lesson plan about religion. Without this training, more social studies teachers are being sent out into the classroom without the knowledge, which continues the cycle that is seen within the public high schools.

### Solution

Throughout this paper I have brought numerous problems to light; problems within the public school curriculum and problems with the training of current and future educators. The problem of too little religion within the curriculum, especially within the social studies, can be fixed in three ways: prospective teacher education, current teacher education, and increasing religion in social studies curriculum within public high schools. There have been some attempts to do this. One example occurred in 2006 when Georgia passed a law that approved state funding for Bible classes; similar legislation has been introduced in Tennessee, Alabama, and Missouri.<sup>23</sup> Textbooks have also begun to include more religion, including the role of religion in history and society.<sup>24</sup> The government has also done a few steps to help re-introduce religion in

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<sup>23</sup> Chancey, *Reading, Writing, & Religion*, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Haynes and Thomas, *Finding Common Ground*, 34.

public schools curriculum. In December of 2000 the United States Department of Education sent a packet of religious-liberty guidelines to every public school principal. These packets included the role of religion within the curriculum.<sup>25</sup> Even though these steps have been taken, it seems that they are not solving the problem of increasing the religion within public school curriculums.

### Solutions within the Public High Schools

The most basic necessity that is needed to increase religion content within social studies curriculums is education. Schools need to make sure their teachers have the right academic background and training in both the legal issues and the content. Moore's expectation of teachers who include religion in their curriculum includes having a solid understanding of the framework that have defined and continue to define the field, and the ability to decide which approach to teaching religion (which will be explored more later) works best for them and their classroom, and the ability to evaluate the information in religion that they wish to incorporate.<sup>26</sup> All of these things need to be taught to current teachers who have not already had this training. This could be done through teacher in-service programs. Moore gave an outline for such a program, which I feel is very good and should be implemented. The three main points that need to be addressed are introducing teachers to the historical contexts regarding religion, values, and public education within the United States; addressing the content and methods that would be required to incorporate religion into the existing curriculum and/or creating a class that is centered around religion in one way or another that would fit into the category of multicultural studies; and showing educators the a cultural studies approach to the study of religion which

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy*, 93.

could focus on particular religions and/or traditions in context with a particular geopolitical region.<sup>27</sup> These in-services could also give the teachers support and understanding of properly teach religion within their classrooms while still following the bounds set by the Supreme Court and the Constitution.

The most important thing for all teachers to know about introducing religion within their classrooms is how to correctly teach it. There needs to be a clear understanding of the difference between teaching of religion and teaching about religion and what sectarianism is, how it is promoted, and how to help minimize it. The teaching of religion is unconstitutional since it is sectarian and involves some form of indoctrination. There are two main ways a teacher can make sure he/she is teaching about religion and not preaching about religion. The first is six distinctions given by the First Amendment Center. These are: teaching of religion is academic and not devotional; the teacher strives for students to become aware of religions and do not try to get students to accept them; schools back the study about religion and not the practice of religion; a teacher will want to expose students to numerous different religious viewpoints but not impose any one particular view; the school educates about all religions and does not promote or denigrate religion; and schools inform students of various beliefs but does not seem to force conformity of a particular belief.<sup>28</sup> This list can help a teacher make sure she/he is teaching about religion in a constitutional way.

Another good tool teachers can use is also used by Supreme Court in cases dealing with the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment. This is the LEMON test, which was given its name from *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), where it was derived.<sup>29</sup> This test has three questions an educator can ask to make sure he/she is not breaking the Establishment Clause. The first, does

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>28</sup> Haynes and Thomas, *Finding Common Ground*, 75-76.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 40.

the lesson/activity I am doing have a genuine educational and secular purpose?<sup>30</sup> The second, is the primary outcome neutral?<sup>31</sup> The last question is could there be excessive school entanglement with religion due to my class, activity, etc.?<sup>32</sup> If a teacher answers yes to any of these questions, then the lesson, class, activity is unconstitutional; if the answers are no then the teacher knows he/she is teaching in a constitutional, nonsectarian way. The LEMON test and the distinctions are a good way for teachers to make sure they are following the law when teaching about religion in their social studies classroom.

After acquiring a basic understanding of how to teach religion, teachers need to determine where they want to incorporate it within their existing curriculum and on which religions to focus. Areas where religion can be easily added, should include the religious aspect to the curriculum. Another good way to choose which religions to teach is by being aware of the different religious beliefs of the community and school at which he/she is teaching at, and focusing on those. With these should be all of the major religions of the world including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Daoism. With these things in mind, it can be easier to see where to infuse the religions the teacher would have listed as important.

Even more important is the classroom environment. It is necessary for a teacher to create a safe environment for all students to express their diverse opinions. This is especially crucial when the discussion is about religion. Creating this type of environment can be done however the teacher sees fit. It could be done through strict rules on behavior, through signs, or whatever other method he/she finds works the best. It is imperative for this environment to exist, so true discussion, critical thinking, and inquiry can occur without fear of backlash or stigma.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

As I had mentioned previously, there are numerous approaches a teacher can use to teach about religion within his/her classroom. It is important for a teacher to decide which one would fit best within the classroom and the current content being taught. There is one approach that is unconstitutional, which is intentional sectarianism. It comes in two forms. The first is inclusive sectarianism. This type overly privileges a certain religious view, even though different worldviews are still explored through a nonsectarian perspective.<sup>33</sup> The second form is exclusive sectarianism, limits the contact and accurate information students are given about other religious perspectives and world views than those promoted within the classroom.<sup>34</sup> A phenomenological approach, instead gives nonsectarian descriptions of religions. Those who use this form feel that religion is a unique dimension of the human experience, which can not be analyzed through any secular frameworks.<sup>35</sup> The third approach is historical. This approach uses historical research to understand religion out of a wider context.<sup>36</sup> The major problem with this approach is that it limits the understanding of the religions to their origins and significant moments in history. Even though this is a problem, this approach can be very good when incorporating religions into a world history or U.S. history classroom. The multicultural education approach is an umbrella term for numerous methods that all try to show the different cultures that are found in classrooms today.<sup>37</sup> The final approach, which Moore and I favor, is the cultural studies approach. One who follows this approach is assuming that religion is deeply intertwined with all the different dimensions of the human experience, so it requires different lenses through which to understand its multilevel social and cultural influences.<sup>38</sup> This means that this approach will use a

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<sup>33</sup> Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy*, 62.

<sup>34</sup> Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy*, 63.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 68-69.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 70-71.

<sup>37</sup> Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy*, 73-74.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 79.



combination of disciplines to better understand the religion being studied. The main objective of this approach is to “understand culture in all its complex forms as expressions of the social and political contexts in which culture manifests itself”.<sup>39</sup> This approach is also learner-centered. Learner-centered means that the student is to guide his/her own learning, instead of a classroom in which the teacher only gives notes and lectures while the students learn through them. It requires inquiry and critical thinking. Using this approach, students will learn to how differentiate, identify, and interpret multiple perspectives and come to challenge and/or discourse fake representations and/or false assumptions.

One last problem is a lack of course material and lesson plans available for teachers to use that incorporates religion in world history. With this in mind, I have created five lesson plans that a teacher could use to begin including religion within the curriculum. These five lessons are based on the Crusades and the Middle Eastern wars today; Hinduism; contemporary Islam; the medieval church and monasticism; and the Reformation. I chose the Crusades, monasticism, and the Reformation because religion fits nicely into these topics in world history. I chose Hinduism because I want to teach in southeast Iowa near Maharishi-Vedic City, Iowa. This is a town whose inhabitants follow a Hindu guru. Many of the students I will teach will have had some contact with the students that go to Fairfield Maharishi High School. I felt that it is important for these students to have a basic understanding of Hinduism, especially the denomination practiced in Maharishi-Vedic City. I then decided to have a lesson on contemporary Islam because most, if not all, of the student, I will teach will have some contact with Islam or a Muslim in their lives, and I feel that it is important for them to have a basic understanding of the religion, its practices, and culture. It also would fit well after a lesson on

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 78.

the history of Islam. With these lesson plans, I created power points that could be used and material that can be handed out.

I was fortunate enough to have been able to implement one of my lessons during my Level II field experience at Price Lab High School in a ninth grade U.S. history class. I decided to do my two-part lesson on The Crusades and the wars being found in the Middle East today. Using formative assessments, it seemed that the students were able to grasp the main concepts and content and do some critical thinking. I was impressed by the amount of knowledge they knew the next day, since I decided to do a short review from last class. The round-table discussion was a little rough, mainly due to my inexperience, but it did show the students how hard it is to come up with a solution to the problems in the Middle East. My advising teacher and I were very happy with how the lesson went, and I was happy to know that my lessons can be successfully used within a classroom, even if the students have had no previous knowledge of the subject, which occurred with the ninth graders I was teaching.

#### Solutions within the University

The solution at the university level is the more crucial for ensuring that religion gets included within the curriculum of social studies, because this is where all future teachers are being trained. In *Overcoming Religious Literacy*, Moore describes the program at Harvard Divinity School. This program is offered for students who want licensure for teaching and getting their masters in religion. This program has five education classes and a student-teaching experience. She also offers three suggestions for colleges. The first is to develop multicultural studies courses that include religion as a subject of analysis. The second is to get the campus' religion departments to offer courses that are especially for education majors. The final suggestion is to require student-teachers to show they can successfully integrate a nonsectarian

study of religion within their curriculum in constitutional and innovative ways.<sup>40</sup> These three suggestions could easily be transferable to the UNI social studies education and endorsement program.

Looking at all three suggestions, I see solutions for all that would need to little or no additional funding. For the first suggestion, I propose to increase religious content within the humanities and other social studies courses, where applicable. This would allow students to analyze religion and its role in history and culture. Many classes I have had, including Humanities, already had a fair share of religious analysis within them. For the second suggestion, “Religion in America”, taught by Dr. Betty DeBerg, is a great example of a religion professor creating a course that is really geared towards those in the education program. I think this course, along with “Religions of the World”, and one or two electives would be a solid foundation. Along with this, I think these classes could be added to the requirements for social studies education majors and those obtaining their social studies endorsement, which means students will be able to become endorsed in religion along with political science and the other social sciences. Having six to nine electives to achieve a religion endorsement is typical for the amount needed to reach the endorsement.<sup>41</sup> The final suggestion could be added on to “Teaching of Social Studies”, which is the methods course for those getting a teaching degree in the history and/or social studies. Students could be asked to create one or two lesson plans that demonstrate their ability to teach about religion in a nonsectarian, constitutional way. I believe that these changes will help future teachers going through the UNI program to be better prepared to teach about religion and its impact on history and culture.

### **Conclusion**

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<sup>40</sup> Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy*, 97-98.

<sup>41</sup> The normal number of credit hours for accreditation within the All-Social Studies Endorsement is six to nine.

Religion in a public high school is a delicate subject, since most people do not understand the difference between teaching about religion and teaching of religion. This misunderstanding has resulted in a lack of the study of religion within the high school social studies curriculum. This is mainly due to lack of education for both current and future teachers. This education would not only include content, but also understanding the laws, the historical debates about religion in public schools, and what is and is not constitutional. Without this knowledge, teaching religion can be very intimidating.

I do feel that there is a simple solution: more education. My solution has a domino effect. There first needs to be more religious content added to the social studies education program at UNI. This would include mandating courses on the constitution, the law, and religion in the public schools, much like “Religion in America” now. Another mandate would be to require “Religions of the World” that has an emphasis for educators. This would help send out social studies teachers that have been better educated.

For current teachers who had not received training while in college, an in-service program to teach them what is constitutional and what is not; the different approaches to teaching; and the history of religion in public high school curriculum would help them be educated. The best thing about the in-service program, is that in a couple of years it would no longer be necessary, since all of the teachers will either be educated through their university training or through in-service training.

Both of these changes will help solve the biggest problem, a lack of religious literacy due to not having religion within the social studies curriculum. If teachers are educated on how to properly teach about religion in their classroom, they would feel more confident and most likely

establish or increase the amount of religion being taught within their classes, thus ending this era of religious illiteracy.

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