



God in the Classroom

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Religion and America's
Public Schools

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Introduction: As Seen from Here

The expression “as seen from here” refers to the intellectual vantage point from which religion-in-schools controversies are viewed. Throughout this book, that vantage point features four components:

- *The state*, a term meaning governments—federal, provincial, local (county, city, village).
- *The church*, meaning religious denominations.
- *Secularists or the concerned secular public*, meaning individuals who are neither (a) government employees, such as legislators, judges, school principals, teachers, nor (b) highly dedicated adherents of a religious body, such as ministers, priests, rabbis, imams, or doctrinaire parishioners. Instead, the secular public consists of nonreligious individuals and of ones who identify themselves with a religious faith—at least nominally—but assign secular considerations a higher priority than religious doctrine. Such people are called *concerned* because they are particularly interested in keeping public schools free of religious influence.
- *Public schools*, meaning institutions governed by publicly elected school boards and funded by tax moneys.

Thus, the book’s interpretation of religion/school episodes focuses on the interaction of those four—on how they affect each other in determining the way state/church controversies develop and are resolved. The purpose of this opening chapter is to explain the nature of that interpretive scheme as preparation for its application in Chapters 3 through 11.

However, before the scheme is described, readers may find it useful to learn what kinds of school/religion confrontations are discussed in subsequent chapters. Therefore, the present chapter’s detailed description of an “as-seen-from-here”

viewpoint is preceded by a selection of episodes illustrating the types of issues that confront Americans with religion-in-schools dilemmas.

ILLUSTRATIVE CONFLICTS OVER RELIGION IN SCHOOLS

Chapter 2, which sketches historical roots of America's present-day dilemmas, is followed by nine chapters, each dedicated to the analysis of one sort of religion-in-schools issue. In the following paragraphs, the nature of each chapter's central issue is suggested by one or two sample episodes that involved the issue.

But first, as a foundation for understanding the significance of the episodes, it is important for readers to recognize the religion-in-schools implications of a passage from the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution that states:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.

Ever since that provision was added to the Constitution in 1791, jurists have generally interpreted it to mean that religion should be strictly separated from federal and local governments. And because schools supported by tax funds are considered a branch of local government, efforts have been made to exclude religious doctrine from public schools. However, over the decades, the propriety of such exclusion has been a matter of continual strife and debate.

Now to the illustrative episodes.

God and Darwin—Chapter 3

Charles Darwin's book *The Origin of Species*, published in 1859, proposed that humans were not originally created in their present-day form but, rather, they evolved over many thousands of years from simpler versions of animal life. Darwin's theory thus conflicted with the biblical account of human origins found in the opening book of the Jewish Torah and Christian Old Testament where an all-powerful being, called *Yaweh*, *Jehovah*, or *God*, created the first man (Adam) and first woman (Eve) in the same form as that of modern-day men and women. Since Darwin's day, his theory of evolution has become the accepted foundation of most biological sciences and has thus been taught in most schools' science classes. However, in recent years, proponents of the biblical story of creation have demanded that the Bible version—or a more recent variant called *intelligent design*—be substituted for, or taught along with, Darwinian theory. The U.S. scientific community has, in the main, objected to such proposals, contending that biblical creationism is not science but, instead, is a religious belief and thus should not be included in science programs.

An Episode

The governing board of the 3,500-student school district in Dover, Pennsylvania, passed a resolution ordering science teachers to identify the intelligent-design

version of creationism as a reasonable alternative to Darwinian theory. The board's policy required that a statement be read to biology students asserting that evolution theory "is not a fact" so that students should "keep an open mind" and consider explanations of human beginnings other than Darwin's. Students were also urged to read a book that promoted intelligent design—*Of Pandas and People*. However, a group of parents filed a lawsuit charging that the board's action violated the U.S. Constitution's separation of church and state. Some of the board's critics suggested that intelligent-design theory should not be discussed in science classes but, rather, it could be treated as a religious concept in humanities courses (Dao, 2005).

The Issue

Should a version of creationism be taught in science classes—instead of, or along with, Darwinian theory?

Curricula and Text Materials—Chapter 4

The term *curriculum*, as intended in this book, refers to what students are expected to study. A school's curriculum is typically in the form of a publication specifying what instructors are to teach and, frequently, what methods to use. Often a curriculum is organized around teaching materials, such as a textbook, a series of pamphlets, videos, Internet sources, and the like. Controversies can arise whenever school personnel or members of the general public disagree about a curriculum's religious content or instructional methods.

An Episode

In 1997, the board of education in Lee County, Florida, authorized the establishment of a two-semester Bible-history course organized around an "Old Testament" curriculum developed by a local committee and a "New Testament" curriculum created by the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools (NCBCPS). The intent of the National Council, as expressed by its president in a 1995 radio interview, was "to expose kids to the biblical Christian worldview" (People for the American Way, 1998).

A group of Lee County parents filed a lawsuit to block the course offering, alleging that in its proposed form it would violate the U.S. Constitution's ban against advancing religion in public school classrooms. The court, in response to the suit, issued an injunction that prohibited the use of the "New Testament" curriculum and allowed the "Old Testament" curriculum to be taught only under strict monitoring. Following the court's ruling, the school board agreed to settle the case by withdrawing both the "Old Testament" and "New Testament" curricula, replacing them with a nonsectarian course based on a textbook titled *An Introduction to the Bible* (People for the American Way, 1998).

The Issue

Should students in public schools study about religion? If so, what should be the aim and content of that study?

Prayer and Scripture Reading—Chapter 5

Prayers are efforts to communicate with personages who dwell in an invisible spirit world—such personages as a supreme being, various gods, or shades of dead ancestors. The intent of prayer is typically to solicit the aid of the invisible spirits, to honor them, or to thank them for blessings they have conferred. Another ceremony intended to accomplish the same aims as prayer is scripture reading—reciting passages of a holy book in front of a classroom or assembly audience.

An Episode

As the result of a lawsuit brought by parents against the New Hyde Park (New York) school board, the U.S. Supreme Court in 1962 addressed the issue of prayer in public schools. In the lawsuit, parents objected to the New York State Board of Regents' regulation that required all public school students to begin each school day by reciting the following prayer:

Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee, and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers, and our Country. (Robinson, 2002a)

Whereas two lower courts had declared the prayer permissible, the Supreme Court found in favor of the complaining parents, ruling that the “daily classroom invocation of God’s blessings as prescribed in the Regents’ prayer is a religious activity” and therefore violated the U.S. Constitution’s separation of church and state. Public schools, as government agencies, “cannot compose official prayers for any group of the American people to recite as a part of a religious program carried on by government” (Robinson, 2002a,b).

The case represented the first important step toward ending a centuries-old public-school tradition—morning prayer and the reading of Bible passages.

The Issue

Can prayer and scripture reading legally be conducted in public schools? If so, under what conditions?

Holidays and Celebrations—Chapter 6

In modern times the meaning of a *holiday* has been extended beyond its original religious meaning of *holy day*. A holiday now is any period of time that students are permitted to be out of school and that workers are officially freed from their

job responsibilities. Some of the most honored American holidays still represent key Christian beliefs and as such have become the subject of controversy.

An Episode

By mid-2005, Muslim parents in Baltimore County, Maryland, had lobbied for more than a year to get schools closed for two of the more important Islamic holidays: (a) Eid al-Fitr, which signals the close of the annual Ramadan month of fasting, and (b) Eid al-Adha, which celebrates, in Jewish–Christian–Muslim tradition, God’s allowing Abraham to sacrifice a sheep instead of Abraham’s son. The Muslims asked the school board why schools should not be closed on those two occasions, just as schools were traditionally closed for the Jewish Yom Kippur and the Christian Christmas (Muslim holidays, 2005).

The Issue

Should public schools close for religious holidays? If so, which religions’ holidays should be so honored?

Financial Support—Chapter 7

In many nations—such as Britain, Indonesia, Italy, Saudi Arabia, and Sweden—public tax funds are used to support schools sponsored by religious orders or to pay for services that religious groups offer to public schools. However, in America the separation of church and state, as implied in the Constitution, has resulted in religious organizations being denied tax funds to finance their activities.

An Episode

For ten years, a nationwide Christian sex-education program known as the Silver Ring Thing was conducted to convince teenagers that they should abstain from sexual intercourse until after they were married. Thousands of youths who participated in the organization’s training meetings were not only urged to forego premarital sex, but were also asked to buy silver rings to wear as symbols of their abstinence vow. However, in 2005 the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in Pennsylvania filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Human Health and Services, arguing that the department’s contribution of more than 1 million dollars to the Silver Ring Thing violated the nation’s constitutional separation of church and state. The ACLU offered evidence in support of the suit, including a Silver Ring Thing newsletter telling young people that “a personal relationship with Jesus Christ [is] the best way to live a sexually pure life” (Saltzman, 2005).

The Issue

Should any public funds be used to support religious groups’ educational activities? If so, under what conditions?

The Pledge of Allegiance—Chapter 8

Traditionally, students in American public schools have been obligated on ceremonial occasions to recite a pledge of allegiance to the nation's flag and government. Over the past half century that oath has read:

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands: one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

An Episode

In 2001, the father of a girl who attended a California public school objected to the word *God* in the pledge and filed a lawsuit to have *God* removed. The father charged that the notion of a supreme being—*God*—was a belief from a particular religious persuasion and therefore violated the U.S. Constitution's requirement that religious beliefs and practices be excluded from government institutions, including public schools (Greenhouse, 2004).

The Issue

Should the word *God* be eliminated from the pledge?

Released Time and Clubs—Chapter 9

American schools may provide time during the school day when pupils are released for religious instruction away from the campus. In addition, many schools make facilities available for meetings of extracurricular clubs in such fields as photography, chess, debating, leadership, international relations, mountain biking, skiing, and far more. Religious groups have often sought permission to use those facilities for faith-based clubs that promote the groups' belief systems. However, advocates of the separation of church and state have opposed such attempts.

An Episode

In 2001, a religious organization called the Child Evangelism Fellowship's Good News Clubs was the plaintiff in a 2001 Supreme Court case filed against a public school in New York State that had denied the group's application to include a Good News Club among the school's extracurricular offerings. The Supreme Court found in favor of the Child Evangelism plaintiffs on the grounds that their group deserved the same opportunity as that accorded other organizations, which were permitted to use the school building for after-school meetings. Over the three years following the court case, Child Evangelism quintupled its presence in public schools to 2,330 clubs (Vaznis, 2005).

The Issue

Should clubs advocating a particular religion be permitted in American public schools?

Symbols and Maxims—Chapter 10

Each religious tradition includes sacred symbols in the form of visual or auditory representations of the faith. Examples of visual symbols are the various Christian crosses, the Judaic six-pointed star and menorah, Islam's crescent moon and star, Sikhism's dagger, and the Hindu spot on the forehead. Visual symbols also include flags and banners of distinctive design and color. Auditory symbols can be the tolling of Christian church bells, Judaic chanting at the wall in Jerusalem, an Islamic call to prayer from a minaret, and Hindus' singing the Saraswati Vandana, hymn of praise to the goddess of learning and wisdom.

Religious maxims are sayings, adages, or proverbs that express significant beliefs of a religious sect.

An Episode

The most frequently cited Jewish and Christian guide to proper human behavior is the set of Ten Commandments (the Decalogue) in Chapter 20 of the book of Exodus in the Jewish Torah and Christian Old Testament. Those ten rules include three ways people should act and seven ways they should not act. Thus, people should (1) worship only the one true God, (2) respect one's parents, and (3) respect the Sabbath day by not working. People should not (4) use God's name in an insulting fashion, (5) worship idols, (6) kill, (7) steal, (8) commit adultery, (9) tell lies about others, or (10) yearn for anyone else's property or spouse.

An Episode

In 1980, the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed a Kentucky statute, which required that the Ten Commandments be posted in public-school classrooms. The Court ruled that the Commandments "are undeniably a sacred text" and "do not confine themselves to arguably secular matters, such as honoring one's parents, killing, or murder." Therefore, the posting would violate the constitutional tradition of keeping religious teachings out of public schools (Kentucky school district, 1999).

In 1999, officials of a school district in rural Jackson County, Kentucky, allowed volunteers to display the Ten Commandments in the district's five schools. The high-school principal described the posting as "an effort to start having good morals in school and making children aware of how they should act because of all the violent issues that have been showing up." But a spokesman for the Kentucky School Boards Association said his group urged districts to abide by the Supreme Court ruling and not display sectarian religious symbols, particularly because a lawsuit could cost the school district badly needed funds (Kentucky school district, 1999).

The Issue

Should the display of symbols or beliefs of a particular religion be permitted in schools? If so, under what conditions?

Sexual Matters—Chapter 11

Religious denominations usually subscribe to particular convictions about sexual behavior, including what sorts of sexual acts are permissible, what kinds of sex partners are proper (age, gender, ethnicity), what marital/nonmarital relationship between sex partners is suitable (premarriage, marriage, open marriage), where different sorts of sexual behavior can be properly pursued, and who should be responsible for instructing youths about sex and for monitoring their sexual behavior. With the passing decades, responsibility for sex education has increasingly been transferred from the family and the church to public schools. However, debate continues over the propriety of assigning such responsibility to the schools and over who should do the teaching, when, and how.

Episodes

In 1996 the U.S. Congress, at the urging of religious groups, authorized funds for sex-education programs that taught abstinence as the only way to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Instruction about other birth-control techniques would not be permitted. By 2005, approximately \$135 million per year, totaling nearly \$1 billion, had been spent by the federal government on programs whose purpose was to teach the benefits that might be gained by abstaining from sexual activity. Also in response to pressure from religious groups, the Texas Board of Education endorsed the statewide purchase of health-education textbooks that exclusively promoted abstinence. In a similar move, the school board in Franklin County, North Carolina, ordered three chapters removed from a ninth-grade health textbook because the content went beyond the discussion of abstinence-only. The deleted chapters addressed AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, marriage, partnering, and contraception (Planned Parenthood, 2005).

Health professionals critical of abstinence-only programs included members of the American Academy of Pediatrics who argued that teenagers need access to knowledge about birth-control and emergency-contraception methods besides abstinence (Tanner, 2005).

The Issue

Should schools' sex-education programs advocate sexual practices and beliefs that represent a religious group's views about sexual matters?

With the foregoing episodes in mind, we next describe the scheme used throughout this book for interpreting controversial relationships among schools, religion, and the state. The description begins with the three main components of the model, and then continues with the roles of belief constituencies, traditions, and critical events.

STATE, RELIGION, SECULAR PUBLIC, AND SCHOOLS

The contents of Chapters 3 through 11 focus on interactions among four sorts of institutions—the state, the church, the secular public, and public schools.

The State

In the context of this book, the expressions *the state* and *the government* are synonyms referring to the organization that holds the authority (official power) to control the behavior of the inhabitants of a defined territory. In such a sense, *the state* can be as large as an immense empire (the Roman Empire, the Chinese Empire, and the British Empire) or as small as a tiny village. The matters that fall within the state's authority are either specified in written documents (edicts, constitutions, laws, regulations) or passed from one generation to the next as unwritten customs. Throughout this book, *the state* means either the U.S. government, the fifty state governments, or a local government—city, county, town, and village. Public schools are *state* institutions.

Religions as Belief Systems (Churches)

A *belief system* or *worldview* is a collection of convictions a person uses for interpreting life's events. Such a system typically concerns matters of

The purpose of life (teleology);

The nature of existence and reality (ontology);

The nature of knowledge and how to distinguish fact from fantasy, truth from falsehood (epistemology);

The origin of the world and of life forms (cosmology);

Why things happen as they do (causality);

Rules governing people's treatment of other beings and the physical environment (morality, ethics); and

People's rights and obligations (privileges, responsibilities).

The word *church* is often used to identify an organized religious effort. For the purposes of this book, belief systems can be divided into two general types, *religious* and *secular*.

A religious system (a religion) typically includes faith in the reality of (a) invisible spirits (gods, angels, genies, ancestral shades, jinns, or the like) that influence events and affect people's destinies, (b) a continuation of spiritual life after physical death, and (c) rituals people can perform to influence the actions of spirits. Life in present-day America is definitely multireligious, distinguished by many varieties of Christianity, several forms of Judaism, at least two major versions of Islam, variations of Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Shinto, Voodoo, Wicca, Scientology, and far more.

Secular Belief Systems

Secular or nonreligious worldviews do not include a theology that recognizes such things as invisible spirits, life after death, and rituals intended to influence events. Five well-known nonreligious philosophical positions are *naturalism*, *materialism*, *humanism* (sometimes referred to as *secular humanism*), *agnosticism*, and *atheism*.

Naturalism is “the hypothesis that the physical universe is a ‘closed system’ in the sense that nothing that is neither a part nor a product of it can affect it. So naturalism entails the nonexistence of all supernatural beings, including the theistic God” (Draper, 2005).

In a similar vein, materialism asserts that there is only one substance in the universe and that substance is physical, empirical, or material. Everything that exists consists of matter and energy. Thus, the idea of spiritual substance is a delusion. There are no such things as supernatural, occult, or paranormal experiences or after-death existence. Those things are either delusions or can be explained in terms of physical forces.

Humanism proposes that people are responsible for fashioning their own destinies through their own efforts, limited only by their innate ability and the physical and social environments they inhabit. A typical humanist is convinced that people can lead fitting lives (a) without believing in God, in a soul that lives on after a person dies, or in the universe having been created by an intelligent being, and (b) believing that quite suitable lives and proper behavior can be based on reason, goodwill, and experience (Mason, 2004).

Agnostics believe that questions about invisible spirits or life after death are unanswerable—at least by any method presently available. In effect, agnostics say, “We just don’t know.” Atheists, on the other hand, reject outright the idea of invisible spirits and life after death, which are notions they regard as ridiculous.

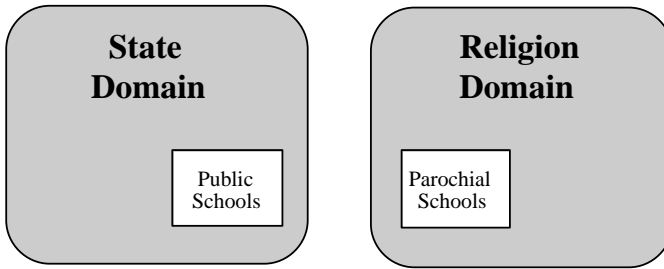
Members of a *concerned secular public* are often people who subscribe to one of the nonreligious worldviews.

Schools as Sources of Education

The word *education* in these pages refers to intentional efforts to improve people’s skills and knowledge. Such efforts can be made either by learners themselves (self-education) or by others (teachers, parents, ministers, mass-communication media) or by a combination of self and others. Schooling is one sort of education—the sort pursued in a particular place (a school) with guides (teachers) who follow a prescribed set of goals and subject-matter (curricula, course of study). Schools can be public (state funded and controlled) or private (funded and controlled by nongovernmental groups or individuals). Private schools can be managed by either religious or secular sponsors.

The words *school* and *schools*, as used in this book, usually refer to public schools, ones financed by tax moneys and administered by a local government

Figure 1.1
Domain relationships in the United States.



entity called a *school district*. Private schools—and especially ones conducted by religious orders—are mentioned only occasionally throughout the book.

With our definitions of *state*, *religion*, *secularists*, and *schools* now in mind, we next consider ways that interactions among the four can influence the place assigned to religion in public schools.

Patterns of Interactions

Although theoretically we can conceive of state, religion (the church), secularists, and schools as separate entities, in real life the four overlap and interact in ways that form diverse and often complex patterns. This point can be illustrated with the concepts of *domain*, *power*, and *authority*.

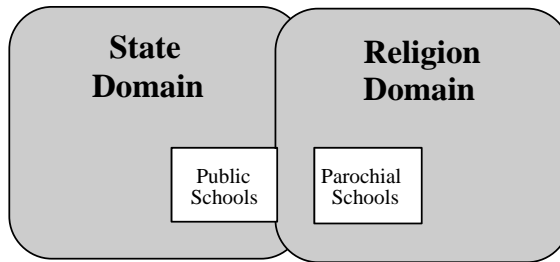
Domain

The term *domain* refers to the matters over which a state, religion, or school holds the right of decision. In the United States, the general relationship among state, religion, and school domains is portrayed in Figure 1.1. Schools fall in the two major domains of state and religion, with public schools located within the state's domain and parochial schools—those managed by religious orders—in religion's domain.

Frequently, religion/school controversies occur because one of the entities—state or church—has been accused of encroaching on, or lapping over, the other entity's domain. Such was the case in our earlier episode of the U.S. Federal Government furnishing public funds for the Silver Ring Thing program that limited sex education to a religious group's beliefs about acceptable sexual behavior. The funding in that instance produced a controversial overlap of state and religion domains (Figure 1.2).

A second example of the controversy about domain borderlines was the debate over including intelligent-design theory in public-school science classes. The conflict was not so much about whether intelligent-design should be taught at all in a public school (many evolutionists would accept the discussion of intelligent

Figure 1.2
Alleged domain encroachment—Silver Ring Thing.



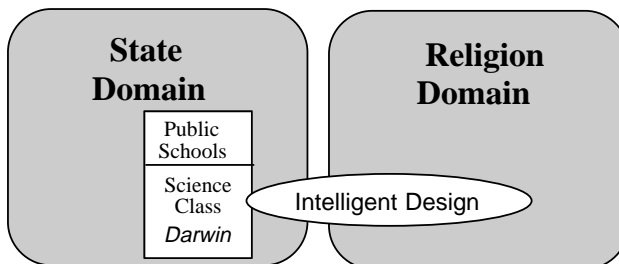
design in humanities or social-science classes) but, rather, about whether intelligent design qualified as science rather than as religious faith. Again, the conflict was about an alleged improper overlap of domains (Figure 1.3).

In summary, many religion/school controversies concern disputes over domains. Advocates of prayer in schools have argued that the government “has no business” telling students and teachers that they cannot communicate with God while on school property. Proponents of the Ten Commandments have charged the government with “overstepping its rights” in attempting to outlaw the long-existing practice of posting Judaic-Christian truths in schools as guides to moral virtue. Supporters of intelligent design have contended that the essence of scientific inquiry is free and open, non-prejudicial investigation, so that proposals about human beginnings, other than Darwin’s, deserve a place in science classes.

Power and Authority

Power can be defined as the influence a person or group exerts over the beliefs and behavior of another person or group. If the presence of Group A changes the beliefs or actions of Group B in any way, then Group A has some measure of power over Group B. In confrontations between two groups, each group usually

Figure 1.3
Alleged encroachment by a religious theory.



has some level of power, as shown by each one's behavior being affected by the presence of the opponent. The decision about which group "wins"—that is, which group's desires prevail—depends on which has the greater power. If the power ratio between the two is about equal, then they must negotiate a compromise if they want to avoid a stalemate.

Groups can vary in the tactics they employ to influence the outcome of a controversy. Such "power tools" include

- Publicity campaigns—Lauding a group's policies, revealing an opponent's faults.
- Facile arguments—Appealing to listeners' emotions, sense of fairness, and notions of convincing logic.
- Threats—Of bodily harm, of property damage, of unsavory rumors, of job demotion or job loss.
- Physical violence—Besting opponents by armed force, stealing, or destroying opponents' property.
- Bribery—Paying influential individuals or groups for their support.

Authority is the official power assigned to, or commanded by, an individual or group. There are various ways individuals or groups gain authority—by election to office, by appointment to office, by the violent ousting of existing authorities, by rules of succession, or by charismatic leadership. If authority is to serve as effective power, the members of the domain to which the authority applies must accept the authority as legitimate—or at least as power that prudent people would be wise to respect. The less the members of a group accept the titular authority, the less power those in authority have to influence the group's beliefs and behavior.

In estimating the role of authority in religion/school episodes, it is important to recognize that there can be different levels of authority, with the lower levels carrying less influence than the upper levels. This was illustrated in our earlier case of the New York State Regents' prayer in public schools. Three levels in the U.S. court system were involved in the case—a state court (with the least power), an appeals court (with more power), and the Supreme Court (with the most power). Both the district court and appeals court had ruled that the Regents' prayer did not violate the U.S. Constitution's separation of church and state. But the Supreme Court decided otherwise, so the prayer was outlawed.

Whenever people respect an authority and are thus willing to abide by its decisions, then authority serves as a very effective source of power. Hence, it usually is a considerable advantage for religion-in-school activists to hold office—and particularly high office—in state, religion, and school domains.

BELIEF CONSTITUENCIES

A *belief constituency* is a collection of people who subscribe to the same cluster of convictions. Controversies over religion-in-schools involve confrontations

between two—or among several—belief constituencies. Thus, the task of understanding controversies profits from information about which constituencies are involved and about their beliefs, aims, membership, tactics, and sources of power.

By way of illustration, consider the constituencies involved in two of the cases described earlier: (a) Muslims asking the Baltimore school board to close the city's public schools in honor of two Islamic holidays and (b) Jackson County, Kentucky, school officials allowing volunteers in 1999 to post copies of the biblical Ten Commandments in the district's five public schools.

The two most obvious activists in the Baltimore episode were (a) a collection of the city's Muslims and (b) the public schools' board members. Additional constituencies that might engage in the debate through letters to newspapers and appeals to board members were (c) Christians who wished to limit religious holidays to the traditional ones, (d) secularists who would do away with any religious school holidays, and (e) members of other religions (Hindus, Buddhists, Scientologists) who would like to have their own holy days recognized by the closing of schools.

In the Ten-Commandments confrontation, the immediately involved constituencies included (a) the Christian group that had posted the commandments, (b) the school officials who had endorsed the posting, (c) the secularists who had filed a lawsuit to have the copies of the Decalogue removed, (d) the U.S. Supreme Court, which in 1980 had declared that the Kentucky statute requiring the posting of the commandments was unconstitutional, and (e) the Kentucky School Boards Association, which advised schools to abide by the court decision. Other constituents that might have participated in the controversy included (f) Christians and Jews who believed that the Decalogue was a universally valid guide to human behavior.

TRADITIONS AND CRITICAL EVENTS

Traditions are beliefs and practices so well established in a society that they not only become what people view as "the way things are" but frequently as "the way things should be." Members of a society who are referred to as *conservatives* are ones who seek to maintain traditions in the face of threats to the usual way things have been done.

Critical events are happenings that either alter traditions or serve to protect traditions from serious threats. Such events serve as decision junctures that can change the direction of affairs. Critical events are accompanied by conflicts between members of society who deem themselves *progressives*, willing to pursue the new tack that an event initiates, and other members who consider themselves *conservatives* attempting to protect the status quo.

Each of the controversies in our earlier description of religion/school episodes involved a conflict between a tradition and a critical event. The event that challenged the public schools' time-honored morning prayer and Bible readings was a secularist lawsuit questioning the constitutionality of the practice. In Dover, Pennsylvania, the school board's requiring that intelligent design be accorded attention

in science classes was an event challenging the traditional status of Darwinian theory as the sole version of human beginnings that students studied. A California father's lawsuit was the event that brought into question the word *God* that had been inserted by Congress into the pledge of allegiance in 1954, an addition which at that time was a critical event altering the form of a pledge that traditionally had been free of any religious allusions.

CONCLUSION

The vantage point from which this book analyzes controversies about religion in American schools is provided by a scheme that focuses on interactions among four entities—the state, religion (the church), secularists, and schools. Aspects of those interactions that are accorded special attention are the entities' domains, the power of the entities' constituencies, societal traditions, and critical events.

From Then to Now

This chapter starts with a truism: *Nothing in our world arises entirely anew. Anything that seems new is just a novel variant of what already existed.* In other words, every innovation grows from historical roots. Thus, the task of understanding the how and why of today's patterns of religion in U.S. public schools can be aided by a review of several trends in American history. The purpose of this chapter is to offer such a review.

The chapter is divided into two major parts. Part one, titled "A Background Sketch," offers a four-century glance back at relationships among religion, state, and schooling from colonial times until the present day—relationships that help explain the origins of current controversies over religion in public schools.

Part two, titled "Trends of the Times," takes the form of an argument in support of four propositions, which assert that over the past four centuries:

- Religions in the United States became more *diverse*.
- Religious beliefs and practices were increasingly *removed from public schools*.
- The teaching/learning process grew more *institutionalized*.
- Sources of knowledge became more *secular* and *empirical*.

A BACKGROUND SKETCH

The following discussion is presented as a succession of eras entitled Colonial Times, The New Nation, The Evolving Nation, and The Present Era.

Colonial Times, 1600–1775

Exactly when and how human inhabitants first appeared in the Americas is a mystery not yet solved to everyone's satisfaction. Paleontologists, anthropologists, and linguists who study those matters continue to disagree. Most of them suggest that the western hemisphere's initial arrivals came from East Asia, traveling across the Bering Strait in the far-north Pacific when that region was a frozen land mass rather than a string of islands as it is today. However, the experts still argue about when the newcomers came, their mode of travel, and the routes they followed to populate the entire western hemisphere, from far-north Canada to the southern tip of South America.

During the opening decade of the twenty-first century, recent geological and genetic findings, along with their diverse interpretations, confronted scientists with an abundance of puzzles to ponder. Did the initial occupants of the Americas appear 10,000 years ago, as many scholars had thought, or did the first ones arrive even 10,000 or 20,000 years earlier? Had those travelers walked all the way from Northeast Asia to what is now Alaska and Northern Canada, then trudged south through valleys on the eastern side of the coastal mountains to eventually—after many millennia—disperse across North America, into Central America, and throughout South America? Or, instead of coming by land, had the migrants fashioned boats of stretched animal skins to sail along the coast of the Bering Sea and down the western shores of North America? Or might some have come by land and others by sea? And did the Asian travelers arrive during only a few time periods or were there many migrations? (Mann, 2005)

Although such matters are still unsettled, there is no question that millions of Native Americans occupied all parts of the western hemisphere and, in North America, spoke more than 250 languages by the time Europeans began colonizing eastern sectors of the continent. All Spanish attempts between 1513 and 1560 to establish a colony in Florida failed, so the successful efforts of Europeans to settle in North America came with the founding of the British colonies of Jamestown (Virginia) in 1607 and Plymouth (Massachusetts) in 1620. By 1770, a century-and-a-half later, more than 2 million people of European heritage lived in Great Britain's thirteen North American colonies.

Apparently most settlers came to America with two motives—one secular and the other religious. The secular motive was to earn a good living—to “get ahead in the world.” The religious mission was not only to perpetuate Christianity among the colonists' own descendents but also to bring heathens into the Christian fold. In effect, religious leaders and much of the populace sought to obey Jesus' biblical command to “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (St. Mark 16:15, 1611).¹ American Indians were seen as heathens. Then what was the nature of the colonists' missionary task? An answer can be suggested by our comparing the Christian belief system with Indian religions that were practiced at the time the colonists arrived.

Religions' Likenesses and Differences

All of the hundreds of Indian nations and tribes that were distributed throughout the Americas embraced religious convictions and practices that played a vital role in daily life. Even though each religion had certain unique characteristics, all of them had basic structural features in common. Those features were also typical of the Christian worldviews to which the colonists subscribed. In effect, Indians and colonists alike were convinced that

- Reality—in the sense of what actually exists—is not limited to what everyone who has intact sense organs can see, hear, or feel in this world. Reality also includes invisible beings, places, and events that are revealed only to special individuals and, perhaps, only when those individuals are in an altered state of mind.
- Invisible spirits, gods, or deities that created the universe continue to influence natural phenomena (crop yields, epidemics, floods, earthquakes) and affect individuals' lives (health, personal relationships, and occupational success).
- People must abide by the spirits' rules of conduct or else suffer unpleasant consequences. Not only is it important to know and obey the rules, but people are also wise to show that they honor and respect the spirits.
- When a personal or general disaster strikes, it is necessary to placate the spirits that have caused the catastrophe. Methods of mollifying the spirits include admitting one's wrongdoing, asking to be forgiven, performing acts of penance, promising to reform, and presenting offerings to the spirits.
- One's lifespan does not end with the death of the body. Rather, an essence of the individual's personality—often called the *soul*—can continue to exist in some form, perhaps as an invisible spirit.

Therefore, conflicts between religions were not over the existence of such structural features but, rather, were over the particular form the structural features assumed in different faiths.² This point can be illustrated with examples of (a) spirits' or gods' identities, (b) the creation of the universe and its inhabitants, (c) causality, (d) prayer and ceremonies, and (e) the human lifespan.

Spirits' and gods' identities. Each religion, Christian and Indian alike, had spirits that bore distinctive names, powers, and functions.

In the Christians' monotheistic system, the spirits were headed by a single all-knowing, all-powerful being called God, Jehovah, or Our Lord (Yaweh for Jews, Allah for Muslims). Christian doctrine held that God was represented as a trinity—three spirits in one: God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Ghost. God was assisted by aides in the form of angels who carried out assignments. One archangel, Satan, had turned bad, became God's enemy, and enticed people into evil behavior.

The typical Indian nation's religion included multiple spirits. Each spirit was thought to have special powers over aspects of the natural world, with the names

of the spirits reflecting those aspects. For example, the religion of the Winnebago nation included spirits named Earthmaker, Earth, Sun, Moon, Water, Stars, and Night-spirits. Other Winnebago deities, such as Trickster, were thought to be the authors of special events. Still others in the Winnebago pantheon bore animal names and were credited with powers and functions associated with the animals' identities—Eagle, Black Hawk, Turtle, Hare, and Thunderbird (Radin, 1945).

Creation explanations. Religious doctrines typically include accounts of how the universe and its occupants began.

The Christian version is found in the Bible's opening paragraph, which explains, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis, 1:1, 1611). Heaven is located above a domed "firmament" that curves over the flat earth below. Subsequent paragraphs describe which of the universe's contents were produced on each of 6 days, until every type of inert matter (minerals, seas) and every type of living thing (plants, animals, humans) that would ever exist were now complete in form and function.

Indian lore contains many versions of creation and of the elements that compose the universe. The Navajos of the Southwest portray the dawn of life as beginning with three beings in a lower world—First Man, First Woman, and Coyote, who was a creator and trickster. The three climbed from the dark lower world up to a second world, where they would meet Sun Man and Moon Man, who governed day and night. Ultimately they climbed a ladder to the third world, where the Navajo people would be born and would multiply (Wherry, 1969).

A story from the Kwakiutl nation in the Northwest tells of Gyd'ee, a supernatural being in human form who went about creating the features of the world—mountains, rivers, plants, and even animals that could change into human forms and back again into animal shapes. One of Gyd'ee's creations was a man who had been a salmon and whom Gyd'ee ordered to don a beak and great wings covered with feathers. "Now you are Thunderbird," Gyd'ee told him. "When there is danger, you will make thunder by flapping your wings and flying. You will do the same thing when a man dies. By flashing your eyes, you will make lightning. With your wings folded, you will symbolize peace" (Wherry, 1969, pp. 63, 65).

In the Northeast, Algonquin tradition describes how the divine Gooskap created humans by shooting arrows at ash trees so that Indians came out of the bark. He next produced all of the animals, first making them very large and then readjusting their sizes or locations to suit the Indians' needs. Enormous Moose intended to pull trees down on the Indians, so Gooskap shrank Moose to a size that enabled Indians to kill him. Squirrel, who began the size of a wolf, said he would scratch trees down on the Indians, so Gooskap made him little. When White Bear said he would eat the Indians, Gooskap banished Bear to a region of ice and rocks that was devoid of Indians. In such a fashion, Gooskap devised a world in which the Algonquins could prosper (Leland, 1884, p. 19).

In the Sioux story of creation, the great Mysterious One is not brought directly upon the scene or conceived in anthropomorphic fashion, but remains sublimely in the background.

The Sun and the Earth, representing the male and female principles, are the main elements in his creation, the other planets being subsidiary. The enkindling warmth of the Sun entered into the bosom of our mother, the Earth, and forthwith she conceived and brought forth life, both vegetable and animal.

Finally there appeared mysteriously Ish-na-e-cha-ge, the “First-Born,” a being in the likeness of man, yet more than man, who roamed solitary among the animal people and understood their ways and their language. They beheld him with wonder and awe, for they could do nothing without his knowledge. He had pitched his tent in the centre of the land, and there was no spot impossible for him to penetrate.

At last, the ‘First-Born’ of the Sioux became weary of living alone, and formed for himself a companion—not a mate, but a brother—from a splinter which he drew from his great toe. This was the Little Boy Man, who was not created full-grown, but as an innocent child, trusting and helpless. His Elder Brother was his teacher throughout every stage of human progress from infancy to manhood, and it is to the rules which he laid down, and his counsels to the Little Boy Man, that we trace many of our most deep-rooted beliefs and most sacred customs. (Eastman, 1911)

Causality. Religions offer explanations of why events happen as they do—why crops prosper or fail, why the rain needed for crops does or does not fall, why earthquakes occur, why individuals enjoy good health or become ill, why some people are rich and others poor, why some are beautiful to look at and others are ugly, why some are skilled and others inept, why some enjoy good fortune and others suffer bad luck, and so on.

Happenings whose causes are not directly apparent are explained by religions as mediated events. That is, (a) people behave in a certain way, (b) gods or spirits that are in control of the universe or of selected features of the universe are either pleased or displeased by people’s behavior, and (c) the spirits then cause appropriate consequences for those people. If the behavior has pleased the spirits, good things happen to the people. If the behavior offends or annoys the spirits, bad things happen. So it is that spirits mediate between (a) people’s actions or attitudes and (b) what happens in those people’s lives. To promote their own welfare, people appeal to the deities by prayer and ceremonies.

Prayer and ceremonies. Prayer can be defined as actions addressed to a god or spirit as a means of (a) asking for favors or for aid in solving a problem or doing a task, (b) directing the spirit to perform services that further the supplicant’s welfare or the well-being of people or missions that the supplicant considers worthy, (c) thanking the spirit for past or present blessings, (d) glorifying and honoring the spirit, or (e) commemorating a critical event. Prayers often assume the form of ceremonies passed from one generation to the next.

Types of Christian prayers offered by the colonists could differ from one denomination to another. A Protestant minister during the Sunday service would openly speak to God in the presence of the parishioners—giving thanks, asking for blessings, and suggesting matters to which God might give attention. The members of the congregation, at the close of the minister’s delivery, displayed their endorsement of the prayer by intoning “Amen.” During special prayer

meetings, individuals could address their requests directly to the Lord. Catholics could accompany their solicitation with fingering prayer beads or lighting candles. And prayer was often expressed in song—psalms from the Bible, hymns of praise, and sacred anthems. Christian ceremonies designed to commemorate critical events and honor the Trinity include Christmas (Jesus' birth) and Easter (Jesus' death).

Indian religions have been replete with prayers and ceremonies in the form of oratory, dramatic dialogues, dances, chants, and offerings to the spirits—such offerings as tobacco and peyote. In the arid Southwest, winter dances among the Rio Grande Pueblos served as prayers to help hunters find abundant game and to apologize to the animals' guardian spirits for having killed the beasts. In the spring, Pueblo villagers not only danced for rain to water the crops, but also performed rites to drive out witches and rid the soil of destructive spirits, thereby enabling helpful deities to work in the fields unhampered. Among the Zuñi, a masked dancer would simulate the visage of Shalako, a sacred messenger who carried people's supplications to important deities. Navajo sand paintings were intended to promote the cure of illnesses. In the Great Plains, the Comanche war dance was expected to bring success in battle. Among the Hopi, masked Kachina dancers depicted spirits that brought seeds to plant, protected villages, and disciplined unruly children (Fergusson, 1931).

The human lifespan. As anyone—religious or not—can observe, the lifespan of the human physical self typically extends from around 70 years to nearly a century, unless cut short by accident or disease. However, there has always been a question about whether physical death entirely ends a person's life. Is there not also an essence of one's *self*—an essence often referred to as *the soul*—that lives on after the body is no longer animate? Religious doctrine typically says, "Yes, spiritual life does continue after physical death." But the conception of what that spiritual after-death existence is like can differ from one religion to another. In effect, both Christianity and Indian religions distinguish two life spans—the physical and the spiritual.

Christian doctrine generally holds that at some time during a woman's pregnancy, God inserts the essence of humanness—an immortal soul—into the unborn child. After birth, that soul not only will vivify its owner throughout the person's life on earth, but will also continue to live on in an invisible state after death. The soul may spend postmortem eternity in one of two places, a blissful and carefree heaven or an excruciatingly painful hell. Or some souls may end up in a rather indeterminate limbo or in purgatory where the individual is obliged to stay while being purged of remaining sins. God makes the decision about where each person's soul will go.

Most, if not all, Indian religions have also envisioned a soul and the soul's fate after death. Among the Winnebago in the Midwest, the soul not only continues to exist after the body has expired, but the soul can be reincarnated—inserted into another body "by having an individual born again into the very

same family and reliving, in every detail, his previous existence” (Radin, 1945, p. 65).

For southwestern Indians, the original happy home was underground or below a lake where the gods still live, waiting to welcome the people back after death. . . . It is generally believed that before they emerged onto this earth, men and animals all lived together [underground] and spoke the same language. (Fergusson, 1931, p. xx)

Nearly all Indian traditions include the belief that the soul of the deceased is violated if the body is taken from the ground. Thus the removal of Native remains for study or display is felt by Indians to be an acute injury (Cockrell, 2005).

Summary. As illustrated earlier, the Christian colonists’ objection to Indian religions was not because Indians failed to believe in prayer, invisible gods, or life after death. Rather, the colonists objected because Indians prayed in objectionable ways to the wrong gods and were mistaken about how the universe was created and what happened to the soul after death. The English-bred Puritans who took seriously Jesus’ command to spread the gospel could not accept Indians’ religions as tolerable belief systems that deserved at least grudging respect. Instead, the savages’ flawed worldviews needed to be replaced by Christian doctrine. Colonial missionaries dutifully accepted that educational challenge.

State, Church, and School, 1600–1699

Throughout the seventeenth century, a variety of communities were established along the Atlantic coast of North America by groups from European countries—Britain, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Sweden, Finland, and Spain. However, the largest number of immigrants were from England, principally members of the middle class—farmers, artisans, and tradesmen—along with unskilled laborers who came as indentured servants to settle in New England and Virginia. As the decades advanced, the immigrants spread west and south, gradually forming what would eventually become the thirteen colonies that created the United States of America near the end of the eighteenth century.

The Europeans peopled the New World with diverse Christian sects. The English included Anglicans, Independents, Puritans, and Quakers. There were French Catholics and Huguenots, Spanish Catholics, Swedish Lutherans, and Dutch Calvinists. Non-Christians included Spanish Jews, American Indians, and Africans (mainly slaves on southern plantations) who retained tribal practices (Cremin, 1970, p. 148).

As noted in Chapter 1, the term *state* refers to a government unit. A *state* can be a nation, a province, town, or village. In seventeenth-century America, the principal governing unit consisted of a village or town and its surrounding countryside. Although the New England colonies were officially under the jurisdiction of the British government, daily affairs were supervised by a village’s or town’s council or