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RELIGIOUS STUDIES TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS
LITERACY IN STUDENTS' CIVIC PREPARATION

by

John K. Grant

A Dissertation

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Acknowledgments

I can, without any hesitation, proclaim this project did not come to completion on my own. There are several individuals who deserve special recognition as instrumental in me crossing the finish line. It fits for a religiously centered study to give thanks to the God who supplies the grace and strength necessary to overcome any of life's obstacles. My interest in religion has been with me since the passing of my parents while I was in middle school. Their deaths shaped me in many ways. However, the most powerful effect of their untimely deaths was how God walked with me as I wrestled with the faith my parents passionately pursued. Their faith became my own. I emerged from my valley of the shadow of death with a religious view of life that has enabled me to enjoy the life granted to me.

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“Now all has been heard;
here is the conclusion of the matter:
Fear God and keep his commands,
For this is the duty of all mankind.
For God will bring every deed into judgment,
Including every hidden thing,
whether it is good or evil.”
Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 (NIV)

Abstract

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers of religion courses who use the study of religion to prepare students for the pluralistic society awaiting them. The primary questions addressed in this study were focused on perceptions of religious studies teachers regarding their definition of religious literacy, the content of a religiously literate person, the civic consequences of an education that ignores religious literacy, and how religious literacy might inculcate civic values.

The participants of this study included five purposefully selected religious studies teachers from five different school types (i.e., Christian, Islamic, Jewish, nonsectarian, public). These participants were purposefully selected because their cases were “‘information-rich’ and illuminative, that is, they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest; sampling, then, is aimed at insight about the phenomenon, not empirical generalizations from a sample to a population” (Patton, 2015, p. 46). A qualitative case study method, utilizing semi-structured interviews, was employed to investigate four research questions: (1) How do religious studies teachers define religious literacy? (2) Why is religious literacy a necessary element in a students' secondary education? (3) What are the civic consequences of a society without religious literacy? and (4) How can religious studies inculcate civic values?

Three common themes were shared among the data provided by the participants: (1) Religiously literate students should be familiar, at least, with the three major religious traditions, i.e., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; (2) Religion can be a catalyst for evil as well as for good; and (3) Religious studies can inculcate civic values. These themes correspond with Prothero's

(2007) *Religious Literacy*, Moore's (2007) *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy*, and Nord's (2010) *Does God Make a Difference*, all of which are leading publications in the field of religious literacy.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The current study was an investigation of the perceptions of religious studies teachers regarding the importance of religious illiteracy in students' civic preparation. According to the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) (2014), religious studies is a discipline within the social studies, and social studies is principally concerned with civic preparation. Moore (2007) wrote that the purpose of education, and particularly social studies education, is for students "to acquire the skills and experiences that will enable them (a) to function as active citizens who promote the ideals of democracy, (b) to act as thoughtful and informed moral agents, and (c) to lead fulfilling lives" (p. 9; c.f. Barr, Barth, & Shemis, 1977; Moore, 2007; Tonga, 2016). While most attention in social studies is given to the more familiar, established subjects of history, geography, and government, the less emphasized disciplines, such as sociology and psychology, play a critical role in preparing students for civic engagement in a diverse nation.

Another neglected aspect of the social studies curriculum is religious studies (Eck, 2001; Haynes, 2019; Marcus, 2019; Tonga, 2016). In 2014, the NCSS, in a position paper on religion, declared:

The National Council for the Social Studies re-affirms that study about religions should be an essential part of the social studies curriculum. Knowledge about religions is not only a characteristic of an educated person but is necessary for active and engaged citizenship in a diverse nation and world. Religious literacy dispels stereotypes, promotes cross-cultural understanding, and encourages respect for the rights of others to religious liberty. (Paragraph 1)

The study of religion is essential for a student's civic preparation although many within public education are hesitant about more instructional time being dedicated to religious studies (Eck, 2001; Moore, 2007; Nord & Haynes, 1998; Prothero, 2007). Some scholars, such as

Warren Nord and Charles Haynes (1998), argued that “one cannot be an educated human being without understanding a good deal about religion” (p. 35). However, a majority of public secondary schools lack religious studies courses due to misperceptions regarding the constitutionality of religion in schools as well as the lack of teacher preparation (Marcus, 2019; Nord, 2010). To understand the need for religious studies in a students’ citizenship preparation, we must examine (a) the goal(s) of social studies education, (b) the role of religion in public and private education, (c) the meaning and importance of religious literacy, and (d) the relationship between religious studies and civic preparation.

The Goals of Social Studies Education

Civic education is inextricably linked with social studies education because it was argued that social studies more efficiently addresses civic values than only studying history (Hartman, 2008). Civic education supposedly equips students with the information and skills they need to critically investigate, assess, and understand issues affecting society, much like religious studies courses prepare students to investigate, assess, and understand issues regarding religious ideology and identity (Marcus, 2019). In a nation where almost 75% of the population identifies as religious, ignoring religion in education is illogical and civically irresponsible (Marcus, 2019; Nord, 2010; Nord & Haynes, 1998; Prothero, 2007). Civic education provides students with knowledge regarding the variety of societal perspectives and encourages students to engage in independent thinking and responsible social criticism, none of which can be done well when religion is marginalized (Metzger, 2002; Noddings, 2006; Nord & Haynes, 1998). Students who possess broad ideological perspectives and critical thinking skills are more likely to transform society into a more tolerant, civil, and participatory environment by inspiring loyalty and

commitment to ideas that unite Americans despite significant differences they may have (Metzger, 2002).

In early America, the focus of education was the community, the family, and religion, but by the close of the 19th century, compulsory schooling emerged and grew to include nearly half of America's children (Barr, Barth, & Shemis, 1977; Hartman, 2008). As national compulsory education continued to grow throughout the early decades of the 20th century, a standardized educational curriculum proved necessary. For the social sciences, U.S. and world history dominated all the other social science disciplines (Barr, Barth, & Shemis, 1977). In 1916, social studies became an independent discipline via the National Education Association (NEA) Committee on Social Studies (Mraz, 2004). Social studies emerged from the dominance of history-centered education along with other less emphasized disciplines of the social sciences (e.g., anthropology, psychology.).

Social Studies and Progressive Education

During the 20th century, the transformation of social studies education from a traditional, expository, history-centered focus was largely the result of several reform movements, most notably the progressive educational movement (Hartman, 2008). Progressive educators desired to transform the social studies disciplines into inquiry-based, student-centered learning environments. Leading the charge for change, John Dewey, one of the most influential American education reformers, challenged the traditional "bookish" curriculum and pedagogy of standard education by arguing for a child-centered education that promoted democratic citizenship via reflective thinking, not rote-memorization (Dewey, 2008, 2009). For Dewey, the traditional "bookish" curriculum served little pragmatic purpose and should be refashioned to address issues relevant to social issues (Hartman, 2008). John Dewey's vision of democratic citizenship was a

“moral and spiritual-way-of-being”; Dewey, however, was opposed to all institutions that promoted society into “us” and “other,” including religious institutions (Webster, 2009). Dewey did not include the teaching of religion as an element of the ideal school, and it is likely that his religious views influenced his position on religion and schools (Dewey, 1908; Knight, 2006).

Despite John Dewey’s talents in American education, the most critical and influential individual to transform social studies education was Harold Rugg (Boyle-Baise & Goodman, 2009). Rugg (1921) lamented the state of education and its emphasis on the “encyclopedic presentation of facts, with little or no emphasis upon the application of these facts to the understanding of great fundamental relationships” (p. 700). Rugg joined voices with Dewey and Counts by challenging the “bookish,” fact-saturated education in which students were expected to only use their brains to download information as opposed to cultivating the skills necessary for a complex world.

In the 1920s, Rugg began his most significant work, which was reforming school textbooks and teacher materials (Evans, 2007; Rugg, 1921). Rugg argued that social studies textbooks did not provide students with the information they needed to gain in-depth comprehension of the issues studied, thereby leaving students ill-prepared for engagement in society (Evans, 2007). Rugg’s argument in the 1920s was similar to modern religious literacy scholars who argue the marginalization of religion in present-day textbooks leaves students unprepared for the complexity of modern society (Kunzman, 2005; Marcus, 2019; Moore, 2007; Nord, 2010; Prothero, 2007).

While the Protestant social gospel movement likely influenced Rugg, he seemed to ignore the role of religion in social studies education (Evans, 2007). There were other progressive theorists like George Counts (1932) and William Kilpatrick (1940) challenging

traditional education; however, John Dewey and Harold Rugg were two stalwarts of the progressive agenda to refashion education as active and student-centered. The progressive movement reached its zenith in the late 1950s to early 1970s during the New Social Studies movement, but not without significant conservative criticisms. This time period was also a one in which religion was increasingly marginalized in education.

The 1950s were turbulent years in education. High student enrollment along with a shortage of teachers presented a unique challenge for educators. Dewey's progressive philosophy was labeled anti-intellectual by conservatives (Foster & Davis, 2004). Although World War II was over, the Cold War (involving the Soviet Union) impacted education through increased scrutiny over the content taught in schools. The criticisms of education were ignited toward the end of the 1950s with the launch of Soviet Union's satellite, Sputnik, in 1957, and the passage of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958. The NDEA allocated hundreds of millions of dollars for curriculum reform in science, mathematics, and foreign languages (Evans, 2010; Parry, 2006). Committees that included leading curriculum experts, content experts, and teachers were formed, and materials were being created to address the social and civic concerns of things the public perceived as *educational failures*.

The New Social Studies movement produced over 50 large-scale, public and privately supported discipline-based projects to cultivate students' skills as "junior historians and social scientists" (Evans, 2010, p. 7). The materials produced during this era "were among the most innovative and influential commodities ever produced for use in the social studies classrooms" (Evans, 2010, p. 14). Curricular lessons and activities strayed away from traditional pedagogy involving lecture and rote memorization and more toward inquiry, simulations, games, and critical thinking. Instead of expository teaching of the past, "social studies classrooms were

converted into decision-making bodies where students and teachers looked critically and analytically at traditional material and contemporary events in history and newspapers” (Massialas, 2009, p. 246). In short, the New Social Studies projects, though relatively short-lived, introduced a generation of educators to an inquiry-based, student-centered, constructionist-based educational experience with the ultimate goal of cultivating citizens capable of critical inquiry and the ability to navigate a complex society (Jadallah, 2000).

Despite increased funding for various subjects, the role of religion in education remained debated (Johnson, 1950; Smith 1957). Fears of the Soviet Union and its’ godless ideology created another opportunity for conservative thinkers to challenge the increasingly secular education system (Foster & Davis, 2004). Allen Zoll, a prominent conservative commentator, criticized American education by saying that education was undermining the core American ideals, one of which was religion (Foster & Davis, 2004). Students needed instruction in religion to effectively engage in society. Joseph Dawson (1952) argued that because public education is a civic enterprise, teaching students about religion should be required in civic education. Despite these arguments for more intensive studying in religion, the role of religion in the public schools would be further pushed to the margins throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Social Studies and Traditional Education

While progressive educators pushed for education reform, traditional educators, such as Albert Jay Nock, Robert Hutchins, and Irving Babbitt, simultaneously argued to uphold traditional teaching methods and curriculum, which included the study of religion. While Dewey and Rugg pushed for a deconstruction of traditional modes of education in favor of more student-centered approaches, the new humanist movement resisted the pedagogical shift in American education, instead favoring “tradition, eternal verities, and unchanging truths” (Hartman, 2008,

p. 44). According to the new humanists, these ideals, coupled with traditional knowledge, were essential in restraining human will and directing it towards good ends (Hartman, 2008). For example, in the 1930s, Nock delivered a series of lectures on the “Theory of Education in the United States.” Nock argued that education in America had wrongly decided that every American could be educated, which is what Dewey and other progressives believed. Nock (1932) argued that only some individuals are genuinely educable although all individuals are trainable. According to Nock (1932), education

...is the establishment of specific view of life and the direction of certain demands on life, views and demands which take proper account of the fundamental aspects of humankind, all in due measure and balance; the instinct of workmanship, the instinct of intellect and knowledge, of religion and morals, of beauty and poetry, of social life and manners. The aim at an inculcation of these views is the Great Tradition of a truly civilized society. (Section 6)

For Nock, a society educated without reference to religion and morals would not be a civilized society. Nock expressed the importance of religion for an educated citizenry. Interestingly, the NCSS (2014) statement on religion likewise stated that “knowledge about religions is characteristic of an educated person” and “is necessary for effective and engaged citizenship in a diverse nation and world” (Paragraph, 1)

Nock (1932) was not alone in criticizing the progressive educational agenda. Another voice for traditional education was that of Robert Maynard Hutchins, President of the University of Chicago and a noted traditionalist. During the 1930s and 1940s, Hutchins opposed Dewey’s ideas regarding the nature of education (Hartman, 2008). Hutchins (1947) believed that progressive educators sought an education that resembled frivolous vocationalism rather than education as understood through the liberal arts. For Hutchins (1947), neither the child nor society was the focus of education; instead, the pursuit of metaphysical, transcendental, universal human truth was the only force capable of halting the unraveling of American society. For

Hutchins, two of the goals of life were wisdom and goodness, both of which required study in metaphysics (Kagey, 1944). As Hutchins (1947) explicitly stated:

We must have universal education--let it cost what it may-- of the right kind, and that is the kind through which we may hope to raise ourselves by our own bootstraps into a different spiritual world; that is the kind which places a sound character and trained intelligence above all other aims, and which gives the citizen a scale of values, rationally established and firmly held, can a democratic individual hope to be more than a transitory phenomenon lost in the confusion of a darkening world. (p. 594)

Richard Weaver, a University of Chicago professor, was another significant voice in the conservative counter movement (Hartman, 2008; Weaver, 1948). Weaver, considered one of the most important postwar traditional thinkers, heavily criticized the progressive, pragmatic educational philosophies of the early 20th century by joining in the conservative chorus with Maynard, Nock, Babbitt, and the new humanists (Hartman, 2008). Weaver (1948) loathed progressive educational philosophies, such as Dewey's child-centered philosophy. Weaver's critiques are ultimately grounded in the central question of this study: the role of religious literacy in civic preparation. For Weaver, the divorce between physical and metaphysical ideas and the antipathy against metaphysics is a root issue (2013).

Throughout the 20th century, both progressive and traditional educational theorists argued that their philosophies were in the best interest of education in America. Within both philosophies, the preparation of future citizens was considered paramount; their differences were with the means of this preparation. In the progressive approach, student-experiential learning and child-centeredness were emphasized and religion was downplayed while in the conservative approach, traditional pedagogical models (e.g., lecture and rote-memorization) were favored and religion was essential. Because the goal of social studies education is to prepare students to be engaged citizens beyond K-12 education and because America may be the most religiously diverse society, it is essential that students understand various religious perspectives (Eck, 2001;

Moore, 2007). As Moore (2007) wrote, “without a basic understanding of the beliefs, symbols, literature, and practices related to the world's religious traditions, much of history and culture is rendered incomprehensible” (p. 5). Moore argued that history and culture are incomprehensible without the study of religion; therefore, including religious studies in every student’s K–12 education is essential.

Religion in Education

In the 1960s, the Supreme Court made decisions in two pivotal cases with implications into the relationship between education and religion. First, “in *Engel vs. Vitale* (1962), the court decided that the government should not sponsor prayers in public schools; later, in *Abington v. Schempp* (1963), the Supreme Court ruled that the government should not sponsor Bible reading and recitation of the Lord’s Prayer in public schools” (Moore, 2007, p. 53). The lingering effects of these rulings are felt in common misunderstandings regarding the nature of religion in school settings, particularly in public education. Most Americans understand the 1963 case to mean that all religion in all forms is banned in school settings; however, this is a gross misunderstanding of the Court’s decision (Moore, 2007). The Supreme Court, while banning public schools from endorsing or castigating any religion, argued in favor of religion remaining in students’ education.

Also, it might well be said that one’s education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It indeed may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment. (*Abington v. Schempp*, 1963, p. 374)

The Supreme Court (1963) explicitly stated that “one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion” (p. 374), which resembles the NCSS’s (2014) position statement. Although religious literacy scholars agree on the constitutionality of religion in

schools, religion is still largely absent from public education (Haynes, 2019; Prothero, 2007). For example, in the state of Tennessee, no school applied for an exemption to offer a world religions course for the 2018–2019 school year. While Tennessee does have a different religions course, an elective offered in the English/Language Arts department called *Bible as Literature*, only 57 schools offered this course in the 2018–2019 academic term, which is down from 71 schools during the 2017–2018 term (email correspondence from the State of Tennessee).

By ignoring religion, Nord (2010) argued, schools are violating the Supreme Court's ruling in that schools are endorsing “religion of secularity” (*Abington v. Schempp*, 1963). Nord (2010) argued that the Supreme Court's decision, in essence, requires that schools take religion seriously and include it in a student’s education. The absence of religion in education, however, may signal to parents that religion is insignificant to daily life and living (Kroeker & Norris, 2007). Despite the overwhelming majority of Americans claiming a religious perspective, public schools continue to marginalize religion in the curriculum, which may be one reason for the growth of independent schools, many of which are religiously affiliated (Palmer, 1974).

Nord (2010) addressed three practical objections against including religion in public school settings. The first objection is that “religion is too controversial” (Nord, 2010, p. 186). Religion is controversial and, if done wrong, can be a means of criticism and potential lawsuits, but religion is not the only “controversial” topic included in education (Nord, 2010). Nord (2010) argued that politics, gender, race, and sex education are also “controversial” issues included in education; therefore, ignoring religion due to its controversial nature while allowing other “controversial” subjects is untenable. A second objection is that including religion in education “cannot be done well” because teachers feel insecure in addressing religions other than their own

while parents from minority religions fear that teachers will misunderstand their religion, even if unintentionally (Nord, 2010, p. 186).

Finally, Nord (2010) mentions a third objection, referring to there not being enough time or space in the curriculum for religious studies. Nord questioned whether or not everything in current textbooks needs to be included. For example, Nord (2010) mentioned that history textbooks offer a plethora of dates and names with little perspective on “what is important” and science textbooks also provide limited perspectives on “what is important” while inundated with facts and formulas (p. 188). As Nord (2010) summarized:

We teach students a lot about things that *all things considered* are not particularly important when compared to those deep, inescapable existential questions about morality and meaning that are so obviously important, and that we either shy away from or totally ignore. We fail to give students a critical perspective on any of the secular ways of making sense of their lives that preface the curriculum. (p. 188)

Nord argued that space for “deep, inescapable existential questions” exists by re-examining current textbooks for information that, when “all things are considered are not particularly important” (p. 188). Developing religious literacy through religious studies or world religions classes is one-way students might have space to wrestle with those inescapable questions.

Context of the Problem

Despite education being encouraged by the NCSS, the ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development), and the Supreme Court, religious studies education, which cultivates religious literacy, is minimized in schools and is reduced to brief representation in history and geography (Berglund, Shanneik, & Bocking, 2016). Though scholars understand the constitutionality of religion, the public may have misunderstood the Supreme Court to mean that all religion in public schools is unconstitutional, leading to a minimization of religion in education (Haynes, 2011; Moore, 2007). Religious studies scholars and educational theorists

agree that religion should be included in the curriculum (Haynes, 2011; Moore, 2007; Nord, 2010; Prothero, 2007). There are educational benefits of religion in education. Scholars also agree that studies of religion will help prepare students for civic participation beyond high school graduation (Moore, 2007).

How Religious Studies Prepares Students for Citizenship

In *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy*, Moore (2007) defined the goal of education along three precepts, stating that students should (1) “function as active citizens who promote the ideals of democracy; (2) “act as thoughtful and informed moral agents”; and (3) “lead fulfilling lives” (p. 9). One particular skill essential for civic engagement is the ability to think critically and independently (Moore, 2007). Religious studies fosters critical thinking by not only allowing an examination of religious perspectives, but also by giving students a “critical perspective on any of the secular ways of making sense of their lives” (Nord, 2010, p. 188).

Nord (2010) argued that critical thinking is the bridge linking religious studies and civic education. Critical thinking is an important component of social studies education. Stahl and VanSickle (2009) argued that social studies educators should strive

...to enable their students to become educated and competent so that they will be successful in the world. Students should study individual, and group ideas, actions, and artifacts in ways that will (a) facilitate their achievement of selected social studies knowledge, understanding, and abilities, and (b) enable them to function well with others both inside and outside the social studies classroom. (p. 9)

Though Stahl and VanSickle did not use the words “citizenship education,” they accurately described the way preparation for civic participation in a complex society should look.

Widespread agreement exists among social studies educators that citizenship education is the goal of social studies; however, there is no consensus that the definition of “citizenship” even exists (Ross, 2006). It is complex to define a “good citizen” as there are many competing

ideologies (Westheimer & Kahne, 2002). At the very least, citizenship education should enable students to acquire the “knowledge, skills, and values necessary for active participation in society” (Ross, 2006, p. 20).

What is Religious Literacy and Why is it Important?

Engaging in society demands that citizens engage with one another. An overwhelming percentage of Americans ascribe to a religion, and even some who identify as nonreligious still believe in the existence of God. Prothero (2007) defines religious literacy as “the ability to understand and use the religious terms, symbols, images, beliefs, practices, scriptures, heroes, themes, and stories that are employed in American public life” (p. 17). However, religious literacy is not synonymous with biblical literacy.

While Prothero acknowledges the broad influence of Christianity in Western history, religious literacy, an understanding of a plethora of religious symbols and beliefs, differs from biblical literacy, referring to the ability to read the Bible with sufficient knowledge to ascertain the meaning of the biblical text (Perkins, 2011). Evans (2017) described the ways that the Bible specifically has influenced culture, for example, the inscription of Leviticus 25:15 on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia or the use of Amos 5:24 in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s iconic “I Have a Dream” speech. The Bible is an essential text in American history, and biblical literacy is an area of research (Evans, 2017). Biblical literacy, however, is limited to Jewish and Christian traditions, which are only two of the religious perspectives represented in America's religiously diverse society (Eck, 2001).

Because the religious perspectives that affect our society include more than just Jewish and Christian traditions (e.g., Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism), the impact of religious literacy in a pluralistic society (as nearly 90% of Americans believe in the existence of God) is the focus of

this investigation. With an overwhelming percentage of the population having some degree of religious belief, religious assumptions and practices are inevitable (Eck, 2001). Failure to inform students in grades kindergarten through 12 about deeply held ideologies may potentially (1) help fuel culture wars, (2) curtail historical and cultural understanding due to religion's role in world history, and (3) promote religious and racial bigotry (Moore, 2007; Spinner-Halev, 2000).

Furthermore, the absence of religious literacy (religious illiteracy) “hinders our capacity to function as engaged, informed, and responsible citizens of our democracy” and “fosters a climate that is both politically dangerous and intellectually debilitating” (Moore, 2007, p. 4). When schools do nothing to combat religious illiteracy, ignoring the diversity of religious ideas that exist throughout our society, they are only constructing a wall between students and civic advancement. Eck (2001) wrote:

Americans, on the whole, have a high degree of religious identification, according to every indication of the Gallup polls, and yet a shallow level of religious literacy. Beginning to root out stereotypes and prejudices that form the fault lines of fracture is critical for a society that has absorbed so much difference, with so little understanding of our differences. (p. 70)

Further emphasizing this point, Noddings (2008) said that educators could not claim to educate while ignoring issues of religion.

Religious Literacy and Civic Values

Religious literacy is essential in social studies education due to the plethora of religious individuals and groups engaging with public issues as well as the growing religious diversity in society (Patrick, Gulayets, & Peck, 2017). Positively, studying the religions of society may cultivate within students a sense of discernment, understanding, and respect regarding varying religious perspectives because “religion has always been and continues to function as a powerful dimension of human experience” (Moore, 2007, p. 28) School settings include other aspects of

the human experience, such as gender, sexuality, politics, etc. Further, religion “invites students to identify and question underlying foundations of assumptions in ways that inspire engaged reflection and critical thinking” by having students as “the ‘why’ of human agency as well as the ‘why’ of existence itself” (Moore, 2007, p. 30).

The absence of religious studies means that students “will not be able to make reflective and critical judgments about anything religious contested” (Nord, 1995). For example, without some degree of religious literacy, how can students contest, reflect, and dissect statements like, “In their heart of hearts, all Muslims are terrorists,” “Homosexuality is a sin,” or “Religion and reason are incompatible?” (Moore, 2007, p. 27). Statements like these often go unchallenged if a student lacks religious literacy and historical knowledge regarding these traditions. Not only does religious studies enable students to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for civic life, but ignoring the influence of religion in civic and political life hinders efforts to prepare students for their real-life roles as citizens (Kunzman, 2005). Ignoring religious studies is a curricular problem as well as a civic problem (Prothero, 2007).

America is a secular nation by design, but a religious nation by choice (Prothero, 2007). The overwhelming majority of Americans are religious and say they believe in God (Nord, 2010; Pew Forum, 2014; Scheiman, 2011). According to the Pew Forum (2014), 70% of the Americans identify as Christian, 5.9% identify as non-Christian, 22% are unaffiliated (although 6.9% of the unaffiliated consider religion important). With an overwhelming number of Americans holding religious beliefs, students should have a level of religious literacy regarding those beliefs that have an influence on society. Few schools offer religious studies classes, and most of the schools that do are independent schools. Considering these things, the perceptions of teachers currently teaching religious studies courses—particularly their perceptions of the role of religious studies

in preparing students for citizenship beyond their high school years—were captured in the current study. Due to religious studies being nearly absent from public schools, data will be collected from teachers of religion courses at independent schools (both affiliated and nonaffiliated with religion) as well as a public school.

Statement of the Problem

The NCSS (2014) issued a position statement that described the critical role of religious studies in a student's education and citizenship preparation. In 1963, the Supreme Court declared that a public school might not endorse any particular religious tradition; however, in the same ruling, the Supreme Court argued that the study of religion and the history of religion is critical in a student's education. With the public often assuming that all things related to religion were outlawed by the Supreme Court (Moore, 2007) and with teachers ill-prepared to adequately address religion (Nord, 2010), many public schools ignore religion altogether. Ignoring religion, however, not only gives students an incomplete education, but it may also hinder students' full, active citizenship engagement (Moore, 2007; Prothero, 2007). Therefore, religious studies is essential in a student's civic education because the study of religion cultivates essential citizenship attributes, such as the ability to think critically and deeply about issues affecting society (Moore, 2007; Nord, 2010). The absence of religious studies cultivates a society of religiously illiterate individuals, thereby enabling distrust, fear, and bigotry. To accomplish the mission of K–12 education, namely acting as thoughtful, moral citizens who live fulfilling lives (Moore, 2007), religious studies is necessary in providing citizenship education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers of religion courses who use the study of religion to prepare students for the pluralistic society awaiting

them. Teachers of religion courses teach a unique discipline without which most of history and contemporary society would be inexplicable (Moore, 2007). This investigation addressed the ways teachers of religion courses define religious literacy, the reasons religious studies is necessary in civic education and to foster religious literacy, the perceptions of teachers of religion courses regarding the civic consequences of religious illiteracy, and the ability of religious studies to inculcate citizenship values (i.e., critical thinking). This study has the potential to illuminate the need for religious studies courses in public schools to complete students' civic preparation in a diverse society.

The Research Questions

The following research questions guided the current qualitative study: (1) How do religious studies teachers define religious literacy? (2) Why is religious literacy a necessary element in a students' secondary education? (3) What are the civic consequences of a society without religious literacy? and (4) How can religious studies inculcate civic values? To answer these questions, standardized open-ended interviews were conducted with one teacher of religion courses from four different types of independent schools (i.e., Islamic, Jewish, Christian, nonreligious) and one social studies teacher teaching a "religion course" at a public school. These teachers were selected via a two-stage nonrandom sample, and all of them lived and taught in a southeastern state.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used throughout this study:

Religious literacy: The ability to understand and use the religious terms, symbols, images, beliefs, practices, scriptures, heroes, themes, and stories that are employed in American public life (Prothero, 2007).

Civic education: Education that equips a citizen with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for active and engaged civic life (NCSS, 2013).

Bible literacy: Also called “Biblical literacy”; the ability and motivation of people to read the Bible with sufficient understanding so that they can explain its basic meaning; having sufficient knowledge and skill to use resources that enable them to discern the basic meaning of a Biblical text. It includes the ability to apply this discerned meaning (i.e., Biblical wisdom) to contemporary life (Perkins, 2011).

Progressive education: A 20th-century American pedagogical movement in which people sought to revolutionize the nation’s formal education experience. Progressive education attempted to make the formal curriculum more pragmatic for the modern world (Hartman, 2008).

New humanists: An early 20th-century philosophical and educational philosophy rooted in knowledge via “tradition, eternal verities, and unchanging truths” (Hartman, 2008, p. 44). New humanists argued for traditional learning to be rooted in metaphysical principles and universal human truth rather than a pragmatic education pushed by progressive educators (Hartman, 2008).

Civic values: Also called “civic dispositions” by the Center for Civic Education, these include civility, respect, individual responsibility, self-discipline, civic-mindedness, open-mindedness, compromise, toleration of diversity, patience and persistence, compassion, generosity, and loyalty to the nation and its principles (Center for Civic Education, 1991).

Supernaturalism: In religion, it refers to a philosophical approach that allows for non-natural explanations of events as opposed to naturalism, which allows only natural cause and effect (Lewis, 1947).

Religions course: A general label for four different kinds of courses in public secondary education: Bible History, the Bible and Its Influence, Bible as Literature, and World Religion (Feinberg & Layton, 2014).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Religious illiteracy is increasingly recognized as a public problem that should be addressed in schools (Rosenblith, 2010). The purpose of this study was to investigate religious studies teachers' perceptions of religious illiteracy and its effects on students' civic preparation. Although a student's family, social world, and religious community all contribute to civic preparation, the role of social studies education is mainly concerned with all students' civic preparation for the good of society (Barr, Barth, & Shemis, 1977; Moore, 2007; Tonga, 2016). According to Moore (2007), the purpose of social studies education is for students "to acquire the skills and experiences that will enable them a) to function as active citizens who promote the ideals of democracy, b) to act as thought and informed moral agents; and c) to lead fulfilling lives" (p. 9). Social studies educators seek to cultivate "active citizens who promote the ideals of democracy" (Moore, 2007, p. 9).

While most attention in social studies is given to history, geography, and government, less emphasized disciplines, such as sociology and anthropology, play critical roles in preparing students for civic engagement in a diverse nation. Another often neglected aspect of the social studies curriculum is religious studies (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1987; Eck, 2001; Tonga, 2016). In 2014, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) reaffirmed:

...that study about religions should be an essential part of the social studies curriculum. Knowledge about religions is not only a characteristic of an educated person but is necessary for productive and engaged citizenship in a diverse nation and world. Religious literacy dispels stereotypes, promotes cross-cultural understanding, and encourages respect for the rights of others to religious liberty. (Paragraph, 1)

The critical role of religious studies in civic education preparation is understood academically although public education seems largely unconvinced (Eck, 2001; Moore, 2007; Nord & Haynes, 1998; Prothero, 2007). According to Nord (2010), two significant reasons that many secondary schools lack religious studies courses are (1) ignorance regarding the constitutionality of religion in schools and (2) a lack of adequate teacher preparation. To understand the need for religious studies in a students' citizenship preparation education, one must examine (a) the role of religion in education in the United States, including a survey of the place of religion in early 20th-century educational movements, and (b) the significant role of the Supreme Court in religion as an issue in education in the United States. After providing an overview of the history of religion in United States education, religious literacy will be defined, and the necessity of religious literacy in students' civic preparation beyond their K–12 years will be addressed. Finally, the relationship between religious literacy via religious studies and civic preparation will also be examined.

American Education Eras

Puritan Influence in Early American Education (1800–1899)

Education and religion have long been interconnected in American society, primarily due to the Puritans having influence both inside and outside of schools. Before compulsory schooling, the family was the primary means of an individual's socialization and education, and religion was central to each endeavor (Carper, 1998). As Hartman (2008) noted, "the first schools in colonial and early national America were emphatically authoritarian. This was partly due to the Protestant conviction that sin organized individual human existence" (p. 7). While not the only aim of early American education, one of its critical goals was to make people more godly despite their inherently evil nature (Marsh & Willis, 2003). The belief that humans were

born evil, a belief prevalent in early America, impacted education and pedagogy on into the 20th century when the Protestant belief was challenged, if not abandoned (Hartman, 2008).

Puritans believed in innate human sinfulness, which was a central belief within the larger Protestant movement in the late 15th and early 16th centuries in central Europe. First was Martin Luther, the German reformer, who famously challenged some of the core teachings of the Catholic church. Many other reformers followed him, such as Philip Melanthon, Ulrich Zwingli, Heinrich Bullinger, and John Knox. In the 16th century, John Calvin, a French theologian, became famous not only for his writings, but also for his vision of the “ideal Christian society.” Centuries later and half a world away, the Puritans sought to create John Calvin’s vision in America (Rury, 2005). One important means of accomplishing this ideal Christian society was education.

The religious beliefs of the Puritans and other Protestants in early America were an important reason for the earlier education initiatives of the new nation. Of central importance to Protestants and Puritans, in particular, was the belief that man needed to form a personal relationship with God. A relationship with God would give an individual the ability “to read and interpret the Holy Scriptures, catechisms, and other religious materials; in particular, that meant every man, or person should be able to read the Bible and interpret it himself” (Rury, 2005, p. 31). Education rooted in literacy through religious texts, specifically the Bible, began in colonial America and remained important until the 20th century when religious influences were minimized due to an increasingly pluralistic populace (Marsh & Willis, 2003). Peterson (2010) wrote:

As an almost exclusively Protestant culture, colonial Americans took their Bible reading seriously. Only in the Bible could one learn the “Word of God,” and only by comprehending the written catechism could biblical vagaries be resolved in a doctrinally

correct fashion. So children throughout the colonies were taught to read. By the time of the Revolution, such education, in the best of families, could be highly elevated. (p. 23)

For people to build relationships with God via reading and interpreting the Bible, they must be able to read and also critically reason based on their reading; these two skills were critical to the Protestant traditions flowing from John Calvin's vision, which led to education being highly prized by these groups (Rury, 2005).

Puritans believed certain ideals were essential to an individual being able to live a good life, one of which was growing his or her relationship with God. Mulholland (1965) wrote:

Historically, Puritanism began as a religious concept of the direct responsibility of each person to God and then became a political concept of the personal responsibility of the individual for the well-being of the political community. The key to Puritan is personal responsibility for the attainment of a goal which in some way is superior to the individual. (p. 268)

One necessary value in the Puritan education model as well as in the modern American civic education model was a strong sense of responsibility (Center for Civic Education, 1991). This sense of human responsibility and accountability extended from Puritan education into the rest of the world. Mulholland (1965) continued:

virtually all dynamic education in the world today assumes human responsibility in some endeavor which has meaning beyond the individual desire has meaning beyond the individual desire. It bases itself on the Puritan concept of responsibility, if not to God, yet to some ideal or achievement which will have more than individual meaning. Without maintaining the religious implications of the Puritan strength, education still maintains the Puritan sense of self-obligation. (p. 269)

The Puritan value of responsibility was not the only permanent feature that extended from Puritan culture—the emphasis of responsibility for the depraved nature of man had a lasting impact, too. As Hartman (2008) shared, “the pedagogy of death, hell, and wrath influenced organized educational activity until the twentieth century in many schools across the nation” (p. 7). The Puritans' religious model was somewhat minimized by the emergence of the common

school movement in the twilight years of the 19th century, in which a more pluralistic model was embraced.

The Common School Movement and Horace Mann (1800–1900)

The 19th century was a time of rapid change for the nation overall, but specifically for education. In the early 19th century, education was reserved for the small portion of the society deemed suitable for specialized training of the mind (Marsh & Willis, 2003). While education served the social good, it more importantly “led to godliness, virtue, and understanding - the proper condition of cultivated human beings” (Marsh & Willis, 2003, p. 31). Initially, formal education was not for the entire populace, but as the 19th century progressed, Americans warmed up to the idea that the entire populace was educable (Marsh & Willis, 2003).

The common or public school movement began in the early 19th century (Johnson et al., 1999). As American society incorporated ideas of the Enlightenment conception of individualism, emphasis began to shift from Puritan schooling for mastery over sin to Horace Mann’s common school approach for social and civic preparation (Hartman, 2008). Horace Mann, who lived from 1796 to 1859, was elected as the Secretary of Education for Massachusetts in 1837 (Groen, 2008; Johnson et al., 1999). Mann thought that his appointment in Massachusetts had been given by God, and he wanted to address the increasing social strife that resulted from industrial development (Groen, 2008; Mann, 1837; Rosenblith, 2017). Common schools, according to Mann, would provide social benefits (e.g., creating wealth, lowering crime levels) as well as prepare citizens to participate in a healthy democracy (Groen, 2008; Marsh & Willis, 2003). The rationale for these new public schools (as visualized by Mann) revolved around a more general morality, differing from the Puritans’ religious schools where scripture was interpreted literally (Rosenblith, 2017). Mann, however, did want religion to

remain an essential element of education because religion is critical for a moral populace

(Jeynes, 2009). As Mann wrote (as cited in Kliebard, 1969):

But, it will be said that this great result, in Practical Morals, is a consummation of blessedness that can never be attained without religion; and that no community will ever be religious without a Religious Education. Both of these propositions, I regard as eternal and immutable truths. Devoid of religious principles and religious affections the race can never fall so low that it may sink still lower. (p. 73)

Explicitly religious scripture reading as seen in Puritan education was no longer part of common education, but religion and morality remained central. While Mann's common school philosophy emphasized a more general morality than its Puritan predecessor, Mann believed that common schooling could address the societal effects of urbanization, industrialization, and immigration (Carper, 1998). The racial and ethnic hostility that was developing in American society coupled with the growing number of immigrants provided opportunities for American schools to help all members of society assimilate into American culture; religious leaders readily accepted this goal because these public schools "exuded what considered a nondenominational Protestantism" (Rosenblith, 2017, paragraph, 3).

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, religious affiliation and compulsory education were experiencing phenomenal growth, and the relationship between religion and education began growing tumultuous (Stallones, 2011). Between 1776 and 1916, the percentage of the U.S. population that identified as "religious adherents" rose from 17% to 53%; during this time, church growth rose from 1 church for every 825 residents to 1 church for every 430 residents (Stallones, 2011). Likewise, in education, school enrollment grew by nearly 300% between 1870 and 1956, with high school graduates growing from 2% to 62% during the same period (Stallones, 2011). At the close of the 19th century, nearly 90% of elementary and school-aged students were enrolled in school (Carper, 1998).

In the early 19th century, religion was a daily part of schools in many states. Few students went beyond elementary school throughout most of the 19th century, and the elementary schools were motivated by religious and educational reasons. Johnson et al. (1999) wrote, “Until the late 1800s the motive, curriculum, and administration of elementary education were primarily religious” (p. 299). For example, a textbook commonly used in the early 19th century included a prayer at the beginning of each school day, which stated, “Oh Lord God, I beseech thee, of thy fatherly goodness and mercy to pardon all my offenses which in thought, word, or deed, I have this day committed against thee and thy holy law” (The New England Primer, 1805; Rosenblith 2017). The religious language was less explicit in the popular *McGuffey Readers* textbook, the main textbook used in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A prayer still began the school day, but more general language was used. An example of the less explicit language is, “I hope you have said your prayers and thanked your Father in Heaven for all his goodness . . . your good health, and a blessing of home” (McGuffey, 1836; Rosenblith, 2017).

As American democracy grew from the 1850s to the 1900s, Americans accepted the notion that a democracy demanded a politically engaged populace. As a result, American society needed education that differed from the Puritan model, education that would provide the necessary framework for people to select appropriate leaders (Marsh & Willis, 2003). Educating the growing nation demanded greater centralization of curriculum. Debates concerning the specific content of the centralized curriculum raged throughout the second half of the 20th century. Two National Education Association (NEA) reports were influential in secondary education, *A Course of Study from Primary School to University* (1876) and *The Committee of Ten* (1893)

The first report (NEA, 1876) detailed a traditional curriculum with emphasis on subject-centered curriculum along with “the value of will and mental discipline, of rationality and the written word” (Marsh & Willis, 2003, p. 33). Religion was not explicitly included in this curriculum although a general course on mental and moral philosophy was included in secondary education. The *Committee of Ten* (NEA, 1893) also recommended a subject-centered curriculum in which students had limited opportunity for electives (Johnson et al., 1999). The focus of this report was on preparing secondary students, who were only about 10% of the secondary school population, for college (Johnson et al., 1999; Marsh & Willis, 2003). Unlike the first report (NEA, 1876), society-centered courses (e.g., bookkeeping) were included; however, the available religion courses were excluded from both reports. In each report, the NEA sought to define the necessary curriculum for common schools and for the society. Both reports were subject-oriented, a reality that 20th-century progressive educators would challenge. Additionally, the role of religion in formal education was minimized in both reports. As a result, “the religious purposes for education inherited from the colonial era gave way to secular purposes, and religion declined as a part of the curriculum of public schools” (Marsh & Willis, 2003, p. 31).

During the 20th century, the minimization of religion in American education continued as the notion of citizenship underwent a shift. According to Rosenblith (2017), “the type of citizen and future worker needed expanded from someone who was morally upright to someone who could contribute to the burgeoning Scientific and Industrial Revolutions” (Paragraph, 4). Coupled with growing religious diversity in American society, religion moved to the periphery of importance in American education. Plurality in cultural beliefs and the growing complexity of societal and global issues also affected the content that needed to be taught and the ways in which students should be taught. Also, the world was no longer viewed as absolute and fixed, so

both the education models and content needed to reflect the complexities that religion seemed to downplay due to the importance of religious absolutes (Rosenblith, 2017).

The Progressive Movement (1890–1958)

The progressive education movement (1890–1958) is the most significant educational movement in U.S. History (Fallace, 2015; Hartman, 2008). Progressive education is a general, all-encompassing term that includes many diverse ideological and political philosophies. However, most, if not all, progressive education reformists sought to redefine school and curriculum by shifting away from the traditional education of the 19th century (centered around objective, subject-centered, knowledge-saturated education) toward a more pragmatic, subjective, problem-centered model focused on society. Progressive education includes a variety of personalities and philosophies, with the variety significant enough for Herbert Kleibard (1987) to write that the term *progressive education* covers “such a broad range, not just of different, but of contradictory, ideas on education as to be meaningless” (p. xi). Even with the multiplicity of philosophies and personalities, one element was shared. As Fallace (2015) shared, “Despite disagreement over the origins, nature, and impact of progressive education in American schools, general consensus exists that the idea of child-centeredness was in some way at the ideological core of the movement” (p. 73). Child-centeredness, not the “drill and kill” approach of the traditional educational model, was the common distinctive feature of progressive education (Kaplan, 2013).

American education theorists adopted the child-centered philosophy from European philosophers of the 18th and 19th centuries. While scholars such as Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852), and Johann Herbart (1776–1841) were some of the originators of the philosophy, Colonel Francis W. Parker (1837–1902) and John Dewey (1859–

1952) adapted and applied child-centered philosophy to American schooling (Fallace, 2015).

Progressive education theorists believed that the way to reform society was by focusing on the child. Hartman (2008) contextualized child-centeredness and progressive education, stating that:

...during the Progressive Era, children's lives were redefined as a time of innocence, and the innocent child was mobilized as a way to regulate society. The child became a means through which reform could be ratified, and education was central to all reform. (p. 8)

The child-centered philosophy was a reaction against Puritan beliefs in an individual's innate wickedness. In Mehl's (1961) history of education, John Brubacher described the way progressive education experienced growth after dispelling those traditional views of children. According to Brubacher, "While formerly children were to be seen and not heard . . . they have increasingly come to be heard as well" (as cited in Mehl, 1961, p. 10). After transforming the ways educators viewed children, educators could then transform their engagement with students. Progressive educators emphasized the need for schools to be places where children lived, rather than merely existed.

Another important aspect of progressive education was for high school education to become as common as elementary education. In 1890, only 5% of the children in high school age ranges attended high school; this figure doubled by the turn of the 20th century and doubled again from 1900–1910. By 1960, almost 90% of the children in high school age ranges attended school (Hartman, 2008). Progressive reformers lobbied for compulsory attendance as a cultural struggle emerged between a growing immigrant population with differing ideas about the ways their children should spend their teen years, none of which included being "conditioned by reform-minded educators" (Hartman, 2008, p. 9). In the end, the White Protestant vision for education superseded the immigrant vision, thereby designating an extended childhood, via formal education, as the precursor to American citizenship (Hartman, 2008, p. 9).

Progressive reformers sought to refashion education toward one of two major objectives: education for social efficiency and education for social democracy (Hartman, 2008). Each strand of progressive education developed different, yet both objectives enlarged and altered “pedagogy and curriculum beyond what were considered traditional methods and programs that had relegated the child to a less important position” (Hartman, 2008, p. 9). The end of education involved a social utilitarianism, which was a part of Mann’s common school philosophy (Marsh & Willis, 2003). Arguably, John Dewey was the most crucial figure in progressive education. Dewey was an influential progressive educator as well as an important American philosopher. However, Dewey was not alone in the most important education reform in American history (Hartman, 2008). Harold Rugg and his critique of traditional textbooks, George S. Counts and his vision of a refashioned society through progressive education, and William Kilpatrick and his project method of education were all influential progressive educators who influenced education in the 20th century.

Influential Figures in Progressive Education

John Dewey, Progressive Education, and Religion

John Dewey (1859–1952) sought to redefine and refashion American education toward a more pragmatic social democracy. Dewey, often considered the father of progressive education, believed education centered on traditional academics was irrelevant for modern existence (Evans, 2007; Hartman, 2008). Defining progressive education, Dewey (1934, 1989) stated, “Progressive education is a phrase at least of contrast with an education that is predominantly static in subject-matter, authoritarian in its methods, and mainly passive and receptive from the side of the young” (p. 194). Like the progressive education movement, Dewey’s philosophy was

child-centered, and his educational vision was focused on *the learning child* rather than on the learning the child was to acquire. Discussing traditional education, Dewey (1990a) stated:

...its passivity of attitude, its mechanical massing of children, its uniformity of curriculum and method. . . it is in the teacher, the textbook, anywhere and everywhere you please except in the immediate instincts and activities of the child himself. On that basis, there is not much to be said about the *life* of the child. A good deal might be said about the studying of the child, but the school is not the place where the child *lives*. (p. 34)

According to Dewey (1990a), traditional education was a wasteful enterprise, as he shared that the irrelevant “bookish” curriculum should erode in favor of a child-centered education that promoted democratic citizenship through reflective thinking and experience, not rote memorization (Dewey, 1990b, 2008; Johnson et al., 1999). Dewey’s position on education was a natural consequence of his pragmatic philosophy.

Dewey’s philosophy on education disdained traditional subject disciplines and static knowledge; instead, Dewey emphasized the quality of mental process rather than the production of correct answers as evidence for educational advancement (Dewey, 1916; Hartman, 2008). Dewey was not concerned with highly abstract learning and irrational dichotomies, as in idealism’s emphasis on ideas as the essence of knowledge (Johnson et al., 1999). As a pragmatist, he rejected the notion that truth is unchanging and ethereal. In pragmatism, truth is relative, and truth is what works for individuals in particular times and places (Johnson et al., 1999). Pragmatic education, then, minimizes abstract learning while emphasizing active experience (Johnson et al., 1999). Dewey sought to destroy “the divides between transcendentalism and unmoored relativity, between a fixed law of nature and freedom of subjective action” (Hartman, 2008, p. 13). Dewey’ sought to radically refashion education, including the place of religion in education.

Considered one of the most prolific writers on educational matters in America's brief history, John Dewey said little about the place of religion in education (Jones & Sheffield, 2010). Such marginalization of religion is fascinating. However, Jones and Sheffield (2010), who acknowledged the mysteriousness of Dewey's lack of writing on religion in education, explain his marginalization of religion, stating "...given that Dewey spent much of his career 'reconstructing' philosophy with the goal of making it experientially valuable, it makes some sense that he 'ignored' issues of a completely metaphysical flavor" (p. 8). Dewey's understanding of democratic citizenship did not include teaching religion. His radical religious views may have influenced his beliefs about religion and schools (Dewey, 1908; Knight, 2006). Dewey was raised by a religious mother and seemed to have participated in Christianity early in life although Christianity, for him, became a cycle of guilt and fear of condemnation (Stallones, 2006). According to Stallones (2006), Dewey erased all his previous doubts and beliefs after an experience of oneness with the universe while teaching at a school in Oil City. However, Dewey's abandonment of Christianity did not equate to a loss in the existence of transcendental ideals (Hickman, 2009). According to Webster (2009):

Dewey's view of religion, then, developed toward a form of naturalism as he moved away from wholly accepting his Christian heritage and his initial attraction for the philosophy of Hegel. He developed a spiritual and natural view of the one dimension of being which combined notions of the real and the ideal together such that there is no secular realm 'outside' but there is only the one realm of existence. (p. 620)

Dewey (1962) argued for religious belief (in democracy and science) and values void of any supernaturalism and institutionalism.

In terms of education, Dewey disapproved of institutional, supernatural, top-down religion and did not see its place in socially democratic education because "when supernaturalist religious arguments enter into the public sphere, they are incompatible with the type of inquiry

that is essential to the technosciences and therefore to honest debates” (Hickman, 2009, p. 31). Dewey had full faith that democracy and science could meet the needs of human society. Because of his faith in democracy and science, Dewey (1908) urged that schools should not “under the name of spiritual culture, form habits of mind which are at war with the habits of mind congruous with democracy and with science” (p. 800). More bluntly, Dewey said it was not “feasible or desirable to put upon regular teachers the burden of teaching a subject which has the nature of religion” (p. 806). For Dewey, the purpose of education was social transformation with the child at the center. Dewey believed that education void of religion could academically and morally prepare future citizens. Jones and Sheffield (2010) wrote, “It is clear that Dewey believed successful moral instruction, as with all ‘instruction,’ should be based on democratic, earthbound, student-centered, ‘experience rather than religion-based metaphysical faith’” (p. 8). With science replacing the church as the final authority in life, religion fell under the category of unnecessary abstractions that needed to be removed from the curriculum (Myers, 2017)

George Counts and a Reconstructed Society

George Counts (1889–1974) was a social reconstructionist and revolutionary voice for progressive education in the 1930s (Hartman, 2008; Myers, 2007). In a speech given to the Progressive Education Association in 1932, Counts called educators to do whatever necessary to radically refashion a profoundly broken society (Hartman, 2008). In this speech, Counts proclaimed, “If progressive education is to be truly progressive it must emancipate itself from the influence of the elite . . . and become somewhat less frightened that it is today at the bogeys of imposition and indoctrination.” Counts also argued that educators should remember that humans need some ideal for which to strive, and he believed that ideal was the American Dream, a

particular view of the good life. Counts (1932) admittedly argued, in this speech, for a form of indoctrination for students toward a vision of a progressive, collectivist society, stating that:

Ordinary men and women crave a definite purpose for which to strive and which lends richness and dignity and meaning to life. I would consequently like to see Progressive Education come to grips with the problem of creating a tradition that has roots in American soil, is in harmony with the spirit of the age, recognizes the facts of industrialism, appeals to the most profound impulses of our people, and takes into account the emergence of world society. But, you will say, is this not leading us out upon very dangerous ground? Is it not taking us rather far from the familiar landmarks bounding the fields that teachers are wont to cultivate? My answer is, of course, in the affirmative. This, however, does not, in my judgment, constitute a serious objection to what I propose. If we are content to remain where all is safe and quiet and serene, we shall dedicate ourselves, as teachers have commonly done in the past, to a role of relatively complete futility, if not of positive social reaction. Neutrality with respect to the great issues that agitate society, while perhaps theoretically possible, is practically tantamount to giving support to the most powerful forces engaged in the contest. You will say, no doubt, that I am flirting with the idea of indoctrination. And my answer is again in the affirmative.

According to Counts, the U.S. education system was inherently classist, and he challenged many of his fellow progressives for their hypocrisy educating in elite private schools and the children of privileged families (Counts, 1932; Hartman, 2008). Counts denounced capitalism and called for a collectivist economy instead (Hartman, 2008). In 1929, he embarked on his self-described “greatest social experiment of history” by driving across Russia to investigate Russian society and education in a Ford he had shipped (Hartman, 2008). Upon his return, he said that he had been impressed by the Soviet education model and its collectivist bias (Hartman, 2008). Counts (1932) was aware of religious persecution in the Soviet Union, but he also praised the scope of their education model, which was well beyond the scope of education in the United States. The Soviet system included “the press, the moving picture, the radio, the library, reading rooms, the bookstores, clubs, young people’s organizations, museums, art galleries, and even the military” (Counts, 1932, p. 22). The Soviet system, with schools and noneducational institutions, all had the same agenda, the five-year plan (Counts, 1932). Although

Counts became an ardent anticommunist, he was impressed by this centralized focus, arguing that education in the United States could transform society if there was, as similar to the Soviet system, a single educational agenda (Counts, 1932; Lagemann, 1992).

The significance of religion to Counts, however, is not clear. In his seminal work, *Dare the School Build a New Social Order* (Counts, 1932), Counts only referenced religion along with economics, morals, politics, and art, whose “old molds are being broken” by the expansion of science and technology in the revolutionary 20th century. According to Counts (1932), any aspect of society with social distinctions should be removed, which is something religion is capable of doing. Counts’s (1932) view of education for democracy was based on the singular virtue of moral equality among all people. In 1929, Counts recommended the reorganization of Teachers College, and the college of religious education was 1 of the 10 colleges in the school of education (Lagemann, 1992). While Counts mentioned religion’s influence on society during his influential speech before the Progressive Education Association, his admiration for the Russian collectivist system and his social reconstructionist philosophy downplayed—if not ignored—religion in formal education (Counts, 1932; Hartman, 2008).

Harold Rugg and Social Studies Reform

Social studies reformer Harold Rugg was the most critical voice in the progressive education movement (Boyle-Baise & Goodman, 2009). Rugg lamented the state of education and its emphasis on the “encyclopedic presentation of facts, with little or no emphasis upon the application of these facts to the understanding of great fundamental relationships” (Rugg, 1921a, p. 189) Rugg’s experience with an irrelevant education too enthralled with the dead past as well as his experience working in a factory before attending Dartmouth are two critical experiences that started Rugg on his journey toward his liberalism that even his mother misunderstood

(Evans, 2007). Rugg joined voices with Dewey and Counts by challenging the “bookish,” fact-saturated education in which students’ brains simply downloaded information rather than processed and cultivated the skills necessary to live in a complex world.

The 1920s and 1930s, when Rugg began his most significant work, were a period of significant societal changes. Makler (2004) described the 1920s and 30s, stating that this period

... was a time of intense contradiction and change in all aspects of life: in morals, dress, technology, women’s roles, and forms of government. Increasing industrialization and urbanization; new psychological theories that located control over behavior in the individual rather than in religious authority; the emerging image of success of communism and social planning in the Soviet Union; and fear that self-regulatory mechanism of the market had been shattered by the excesses of monopoly capitalism all contributed to a sense of social instability. (p. 22)

Within this greater societal context, Rugg began his hallmark work, which was reforming school textbooks and teacher materials although he seemed to ignore the role of religion in social studies education (Evans, 2007). Rugg argued that just as natural science manipulated nature for human benefit, social scientists could manipulate society for the greater good (Boyle-Baise & Goodman, 2009). Education was critical in producing a better society.

To build a new social order, schools needed the necessary materials. According to Rugg (1931), schools suffered from two significant problems: “inadequate information and inadequate practice in using it” (Boyle-Baise & Goodman, 2009, p. 33). Rugg believed that textbooks failed to provide students with the information they needed to comprehend the real issues of society in depth and also that textbooks failed to lead students to provocative questioning while studying critical issues (Boyle-Baise & Goodman, 2009; Evans, 2007). Rather than maintaining arbitrary disciplines (e.g., history, geography, economics), Rugg advocated for an integrated pedagogical approach in which traditional disciplinary lines were erased in favor of topics and issues that were focused on the big ideas (Boyle-Baise & Goodman, 2009). Rugg emphasized an education

model in which there was critical engagement with issues with a goal of questioning the national narrative concerning power and wealth being hoarded at the expense of the greater society.

In terms of religion, Rugg seems to have been connected during his childhood. As Evans (2007) wrote, “it appears that the Rugg family may have had some affiliation with the Congregational church, a family of protestant denominations arising from the nonconformist religious movement in England during the Puritan reformation” (p. 4). Further, Rugg’s reformist views may have been influenced by the Protestant social gospel movement, which transferred the power of social redemption from religious institutions to social institutions such as schools (Evans, 2007). In the 1930s, Rugg was intrigued with a proposal called “Technocracy,” which offered technological means of engineering society towards a better future based on scientific facts rather than “theories, credos, religious and political faiths” (Evans, 2007, p. 34). In 1940, the relatively unknown Orlen K. Armstrong published an article and charged Rugg and other progressive education theorists with attempting “to mould opinion against traditional religious faiths and ideas of morality, as being part of an outgrown system” (as cited in Evans, 2007, p. 162). This charge, though not endorsed by all Legionnaires, created controversy for Rugg; controversy accompanied Rugg throughout most of his working life.

The most that can be said about Rugg’s relationship with religion is the possible influence of the Protestant social gospel movement that began in the late 19th century (Evans, 2007). Rugg believed that education could change society if it could be harnessed around a singular goal, “like a religion”; however, no greater relationship between Rugg and religion seems to exist (Rugg, 1931).

William Heard Kilpatrick and the Project Method

William H. Kilpatrick was a student of John Dewey's who, like Dewey, was raised in a religious home. Kilpatrick's home, however, was a devout Southern Baptist home in rural Georgia (Stallones, 2006). Doubts about his religious upbringing emerged while he was pursuing higher education and continued until the sudden death of his wife, an event that caused his break from his religious upbringing (Stallones, 2006). Kilpatrick pursued doctoral studies at Columbia University and became the educator most responsible for popularizing Dewey's child-centered education model (Hartman, 2008). Like Dewey, Kilpatrick criticized the fact-centered curriculum, instead promoting a life-centered education that was focused on individuals acquiring knowledge and skills that would help them overcome the hindrances of life (Hartman, 2008).

Kilpatrick's education model is known as the "project method," which was aimed:

...to try to find a teaching method that takes into account the general psychological rules of law in the pupil's learning process (1) and is also ethical and democratic in nature (2) The teaching method should combine both the social situation and the individual attitude at the same time. (Sutinen, 2013, p. 1041)

Kilpatrick's project method de-emphasized verbal transmission of knowledge via lecture and rote memorization, as in traditional education, in favor of an experiential, shared, project-centered model that included both the teacher and students (Hartman, 2008). Kilpatrick (1940) wrote that secondary schools were suffering from irrelevant subject discipline and a disregard of student personality. The project method was an attempt to remedy this suffering by shifting the focus to the students, their interests, and the social setting. Arbitrary subjects were irrelevant (Kilpatrick, 1940). Religion, as an educational discipline, was also irrelevant.

Kilpatrick, like Dewey and other progressive theorists, had a religious upbringing. According to Stallones (2010), Kilpatrick seemingly left the religion from his childhood as he pursued his professional interests in adulthood. He accepted science as the arbiter of truth and,

while studying at Johns Hopkins, encountered higher biblical criticism, a critical approach to the Bible as a text that is no different from any other literary text (Stallones, 2010). Higher biblical criticism, according to Stallones (2010), expedited Kilpatrick's departure from his childhood faith. As Stallones (2006) wrote, "For the rest of his life he denied any religious belief, yet employed religious ceremony in all the milestone events of his life. He rebuked religion, yet peppered his speeches and writings with Biblical texts" (p. 29). Kilpatrick's departure from his childhood faith was not complete, however. He denied religious ideology and much of its ritual, but his wedding and his wife's funeral were examples to the contrary. Stallones (2010) further shared, "the Judeo-Christian view of ethics was foundational to Kilpatrick's work and he freely embraced religion as a source of morality" (p. 95).

The progressive education movement began in the early 20th century. Although there were varying philosophies, progressive education was supposed to redefine school and curriculum away from traditional education centered upon independent, objective, knowledge-saturated education toward a more pragmatic, subjective, problem-centered model. Largely absent within this critical education movement was religion, despite the religious nature of the nation. Some progressive thinkers, like Dewey and Counts, used religious language in their educational careers though they minimized religious content. Others, like Rugg and Kilpatrick, ignored and criticized religion. Progressive education was carried on in Mann's vision for common schools in that progressive education, like the earlier common school movement, de-emphasized the explicitly religious schools of the Protestant culture that emphasized literal scripture reading while emphasizing a more general morality for a pluralistic culture (Rosenblith, 2017).

By the end of the 1920s, the conservative counter-movement began to gain steam on the heels of the Great Depression. While Dewey, Rugg, Counts, Heard, and other progressive educators continued the call for a transformed society through a pragmatic, issue-centered approach to education, an education largely ignoring metaphysical and religious issues, conservative education theorists raised concerns about things perceived as mere instruction and not education.

On the contrary, traditional educators, such as Albert Jay Nock, argued that a proper education should inculcate “the ethical, moral and aesthetic philosophies that encapsulated the best of human history” (Hatman, 2008, p. 46). Traditional education opposed all “educational” movements that sought to decentralize the collection of human wisdom in favor of social education fads. The major industrial and social revolutions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were significant catalysts for educational innovation, and the new social and industrial outlook created a demand for a new type of citizen. As quoted earlier, “the type of citizen and future worker needed expanded from someone who was morally upright to someone who could contribute to the burgeoning Scientific and Industrial Revolutions” (Rosenblith, 2017, paragraph, 4). These major social changes provided the impetus to reimagine education, thereby allowing progressive education to re-engineer education. As a result, the first few decades of the 20th century were the heyday of progressive education.

The 1930s and 1940s and the Rise of Anti-Progressive Education

Irving Babbitt and New Humanism

In the 1930s, “a revived epistemological revolt against pragmatism, and progressive education” emerged with the new humanists at the fore (Hartman, 2008, p. 45). One strand of the conservative counter-movement came via the new humanist philosophy and scholars such as

Irving Babbitt (1869–1933). During his 39-year tenure at Harvard University, Babbitt cofounded the new humanists who “sought to defend cultural, religious, and philosophical ideals they believed were under attack by the new Modern movement” (Smilie, 2012, p. 63). Babbitt believed the modern age was “a post-religious age that had lost the sense of absolute truth derived from a supernatural source and had allowed intellectual confusion and moral relativism to fill the vacuum” (Hoeveler, 1974, p. 658). Babbitt and other new humanist thinkers, such as Paul Elmer More, argued that society needed to rediscover its humanity by emphasizing an antiromantic, antinaturalistic, classical view of the human person (Hoeveler, 1974).

While the term *new humanism* included varying philosophies, one element of the new humanists pertaining to education was the concept of dualistic humanity, which divided humanity into two aspects: (1) one connecting mankind to the animal world and an obedience to wants and desire and (2) one aspect capable of rising above base instinct into a fully human existence that included discipline and denial of base instinct (Hartman, 2008; Hoeveler, 1974). The *higher* aspect was necessary for society because it was said to rise beyond the basic, evil instincts of human nature (Hartman, 2008). Babbitt believed that the positive, good-natured view of children birthed in Romantic philosophy and that was also foundational to progressive education undermined cultural safeguards of tradition and unmoored a dangerous society (Hartman, 2008). Babbitt and other new humanists argued that the Romantic notion of an innate goodness “encouraged irresponsibility and moral evasion, promoting a false human pride that ignored a natural tendency for evil” (Hoeveler, 1974, p. 660). Instead of education being child-centered, Babbitt and other new humanist thinkers argued for a pedagogical alternative in which respect for authority and hierarchy was the focus (Hartman, 2008).

Contrary to Dewey's emphasis on child-centeredness and disdain for "bookish" curriculum, new humanists argued that traditional knowledge could produce citizens with the "will to refrain" from the evil instincts of children (Hartman, 2008). Both Babbitt and the new humanists believed that the traditional knowledge, as passed down through religion and the humanities, was necessary to constrain evil and also essential to a safe, civil society (Smilie, 2012). Babbitt argued for a humanistic education in which the truths passed throughout Western civilization. At the core of Babbitt's ideal education were the classics of Rome and Greece (Smilie, 2012). Babbitt emphasized ancient Greek and Roman classics because

These philosophical, rhetorical, and literary works often advocated the merits of restraint and balance, exemplified best by Aristotle's tenet of the Golden Mean. These works encouraged and celebrated the ability to check desires and inclinations that naturally ran to excess (such as the desires for fame, material possessions, and even knowledge). Too, these works provided examples of those characters who could not restrain themselves, those characters who over-stepped their bounds and were consequently punished (often by the gods). (Smilie, 2012, p. 64)

Ancient works emphasized a humanism which stressed the importance of wisdom and virtue to combat vices and not the humanitarianism in Progressive education that sought to remove all constraints upon the individual. Babbitt identified this humanitarianism in the progressive education's emphasis on student-led, child-centered learning. For Babbitt, destructive humanitarianism was evident in the desire for student interests to drive the curriculum. By allowing student interest to dictate the curriculum or vocational specialization in vocational tracks, education served students' needs and desires, which is something Babbitt believed would be disastrous for society because of the implicit allowance for desires to go unchecked throughout a student's education (Smilie, 2012).

According to the humanist tradition, the pragmatic education prescribed by leading progressive educators ignored metaphysics by reducing knowledge to things that work, thereby

resulting in a chaotic society (Hartman, 2008). A society that works may require a citizenry that also advocates the merits of restraint and balance. Babbitt laid partial blame for the state of society at the feet of Dewey, saying that Dewey had “an influence on our education that amounts in the aggregate to a national calamity” (Babbitt, 1924; Hartman, 2008). Instead, a pursuit of universal, transcendental human truth was the only endeavor capable of stopping civic chaos (Hartman, 2008). However, as prominent as Babbitt and the new humanists were in the 1930s, Albert Jay Nock may be the most significant conservative thinker of that era (Hartman, 2008)

Albert Jay Nock and the Difference between Education and Training

Albert Jay Nock (1870–1945) lamented progressive education and its premise regarding the educability of the whole population (1932). Nock emphasized a significant distinction between “education” and “training,” the latter he believed to be the purpose of progressive “education” and not true “education” (Hartman, 2008). Nock believed that progressive education failed in the first few decades because of the incorrect presupposition that every individual could be educated. Nock (1932) wrote:

...very few are educable, very few indeed. There became evident an irreconcilable disagreement between our equalitarian theory and the fact of experience. Our theory assumed that all persons are educable; our practical application of it showed that the creator, in His wisdom and in His loving-kindness, had for some reason unsearchable reason not quote seen His way to fall in with our theory, for he had not made all persons educable. We found to our discomfiture that the vast majority of mankind have neither the force of intellect to apprehend the processes of education, nor the force of character to make an educational discipline prevail in their lives. (Section 6)

Despite progressive educators’ push for a more pragmatic *education*, their program encouraged something more akin to vocational training, not true education, in the sense of Nock and other conservative thinkers such as Irving Babbitt and Robert Maynard Hutchins. Nock (1932) lamented the notion that a “trained citizenry is an educated citizenry” because formative knowledge—as found in an education through a humanities approach with the Great Books

tradition —differs from instrumental knowledge—as found in training or vocational education. Unlike Dewey, Nock did not consider the modern curriculum “bookish” enough.

For Nock (1932), education involved engagement with the Great Tradition, the humanities, and as such, included mastery with “formative knowledge” instead of training’s emphasis on “instrumental knowledge.” Education, for Nock, was to inculcate “the ethical, moral and aesthetic philosophies that encapsulated the best of human history” (Hartman, 2008, p. 46). On the contrary, the progressive education model emphasized training and life skills as part of a proper education. Yet, according to Nock (1932), training had become understood as education meaning a trained person was an educated person.

To be an educated person, according to Nock, one must understand the best philosophies within human history, and religion is an important aspect of this antiprogressive education. Religion was centrally important to the Great Tradition, was one of the four main disciplines of traditional universities, and is part of a legitimate education (Nock, 1932). Religion, then, was one of the essential formative disciplines that students needed to complete their education, a fact that is echoed today (NCSS, 2014; Nord, 2010; Prothero, 2007).

Robert Maynard Hutchins and the University of Chicago

Robert Maynard Hutchins (1899–1977), the president of the University of Chicago from 1929 to 1945), opposed Dewey during the 1930s and 1940s regarding the nature of education (Hartman, 2008). Hutchins believed progressive education did not provide a proper education because of its emphasis on unnecessary overspecialization, as opposed to a humanities rooted approach in traditional education (Hartman, 2008). To Hutchins, neither the child nor the problems in modern society were the center of education, but that the pursuit of metaphysical, transcendental, universal human truth was the only force capable of slowing the unraveling of

U.S. society (Hartman, 2008). According to Hutchins, wisdom and goodness were the two goals of life, and both required study in metaphysics, which to Hutchins and throughout the 1940s, meant “the study of the nature of being and the nature of man” (Kagey, 1944, p. 185). Like Babbitt and the new humanists, Hutchins believed that formative knowledge, discovered within a liberal curriculum and centered on the Great Books, was necessary to constrain the human will and provide humans with the perspective necessary to engage in society (Hutchins, 1947).

Dewey and Hutchins did agree “that humanity was lost in a wilderness of selfishness and greedy ambition” (Hartman, 2008, p. 123). They differed drastically, however, on the remedy to the malady. For Hutchins, a truly “liberal” education was necessary, meaning that education should be rooted in great ideas and principles of humanity that transcend time as opposed to the technical and vocational training he had witnessed (Hutchins, 1947). More explicitly, Hutchins (1946) wrote:

Civilization can be saved only by a moral, intellectual, and spiritual revolution to match the scientific, technological, and economic revolution in which we are living. If American education can contribute to a moral, intellectual, and spiritual revolution, then it offers real hope of salvation to suffering humanity everywhere. If it cannot or will not contribute to this revolution, then it is irrelevant, and its' fate is immaterial. (as quoted in Hartman, 2008, p. 120)

Hutchins understood that for education to be beneficial for the U.S. and throughout the global society, it had to be universal, moral, and spiritual, one that emphasized “a sound character and a trained intelligence about all other aims, and which gives the citizen a scale of values by which he can learn to live” (Hutchins, 1947, p. 594). Hutchins could not understand people’s failure to realize that *training as education* was a doomed enterprise. Mayer (1993) further explained Hutchins’s lack of disagreement:

...why wasn't it self evident that liberal education was the best preparation (to the extent that education was preparation) for the vagaries and vicissitudes that commence with commencement? That specialized study (and, at a low level, vocational training) was no

preparation at all for those vagaries and vicissitudes? That technology would continue to reduce and eliminate the crafts and skills which vocational training imparted? That a man, no matter what his occupation, needed more to know how to live (and die) than how to make a living? Why wasn't it self evident that a self governing people could not hope to perpetuate self government without the development of their powers to comprehend, analyze, and judge the social issues that turned on their understanding of the nature of man and society? (p. 167)

For Hutchins, metaphysical questions were necessary aspects of real education. Rather than emphasizing ways to make a living, Hutchins believed mankind was better equipped for life if he understood how to live and die. Engaging in differing perspectives on living and dying would demand an education that investigates the deeper meanings of life and death embedded within human cultures, beliefs, and religions. According to Hutchins (1947), education could benefit society only if sparked moral, intellectual, and spiritual revolution within students; otherwise, education is irrelevant.

Russell Kirk and the Conservative Mind

Russell Kirk (1918–1994) was another influential post-World War II conservative thinker who bemoaned the progressive dismantling of knowledge from metaphysical principles (Hartman, 2008). One of Kirk's most influential works, *The Conservative Mind* (1953), was a seminal work in conservatism. To be a conservative meant at least being one who conserves learning and ideals, and education was a vital element in conservatism. Kirk was involved in education debates throughout the 1940s and 1950s and focused his critique towards Dewey and progressive education (Hartman, 2008). Kirk believed a conservative resurgence in education, one rooted in metaphysical principles, could not proceed until Dewey and his philosophy, likened to “the weight of an intellectual corpse” (Hartman, 2008, p. 94), was lifted from schools and universities.

For Kirk, the progressive education movement was eroding society. Ironically, U.S. education institutions had far more financial support than they had in early education history although they simultaneously exhibited “less independence and strength of opinion than they did in less egalitarian times” (Kirk, 1963, p. 607). According to Birzer (2015), Kirk believed that “in the West, progressive education, centralizing authorities (in government and the corporate world), and demeaning art and architecture had served only to create a shallow world among the ‘demos,’ the unthinking mass, doomed to follow those who wish to lead” (p. 99). Those against the progressive education movement, such as Babbitt, Hutchins, and Nock, argued that progressive education could not rightly be designated “education” because it failed to inculcate students in the breadth and depth of human intellectual, moral, and philosophical thought. In the conservative view, progressive training had consequences outside of school classrooms and affected the moral fabric of society. Kirk (as cited in Birzer, 2015) believed:

...most Westerners and Americans had been trained well but only partially educated. Rather than giving them control over the self, their education had only created insatiable longings. The average person, only half-educated and almost certainly not liberally educated, had rejected all that tradition, mores, and norms had restrained in him. (p. 33)

To Kirk, Dewey and the progressive education movement signified one of two possible trajectories for man to follow: nihilism or religion. Kirk believed that the “inner-directed man” in progressivism rested solely on the individual experience instead of the wisdom of human traditions and also that the traditions of man were essential in addressing the complex world because present experience alone was incapable of solving issues (Hartman, 2008). For Kirk, religion was the source of learning and liberty (Hartman, 2008). Kirk (1955) wrote:

I think that men who will not acknowledge the Author of their being have no sanction for truth, and that men who take this world for the only reality are actually in Hell and that man who talk of the 'dignity of man' without confessing that we all derive that fleeting dignity from a yearning and an example more than human are bladders of the wind. The

pursuit of power and the gratification of concupiscence are the logical occupations of rational man in a world that is merely human and merely natural. (p. 1)

Richard Weaver and the Consequence of Ideas

Another influential voice in the conservative counter-movement was University of Chicago professor Richard Weaver (Hartman, 2008). Weaver (1910–1963), one of the most important postwar traditional thinkers, heavily criticized the progressive, pragmatic education philosophies of the early 20th century by joining in the conservative chorus alongside Maynard, Nock, Babbitt, and the new humanists (Hartman, 2008). Although each differed slightly in his education philosophy, the conservative chorus did agree that progressive education did not deserve the title education (Hartman, 2008; Nock, 1932; Weaver, 2013). For conservative thinkers like Weaver, education “shared, inherited the wisdom of humanity; it taught the young how to lead a moral, disciplined life; and most importantly it fostered a respect for order and authority” (Hartman, 2008, p. 92). Whereas progressives like Dewey and Kilpatrick preferred pragmatic, societally oriented education, Weaver described such education as “specialization” versus the traditional “generalization” model (Weaver, 2013).

Weaver particularly loathed the progressive idea of child-centeredness, instead writing of the spoiled-child philosophy (Hartman, 2008; Weaver, 2013). For Weaver, traditional education enabled students to distinguish “between right and wrong, good and evil, and beauty and ugliness, and progressive schools trained children to manipulate their environments to attain happiness” (Hartman, 2008, p. 92). Rather than relaxing standards, as Weaver perceived progressive education to be doing, Weaver (2013) called for a return to a “hard-boiled pedagogy of discipline” (p. 103) because as Hartman (2008) stated, “the spoiled child has not been made to see the relationship between effort and reward. He wants things, but he regards payment as an

imposition or as an expression of malice by those who withhold for it. His solution, as we shall see, is to abuse those who do not gratify him” (p. 93).

Weaver’s critiques are ultimately grounded in the central thesis that religious literacy is paramount to civic preparation. For Weaver, the divorce between physical and metaphysical ideas and the antipathy against metaphysics is a root issue. Weaver (2013) discussed the liberal solution to modern society:

These leaders adopted the liberal's solution to their problem. That was to let religion go but to replace it with education, which “supposedly” would exercise the same efficacy. The separation of education from religion, one of the proudest achievements of modernism, is but an extension of the separation of knowledge from metaphysics. Moreover, education thus separated can provide their kind of indoctrination. We include here, of course, the education of the classroom, for all such institutionalized instruction proceeds on the assumptions of the state. However, the education which best accomplishes their purpose is the systematic indoctrination from day to day of the entire citizenry through channels of information and entertainment. (p. 85)

Weaver (2013) believed that liberal education centered on metaphysical principles did not happen in state institutions because such institutions were “at the mercy of elected bodies and of the public generally, and under obligation to show practical fruits for their expenditure of money” (p. 124), which thereby caused a digression from education into mere specialism and vocationalism.

For Weaver, when there is a focus on the child in education and no longer a search into metaphysical issues, education becomes a form of purely secular indoctrination. More recently, Nord (1995) similarly argued that if students are not taught both secular and religious ways to make sense of the world, then they are systematically and uncritically being taught secular ways to understand reality, which is borderline indoctrination.

The Beginning of Turmoil: McCollum v. Board of Education (1948)

At the close of the 1940s, McCollum sued the Champaign County Board of Education over the district's policy that allowed the use of public school space for "released time" for voluntary religious education classes (Illinois ex rel. *McCollum v. Board of Education of School District No. 71*, Champaign County, n.d.). Religious education teachers were hired by third-party agencies, but the education occurred on school grounds. McCollum, an atheist, argued that her son was ostracized for not attending the voluntary classes (Champaign County, n.d.). McCollum argued that the district-run program violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

In a controversial 8-1 decision, the Court ruled the "released time" program unconstitutional because the use of tax-funded property for religious education is a violation of the constitutional separation between church and state (Champaign County, n.d.). Some people considered the Court's decision positive and democratically motivated while others thought it signaled a continuing secular trend in the nation. This ruling also played a role in the conservative countermovement of the 1950s as this case, among other events, was used to associate progressive education with communism.

Despite the outcome of the Court's ruling, an important aspect of the decision is sometimes overlooked. The Court made it clear that publically funded, government-operated schools cannot promote religious practices. However, publically funded, government-operated schools can and should include religion. Justice Robert Jackson, who was in the Court's majority ruling, wrote:

While we may and should end such formal and explicit instruction as the Champaign plan, and can at all times prohibit teaching of creed and catechism and ceremonial, and can forbid forthright proselytizing in the schools, I think it remains to be demonstrated whether it is possible, even if desirable, to comply with such demands as plaintiff's completely to isolate and cast out of secular education all that some people may reasonably regard as religious instruction. Perhaps subjects such as mathematics, physics or chemistry are, or can be, completely secularized. But it would not seem practical to teach either practice or appreciation of the arts if we are to forbid exposure of youth to

any religious influences. Music without sacred music, architecture minus the cathedral, or painting without the scriptural themes would be eccentric and incomplete, even from a secular point of view. Yet the inspirational appeal of religion in these guises is often stronger than in forthright sermon. Even such a "science" as biology raises the issue between evolution and creation as an explanation of our presence on this planet. Certainly a course in English literature that omitted the Bible and other powerful uses of our mother tongue for religious ends would be pretty barren. And I should suppose it is a proper, if not an indispensable, part of preparation for a worldly life to know the roles that religion and religions have played in the tragic story of mankind. The fact is that, for good or for ill, nearly everything in our culture worth transmitting, everything which gives meaning to life, is saturated with religious influences, derived from paganism, Judaism, Christianity -- both Catholic and Protestant -- and other faiths accepted by a large part of the world's peoples. One can hardly respect a system of education that would leave the student wholly ignorant of the currents of religious thought that move the world society for a part in which he is being prepared. (Champaign County, 1947, p. 333)

At the close of the 1940s, progressive education continued to minimize, if not ignore, religion in education. Conservative, or antiprogressive, educators argued that religion in education was necessary for an educated citizenry. Justice Jackson, concurring with the unconstitutionality of the 1948 Supreme Court ruling regarding the use of taxpayer properties for religious education, argued that students who are devoid of religious thought would not prepare students for the society they enter after graduation. This argument mirrors the arguments of educators today. The McCollum case closed out the 1940s while also opening the doors to a renewed conservative counter-movement in the 1950s by associating progressive education with irreligiousness and communism.

The 1950s: The Decade of Turmoil

The 1950s were tumultuous times in education. For the first time in the history of U.S. education, all teenagers were expected to attend high school. These higher student numbers were occurring simultaneously with two other challenges. Following World War II, there was a shortage of teachers due to many leaving for the war as well as a shortage of facilities. In classrooms, educators like John Dewey and other progressive thinkers (e.g., Harold Rugg)

continued to influence pedagogy until a significant conservative countermovement began during education's "red scare" in the late 1940s and 1950s.

Foster and Davis (2004) commented on Dewey's influence: "Some post-war critics, for example, built cases of anti-intellectualism in schools upon their perceptions of the ruinous influence of John Dewey's progressive education" (p. 124). The fear surrounding Dewey's idea of progressive education was part of the red scare in American education that caused more considerable investigation into curriculum content and also caused a significant number of teachers to lose their jobs. Foster and Davis (2004) commented:

In a fashion strikingly similar to today's situation, schools in the late 1940s and early 1950s became engaged in bitter socio-political clashes precisely because they wrestled with many of the issues that divided the country at mid-century. Supporters of federal aid to education, racial integration of schools, modern or 'progressive' teaching methods, UNESCO, and a liberal academic philosophy stood in stark contrast to those who argued for the sovereignty of states' rights, racially segregated schools, a 'traditional' and disciplined educational environment, and a strongly nationalistic approach to world affairs. (p. 124)

The confluence of issues facing American society was associated with the Cold War tensions with the Soviet Union and caused anxiety over the nation's enemy: The Soviet Union and its "godless" communist ideology (Foster & Davis, 2004, p. 125). The nation associated several targets to the communist enemy, one of which was the nation's public schools. Foster and Davis (2004) shared:

During the post-war red scare era, schools throughout the United States encouraged savage and venomous attacks unprecedented in American educational history. . . . For example, these strident critics accused many public school teachers and administrators of outright 'subversion of American values and institutions, of 'advancing the work of the Kremlin' and 'promoting communism,' and of being 'disloyal' or 'un-American.' Charges of communistic influences easily became claims that public schools did not teach 'the fundamentals,' failed to teach appropriate morals, and subverted the traditions and values of American society. (p. 126)

While progressive theorists like Dewey and Rugg continued to strive for schools and for social efficiency and life adjustment, conservative voices associated these educational methods with communism. Conservative theorists (e.g., Richard Weaver, Russell Kirk) argued that education had violated the foundational principle of absolutes grounded in a divine being (Hartman, 2008). Allen Zoll, another conservative voice, loudly criticized what he believed were communist propagandist schools. Zoll, the most notable red-scare critic and the head of the National Council for American Education, vehemently criticized American education (Foster & Davis, 2004). Zoll (as cited in Morris, 1976, p. 236) commented:

For a generation, *your* tax money helped pay the salaries of many propagandist teachers who have been endeavoring to make socialists, or worse, of America's youth; attempting to rob them of their self-reliance and substituting dependence on the government, on doles, on subsidies; seeking to ensnare them with false doctrine that it is better to have statism than liberty; undermining the Christian principles and ethics upon which this nation was founded; scoffing at everything American and exalting everything collectivist. (p. 236)

One possible reason for Zoll's attack is the decentralization of textbooks, content, and rote-learning within progressive education. Rather than content and textbooks, progressive education favored experiential, student-centered learning. On the contrary, conservatives upheld traditional lecture-based instruction that was centered on books and content. Richard Weaver's *Ideas Have Consequences* (1948), an essential philosophical work in the conservative movement, articulated the significance of rooting life in ideas rather than experience. Among the conservative argument was a continued emphasis the necessity of religion in education. The conservative movement gained momentum in the U.S. in the early years of the Cold War as progressive education was associated with communism, especially following the *Everson v. McCollum* (1948) ruling.

The Supreme Court's ruling that struck down Illinois's "released-time" plan to allow students to have part of the school day for voluntary religious classes was quite controversial.

Some people argued that the Court's ruling upheld essential democratic values while those in favor of the release-time plan in Illinois and New York favored it because of the perceived growing secularism that many feared would lead America to a godless, secular, and communist state (Zucker, 2007). Paul Reinart, president of St. Louis University, said that the "dubious interpretation" of the First Amendment, which ruled out release time, effectively gave the government the role of deciding all of education, which "is tantamount to opening wide the door to statism or totalitarianism" (as cited in Zucker, 2007, p. 2107). A radio program entitled Ethical Issues in the News in New York, a state with a slightly different "released-time" plan, covered the various Court rulings on "released-time" and included the following summary:

. . . have viewed [released time education] in terms of fighting anti-democratic ideas, hoping that religion would arouse an awareness of higher powers . . . to offset statism, and a respect for the individual over and against totalitarian controls. Some have considered it as a way of fighting Communism; some as a way of resisting Godlessness and immorality. (as cited in Zucker, 2007, p. 2107)

The confluence of social, political, educational, and religious factors favored the conservative movement. Hartman (2008) wrote:

It is no accident that this fusion took place during the early Cold War battle for the American school. This battle helped synthesize conservatism because, in the minds of both traditionalists and libertarians, the schools were quintessentially collectivist institutions, and the nation's leading educators were some of the most infamous promoters of collectivism. As such, the debate over the schools served as a launching pad for the rise of the postwar right, arguably the first coherent conservative movement in the history of the United States. (p. 91)

The collectivist trend in progressive education, which in the 1950s became associated with communism, began with an interest in life-adjustment education and affected the approach to school by changing the role of schools from enhancing an education experience to running a business that prepared young people to fit within the economic order (Hartman, 2008). Schools preparing students to fit within the economic order reflected communist ideology. In the Cold

War era, parents were bombarded with the rhetoric of atheistic communist infiltration in schools via dangerous textbooks and subversive teachers (Peacock, 2014). Such rhetoric created fear because “the fear of communism derived much of its power from the threat of loss: particularly loss of private property, civil rights, control over the family, and religion” (Peacock, 2014, p. 75). Allen Zoll, head of the National Council for American Education, deemed progressive education a primary cause in the growing collectivism in American society (Peacock, 2014).

Life- adjustment education, which conservative educational theorists criticized, emerged from the child-centered, progressive education model of John Dewey. Theorists like Richard Weaver argued that the progressive model—the one in which metaphysical ideals (e.g., a divine being in whom absolute truth is grounded) were discharged—aims much lower than truth and settles with manipulation of environments for personal happiness (Hartman, 2008). By the end of the 1950s, American education, which was primarily influenced by Dewey’s progressive education model, began to shift towards a traditional, classroom-oriented, rote-learning style of education (Peacock, 2014).

The shift away from education’s progressive model and toward the conservative, traditional model also revived questions concerning traditional values and learning, including religion. Progressive educators argued for the minimization of religion in education as part of the broader agenda to make school less centered on ideas and content in favor of experience and life adjustment. On the contrary, the conservative movement argued that religion was a necessary component of education because a proper education is more focused on ideas and movements that transcend any single time or nation, not on a pragmatic adjustment to life as it is now.

The Secularized School

As in previous decades, the debate on whether or not religion had a place in schools continued, and there were two probable outcomes. F. Earnest Johnson, professor of education at Columbia University's Teachers College, summarized these two outcomes in a speech (Earnest, 1950):

In a society that has ordained the separateness of church and state and at the same time has undertaken to educate its children in a system of public schools, one of two things is likely to happen. Either the whole of life will become secularized because religion is given no place in the educational system that furnishes the young with patterns of thought and conduct, or religion will come to be recognized as a vital factor in the common culture and as such studied in the schools without imposition or any ecclesiastical sanction. (p. 311)

Earnest argued that if schools ignore religion throughout education, a secularization of students will occur, thereby creating a new religious mindset, albeit a secular one.

In this speech, Earnest (1950) argued that the Protestants' growing demands to include more religion in education, as evidenced by a growing number of independent religious schools, was a reaction to growing hostility toward religion in education. Earnest, a self-described Protestant (1950), agreed with the Protestant desire for more teaching about religion and described, much like Nord (2010), that educating students without mentioning religion would cultivate religiously illiterate students.

Like Earnest, there were others who supported the inclusion of religion in education.

Another Protestant, Joseph Dawson (as cited in Smith, 1957) argued:

The public schools are the number one asset in the nation's civic life, the true source of our democracy, and the greatest means to national unity. They teach moral and spiritual values, they properly teach much about religion, and most of the teachers in them are members of our various churches. (p. 203)

Dawson connected religion, education, and civics as a vital means for national unity. Although schools were supposed to be places where students were prepared for civic life, the growing hostility toward religion in education led to the emergence of independent schools as an

alternative education option. Dawson supported public education just as Earnest did. However, Earnest considered the growth of independent, parochial schools a reaction to the marginalization of religion. As a result, Earnest believed that religious perspectives were needed in school curriculum. As Earnest (1950) wrote, “religion is one of the major forces in history and in contemporary life. . . The separation of religion from life is a reactionary tendency which the very persons who are now calling for it do not really, deeply and permanently want” (p. 314). The Educational Policies Commission (1951) stated that teaching about world religions would not only enhance understanding of the world, but would also enhance the “unity of our country” (p. 78). However, not everyone agreed.

Charles B. Smith presented a clear argument against religion in schools. In 1957, Smith was the president of State Teachers College at Troy State and argued that American schools must remain secular despite the growing tide of religious voices. For Smith, granting religion more space in public education was harmful to students’ educational growth due to the way religion declares “truth” in comparison with secular views. Smith (1957) wrote:

Introducing religious teaching into the schools admits an approach to truth and the discovery of truth in opposition to the approach used in our secular schools. This is confusing to the learner. Religious truth is mostly outlined in an authoritarian fashion. This is necessarily the case because religions claim many of their truths as supernaturally arrived at. The revelations of some religions are not accepted by other religions as genuine. This is still more confusing. The secular school, on the other hand, assumes that truth is gained through experience and reason. (p. 204)

Smith, much like Dewey, understood truth and learning to stem from individual experience and exploration. Though many religions emphasized experience as necessary, the largest religions in the world, such as Christianity and Islam, believe in the revelatory nature of truth. Smith believed that such a method of instruction, one of an authoritarian nature, did not belong in the secular school.

Smith (1957) did note that the Bible could be studied in public education if it was studied “as other things are studied, historically, critically, and inductively” (p. 204). However, Smith (1957) believed that approaching the Bible this way would be problematic because of the supernaturalism in the text. Supernaturalism, as a philosophical approach to reality, has no universally agreed-upon definition (Spiegelberg, 1951). Clive Staples Lewis (1947), writing from a religious perspective, differentiated supernaturalism from naturalism, which described reality as governed only by cause and effect from within the natural world. Jacques Maritain, a French philosopher, defined supernaturalism as “a spiritual metaphysical order, superior to external nature above all the mechanisms and laws of the material world. . . . As such it is no part of this universe . . . it rises above the created world, the sensible and the suprasensible both” (as cited in Spiegelberg, 1951, p. 316). Smith’s (1957) objection to the Bible being included in education was due to the supernaturalism within the Bible’s narrative (e.g., the 10 plagues, the parting of the Red Sea in the book of Exodus) to explain reality and also due to his view that such a philosophy was no longer acceptable.

Smith’s objection to the supernaturalism of the Bible, the Qur’an, Guru Granth Sahib, the scriptures of Sikhism, or other religious texts, is, ironically, one of the reasons that modern religious literacy scholars think religious education should be included in school curriculum. For example, Nord (2010) argued that education must not just include religious ideas, but that students must be educated in such a way that they are able to think like “insiders” of both religious and secular thought. When religion’s supernaturalism is not addressed in school curriculum, education loses its neutrality regarding religion, and secularism against religious perspectives is implicitly endorsed. Smith (1957) argued that supernaturalism is not a way to

understand the world in education, and Nord (2010) later challenged such claims by emphasizing that statements like those are antieducational and possibly unconstitutional.

As the 1950s closed, there was renewed emphasis in science education in America. Following Russia's launch of Sputnik in October 1957, fear for the quality of American education, which existed in the early 1950s, was crystallized, and the search for an educational remedy began (Peacock, 2014).

The 1960s: Court Decisions and a Changing Education Landscape

Several significant events occurred in the 1960s, such as the debate over public funds for private education, or two Supreme Court Cases, *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) and *Abington School District, Pennsylvania v. Schempp* (1963). Each of these events affected the relationship between religion and education. Up until the 1960s, the relationship between religion and education had been contentious, yet cooperative. For example, through the 1940s and 1950s, public schools were often housed in Catholic-owned buildings and often relied on the employment of Catholic priests and nuns for staffing (Gordon, 2007). Some public schools used religious spaces, yet other schools in public buildings could not be used for religious purposes. As of 1948, religious instruction was now allowed in public school buildings during school hours whether this religious instruction was voluntary or not (Illinois ex rel. *McCullum v. Board of Ed. of School Dist. No. 71*, Champaign County, n.d.). Debates regarding the relationship between religion and education revolved around the precise application of the 1st amendment to the U.S. Constitution and the separation of church and state. The 1st amendment includes the phrase, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the exercise thereof" (Gordon, 2007). The exact meaning of this phrase became a hot-button issue in the 1960s with issues such as funding for parochial schools and school prayer.

As the 1960s ushered in the Kennedy presidency, the debate around the “separation of church and state” continued. Kennedy, a devoted Catholic, proposed the School Assistance Act in 1961, which provided funds to construct public elementary and secondary schools while excluding aid for private schools (McAndrews, 1991). This bill was created due to the committee’s belief that Americans desired excellent schools and demanded that the national government did more to ensure that these schools existed. The Catholic church’s leadership argued that funds for education should include private and parochial education. However, some feared that a bill allowing funds for both school types could drastically impede the success of public schools (Battle over Schools, 1961; Fuller, 1964). During a 1961 speech, President Kennedy said, “In accordance with the clear prohibitions of the Constitution, no elementary or secondary school funds are allocated for constructing church schools or paying church schools’ teachers’ salaries” (as cited in McAndrews, 1991, p. 545). The Catholic church challenged the bill. McAndrews (1991) wrote, “Archbishop Karl Alter of Cincinnati, speaking for the Roman Catholic bishops of the United States, announced, ‘In the event that a federal aid program is enacted which excludes children in private schools . . . there will be no alternative but to oppose such legislation’” (p. 545).

The authorities in the Roman Catholic church met with President Kennedy and reached a compromise (McAndrews, 1991). This compromise was an amended bill that allowed nonpublic loans “for the construction of science, mathematics, foreign language, physical health, and lunch facilities” (McAndrews, 1991, p. 546). However, the compromise failed. A second compromise between Kennedy and the Catholic church was constructed, but it never reached the Senate floor, effectively ending a deal between Kennedy and the Roman Catholic church (McAndrews, 1991).

Ultimately, President Kennedy believed that the dedication of federal funds for religious schools would be unconstitutional (Battle over Schools, 1961) as this would violate the Establishment Clause. However, an important distinction may be missed concerning the Establishment Clause and the First Amendment. Government endorsement of religion or nonreligion is unconstitutional, but including religious perspectives and ideas in education is constitutional. Interestingly, there continues to be a misperception among the public that the Constitution and the Supreme Court clearly state that religion cannot be part of education (Moore, 2007; Nord, 2010; Prothero, 2007). As debates regarding whether or not aid should be provided for all educational endeavors, public or private, the Supreme Court decided on two famous cases involving religion and education.

Engle v. Vitale in 1962

The Supreme Court's decision in *Engel v. Vitale* is arguably one of the most controversial cases regarding religion in the history of the Supreme Court (Nord, 2010). The precedence, in this case, was regarding a short, voluntary prayer that the New York State Board of Regents authorized for the beginning of the school day and whether or not such a prayer violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment (*Engel v. Vitale*, n.d.). The prayer read: "Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee, and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers, and our Country" (Nord, 2010, p. 157). Preceding the Court's decision, schools were allowed to begin the day with prayer. Public schools were not required to open with the prayer, and if a school did elect to use the prayer, the law protected those students who opted out of the prayer (Nord, 2010). The Supreme Court ruled this prayer unconstitutional because the wall separating church and state was breached by this use of the school as a place to recite a prayer, thereby a violation of the Establishment Clause. Justice Black wrote, "it is no part of the

business of government to compose official prayers for any group of the American people to recite as a part of a religious program carried on by government” (as cited in Nord, 2010, p. 158).

Additional court cases regarding prayer in schools are important (Nord, 2010). In *Lee v. Weisman* (1992), a middle school principal, Robert E. Lee, invited a Rabbi to speak at the school’s graduation ceremony, which was aligned with the customs of other schools in Providence, RI (*Lee v. Weisman*, n.d.). Neil Weisman’s daughter was participating in the ceremony, and Weisman had attempted to block the Rabbi’s speech via a restraining order, which was denied. A prayer was recited during the graduation, and after the graduation, Weisman filed an injunction to stop public schools from inviting clergy to give invocations at graduations. The Supreme Court debated the issue of whether or not clergy offering invocations at public school ceremonies was a violation of the Establishment Clause (*Lee v. Weisman*, n.d.). In a 5-4 decision, the Court ruled that prayer at public school ceremonies was in violation of the Establishment Clause, and these prayers were ruled unconstitutional (*Lee v. Weisman*, n.d.).

Second, the Supreme Court case, *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe* (2000), was argued over whether or not student-initiated, student-led prayer before football games was a violation of the Establishment Clause. This practice of prayer had been a tradition since 1995 and continued despite several lawsuits and amendments to the practice and stipulations of the prayer (*Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe*, n.d.). In a 6-3 decision, the Court ruled that despite the prayer being student-initiated and -led, it was still occurring at football games held on government-owned property at government-sponsored, school-related events (*Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe*, n.d.) Interestingly, in dissent, Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, joined by Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas, noted the “disturbing” tone

of the Court’s opinion that “bristle[d] with hostility to all things religious in public life” (*Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe*, n.d.)

Neither *Engle v. Vitale* nor *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe* regulated prayer or the performance of private religious acts. In both cases, the Supreme Court ruled not on the functionality of prayer, but on the use of prayer at secular school events as directly related to the Establishment Clause. Although these cases were crucial to religious activities and education, *Abington School District v. Schempp* (1963) was more closely related to the study of the Bible (and by extension other religious texts) and the classroom.

***Abington School District v. Schempp* in 1963**

In *Abington School District v. Schempp* of 1963, the Supreme Court decided on “the most important case by far addressing the role of religion in the classroom and curriculum” (Nord, 2010, p. 163). A critical issue was the Court’s distinction between two different approaches in the use of the Bible: a devotional or proselytizing approach versus an academic, educational approach. At the time of the court proceedings, Pennsylvania law required that public schools read from the Bible at the start of the school day (School District of Abington Township, *Pennsylvania v. Schempp*, 1963). The Court combined this Pennsylvania case with a similar case from Maryland in which atheists were challenging a city law requiring schools to begin the school day with Bible reading and recitation of the Lord’s prayer.

Interestingly, Maryland’s highest court ruled that these school exercises did not violate the First Amendment (School District of Abington Township, *Pennsylvania v. Schempp*, 1963). The question for the Supreme Court was similar to the following: “Did the Pennsylvania law requiring public school students to participate in classroom religious exercises violate the

religious freedom of students as protected by the First and Fourteenth Amendments?” (School District of Abington Township, *Pennsylvania v. Schempp*, n.d.).

In an 8-1 decision, the Court ruled that devotional reading of the Bible was unconstitutional while academic study of the text or teaching about religion is constitutional (Nord, 2010; School District of Abington Township, *Pennsylvania v. Schempp*, n.d.). In terms of devotional Bible reading, the Court ruled that laws requiring that students participate in Bible reading is a direct violation of the First Amendment (School District of Abington Township, *Pennsylvania v. Schempp*, n.d.). Further, the Court overruled and remanded the Maryland court, ruling that the government’s public schools should sponsor neither Bible reading nor recitation of the Lord’s prayer (Moore, 2007; School District of Abington Township, *Pennsylvania v. Schempp*, n.d.). As these lingering vestiges of Protestantism in education were removed, the Court decision sparked mixed reactions among the public (Chandler, 1966; Moore, 2007).

Many educators and parents believed that the Court’s ruling was strong endorsement of the separation of church and state while others believed this ruling evidenced moral decay (Moore, 2007). Christian communities, such as the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition, viewed the Court’s ruling in *Abington vs. Schempp* as well as in *Engel v. Vitale* as evidence “that the Supreme Court broke the chain of memory that is religion when it banned prayer and devotional reading in the public schools in the early 1960s” (Prothero, 2007, p. 110). With the Cold War in progress, many Americans saw this Court decision as a strong endorsement for secularism, which was associated with communism (Gordon, 2007). The Court’s ruling received harsh criticism, and “often the criticism was based in claims that secularism would sap the moral foundations of the country, reducing it to the level of the Soviet Union” (Gordon, 2007, p. 1212).

For religious people, mainly conservative Protestants who once defended public education, the Court's ruling was disastrous (Gordon, 2007).

This Court decision guided both public and professional educators' opinions regarding the constitutionality of religion in public schools (Moore, 2007; Prothero, 2007). With school systems and educators grappling to find the best approaches to implement the Supreme Court's ruling, noted religious educator Charles Chandler (1966) acknowledged that the removal of religious ideologies and pedagogy would negatively impact high school graduates' religious literacy.

Despite the Supreme Court's ban on secular school systems' endorsement of religion, the Court signaled the importance of maintaining religion as a component of a student's education:

...it might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It indeed may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment. (*Abington v Schempp*, 1963, p. 374)

To clarify the Court's ruling, Justice Clark reiterated the constitutionality of the study and teaching of religion in the classroom (Moore, 2007). In support of Justice Clark's clarification, Justice Brennan noted:

The holding of the Court today plainly does not foreclose teaching *about* Holy Scriptures or about differences between religious sects in classes in literature or history. Indeed, whether or not the Bible is involved, it would be impossible to teaching meaningfully many subjects in the social sciences or the humanities without some mention of religion. (*Abington v Schempp*, 1963, p. 374)

The Court deemed religion in education as constitutional. However, a significant impact on education following the Court's ruling was the silencing of religion in textbooks in the 1960s up until the 1980s (Haynes, 2019). This silencing of religion, however, did not provide students

with neutral religious education; instead, this silence was implicitly against religion. Nord (2010) stated:

When we teach students to think in entirely secular ways about history, nature, psychology, morality, and society, it should come as no surprise that after twelve (or sixteen) years of study they conclude either that there are no religious fish to find in the sea or that if there are, one must accept their presence as a matter of faith. We teach them to interpret (to see, to feel, to experience) the world from a broadly secular worldview. Is this indoctrination? (p. 91)

“Constitutional” religious education must be neutral, favoring neither religious nor nonreligious ideology. Presently, as seen in the 1970s, public education is still not neutral because religion is largely silenced, thereby implying an endorsement for secularism (Nord, 2010). As such, the silencing of religion does not imply neutrality in religion, but instead favors nonreligion, or secularism (Nord, 2010).

Despite deep ideological perspectives across school disciplines, public schools encourage students to think about reality in exclusively secular ways, which, for Nord (2010), is discriminatory and unconstitutional. “Hence, schools and universities are constitutionally obligated to set things right by including religion in the curricula conversation, by taking it seriously” (Nord, 2010, p. 167).

The 1970s: Back to the Basics

Following the Supreme Court’s decision in 1963, religion significantly diminished from education with the exception of independent and faith-based schools, which experienced exponential growth in the 1960s and 1970s. Stanton (1980) documented the private school boom, stating, “Worst of all, from the standpoint of many parents, is what they see as a subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) attack on traditional notions of family life, morality, and religion in many facets of public schooling” (p. 602). One possible avenue of attack on religion, as feared

by some parents, may have come via curriculum in which religion was largely ignored as a result of the Supreme Court's decisions in the 1960s. Haynes (2019) wrote:

By the time the U.S. Supreme Court finally struck down as unconstitutional state-sponsored religious practices in the 1960s, much of the curriculum rarely mentioned religion. Vestiges of the bygone Protestant era were retained in some schools, particularly in the south, where one religion continued to be imposed through teacher-led prayer and other practices. Many other schools, out of confusion over Supreme Court rulings or fear of controversy, attempted to ban the expression or discussion of religion altogether. In these religion-free zones, students were often unconstitutionally prevented from expressing their faith during the school day. The tide began to turn in the 1980s. Litigation, including lawsuits over the absence of religion in textbooks, led to a national re-thinking of the role of religion in public schools. (p. 5)

As a result of the Court's ruling and also the confusion among educators about the meaning of the ruling, religion was still absent from state curriculum throughout the 1970s and on into the 1980s. According to Haynes and Thomas (2007), even in the present, "the most widely used textbooks largely ignore the role of religion in history and society" (p. 99) For example, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are often mentioned in social studies textbooks, but these religions are discussed in such simplistic, reductionist ways that the diversity within religious traditions cannot be captured (Padela, 2018). For some religious parents, the Court's ruling affirmed fears of a secularized educational system, thereby giving parents a reason to consider other educational options for their children.

Religion also influenced the growth of private schools throughout the United States. Palmer (1974) suggested five possible reasons for the growth of private education throughout the 1970s: (a) the democratic right of a parent to decide the education of their child, (b) private education as practical within the free enterprise system, (c) the growing wealth in affluent families that may create a class consciousness and demand the need for "quality education," (d) the rising disenchantment with public schools and its' growing secularism, and (e) the racial integration of public schools.

While some—or maybe all—of the above factors may have contributed to the exponential growth of private education, racial integration may be the most significant impetus for the private education boom in the 1960s and 1970s. An article entitled “A History of Private Schools and Race in the American South” (n.d.) records:

Private schools may have a long, honorable tradition in America that goes back to colonial times, but that tradition ended—at least in the American South—in the last half of the 20th century when they were used as safe havens for Southern whites to escape the effects of the impending and ongoing desegregation mandates. This exodus from public schools began in the 1940s, when private school enrollment in the 15 states of the South rose by more than 125,000 students—roughly 43 percent—in response to U.S. Supreme Court decisions outlawing segregation in graduate and professional schools in the South. While the decisions only concerned institutions of higher education, it signaled to watchful Southern leaders that desegregation might soon spread to their public elementary and secondary schools, compelling them to react in ways to defend their way of life. (paragraph, 1)

Between 1961 and 1971, private school enrollment continued to grow. Although private schools emerged throughout the country, the most concentrated growth occurred in southern states” (Clotfelter, 1976).

From the mid-1960s to 1980, as public schools in the Deep South began to slowly desegregate through federal court orders, private school enrollment increased by more than 200,000 students across the region – with about two-thirds of that growth occurring in six states: Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. (A History of Private Schools & Race in the American South, n.d., paragraph, 5)

However, religiously affiliated schools were not the only schools to emerge or grow in the 1970s. In non-Catholic private schools, enrollment doubled to 1.4 million students (Clotfelter, 1976).

The Supreme Court’s ruling on prayer and the Bible also played a role in the growth of schooling options through religious schools. Christian schools that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s likely had religious motivations for beginning although this did not exclude school desegregation as a major catalyst for this growth. (In the *Deep South*, some of these “segregation

academies” had the word “Christian” in their school names although such schools do not fit into the “Christian academy” category due to segregation being the primary reason that the school was opened.) However, a Christian school is one that is often connected to a church even if it is not denominationally affiliated (Palmer, 1974). At Christian schools and some other independent schools, the Bible is part of the official school curriculum, and many of these schools came into existence in response to the growing secularism in public education and the marginalization of religion in curriculum (Palmer, 1974).

The 1980s: The Justification of Religion by National Education Organizations

In the 1980s, there was a growing consensus among 17 groups/organizations (including the NCSS and the National Association of Evangelicals) that religion was a necessary element of a student’s civic education. This consensus toward religion in public schools emerged within the broader context of national education criticism. In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, which “invoked a crisis so far-reaching in its impact that it still governs the way we think about public education 30 years later” (as cited in Mehta, 2015, p. 20).

Following an 18-month study of American education, the report described American education as eroding “by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people” (NCEE, 1983, p. 9) The mediocrity, according to the Commission, was evident in the rate of technological and material advances of other nations, a trait that was once dominated by the United States. *A Nation at Risk* was not merely focused on the innovations of industry, but “the intellectual, moral, and spiritual strengths of our people which knit together the very fabric of our society” (NCEE, 1983, p. 10). Education was failing in the United States, and evidence for this included (a) American students placing last in standardized test as compared with students

from other countries, (b) an estimated 23 million American adults being functionally illiterate, (c) a steady decline in SAT scores from 1963 to 1980, (d) many 17-year-olds not possessing “higher order” intellectual skills (e.g., drawing inferences from material, writing a persuasive essay on solving multi-step mathematics problems), and a number of other issues (NCEE, 1983, p. 11). *A Nation at Risk* highlighted some educators’ concerns that American education was too focused on technical and occupational skills while ignoring the arts and humanities that “enrich daily life, help maintain civility, and develop a sense of community” (NCEE, 1983 p. 10). Concerns over the de-emphasis of the humanities and overemphasis on technical education mirrored the conservative arguments of the 20th century around the need for education to include the humanities, of which religion is central. A U.S. Department of Education survey administered in the 1980s showed that of the 15,000 high schools throughout the country, only 640 had a stand-alone course in religious studies (Prothero, 2007). The minimization of religion is one positive outcome of America’s reassessment of education.

By the end of the 1980s, 16 education, religious, and civil groups (including the NCSS, National Association of Evangelicals, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and several others) released a joint document related to the importance of religion in education (ACSD, 1987; Haynes, 2019; NCSS, 1988). The document, entitled *Religion in the Public School Curriculum: Questions and Answers*, included the following consensus:

Because religion plays a significant role in history and society, study about religion is essential to an understanding of the nation and the world. The omission of facts about religion can give students the false impression that the religious life of humankind is insignificant or unimportant. Failure to understand even the basic symbols, practices, and concepts of the various religions makes much of history, literature, art, and contemporary life unintelligible. (Haynes, 2019, p. 228)

Their agreement indicated the necessity of religion for an educated citizenry because failure to understand religious symbols and practices “makes much of history, literature, art, and contemporary life unintelligible” (Haynes, 2019, p. 6).

After the group’s initial documents, a series of additional documents and guidelines pertaining to religion in education were issued. The broadest distribution of religion and education guidelines appeared in 2000 when the U.S. Department of Education disseminated a packet of guidelines to every public school in the country that included “A Teacher’s Guide to Religion in Public Schools” and was also endorsed by NCSS (Haynes, 2019). Nearly two decades later, religion is still minimized—if not avoided—in schools and curriculum (Eck, 2001; Haynes, 2019; Nord, 2010; Prothero, 2007).

The 1990s to Present Day: From Theory to Practice

After a multiyear review of 82 high school textbooks in subjects including history, economics, home economics, health, and science, Nord (1999) found that religion had been severely minimized. For example, in 10 popular history textbooks, Romanowski (2003) found that religion was merely mentioned in passing and that there were no thorough explanations of contexts, events, figures, or ideas. For example, Judaism and Islam, when included, are often described superficially or, in the case of Islam, in a way that presents the entire Muslim world monolithically in terms of beliefs and practice. Also, Padela (2018) found that of the three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), Christianity is often the most diversely represented although it is often done superficially (Padela, 2018). Romanowski (2003) wrote: “Textbooks are often devoid of adequate information about theological concepts, or authors make authoritative knowledge claims that are beyond questioning, which make it nearly impossible for students to evaluate textbook claims” (p. 31)

The present situation has changed in some states as social studies standards have been expanded to include greater instruction about religion; however, “textbook treatment remains largely superficial” (Haynes, 2019, p. 6). Despite the changing standards in some states and the call for greater religious literacy nationally by organizations such as NCSS or ASCD (Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development), controversy about religion in education remains. To be clear, religious literacy refers to “the ability to understand and use the religious terms, symbols, images, beliefs, practices, scriptures, heroes, themes, and stories that are employed in American public life” (Prothero, 2007, p. 17). Religious literacy is essential in social studies to prepare students for a complex, pluralistic society in which religious ideologies engage with public issues (Patrick, Gulayets, & Peck, 2017). Moore (2007) noted that the absence of religious literacy “hinders our capacity to function as engaged, informed, and responsible citizens of our democracy” and “fosters a climate that is both politically dangerous and intellectually debilitating” (p. 4). As individual states ponder over the place of religious literacy in school curriculum, a few obstacles to greater religious literacy education must be addressed.

Haynes (2019) argued that fear of controversy, indifference to the need for religious literacy, or both of these could be reasons for the exclusion of religion in the curriculum. Religion is a controversial subject because of the diversity of religious traditions as well as the diversity within specific religious traditions. If a school is going to allow teachings about Christianity, for example, it is important that students understand that Christianity includes thousands of Protestant denominations, not to mention the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions each having internal differences as well. What traditions receive greatest attention and why? Are the various beliefs evaluated and explained so as to grant legitimacy to the inherent

differences? Similar controversies would arise when engaging with Judaism or Islam, religions that are not only diverse, but also dynamic and changing. Within Judaism are varying traditions, such as Orthodox and Reform Judaism. Islam also has the Sunni and Shia traditions as well as more mystical approaches such as the Sufi tradition. Including these religious traditions is essential for a student's civic preparation, but the fear of controversy is often a significant obstacle to greater emphasis on religious literacy.

Nord and Haynes (1998) argued that religion is minimized or excluded because (a) educators still misunderstand the Constitution's phrase regarding the separation of church and state, (b) textbook companies believe religion is too controversial, and (c) religious conservatives and their beliefs that secularism is the religion expressed by education. Some public school teachers "are not merely afraid to include religion in their lesson plans; they are 'scared to death' even to mention the subject at all" (Prothero, 2007, p. 158). The Pew Research Center (2010, as cited in Marcus, 2019) found that 67% of Americans think the law prohibits readings from the Bible as literature in schools, and 51% of Americans think the Supreme Court's ruling does not allow for religion in education, both of which are wrong. Although the obstacles interfering with people's understanding of religion and education are significant, excluding religion from education is potentially harmful because of the positive educational impact of discussing religion in schools and the negative civic consequences of excluding the subject.

Religion is a necessary element of a liberal, civic education (Feinberg & Layton, 2014; Nord, 2010). Religious studies courses are essential in the development of student autonomy and in the improvement of the quality of civic participation (Feinberg & Layton, 2014). Further, religious studies promotes students' religious literacy, and religious literacy is educationally beneficial. As Moore (2007) shared:

Promoting religious literacy in the schools will enhance intellectual rigor, sharpen critical thinking skills, and further advance deep multiculturalism by giving students the tools to understand religions and the plurality of religious experiences across the curriculum and within the school community itself. (p. 33)

Students need religious literacy to be active, productive citizens in a democratic, multireligious society (Haynes, 2019; Marcus, 2019; Moore, 2007; Nord, 2010; Prothero, 2007). Marcus (2019) argued that “religious literacy education can empower students to take informed action as guardians of our First Amendment rights” (p. 11). Marcus (2019) also stated that “as citizens of a religiously diverse democracy, young Americans must learn about religion in order to develop a stronger commitment to religious liberty, a cornerstone of our democracy” (p. 11).

An education without religious studies is both educationally deficient and fraught with civic consequences. The minimization, if not exclusion, of religion in schools, has resulted in a secularized way of life that borders on indoctrination. Nord (2010) believed that when education ignores religious perspectives, students are inculcated to consistently understand life via a secular lens. In a society in which the majority of the population self-identifies as religious, an education that only allows secular voices does not adequately reflect society. Nord and Haynes (1998) argued that by ignoring religion in schools, we “teach students the (functional) religion of secular humanism” (p. 41). Nord and Haynes (1998) further state that public education:

...assumes a secular, largely scientific worldview, and teaches students to make sense of their lives and the world in terms of that worldview. By providing students with secular conceptual nets only, by ignoring religion (except in a safely historical context), the curriculum conveys the idea that secular nets are adequate for catching all of reality and that religion is irrelevant to the search for truth. As a result, religion is intellectually and culturally marginalized. (p. 42)

As Noddings (2006) argued, ignoring religious perspectives in education is committing educational “malpractice” because we are ignoring the overwhelming percentage of Americans

who consider themselves religious and because of the influence of religion on Western civilization.

The minimization of religion in education not only has educational consequences, but civic consequences as well. Haynes (2019) wrote that “in the United States, home to the world’s boldest experiment in religious freedom, religious differences and religious illiteracy contribute to bitter culture wars, growing Islamophobia, and resurgent anti-Semitism” (p. 5). For example, Jandali and Millstein (2019) noted that there has been more bullying of South Asian, Hindu, Sikh, Arab, and Muslim students since the 9/11 attacks. Greater religious literacy does not guarantee an end to bullying, anti-Semitism, or Islamophobia, but it may help prevent hate, discrimination, and violence (Haynes, 2019). The U.S. Constitution and the Supreme Court clearly indicate that religion cannot be included in education for the purpose of indoctrination. However, to teach religion constitutionally, Haynes and Thomas (2007) stated:

1. The school’s approach to religion is *academic*, not *devotional*.
2. The school may strive for student *awareness* of religions, but should not press for student *acceptance* of any one religion.
3. The school may sponsor *study* about religion, but may not sponsor the *practice* of religion.
4. The school may *expose* students to a diversity of religious views, but may not *impose* any particular view.
5. The school may *educate* about all religions, but may not *promote* or *denigrate* any religion.
6. The school may *inform* the student about various beliefs, but should not seek to *conform* him or her to any particular belief.

When education includes religious studies according to the six aforementioned principles, education better prepares students for the sophisticated, multireligious society in which they enter. Students are better prepared to engage with the plethora of religious perspectives in an overwhelmingly religious society (Eck, 2001; Haynes, 2019; Moore, 2007; Noddings, 2006; Nord, 2010; Prothero, 2007). To ignore religion is to commit educational malpractice, and ignoring religion is borderline secular indoctrination (Noddings, 2006; Nord 2010). Including religion in education is not only an educational necessity, but it is a civic necessity (Prothero, 2007). Feinberg and Layton (2014) wrote, “At a time when different religions are playing such an important role in civic life throughout the world, citizenship and informed public participation require a greater understanding of the role religion plays in people’s lives” (p. 4).

Substantial care was taken during this study to ensure consent and confidentiality while also following IRB guidelines. None of the study participants were part of vulnerable populations, such as individuals under the age of 18 years. After initial IRB approval and before interviews were conducted, participants signed a consent form and were informed that they could opt out of the study at any point. Participants and their ideas were protected during data collection and reporting. Study participants will only be referred to by pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity, and participants reviewed transcripts and field notes to address any issues with the data. All transcripts and data were stored in a locked location during the course of the study and will be destroyed at the appropriate time.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The current study is an investigation of religious studies teachers' perceptions of students' religious literacy and civic participation. The lack of religious literacy is increasingly recognized as a public problem that should be addressed in schools (Rosenblith, 2010). Although a student's family and social and religious communities are influential in his or her civic preparation, the role of social studies education is principally concerned with civic preparation for all students for the good of society (Barr, Barth, & Shemis, 1977; Moore, 2007; Tonga, 2016). Historically, religious literacy has been incorporated in civic education due to the inexplicability of history without religion as well as the overwhelming majority of self-identifying religious individuals and groups in society (Nord & Haynes, 1998; Patrick, Gulayets, & Peck, 2017; Prothero, 2007). Noddings (2008) and Nord and Haynes (1998) argued that individuals cannot claim to be educated without a good understanding of religion and that the schools that do not provide religious education cannot claim to educate.

Being educated, according to Nord and Haynes (1998), demands that a person is religiously literate. Prothero (2007) defines religious literacy as "the ability to understand and use the religious terms, symbols, images, beliefs, practices, scriptures, heroes, themes, and stories that are employed in American public life" (p. 17). Additionally, Moore (2007) shared that studying religious perspectives "invites students to identify and question underlying foundations of assumptions in ways that inspire engaged reflection and critical thinking" by having students ask "the 'why' of human agency as well as the 'why' of existence itself" (p. 30). Prothero (2007) also stated that a lack of religious literacy does not only have educational consequences, but there are also civic consequences. With demonstrable increases in bullying

against South Asian, Hindu, Sikh, Arab, and Muslim students since the 9/11 attacks, cultivating students' religious literacy may strengthen their discernment as well as their understanding of and respect for varying religious perspectives because of religion's power and influence in the human experience (Jandali & Millstein, 2019; Moore, 2007).

Research Methods

A qualitative case study method will be used in the current study. A qualitative approach was selected because of the personal and unique nature associated with qualitative research. Patton (2015) wrote that qualitative research is personal and that it not only allows for personal experience, skills, and training, but such personal elements support the results of the study. Qualitative research allows for deep exploration of issues, and religious studies teachers' perceptions regarding religious literacy will be examined via case study. While there is no universally agreed-upon definition for case study research, leading scholars concur that the case study method utilized in qualitative research allows a flexible case study design that includes a variety of methodological approaches (Dumez, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). According to Creswell (2007), a case study

...is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-based themes. (p. 73)

Patton (2015) notes that a case study is “a detailed and rich story about a person, organization, event, campaign, or program - whatever the focus of the study (unit of analysis)” (p. 259). In this study, the unit of analysis from which a detailed story emerges is the perception of religious studies teachers regarding the importance of religious literacy. By examining teachers' perceptions, there is an opportunity for reflection on education practices; this opportunity to reflect is one goal of case study research. Freebody, (2003) wrote that “the goal of

a Case Study, in its most general form, is to put in place an inquiry in which both researchers and educators can reflect upon particular instances of educational practice” (p. 81).

Case studies can be used in studies with various sample sizes. In the current study with a sample size of five ($N = 5$), a collective case study (or multiple-case study) will be used in which “the one issue or concern is again selected, but the inquirer selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue” (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). Creswell (2007) discussed the validity of four or five cases within a case study because these small sample sizes allow ample opportunities for themes to be identified and representative cases to be compared. The case study method is useful when researchers seek a holistic, detailed analysis of an issue through the selected cases. The case study approach in this study fit the research parameters, specifically in the selection of a single issue, namely religious studies teachers’ perceptions regarding the importance of religious literacy, which should effectively illustrate the issue (Creswell, 2007)

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the current study: (1) How do religious studies teachers define religious literacy? (2) Why is religious literacy a necessary element in a students’ secondary education? (3) What are the civic consequences of a society without religious literacy? and (4) How can religious studies inculcate civic values?

From the four research questions, eight semistructured interview questions were created to encapsulate religious studies teachers’ perceptions. Two sub-questions were created for each of the four research questions to allow for greater depth into teachers’ perceptions. Research questions and their associated sub-questions are shown in Table 1. However, the order of the questions in the table is not necessarily the order in which interview questions will be asked.

Table 1: Research and Interview Questions

		Research Questions			
		How do religious studies teachers' define religious literacy?	Why is religious literacy a necessary element in a students' secondary education?	What are the civic consequences of a society without religious literacy?	How can religious studies inculcate civic values?
Interview Questions	What does religious literacy mean to you?	X			
	Suppose you were asked to outline what religious content a religiously literate person would know. What would you include?	X			
	What are the most important civic values students should have as they enter the post-high-school world?				X
	If you were asked to give a speech on ways religious studies helps cultivate civility and respect, what would you say?				X
	Suppose a student goes through high school and never receives any formal instruction on religions in society. What consequences for society might result from the neglect of religion?		X		
	Let's imagine I were a student in your class, and I said, "The media constantly preaches that religion is the reason for social problems like hatred, bigotry, and violence. Is it true?"		X		
	Some educators say a K-12 education should prepare students for active and informed citizenship. In what ways can religious help prepare students for such citizenship?			X	
	What are some examples of religious misinformation that you would use to argue for the need for greater religious literacy?			X	

Sites of Research

Data will be collected at 5 different schools located within a 30-mile radius of a metropolitan area with an estimated population of almost 700,000 people in 2018 (www.Census.gov). Four of the school sites will represent four different religious and educational perspectives: Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and nonsectarian. The fifth school is a public school to capture the public school perspective. Due to the marginalization of religion courses in public education, it is more difficult to identify religious studies teachers from the public school setting than in it is to select teachers at independent and/or religion-based schools. However, this marginalization was one of the primary reasons to include a teacher from the public school environment. Religious studies is a broad discipline that includes courses where religion is examined as “phenomenon of human thought and culture, as a dimension of life and culture having significance for other fields of study: and as a particular tradition and heritage carried on in particular cultures and communities” (Harshbarger, 1961, p. 177). In the state of Tennessee, only 57 schools offered a religious studies course during the 2018–2019 academic year. On the contrary, the majority of private schools (67%) are religiously affiliated (Council for American Private Education, 2015).

Each of the four independent schools selected for this study represent different religious and educational perspectives. These four representative schools include a Christian, a Jewish, an Islamic, and a nonsectarian school. Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are different religious traditions that share similar historical origins story with the patriarch Abraham. As of 2015, Christianity and Islam were the two largest religions in the world, 31.2% and 24.1%, respectively (Pew Forum, 2015). Although Judaism is small (on a worldwide scale), accounting for 0.2%,

Judaism (1.9%) is the second-largest religion behind Christianity (70.6%) in America, and Islam third (0.9%).

While social studies in the state of Tennessee includes religion within individual courses, such as Ancient History and World History, no school in Tennessee filed a request to allow an elective in world religion during the school year most recently completed at the time of this study (2018–2019). However, other religion courses are offered in the state of Tennessee, such as an English/Language Arts elective entitled “Bible as Literature.” As of the 2018–2019 school year, only 57 schools in the state offered the Bible as Literature course, and 2,188 students were enrolled in the course, which is a decline from the 2017–2018 school year in which 71 schools offered the course and 4,108 students were enrolled. In the current study, religious literacy as an element of social studies was of primary interest. Only one school within a 30-mile radius of the metropolitan area was identified by the Tennessee Department of Education as offering a social studies elective; this course was entitled “Introduction to the Bible.”

According to the Tennessee Department of Education, there are nearly 600 nonpublic schools in operation. Tennessee has five classifications of nonpublic schools. There are 146 Category 3 schools, and these schools are accredited by a regional accreditation body, such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Schools in Category 1 and Category 2 are approved by the State of Tennessee and approved by private school agencies with state approval. Category 4 and Category 5 include “church schools” and schools “acknowledged for operation.” In the current study, independent schools from Category 3 were selected (tn.gov).

Of the 14 Category 3 religiously affiliated schools in the 30-mile radius, 12 were affiliated with Christianity. Only one school was affiliated with Judaism and Islam, respectively. There are seven nonsectarian independent schools within this geographic region, two of which

were specifically for students with disabilities (tn.gov). With there being only one school affiliated with Judaism and one affiliated with Islam, the sample was limited to only one school from the other perspectives to maintain equality.

As a result, 5 schools with religion courses within a 30-mile radius of the metropolitan area were selected. Four of these five schools are independent schools that offer religious studies courses that represent four different religious traditions: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and nonsectarian. The fifth school is a public school that offers a religion course (according to Feinberg & Layton, 2014). These five schools were purposefully selected as equal representation across the five different school types (i.e., Christian, Jewish, Islamic, nonsectarian, and public) was desired. The sample size was kept small due to the researcher’s desire to give equal voice to teachers from each school type and due to the presence of only 1 Islamic and 1 Jewish school within the 30-mile radius of the other schools. As Creswell (2007) acknowledged, a sample size of five is sufficient for depth of inquiry and the emergence of themes. Table 2 provides more information on the research sites.

Table 2

Sites of Research

	Location Type	School Type/ Religious Affiliation	Number of Students Enrolled	Tuition (U.S. Dollars)	Faculty-to-Student Ratio
School A	Suburban	Christian	630	\$10,796	10:1
School B	Suburban	Jewish	199	\$19,530	3:1
School C	Suburban	Islamic	425	\$6,000	9:1
School D	Suburban	Nonsectarian	630	\$21,110	9:1
School E	Suburban	Public	2,077	None	Unavailable

School A is an independent Christian school that began operating in 1972 and currently serves students in grades K–12. There are two religion courses in the high school curriculum, Bible and World Religions, and both are required courses. The school is located in an eastern suburb of the greater metropolitan area, and the most recent data from the U.S. Census (2010) estimated the population within the school's zip code at 35,059 people. The median household income for the zip code is \$67,848 (according to U.S. Census data). School A is one of several school options in the zip code, and there is also a large public high school and a similar private school.

School B is an independent Jewish school that serves students in grades preK–12 that opened in 1949 and had all buildings consolidated onto a single campus in 1987. The Judaism-affiliated school provides study of the Torah and Judaic studies, and religious studies courses are required. Concurrently, this school advertises a secular curriculum with a focus on both analytic and real-world skills. School B is in the greater metropolitan area, the population of the school's zip code is 26,125, and the median income in the area is \$71,044 (according to the U.S. Census, 2010).

School C is an independent Islamic school that was founded in 1996 and currently services students in grades preK–12. Traditional social studies courses, through which the school seeks to instill tolerance, diversity, and good citizenship, are included in the curriculum as well as Islamic and Quranic studies courses. School C is in a northern suburb of the metropolitan area, and there was a population of 41,948 (according to the U.S. Census, 2010). The median income in the school's zip code is \$46,720, and there are other school options in the area, including 2 public high schools and 2 private high schools.

School D is an independent, all-girls nonsectarian school that began operating in 1902 and serves students in grades preK–12. The tuition is \$21,796 for students in grades 5 through 8

and \$22,292 for students in grades 9 through 12. This school offers a World Religions course and an Honors World Religion course, both of which are electives. School D is situated in the metropolitan area, and the school's zip code has a population of 22,330 (according to the U.S. Census, 2010). The median household income in the zip code is \$58,257, and other school options in the area include a sizeable public school and several other private schools, but only three of the private schools serve students in grades 9 through 12.

School E is a public high school that opened in 2004 when the municipality formed an independent school district. The religion course offered at the school is an elective in the social studies department entitled Introduction to the Bible. According to the course description in the school's course catalog for the 2020-2021 school year, the course is designed to "challenge students to study sacred texts from an academic perspective instead of a devotional perspective" (p. 75). It is also noted in the course description that the Bible is "scripture for a number of religious traditions" (p. 75). School F is within 30 miles of the metropolitan area, and the population of the school's zip code is 38,927 (according to the U.S. Census, 2010). The median income in the zip code is \$96,962, and there are 2 other public schools and 1 private school in the zip code as well.

Participant Selection

In the current study, the perceptions of five purposefully selected religious studies teachers from five different school types (i.e., Christian, Islamic, Jewish, nonsectarian, public) will be investigated. These participants will be purposefully selected because the cases "are 'information-rich' and illuminative, that is, they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest; sampling, then, is aimed at insight about the phenomenon, not empirical

generalizations from a sample to a population” (Patton, 2015, p. 46). Teachers’ perceptions that are directly related to greater religious literacy are examined in this study.

Religious studies teachers were selected for the current study because these teachers are “information-rich” and because religion courses are uniquely focused on the study of religion (as discussed by Patton, 2015). Social studies courses and textbooks are inadequate in clearly addressing issues of religious literacy (Romanowski, 2003). After a multiyear review of high school textbooks, Nord (1999) wrote that religion virtually disappeared from World History texts past the 18th century or, in the case of American history, after the Civil War. Nord (1999) similarly pointed out that textbooks in civics contain topics such as government, rights, and justice, but do not contain substantive discussions of religion. Therefore, teachers were selected whose courses were focused explicitly on content related to religious literacy.

Saldaña (2011) argued that a sample of three to six participants can allow for a broad spectrum of data, but that the number of participants is not as important as the quality and depth of the data. Five cases were selected for the current study because these cases represent five different education perspectives with neither perspective being granted greater voice by number. While the majority of private schools from which the teachers were selected are religion-affiliated, limiting participants to one teacher per education perspective is important due to the single schools from Jewish and Islamic perspectives while the overwhelming majority of private schools are affiliated with Christianity, whether Catholic or Protestant. The Council for American Private Education (CAPE) noted that as of 2014–2015, there were 34,576 private schools. As of 2014-2015, nearly 60% of private schools are affiliated with Christianity, and although perspectives within Christianity vary widely, including non-Christian perspectives is necessary in aiding our understanding of the importance of religious literacy from more religious

perspectives (capenet.org). Of the 34,576 private schools in 2014-2015, 21.8% are nonsectarian, 6.1% are Jewish, and .08% are Islamic (capenet.org).

In the case of public school teachers, the difficulty lies with the marginalization of religion in public education. In Tennessee, although social studies standards include religion within individual courses, the actual religion course in the state is an elective in the English/Language Arts department entitled *The Bible as Literature*. As of the 2018–2019 school year, only 57 schools in the state offered this course, and 2,188 students were enrolled in the course. One school within the 30-mile radius offers a social studies elective entitled *Introduction to the Bible*. There was an extremely limited number of social studies teachers teaching a religion course in the state.

Participants were selected using a two-stage, criterion-based purposeful sampling strategy. The first stage of this process to separate religious studies teachers from social studies teachers who teach religious studies within a social studies course, such as history. Only 57 public schools in the state of Tennessee offered a religion course, *The Bible as Literature*, during the 2018–2019 school year, and this course is in the English/Language Arts division. In the current study, however, courses offered in the social studies department were preferred, and only 1 school within a 30-mile radius offered such a course. The first stage of the selection process with the independent high schools designated as Category 3 located within a 30-mile radius of the metropolitan area. There were 14 religiously affiliated schools within the geographic boundaries.

The second stage of sampling involved purposeful selection to ensure a variety of perspectives. This sampling was partially completed due to there being one Jewish school and one Islamic school. The other independent schools were purposefully selected due to the

researcher's familiarity with these schools' course offerings, which included religion courses. The second stage of the participant selection process was to select one religious studies course teacher to interview.

Data Collection and Analysis

As previously stated, data were collected from one religious studies teacher from four different types of independent schools (i.e., Christian, Islamic, Jewish, nonsectarian) and one teacher from a public school. Creswell (2007) shared that four or five cases for case study research allows a researcher ample opportunity to identify themes and compare the representative cases (p. 128). Most private schools are affiliated with Christian traditions; therefore, the research sites were purposefully selected to include other religious perspectives.

A small pilot study preceded the current study with the goal of verifying clarity, readability, and the tone of the interviews to gain a sense of validity before the interviewing process began. The pilot study revealed whether or not the interview questions offered sufficient opportunity for detailed answers. Results of the pilot study were thematically analyzed and triangulated to evaluate the potential effectiveness of the current study.

This purpose of the current study was to capture religious studies teachers' perceptions regarding the importance of religious literacy in students' civic preparation. According to Eck (2001), the United States is arguably the most religiously diverse nation, yet religion is minimized in the nation's public schools. The majority of public schools do not offer religion courses, and the superficial treatment of religion in the social studies is often inadequate in cultivating religious literacy (Marcus, 2019; Nord & Haynes, 1998; Prothero, 2007). On the contrary, the majority of the nation's private schools are religiously affiliated and offer religion courses. These religious studies teachers have unique insight into issues of religious literacy and

may be able to describe the problem of religious literacy and possibly offer means to promote students' religious literacy.

Five teachers from different school types (see Table 2) were purposefully selected using criterion-based selection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to participate in the current study. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) wrote, “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 96). The two criteria were as follows: (1) the educator must teach a religion course, and (2) the educator must teach at a school reflective of one of five education perspectives, Christian, Jewish, Islamic, nonsectarian, and public. Each of the 5 schools was within a 30-mile radius of a metropolitan area with a population of approximately 700,000 people. Approval was granted by the University of Memphis Institutional Review Board (IRB), and proper permission was granted in association with the teachers from all five schools before data were collected. Each participant signed a consent form.

Data Source 1: Semistructured Interviews

One-hour long interviews were conducted via a standardized open-ended format (Patton, 2015). Standardized open-ended interviews, similar to Creswell's (2007) semistructured interview, are those in which “the exact wording and sequence of questions are determined in advance. All interviewees are asked the same basic questions in the same order. Questions are worded in a completely open-ended format” (p. 437). This standardized approach streamlined the data so that “respondents answer the same questions thus increasing comparability of responses” (Patton, 2015, p. 437). When necessary, follow-up questions were asked to probe for more detailed descriptions. Interviews were conducted in a cordial, comforting atmosphere in which there was a degree of trust between the interviewer and the study participants. All interviews

were recorded and subsequently transcribed to ensure the accuracy of the interview data. To promote accuracy and triangulate the data, field notes and documents were also included.

Eight interview questions were developed in accordance with four research questions. Interview questions included a variety of four types of research questions developed by Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, and Sabshin (1981): (1) the hypothetical question, in which participants are asked how they might respond to various situations; (2) the devil's advocate question, in which participants are encouraged to engage with opposing viewpoints; (3) a question that leads a participant to define or elaborate on an ideal situation; and (4) the interpretive question, in which the interviewer offers ideas or explanations and seeks a response from the participant.

All teacher participants will be asked the following research questions:

1. What does religious literacy mean to you?
2. Suppose you were asked to outline what religious content a religiously literate person would know. What would you include?
3. What are the most important civic values students should have as they enter the post-high school world?
4. If you were asked to give a speech on ways religion courses help cultivate civility and respect, what would you say?
5. Suppose a student goes through high school and never receives any formal instruction on religions in society. What consequences for society might result from the neglect of religion?
6. Let's imagine I was a student in your class and I said, "The media constantly preaches that religion is the reason for social problems like hatred, bigotry, and violence. Is it true?" How would you respond?

7. Some educators say a K through 12 education should prepare students for active and informed citizenship. In what ways can religious help prepare students for such citizenship?

8. What are some examples of religious misinformation that you would use to argue for the need for greater religious literacy?

Data Source 2: Field Notes

Field notes were used to aid in the interview process. Field notes enable a researcher to jot down ideas on which he or she wants to follow-up or probe for greater depth. Taking field notes also allows a researcher to record notable reactions observed throughout the interview as well as signal to the participant the importance of what is being said (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). When taking field notes, the researcher is able to capture details about the context, setting, and other notable events that may not likely be recalled later (Patton, 2015). Field notes are also useful in capturing a researcher's reactions to events and reflections on content, both of which are part of the data (Patton, 2015).

Data Source 3: Documents

Along with interview data and field notes, the in-depth literature review regarding the history of religion in education and the modern need for religious literacy was used as the scholarship surrounding religious literacy is the basis of the interview. Literature reviews are useful in summarizing the historical significance of a topic while also describing the ways that a research topic may affect future outcomes. In literature reviews, findings from the research can be incorporated, which can also support data triangulation. In this study, the literature review supported triangulation by presenting a comparison of the themes emerging from the interview data with information from the literature to distinguish between religious literacy scholarship and the perspectives of religious studies teachers.

Ethical and Political Considerations

Substantial care was taken during this study to ensure consent and confidentiality while also following IRB guidelines. None of the study participants were part of vulnerable populations, such as individuals under the age of 18 years. After initial IRB approval and before interviews were conducted, participants signed a consent form and were informed that they could opt out of the study at any point. Participants and their ideas were protected during data collection and reporting. Study participants will only be referred to by pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity, and participants reviewed transcripts and field notes to address any issues with the data. All transcripts and data were stored in a locked location during the course of the study and will be destroyed at the appropriate time.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of religious studies teachers regarding the importance of religious literacy in a student's civic preparation. Data were collected from five religious studies teachers at five different schools, each representing different education perspectives; four of the five schools were private schools, including a Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and nonsectarian perspective. The lone public school was the only school within a 30-mile radius (known to the researcher) that offered a religious studies elective as a social studies course. A qualitative case study research design was utilized in this study, and semistructured interviews were the primary data source.

The research questions that were the foundation of this study had several aims: (1) to investigate the way religious studies teachers defined religious literacy and to compare their definitions to the standard definition developed by Prothero (2007); (2) To investigate religious studies teachers' perceptions about the importance of religious literacy in a student's civic preparation (Haynes, 2019; Marcus, 2019; Nord & Haynes, 1998; Patrick, Gulayets, & Peck, 2017). Though the need for religious literacy has been expressed since the 19th century, the importance of religious literacy has become more important in recent years. Tan (2008) wrote, "In the wake of events such as the September 11, 2001 airliner attack on the New York Trade Center, the 2002 and 2005 Bali attacks and the 2005 London bomb blasts, there is a perceived urgency to promote religious harmony and understanding through education" (p. 177).

Extant literature informed research question development. Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, and Sabshin (1981) outlined four types of research questions: (a) hypothetical questions, (b) devil's advocate questions, (c) posing the ideal questions, and (d) interpretive questions. The

hypothetical question asks a participant how he or she might respond to various situations. The devil's advocate question encourages a participant to engage with opposing viewpoints. The third type of question asks a participant to define or elaborate on an ideal situation. The interpretive question refers to the interviewer offering ideas or explanations and seeking a response from the participant.

This qualitative case study involved triangulation with three data sources of data: (a) semistructured interviews; (b) field notes; and (c) a document analysis through an in-depth literature review primarily based on work on religious literacy by Prothero (2007) and Nord (2010), which deemed religious literacy a necessary element in a student's civic preparation. Further, Patton (2015) suggested that triangulation strengthens the credibility of conclusions by requiring data evaluation from various perspectives. This study also included member checking, which is an important element that Stake (1995) described as enhancing the confidence regarding data interpretation.

Two interview questions accompanied each of the four research questions, and interviews were recorded and transcribed in November and December 2019. Interview questions were structured based on the four categories of interview questions (Strauss et al., 1981) previously mentioned. Follow-up and clarifying questions were asked, as needed, to generate more developed responses. Each of the five teacher participants was asked the eight interview questions in the same order to maintain response consistency among participants. In addition to interviews being recorded and transcribed, field notes were also taken to capture the substance of interviews. These field notes were taken on an interview guide, and nonverbal communication, (e.g., pauses) and possible ideas to probe through follow-up questions (Creswell, 2007) were

recorded in the notes. Observer comments, idea mapping, and theme identification were also recorded during and after the interviews.

Along with interview data and field notes, the in-depth literature review outlining the history of religion in education and the present need for religious literacy was used to contextualize participant responses. The scholarship on religious literacy was the basis of the interview questions. The literature, in this study, aided in data triangulation by enabling a comparison of the themes emerging from the interview data with data from the literature review to distinguish between scholarly literature and practitioners' perspectives (Creswell, 2007).

Research Questions and Responses

Research Question 1

The first research question was, "How do religious studies teachers define religious literacy?" Two corresponding interview questions were generated to address this research question. The first interview question was, "What does religious literacy mean to you?"

Two of the five participants held dissenting conceptions of religious literacy from the majority. One participant, Jane, the Islamic school educator, emphasized character building, values, morals, and a "God-fearing mindset," which aligns with Prothero's (2007) definition of religious literacy. Prothero (2007) defined religious literacy as "the ability to understand and use the religious terms, symbols, images, beliefs, practices, scriptures, heroes, themes, and stories that are employed in American public life" (p. 17). James, the Christian school educator, seemed to understand religious literacy in a more devotional context. James stated:

Well, that's a great question. I would have probably answered that in a different way my first or second year. I'm sure you've probably had experiences you think you know more when you're younger. The older I get, honestly, the more ... Let me rephrase that. The older I get, it's like the less I know. I know I'm growing, I know I'm learning more, but I feel like when I get one question answered, it opens up more questions. Don't get me wrong. I know where I stand. I know what I believe. I just know there's a lot more depth

than I ever imagined to it. In terms of religious literacy, I feel like, I'm probably never going to get there. Because I feel at least from a Christian perspective, the more I know God, the greater he seems to get and I realized I can't fully grasp it, I just can't. No matter how I try, I feel I'm never going to fully get there. Is that kind of what you asking?

The majority view expressed by three of the five participants indicated that religious literacy included a level of in-depth understanding and a knowledge component to religious literacy (Moore, 2007; Nord & Haynes, 1998; Prothero, 2007). While religious literacy was not equated only with participants' content knowledge, such knowledge is important. Bill, the nonsectarian independent school educator asserted:

Religious literacy, for me, means having a fundamental understanding of not just dates and doctrines, but also the lived experience of a practitioner of a given faith. So, I could give you the religious literacy means yes, I know that there are five pillars in Islam, and I also know what the daily practice of someone who's Muslim looks like. It has to be both for me because if you just have dates and doctrines, you get this nice little sheet and everything fits in. And we're looking at religions as if they're all the same and founder, what year, and it gets way more complicated than that. That's where I think the lived experience is such an important part of understanding religious literacy.

Bill's dual emphasis on content knowledge and lived-experience parallels that of Nord (2010) as Nord argued that education must not only include religious ideas, but students must be educated so that they can think like an "insider" of religious and secular ways, not only thinking about different ways of thinking.

Andrew, the Jewish school educator, echoed the importance of substantial content:

I'm coming from a Jewish perspective. I want to interpret the word religious literacy from the areas that I have expertise in, which is Jewish teaching. I don't have any expertise in any other teaching, any other religion, so I can't really speak to those. In that context, religious literacy means number one, familiarity with reading, translating and understanding the nuances of biblical Hebrew. The type you find in the Old Testament and as well Aramaic, which is the type of language that was used in the Talmud. Number one. So, it's not to speak, but be able to read and understand in those two languages, in those contexts. That's number one. Number two, is religious literacy is to be able to have a depth of understanding of the breadth. So the stories and other ... Not just stories, but the passages and the narrative that is of the Bible, the Old Testament, and as well many of the subjects, with some level of depth, that are taken up in the Talmud.

Mike, a public school educator with 32 years of teaching experience, initially said, “Wow. I guess when you say religious that throws me way off base because I really don’t know what that means,” but after a brief pause added, “In our society, we talk religious literacy, and in my perspective that is an understanding of the Bible. But I don’t think that people perceive it that way.”

Three participants, Bill, Andrew, and Mike, described religious literacy in a way that paralleled Prothero’s (2007) definition as “the ability to understand and use the religious terms, symbols, images, beliefs, practices, scriptures, heroes, themes, and stories that are employed in American public life” (p. 17). Bill only mentions Islam in his response, but Andrew and Mike both refer to the Bible, specifically the Old Testament. The importance of the Bible in American society can be seen in Americans’ overwhelming identification with Christianity at roughly 70% (Pew Research, 2014). Judaism is rooted in the Old Testament, which includes the Ten Commandments. The visual presence of these commandments, which are important in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, have been the focus of debate. For example, The Boston Globe (2017) reported on the U.S. Supreme Court’s siding with the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to remove a monument of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) from Bloomfield, New Mexico. A religiously literate populace should understand the broader significance of the Ten Commandments for the Abrahamic faiths that share them (Moore, 2007).

The second corresponding interview question associated with the first research question was, “Suppose you were asked to outline what religious content a religiously literate person would know. What would you include?”

All teacher participants indicated that a religiously literate person should be familiar with the Abrahamic religions (i.e., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). James, who majored in

psychology and never intended to enter education, discussed several religions that he believed a religiously literate person should be familiar with. James said:

Obviously, I'm going to be a little biased, but I start with Christianity. I would include Islam as well because that's growing exponentially. I'd include secular humanism which is atheism. Maybe I'm wrong, but the ones that seem to be growing a little bit are postmodernism and cosmic humanism, which I know is a big umbrella. They do seem to be growing rapidly. As a matter of fact, I just read an article recently where, and this is actually told of Christians. They said that 61% of Christians today are including cosmic humanist types of beliefs into their thinking and intermixing it with their Christian worldview, which I found to be very interesting. Postmodernism was number two believe it or not at 54%. I think those are ones that you definitely want to know about.

After the interviewer repeated the religions mentioned, James responded by saying, "Maybe one more, Judaism."

Bill began quickly with, "Okay," but he paused to think for a moment, exhaled deeply, and gave his answer in several parts. Referring to his answer of the first question, Bill said:

So as I mentioned in the beginning, I think it does start with some dates and doctrines, but I think it has to all be contextual, with the understanding that you cannot Christianize the study of religion. We can't just say that, who's the founder of Hinduism, because there is no founder. If you try to pigeonhole Hinduism into that box of who founded Hinduism, then it's not going to work, and you're going to come up with something that doesn't quite fit. And so, I think that there are some fundamental components about the historical understandings of where religion comes from. So I think historical underpinnings is an important piece, the first part.

After Bill described the historical underpinnings necessary for religious literacy, Bill continued to explain what a religiously literate person would know:

The second part that I would add is what I teach my students as the phenomenological approach, which is the idea that, how does a practitioner in this religion practice that religion in their daily life? What does it look like? When you wake up, how does religion order your life? When you go to sleep, how does religion order your life? On a holiday, how does religion order your life? So, that's an important piece of understanding. And then I also do the big questions that religion help us understand about: where did we come from, why are we here, where are we going? I think those are the fundamental questions that religions help us answer, on a daily basis.

Bill's perception appears to mirror Goldschmidt's (2019) description of a "lived religion" pedagogy. Goldschmidt (2019) described the "lived religion" pedagogy as one

...grounded in everyday religious life, rather than canonical doctrines or texts. . . . In short, the study of lived religion takes the analysis of religious diversity out of the rarified realm of doctrine and text, and places it instead within the give-and-take of the multicultural public sphere. (p. 54)

Andrew, Jane, and Mike mentioned the Abrahamic traditions as well, though in different interpretations. For Andrew, necessary religious content for a religiously literate person included "the Old Testament" and "the philosophical writings of each of the religions," specifically Islam and Christianity.

Jane, an educator with 10 years of experience, specifically mentioned the Abrahamic faiths by saying, "I would say Christianity, Islam, Judaism. Those three, those are the Abrahamic Faiths that I feel that they really have strong presence and influence in the current American society." Jane elaborated and included specifically "the Ten Commands in the Bible" because "there's a lot of commonality and similarity between the Ten Commands in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, which share the same exact value system. So, if we have a common ground, the Ten Commands would work as a common, neutral ground could be an Abrahamic faith." Nord (2010) said that building schools and communities on "common ground," as Jane mentioned, is necessary for schools, both secondary and postsecondary, to stop being battlegrounds for ideologies and subcultures and to start rebuilding respect. Mike also referenced the three Abrahamic faiths, in his response, saying that a religiously literate person should be familiar with "the history of the Jewish people," "the Old Testament," the New Testament theme of the "upside-down kingdom," and "what motivates Islam."

All teacher participants indicated familiarity with the Abrahamic religions as essential aspects of religious literacy (Moore, 2007; Prothero, 2007). The Abrahamic religions are

grouped due to their shared history and scriptural narratives. Each of the Abrahamic religions is present in American society, which may be the most religiously diverse nation in the world (Eck, 2001). In terms of Americans' knowledge of Christianity and other religions, Prothero (2007) wrote, "Americans' inability to think clearly and speak confidently about Christianity and other religions should concern anyone who cares about American public life" (p. 10). The Abrahamic religions are not only influential in America, but these religions are also influential globally. Although Judaism was the historical origin of the three faiths, Judaism is practiced by only .2% of the world's population while Christianity and Islam are the two most dominant religions, 31.2% and 24.1%, respectively (Pew Research, 2015). In the United States, knowledge of Christianity is important because of the historical importance of Christianity in the nation's history (Prothero, 2007). Knowledge of Islam and Judaism is important because of the "growing Islamophobia, and resurgent anti-Semitism" (Haynes, 2019, p. 5; cf. Douglass, 2019).

Research Question 2

The second research question was, "How can religious studies inculcate civic values?" Two interview questions were used to address this research question. The first corresponding interview question was, "What are the most important civic values students should have as they enter the post-high school world?"

The Center for Civic Education (1991) identified the following foundational civic virtues: civility, respect, individual responsibility, self-discipline, civic-mindedness, open-mindedness, compromise, toleration of diversity, patience and persistence, compassion, generosity, and loyalty to the nation and its principles. All five teacher participants' responses included one or more of the civic virtues listed above.

James, who worked in banking before entering education, mentioned tolerance as a key virtue. James said:

All right. I know the word that seems to be out there a lot today is tolerance, right? I would say we need to understand what that word really means because it seems to have taken on a new meaning. Tolerance, today, people think it means agreeing or at least agreement. That's really never what it meant. It's essentially saying, "I can agree to live with you. I may not agree with you theologically or in any other way, but I'm not going to hurt you. I'm not going to try to slander your character. I can actually live in harmony with you and we can both disagree on some very big issues without hurting each other.

James's personal understanding of *tolerance* was aligned with the standard definition, according to the Oxford Dictionary, as "the ability or willingness to tolerate something, in particular, the existence of opinions or behavior that one does not necessarily agree with." In an effort to bring clarity to James's definition, a follow-up question was asked, "In your opinion, you mentioned tolerance. Would you say studying religion or developing religious literacy students could help cultivate tolerance?" James responded quickly and confidently:

I believe it's possible. I do. Sometimes, it may depend on the professor. Sometimes, you may have people that are just having agenda. Don't get me wrong. I know there's no one that's probably truly unbiased, but even as a Christian, like in my classroom and I'm in a Christian school, one thing I always tell my students, 'You have every right to disagree with me. It will never hurt your grade at all. As a matter of fact, the more you talk, the more we discuss, it can only enhance your grade.' I say, 'You do not have to agree with me, whatsoever.' I say, 'You don't ever have to feel like I'm going to think differently of you. You're going to hear my opinion and I want to hear yours. You're more than welcome to give it. It will never hurt you in any way.' That's what I'm trying to stress. I've got my bias obviously, but I don't want that to impede in their thinking because I want them to find it themselves. I want them to think for themselves and look and search. Even though the fact that I want them to become Christians, they can't do it because I want them to. They have to want to do that. I know I can't force that no matter what. I want them to be able to search and look for answers. I guess that's a long answer, but I think I do believe a religious course actually would help in terms of tolerance. I believe it would.

James's emphasis as an important civic value echoes a theme from Prothero's (2007) work on religious literacy. Prothero (2007) wrote:

Tolerance is doubtless a necessity for civil society. . . . But a commitment to tolerance by no means entails indifference to religious doctrines or religious differences. In fact, tolerance is an empty virtue in the absence of firmly held and mutually contradictory beliefs. (p. 178)

Though James emphasized tolerance, he offered another important civic virtue emerging within his Christian framework:

I'm going to actually say from a Christian perspective, I think love is the most important thing, loving our neighbor, which I think runs across the board. You'd be hard-pressed to find anybody who would disagree with that. You might, I mean, you might still find somebody, don't get me wrong, but I think that will let you go across the board. If we can love our neighbor as ourselves, treat people with dignity and respect, I think the rest usually fall into place if we can do that.

Jane, who has begun working on her doctorate, mentioned four specific values, “tolerance, celebrating diversity, accountability, and respect.” Tolerance, respect, and the celebration of diversity are potential outcomes of greater religious literacy among students. Exposing students to a more informed understanding of religion will not end all intolerance. However, greater religious literacy will help diminish discriminatory practices because exposure to the variety of beliefs extant in our society is an essential means of providing students with a perspective on the religious beliefs and behaviors shaping our society (Farrington & Jamison, 2019; Moore, 2007).

Similar to Jane, Andrew mentioned tolerance and diversity as two essential values a student should have upon entering the world after high school. He structured his four responses and addressed them each:

One is being a citizen, being an American citizen. Okay. So voting, thinking about becoming well-read and thoughtful about politics and lobbying and contributing your voice to the politics, to the oral ... That's what I mean by being a good citizen. Okay. Being a political citizen. Okay. That's one. Potentially running for office. I mean, contributing as a citizen. Okay. That's number one. Number two is diversity. The importance of diversity. E pluribus Unum. The importance of diversity and the contribution that diversity has in terms of American ethic. The value as American ethics. The diversity. To value diversity. Three, education. The value of education. You say,

what is the value of education? Really valuing education as a mission in and of itself, becoming educated, teaching your children to become educated. That's critical. Finally, I think would be giving back. Contributing money, contributing time, contributing energy to building one's community, one's city, one's state. However you define that, the population around a person.

Andrew's note about the community was also a point of emphasis for another participant, Bill, an educator with ten years of experience. Bill spoke about three values, beginning with the community. Bill started to respond but paused for a long while to think and, when ready, said:

Yeah. . . I think that there should be a connection to community, and understanding that everyone in the community, on some level, wants the same thing. And being able to articulate that as a community, we have these goals. Now, how we achieve those goals is going to be where politics comes into the process and that's different than civic engagement. So I think there has to be that recognition that we're working together in a community. There also has to be a foundational knowledge component so that they can contribute to those conversations, so they have to know certain things about different groups of people or different policies. And then they also have to have empathy, which I don't necessarily as often thought about as civic engagement. But I think being able, if you are going to recognize that we have the same goals and different tactics to reach those goals, I think it's also important to have that piece of empathy and knowledge about other people's lives and lived experiences. I think those are my big three.

The emphasis on community is important because students should be aware of the variety of religious perspectives in our society, including more than just major religions (e.g., Judaism, Christianity, Islam), but a variety of perspectives within each of the major religions (Farrington & Jamison, 2019; Prothero, 2007).

In Mike's response, he mentioned integrity, humility, kindness, and compassion. His answer seemed to suggest that he felt religious studies were uniquely suited to address such values. To clarify Mike's answer, the interviewer asked Mike, "If I'm hearing you, it's almost as if those are values that are almost explicitly taught, when you combine the study of religion and education, those are clear," at which point Mike interjected and said inquisitively:

Where else is taught? Do you teach it in math? Do you teach it in English? Those other classes teach your mind. Physical education, you teach the body. But religious study

teaches all that other stuff, and it frees me to teach all that other stuff through the use of stories.

Then, when asked whether or not Mike believed religious studies are better suited to teach civic values than other social studies or humanities courses, Mike responded quickly:

Definitely. Where else do they get it? They're not getting in the home. Because a lot of times I have kids, they act out. Then I meet the parents, I say, "Yeah, I understand why." Because that's what they're taught. What I'm teaching goes against the flow, it really does.

Along with Mike's specific values, Mike mentioned how his class "goes against the flow" when the material challenges issues he considers cultural or societal norms. Mike's perceptions parallel Nord's (2010) argument for greater religious literacy education, particularly in public education. Since religion is minimized, if not altogether excluded, public education borders on secular indoctrination. Nord (2010) wrote:

When we teach students to think in entirely secular ways about history, nature, psychology, morality, and society, it should as no surprise that after twelve (or sixteen) years of study they conclude either that there are no religious fish to find in the sea or that if there are, one must accept their presence as a matter of faith. We teach them to interpret (to see, to feel, to experience) the world from a broadly secular worldview. Is this indoctrination? (p. 91)

The second corresponding interview question accompanying the second research question was, "If you were asked to give a speech on ways religious studies helps cultivate civility and respect, what would you say?"

The nature of the question fostered uniquely personal responses from the participants. Four of the five participants' acknowledged their personal perspectives and values. Three of the four participants, James, Mike, and Andrew, alluded that modeling civility and respect or scriptural examples are the best and most effective methods of cultivating civility and respect. Bill, the contrarian, said he would not actually give a speech on civility and respect, but take a different approach. Bill stated:

Well, first, I would say, ‘I’m not the person you want to invite. In fact, we need to invite these five community leaders who are all practitioners of this faith. And how about I organize a panel to help them answer these questions about their own respective communities?’ because one of the things that I’m doing this year is visiting houses of worship, and going to the Hindu temple in the east was one of the, I think the best experiences my students have ever had. We’re going to the Buddhist monastery on Apple Road in a couple of weeks. They’re so excited about it. And so I think I would... So, I’ll come back. I think I would have all of these five different groups of people talk about how religion plays a role in their daily lives, not getting into the capital ‘T’ truths of religion, but what role does religion play in your daily life?

Bill asserted that having religious practitioners involved in such a speech or panel is a better way to model civic engagement than one person speaking for others. He elaborated:

And I think when you can start to understand that, you can understand how people participate in civic engagement in a responsible way. So it has to be a step back from, ‘I’m going to tell you why it’s important’ and it’s got to be experiential. It’s got to be us working through this. I mean, I think that’s modeling what civic engagement looks like is, ‘Hey, let’s get a whole bunch of people in a room and talk about it.’ I think that is where the good work is to be done, rather than me taking a room full of people and talking about it. Somebody else doing a room full talking about it, somebody else... Let’s model and actually do this community thing together.

James also referred to modeling, but rather provided a personal example in which he modeled respect. James quickly began his response with, “That’s a good question,” paused for a moment, and continued on:

Well, I will begin on what we have in common, I guess. There’s no doubt I would at least express my religious beliefs and who I am, so they know who I am and where I’m coming from. I would say we have things in common. I would admit that while I would disagree with most theologically, I would start from my personal belief. I believe that we’re all created equal in God’s eyes and that no matter what, he loves us all. That’s where we can start.

World religions, such as the Abrahamic religions, have much in common. For example, the Abrahamic faiths share similar beliefs, such as the belief in a divine creator and communicator, the metaphysical foundations of morality, the belief in life after death, and a final judgment. As mentioned above, emphasizing the “common ground” of the religions in society is necessary for schools, both secondary and postsecondary, to stop being battlegrounds for ideologies and

subcultures and to start rebuilding respect (Kunzman, 2005; Marcus, 2019; Moore, 2007; Nord & Haynes, 1998; Prothero, 2007). After mentioning that he would begin with the basic, shared beliefs among religions, such as the supernatural origins of the world, James leaned forward in his seat and continued:

You don't have to agree with me, but I can at least say, 'You know what? No matter what, God loves you. No matter what, whether you agree with me or not, whether you love him or not. I believe he loves you. For me, that gives you value. No matter what, that gives you value. I think that puts us on common ground.' I'll probably start there.

James concluded his response with a long story about an experience with a former coworker in which he appears to have modeled the civility and respect necessary in society. He shared:

I used to work with a guy who is, well, the antithesis of a Christian. When he came in the first day at work, he told us, 'There's only three things we can't talk about, sports, politics and religion.' Believe or not, he actually broke his rule for me because I was a little bit different than what he is used to. From what I gathered from him, he grew up with people that are very judgmental. His lifestyle was pretty rough. He had a hard lifestyle, but I told him, 'Look, in my opinion, my humble opinion, the only difference between you and me is I've admitted I've accepted Christ and you tell me that you haven't.' I said, 'Other than that, there is no difference. In my opinion, I'm as sinful as you.' That startled him. It actually shocked himself a little bit because he always saw me as the guy who's honest, the one he could trust at work. 'Look, I know most of them better than anyone except for God. I know that in my core, I'm not wary.' It only takes one just like anyone, but I know there's a lot more depth to who I am that he now realized that would probably terrify me if I saw it. That's why I told him, I said, 'Look, we're no different at the end of the day. The only difference is I'm just forgiven. That's all. That's it.' He seemed to be pretty receptive to it. I don't know if he ever changed, but it was definitely he can tell that was something he wasn't used to.

The belief that studying religion can help ameliorate social ills (e.g., intolerance) and foster civility and respect is shared by several scholars (Byrne, 2014; Miedema & Bertram-Troost, 2008; Moore, 2007; Parker, 2014). If students are not introduced to the variety in society's religious perspectives or if they are introduced to unjust simplifications of religious ideologies, then they are not prepared "to meet people and ideas in their life that they don't understand, and possibly don't agree with" (Byrne, 2014, p. 26). Eidoo et al. (2011) argued that education for

civility and respect must include religion so that students can learn about conflicting perspectives, learn how to manage conflict, and learn how to engage with different ideologies while still working towards a common societal goal. Miedema and Bertram-Troost (2008) also argued that studying religion is a necessity in our globalized world due to the political, economic, and cultural impact of religion. They wrote that schools “should take the impact of the processes of globalisation seriously by preparing students for their encounter with cultural ‘others.’ As part of this, education should also prepare them for the encounter with religious others” (p. 127). With the vast majority of Americans identifying as religious as well as the majority of the earth’s population identifying as religious, studying religion is essential to foster the mutual respect that people in our society needs (Pew Research, 2014, 2015).

Mike had a uniquely personal response. He indicated that when he had a stroke, his faith gave him the perspective to deal with the stroke in a positive way. His speech, in which honesty and integrity were mentioned again, was focused on the perspectives he believed were necessary for success. Mike shared:

I believe that the perspectives that you need to learn, to live in this society to be successful. Because again, I'm wanting all of this from what I was taught growing up, in regards to, if you're honest, you show integrity, you're going to succeed, because that's what the Bible teaches. If you're dishonest and all that, eventually you're going to pay for it. That's one of the things that keeps me doing what I'm doing in society, doing what I'm supposed to. Obviously, I come under temptation like anybody else, I have that feeling that if I do the right thing, that eventually it's going to go my way. It can. Same thing, I had out from my stroke. I'm thinking, ‘I believe all things work together for good, for those who love God and are called according to his purpose.’ If he allows this to happen, yeah, it's going to be tough to go through it and that's fine, because I know there's something better on the other side, or he wouldn't let it allow it to happen.

Religion and civics are complementary. Lester (2011) argued that schools in which students are not taught ways to use and understand religion in society could be partly responsible for perpetuating culture wars. Other scholars (Moore, 2007; Spinner-Halev, 2000) argued similarly

that failure to inform K–12 students about deeply held ideologies may potentially help fuel culture wars, curtail historical and cultural understanding due to religion's role in world history, and promote religious and racial bigotry (Moore, 2007; Spinner-Halev, 2000).

Mike's personal experience was central in his response. His faith commitment also seemingly provides him with his purpose for teaching. He indicated a larger concern with his classes than mere intellectual formation, hoping that his class might give the students a reason to possibly refrain from harmful behavior in which they might otherwise engage. Mike shared:

Then I look at the ultimate goal and again this is why I do what I do. I tried to teach the kids that as well. Again, a lot of them are just taking it for the credit, I know that. But I'm also trying to plant a little seed in there, that maybe sometime, maybe they'll refrain from doing something that they might've done otherwise.

Andrew, a 25-year veteran teacher, paused for a moment, chuckled, and said, "That's a good question. You really thought these out." After a long pause to think about what he would say next, he continued:

I think that the way I would speak about is that the religious person, the way I'd be defining it, the religious person is the person who looks to models. Models from our heroes or anti-heroes, from God as well, regarding how to behave. I think that from a religiously minded person, a person does that. That's the orientation. That type of person would use that same pattern of thinking, that pattern of behavior into their life, civilly. They would look to translate those kinds of values to how they deal with their neighbor and how to deal all around. I think that that's the biggest contribution is being grounded in a set of values that is based on models. That are based on time true models. That are based on models that we have confidence in and that we can be sure that those models of behavior are going to be ones that are going to improve our lives now. I would give examples. I would speak about the general, but I'll also give a lot of examples about how that would translate to modern-day life.

Each of the respondents elucidated ways that religion can inculcate values such as civility and respect. The importance of religion for civic education is noted in the literature as well. Miedema and Bertram-Troosts (2008) argued that "A broad concept of citizenship education implies that religious education and development is part and parcel of citizenship education and should not

form an optional or facultative element, but instead a structural and necessary element of all citizenship education” (p. 131).

Research Question 3

The third research question guiding this study was, “Why is religious literacy a necessary element in a students’ secondary education?” Two interview questions accompanied this research question. The first interview question was, “Suppose a student goes through high school and never receives any formal instruction on religions in society. What consequences for society might result from the neglect of religion?”

All five participants indicated that not studying religion in the K–12 environment would have a negative impact on society, causing issues such as public deception, misinformation, misguided public stereotypes, loss of an objective moral framework, and possible lack of personal enrichment. Mike offered the dissenting perspective that if a student does not engage with religious ideas, the consequences would be students’ simply going along with societal standards. Mike, who is a military veteran, focused on the lack of discipline that youth are taught at home. Using cell phones to justify his point, Mike elaborated:

A 15- to 16-year-old is going to go with society and that's what I see in our schools. The biggest problem I have with those schools right now, and I think, again, I don't know, is the cell phone. When you allow a 15- to 16-year-old to determine, it can't be a good time. I couldn't have done it at that age. I think that is, again, I told the kids, there's nothing wrong with your cell phone. I love it too. I have the sonic app and I get this drink right after school. But when I see kids with cell phones, and they're not working, it's just their entertainment. In fact, I told the kids when ... Because right now I have a place, that I have them put their phones when in lecture, when they're taking their tests. They have a place because it's a distraction in class. Obviously, I don't even want to know what they're doing on it. I believe it's going to be the downfall.

To help clarify Mike’s stance on whether or not a student missing any education about religion would be negatively affected in terms of education, the clarifying question was asked, “Do you think it’s possible that, let's say if a student never has any studies, do you think a student could

end up getting the implication that ‘Well, apparently religion doesn't matter?’” Mike thought for a moment, nodded his head, and replied, “He probably could.” Such an attitude towards religion, such as religion being unimportant in life, is a dangerous conclusion, according to Nord and Haynes (1998), which is a particular danger of public education because public education

...assumes a secular, largely scientific worldview, and teaches students to make sense of their lives and the world in terms of that worldview. By providing students with secular conceptual nets only, by ignoring religion (except in a safely historical context), the curriculum conveys the idea that secular nets are adequate for catching all of reality and that religion is irrelevant to the search for truth. As a result, religion is intellectually and culturally marginalized. (p. 42)

When James was asked the interview question, he responded quickly and confidently:

Well, definitely a lot of deception. For example, in our class, we talk about Marxism. What it does, it goes through all the things ... Well, it can't get through everything, but it goes through a lot that they actually believe in terms of their ethics, their theology, things such as that that a lot of people don't know about. For example, I just had to give a statistic where from 1917 to I think to 1964, somewhere in the 80 million people were killed, that's the number that were recorded, by communism. They're not always told, some of these issues. It's almost like what you don't know will end up hurting you. Honestly, you open up to deception.

James' first example of the deception that occurs when students do not encounter religion in education was centered on “deception” about Marxism. His second example was specifically related to religion. James continued:

I saw in the article where it said 28% of Christians strongly agree that no matter who we're praying to, it's all the same God, whether it's Islam, Christianity, Judaism. It's all the same God. If you really look carefully Christianity or at least any other religion, they're not really saying that. That's another maybe a form of deception that would probably be a result.

Bill addressed a number of consequences that might result from a student not engaging with religion. Before addressing possible consequences, Bill offered his perception about the reasons that the curriculum at many public schools does not include religion. Bill, who was sitting in a relaxed mode by this point, mentioned the relationship with religion at his school:

Because I'm in an independent school, we do have a lot of religion baked into what we do as a school, that I know that a lot of public schools don't have and a lot of public schools are kind of afraid because they don't understand how to navigate this framework within the first amendment. But it's totally academic. And when it is totally academic, it is relevant for every single religion, for every single person to know.

Bill's perspective is supported by religious literacy scholars such as Nord. Nord asserted two basic reasons that public schools ignore religion, one of which echoed Bill's perspective.

According to Nord (2010), two significant reasons that many secondary schools do not have religious studies courses are an ignorance about the constitutionality of religion in schools and a lack of adequate teacher preparation. After Bill shared his perspective as to why public schools ignore religion, he discussed two specific consequences:

I think some of the consequences that come out of this are stereotypes about how different people in the world operate, and why they operate the way that they do. I also think it's a missed opportunity for one's own enrichment, because one of the first things I say in my class is that I am not here to teach you capital "T" truth. You are working on capital "T" truth with your family and your religious leaders and your own brain. And I am not here to tell you what is capital "T" truth, but I can tell you what's lowercase T true for many people as they practice their own religions. And what I often find is that when students learn about nuances in other religions, it helps them to understand their own religion and have a greater appreciation for different parts of their own religion. Or if they don't have a religion, they can respect that, or understand why they don't have religion in their lives. So I think it is both the, you're missing out on an opportunity to understand yourself in a different way, and you're missing out on an opportunity for that academic knowledge of the way that other peoples in the world live.

Bill's belief that the study of religion can dismantle stereotypes is an important goal of religious literacy education. As the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) (2014) acknowledged:

Knowledge about religions is not only a characteristic of an educated person but is necessary for effective and engaged citizenship in a diverse nation and world. Religious literacy dispels stereotypes, promotes cross-cultural understanding, and encourages respect for the rights of others to religious liberty. (Paragraph 1)

One of the ways that religious literacy education is able to dismantle stereotypes is by not only introducing students to the variety of extant religious perspectives, but also by introducing students to the myriad of differences that exist within religious perspectives (Nord & Haynes,

1998). Students should investigate the ways individual religions exhibit a diversity of thought and practice as well as the ways that individual religions have changed over time (Marcus, 2019). In doing so, students will have the background needed to challenge stereotypes, which are oversimplified descriptions of persons or things.

Before Andrew responded to the question, he inquired about the interview question's intent. Once he had clarity, he paused for a moment to prepare and to parse his response:

I think we've tried that experiment. I think that has been deleterious for society. I think that, especially in the sixties and seventies, I was alive but I wasn't engaged, whatever. I think that that was the experiment that America had tried. I think that it was a value, it was a really a value-neutral education. Okay. So I think that there would be negative consequences. I think that students would miss out first of all on the opportunity to hear from people who are excellent examples ... should be excellent exemplars for them, their teachers. Those are people who they trust and people who have real high influencers. They would miss out on the opportunity to learn values from those kinds of people who should be influencing them. That's number one.

Andrew focused the next segment of his response on the consequences when the values promoted by religion are ignored. He elaborated:

I think the other is, is that I don't believe that ... I don't believe they can be neutral in this area. I think that not teaching values is also itself a statement about values. It's a statement that, yeah, there really are no values and that you can choose whatever values you want or whatever values feel good for you at the time. Or alternative or even worse that there really are no values and there's no need to hold yourself to any standard. I think that that would be the consequence.

Jane concurred with Andrew that a specific consequence of ignoring religion might be the ultimate loss of a value system. Jane became an educator because of the influence of two educators on her life, a middle school librarian and a high school physics teacher. Jane began where Andrew concluded by discussing the potential loss of values, stating:

I think as a human nature, generally we have to be connected to a higher power. We have to think beyond ourselves and we have to ... It's helpful to have those guidelines because otherwise, I mean we're tempted to do not the right thing all the time. But if we know that we are accountable, there is a higher power that will hold us accountable. There is safe judgment and we're going to be asked about all our deeds. We are accountable for those

deeds. I think this will definitely increase the adherence with the moral or value system that we are trying to teach our students.

Jane's beliefs are supported by a Pew Research Poll (2011) demonstrating that many Americans say the belief in God is necessary for morality although the percentage of those who disagree climbed from 49% in 2011 to 56% in 2017 (Smith, 2017). Those who identified as religious and who believed God was not necessary for morality rose slightly in 2017 to 45%, up from 42% in 2011. Smith and Denton (2005) found that many of the teenagers they interviewed believed God was actively involved in morality. The majority of Americans, however, no longer believe that a belief in God is necessary for morality. One issue that lies between those who think God is necessary for morality and those who do not think so is the precise meaning of morality (Noddings, 2008).

The second corresponding interview question was, "Let's imagine I were a student in your class, and I said, "The media constantly preaches that religion is the reason for social problems like hatred, bigotry, and violence. Is it true?"

All five of the teacher participants' affirmed that religion could be an originator of hatred, bigotry, and violence. Coinciding, all five participants made it clear that they were not saying that religion causes social ills, but rather saying that those individuals who claim various religious ideologies are responsible and may not accurately represent the religious tradition. Four participants made a distinction between representations of perceived "true" and perceived "false" religious expressions.

James, who studied psychology during college, answered in the affirmative and also suggested a distinction between religion and relationship, stating:

I'd say religion itself, there might be some truth to that if you really look at. Like I said Christianity, I don't quite believe as a religion. I believe it's a relation with Christ, but religion is hardly ignored. There has been a lot of things in the past where you can

actually pinpoint religion as being at the epicenter of all kinds of tragedy. Spanish inquisitions, we've seen all kinds of things in our history. Even stuff after The Reformation, that took place in Anabaptist was pretty horrific and all in the name of God, but yes, it's amazing, I think a lot of times that religion you got something that man really comes up with and he makes his own, but it can be destructive. Obviously, as a Christian, I really don't see Christianity as a religion. I see it as a relation with Christ. I know that people look at it from the outside and think, "This is something that you guys have rules. You've got The 10 Commandments. You have the Sermon on the Mount that you have to live up to," but I look at it as something that I could not achieve that by myself and I'm aware of that. I feel like that's what God is trying to tell me, "You can't do that." You can't do that, but that's why I set myself in Christ. I feel like for me Christ is the one who changes me. I can't change myself. I don't really have hope to do it. That's why at least to me I feel like Christ can come renew me, I guess, producing me a new spirit that will actually love other people the way he's loved me, but without him, I can't do that. That's why I feel like at least Christianity is different in that respect, but I'll say this, I do believe there's people that take the title Christian, they may, they may not be, but they're missing out that relation with Christ and that can be very destructive, hence, what happened to this pastor and his family being kicked out. I think that's a religious move.

To bring clarity to James's distinction between religion and relationships, his initial response was followed by, "The distinction between relationship and religion, how would you define the word religion? How would you define that?" Without hesitation, he responded:

To me, religion is more like a second works-based thing. You have to work to get there. To me, it also goes down to your motivation and why do you what you do. If I'm a religious person, I most likely think in terms of, "Okay, if I do this, this and this, I can get to this, but still, no matter what, the center is me, isn't it? It's all about me." If I think about relationship, then I'm thinking a real loving true relationship is about the other person, if we really get it. I know not everybody gets that, but if I truly love somebody that I want to do what's best for them. I want to please them. It really isn't about me at that point. That's why I see there's a difference. It comes out in the question, "Why do I do what I do?" even the good things because I can do what would be considered a good act for a very selfish reason and I would consider that religious. If I do it for a selfless reason, in terms to do something good for them, to bless them, then I would see that, "All right, that's stemming from love. That's a selfless reason," when I look at that in terms of Christ.

Similar to James, Mike made a distinction between the ways that religion might differ from a relationship. Mike indicated hatred for the term *religion* and elaborated on his distinction by providing an example of authentic religion, which he defines as a relationship. Mike first

responded assertively, “Not my religion,” and a long pause to think about what he would say next followed. Mike then shared:

I'm very political, I get into this day all the time in regards to Christians and conservative, all that. You're familiar with DACA, right? We've had DACA on the books for a long time, and obviously these young people that are under DACA, they grew up here and they've been here all this life and to basically send them back to their country is stupid. Because they don't speak the language, so we should allow them to stay here and that goes against all the Republicans right there. They're basically saying ... I feel I try to be compassionate as well, in regards to my ... I guess probably what we should do is, allow them to stay here but now allow anybody else to come. These people are under there, because again, politicians, again Democrats don't want to solve the issue either. They want the issue, they don't want to solve it. They want to say, ‘These poor people have been here, but we're not going to do anything because we want the issue. I feel that is something in regards to religion, that I've been taught is to have compassion. Not necessarily just take a stance to become a Republican, or Democrat, or any of that. There is a time to be compassionate and that's what I think, that's what we should do. I think biblical training gives you some of that. Where a lot of people just issue out, “Because I'm a Republican, this is what I need to believe. I'm going to party lines or whatever it happens to be.’ They think they have compassion, but they don't, they don't want it solved either. They just want the issue. They're not compassionate either. Then the Republicans want them turned away, they're not being compassionate. If you have a religious training in that way, I feel maybe your ideas of compassion might come forth. I guess I could say. That's why sometimes my son's questioned me, ‘Dad, conservatives believe this and they're mean spirited.’ I said, ‘I believe in the ideas that they inspire, but I'm also compassionate in regards to ... Some of these ideas ... Talking politics and here's Trump's bashing Mexicans and all that.’ If you're really a true Christian, you're not bashing any group of people. They're all equal, black, African Americans, Mexicans, Chinese, whatever that case might be. Our society, they try to label, ‘You're Republican you hate Mexicans. You do this and you do this.’ That's not what the Bible teaches. I try to instill that in my students, different issues.

To get further clarity on Mike’s perspective on the relationship (or lack thereof) between religion and hatred, bigotry, and violence, a follow-up question was asked: “Do you think religion has been blamed, or has also been given those titles that religions foster hatred, and religious people are bigots, religious people are violence, you think that's a label that's attached?” Mike elaborated:

It's an unfair label because they label Christians as ... My personal beliefs are not into those, but religion has a tendency to be. Because I teach history, you think about the Catholic church in Europe, horrible things that they did on the account of religion. Well,

that's religion and I separate. Religion is an issue all that, but the religion I practice is, it's individual. I hate the word religion, because it's out there. It's a relationship. That's the way I look at it.

Unlike Mike, Bill's perspective did not charge religion as being a means of social ills.

Rather, Bill, echoing a Romanian author and scholar of religion, argued that religion only exists in the hands of its devotees. Interlocking his hands, Bill began:

I would say that, I'm quoting an author named, I think his name is Eliade is the last name. And I would say that religion doesn't exist outside of the hands of human beings. And I would say that human beings are responsible for interpreting religion, and they're going to do that in many different ways that suit their political aims, that suit their economic aims, their social aims. And I think that all religions have instances of people using the religion as a justification for their evil, whatever that evil may be, if it's persecuting a group of people because of their beliefs or because of their skin color, because of their gender, all of that is in the hands of human beings. Now that's not to say that religion doesn't have anything doctrinally that has been bad for people. But again, I would just go back to, human beings made those decisions as interpretations of their understanding of the sacred, right? I mean, most of the time, people when they make these big decisions, 'I'm going to nail 96 theses on the door of the Catholic church in the 16th century and say, 'I want something to be different.' It's because you think that you have the sacred on your side or that you have an insight into what is sacred that everybody else is missing out on.

Bill conveyed his perception that religion, in the hands of people, can be the cause of evil, but religion, in the hands of people, can be a source of good as well. Bill summarized his response:

So, I would just keep coming back to that quotation, that religion outside of the hands of human beings is difficult to find and explain. And so, on the flip, the other, I would also encourage students to think about the flip side of that, that it is through religion that so many good things are happening in the world.

Bill's emphasis on both the good and evil that can result from religious participants is echoed in Prothero (2010). Religion can more often be portrayed in negative terms than in positive terms.

For example, Hartwick, Hawkins, and Schroder (2016) found that social studies' civics standards in America tend to portray religion as a catalyst for conflict, which is one argument for the inclusion of the positive features of religion.

Andrew's perspectives were similar to those of James and Mike in his agreement with religion possibly being responsible for the social ills included noted in the question. While agreeing with the hypothetical student, he also said he would investigate the evidence upon which the student based his claim. Andrew, a Jewish school educator, began laughing when answering affirmatively:

Okay, yes. That's probably true. Okay, that's probably true. But there are a number of people who will hold themselves up as religious people. They are either hypocritical or they are misinformed or they speak arrogantly, or they have an agenda. Yeah, they use religion to beat other people over the head or to self-aggrandize, whatever the situation may be. I don't know that I can say most if the student would say ... I would ask the student, 'Where are your facts coming from in terms of saying most?' But I would, or even a lot, but I would want to hear more about those facts. How does the student come to that conclusion? But I would say that there is a phenomenon out there of people who are in the media, who are in public eye, who don't represent religion well and it is a problem.

To investigate Andrew's perspective on the signs that might distinguish an authentic religious practitioner from one who is misinformed or speaking arrogantly, the researcher asked, "Would you say there are clear signs of someone who represents religion well as opposed to someone who represents religion poorly?" Andrew pondered silently for a moment before saying:

Trying to stay out of the public eye would be a good sign, in my mind, that they are ... As soon as they're in the public eye ... I'll put it in a positive way. As soon as I'm in the public eye, I act suspicious. That's one. Some of them you get them in the public eye, there's nothing you can do about it, but you would endeavor to try to get out of it as soon as possible. I don't mean they don't lead. There's a lot of leadership that can take place outside of the media and outside of the public eye. You're still leading, but you're not obsessed with trying to get into the public. That's one. Two, another marker just to universalize, another marker is humility. Just overall humility. So that's to the related to the media, but overall humility is another marker. I would say another marker is a slowness to anger, a slowness to vitriol, a slowness to sounding overly judgmental. I certainly think that a person has to be critical in general in their own mind. You have to engage in your own mind in viewing the world critically. I mean to say what it means, a discerning. A discerning eye and a starting thought, that's important, but it doesn't necessarily have to yield criticism. I would distinguish between those two things. Although criticism is necessary sometimes. It's okay. But I would say a tendency towards soft. Tendency towards not anger. Okay. Then I think another would be a tendency towards charity and charitable behavior.

Giving students perspective on the variety of ways any particular religion is practiced or giving insight into the diversity of thought and practice within particular religions (e.g., Judaism, Christianity, Islam) is important for students to get a more nuanced perspective of religion.

Marcus (2019) wrote:

Students who study the many ways individuals and communities experience religion in their own lives will not only gain a more nuanced understanding of religion, but will also cultivate a stronger commitment to work with and protect the rights of religious groups - a hallmark of constitutional, civic education. (p. 14)

Jane's response echoed that of James in both of them distinguishing between the things they thought religion practiced properly and the things they thought religion misunderstood. Jane's response also mirrored that of Bill in that she similarly argued that religion itself is not responsible for social ills, but that those who interpret and misapply religion are the guilty ones.

Jane emphasized that true religion would not produce hatred, only love:

I would say the misinterpretation and lack of knowledge of the religion, yes, leads to hatred and intolerance. So lack of proper education, proper dialogue between different religion and lack of understanding for different religions might lead to hatred. But religion itself and people that really truly follow their religion will never produce hateful person. A person who truly follows Gods guidelines and teachings, whether Islam or Judaism or Christianity. There's no way that the love of God would be combined with hatred and intolerance, then they don't mix at all, there's no way.

Jane elaborated on the things she considered the clear distinguishing mark between a truly religious person and a person using religion as a means to an end. Jane continued:

And the reason that we see people that portray themselves as God loving and practicing Muslims or Christians or Jews that exhibit the hate and intolerance means that the love of God and too understanding of religion, it's not really there. Because there's no way that hate coexists with love. If you love God, you will love the creations of God. You respect it. Because God himself loves us, respects us, value us a lot. So, there's no need for us to be very judgmental and be hateful and intolerant. And they don't encourage it, basically.

To better appreciate Jane's distinction between a truly religious person and one who is not truly religious, the follow-up question was asked: "How do you tell the difference between someone

who's genuine and someone who uses religion as a means? What would you say are the indicators?" Jane responded quickly and assertively:

Indicators, tolerance. Yeah, the biggest indicators. If this person is tolerant, if this person reaches out to other communities. This person is not judgmental, not harsh. There is mercy, there is compassionate to other people, regardless. Then you know, this is a genuine ... In my opinion, and I could be wrong. But this is how I differentiate between sincere people and people who just took their religion, the teaching, the love of God did not really touch their hearts. It's just the surface-level clean.

Jane's perspective on misinterpretation and tolerance are important to note because of increasing Islamophobia as Islam is often misrepresented in American society (Haynes, 2019). Farrington and Jamison (2019) noted FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) data, which showed surges in hate crimes against Muslims in 2011 and 2015. Farrington and Jamison also wrote that "The historical narrative and current reality of imbalanced news coverage on Islam have helped create a false narrative about Islam." While misrepresentation is a problem for Muslims, other religions experience misrepresentation as well because many religions, if included, are often oversimplified and presented as a reason for conflict in social affairs (Hartwick, Hawkins, & Schroeder, 2016).

Research Question 4

The final research question was, "What are the civic consequences of a society without religious literacy?" Two corresponding interview questions were associated with the fourth research question. The first interview question was, "Some educators say a K-12 education should prepare students for active and informed citizenship. In what ways can religious studies help prepare students for such citizenship?"

All five teacher participants elucidated specific ways that religious studies could help prepare students for citizenship. Three participants referenced that the role religion helps ground morality, and two participants mentioned particular civic values (i.e., critical thinking, tolerance).

James began with, “That’s a great question,” before he sat back to ponder the question. The bulk of his response was an example supporting his main point, which was captured when he said, “I would say to me I would begin with truth. I would start there because obviously if you want to be a good citizen, you want to know what the truth is.” To explain his main point, James referenced a historical figure from World War II:

The first person that stems to my mind that I would consider a good citizen although his community probably wouldn't have at the time would have been Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I look at that guy, he actually did go against the norm, at least initially. Not everybody knew what Hitler was capable of when he first took power but Bonhoeffer seemed to see it before most people did. If I'm not mistaken, if you find that I'm wrong, please correct me, but I read somewhere I believe that when Bonhoeffer saw out of the church was kowtowing to some of things Hitler wanted to do, I believe he made the statement that, ‘if you do this, you no longer the church.’ Please correct me if I'm wrong. Technically, it almost looks like he's not really being a good citizen. He's not really going along and bringing peace. He actually brings a fight to the table, but he does because of truth. He does because of what's honorable.

To conclude his historical anecdote, James reiterated his main theme and summarized his belief about citizenship: “I believe it's really our job, our duty to bring truth to our community whether it’s popular or not. I think being a good citizen is doing the right thing morally.” Similar to James, Mike emphasized the role of religion in encouraging morality, ethics, and responsibility:

I think it pairs up more so than any other subjects. Some of the things that we make mandatory in schools, what do you have to have? Four sciences now? Really for what? What is the purpose of going for all that stuff? Then I think, some of the things that we leave out, in regards to teach them ethics and teaching them the responsibility and teach them effectively.

Mike’s ideas seemed to wander somewhat after he began. He mentioned several life-worthy electives that he believed schools should offer. However, when returning to the question, Mike concluded:

That’s why I love teaching Bible so much too, because we are addressing concerns that, at least I have in this world about integrity and all that. We've lost all that, and at least the Bible teaches to make that.

Jane's perspective echoed those of James and Mike in her stressing religion as a foundation for morality, which, in her perspective, is vital in citizenship education. An experienced educator and participating member of accrediting teams, Jane made her rejoinder:

The religion acts like a glue to all those guidelines. And because if I'm a person, you teach me all you want in K to 12 that I don't have to lie, no stealing, no this or that. But I'm tempted and if I don't have the guidelines and the reward. Because we are motivated by rewards, that if you don't do this, you're rewarded by this. Maybe Paradise or Eternity. So if I'm not motivated, I might not really adhere to all what you're teaching me and civic and gave me. So because we are wired to always as what's in it for me. Like as a person, you tell me, give me a set of rules. If I see those rules are benefiting me, they're the direct benefits for me personally. I will be more inclined to follow them. But if there's no direct benefit, I mean why should I? Yeah, it's good to be a good person, but when hardship comes and challenges happen and you're pushed to make decisions and you're pushed to make choices.

Andrew, a 25-year veteran teacher, noted specific values such as charity, gratitude, and industriousness. However, he launched his response by noting an important distinction that he believed was exhibited in Jewish education, critical thinking.

Good. Okay. One, part of Jewish religious education is related to what I said before is to produce a student who can think very critically, can write critically, can think critically, can read critically. I think that's highly important for a person who is an engaged citizen. A person who can discuss. A person who can ask questions. A person who can look at the world. Who can look at the media critically. All those kinds of skills. That's one. Two, is there is a set of values that hopefully we're imparting to our students, but that any religious school would impart to their students, the value of charity. Again, the values we talked about before. The value of charity, the value of humility, the value of education, the value of role models. So all those kinds of values would hopefully be imparted to a student through the K - 12 education that would then yield a student who could be an excellent ...Gratitude. I haven't mentioned gratitude. Gratitude is an exceptionally important value as a citizen. A person that's gracious and then they realize that they also have a debt to go serve. So, called upon to serve, you know, in the most serious way. To go serve, you know, in the army. I believe that's a ... Being gracious for the opportunity we have in America is important. So all those values. I think those two.

Andrew's inclusion of critical thinking is similar to Moore (2007), who noted that religion "invites students to identify and question underlying foundations of assumptions in ways that inspire engaged reflection and critical thinking" by having students as "the 'why' of human

agency as well as the ‘why’ of existence itself” (p. 30). Questions about the “why” of human nature and existence are answered differently via secular and religious schools of thought. Much of public education minimizes—if not excludes—religious perspectives. When religious perspectives are silenced in a student’s education, students are not given an opportunity to develop the critical thinking skills necessary to engage different religious ideologies. Such an education, one that ignores religious ideas, is borderline indoctrination, and is not a proper education (Noddings, 2008; Nord & Haynes, 1998).

The second interview question corresponding with the fourth research question was, “What are some examples of religious misinformation that you would use to argue for the need for greater religious literacy?”

All five teacher participants provided examples of religious misinformation that they believed supported the need for greater religious literacy education. Before responding, James sat upright and thought for a moment. When ready, James spoke about misinformation first with Marxism and politics before moving into matters of religion:

That’s a good question. That was clear. Let me think. That's a thing. The example I can think of, my curriculum calls it worldview or at least a religion. They don't classify it. The world might not classify as religion with Marxism. We look at something that can be classified one way is that we're trying to help eliminate class distinctions. We're trying to help the poor, lift them up, but in the end of the day though, you're just not really given all the truth. I feel like Venezuela is a pretty good example of what's going on. I know they're not quite communist but they're socialists which seems to be just a step away, doesn't it? They tell you the pretty part of the picture and you're going to hear my bias mind again, I hope you don't mind, but like we hear in politics today. ‘Well, we're going to give you free college.’ Well, is it really free? Because what they're going do is raise taxes. They're going to raise taxes for everybody. You get all these good things or at least you hear all these things that sound great and I know both parties or both sides can do it. They might tell you something that sounds so good, but they don't tell you everything. You got to look for yourself to see, ‘Okay, let's do this.’

James’s response was focused on the ways misinformation occurs when part of the truth about a religion or perspective is excluded so as to skew the public image of an ideology. Religions are

diverse both externally and internally. A constitutionally appropriate religious studies class should introduce students to the variety of perspectives that exist among the various religions as well as within specific religious traditions (e.g., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) (Marcus, 2019). As James turned to examples of misinformation and religion, he began with Islam and moved into Christianity. He continued:

For Islam, you might hear about how this is a peaceful religion and some of them maybe, but you don't always hear about the different factions that are out there which I know at least there's Sunni and the Shi'ite. There's certain things you don't hear about. For example, maybe Mormonism. Some people will view that as a denomination of Christianity where when you think about denominations of Christianity, denominations are things actually will differ on things such as baptism or views on the end times possibly or things that are not necessarily related to salvation. Mormonism on the other hand is very different. Someone recently told me when they do the tour, they talk to certain people that are I guess very high up and they said, "They don't usually tell you everything. You have to learn more as you go." We found out obviously and I found out through students of mine that I didn't know they're Mormon, but I was giving a test on the Trinity and they came in and they said, "We can't answer this question." "Why not?" I forget they were Mormon. They said, "We're Mormon. That's all." I wasn't thinking of that. I said, "Well, okay." Don't get me wrong. I'm not trying to downplay anyone who's a Mormon, but there's a difference there between that and Christianity. Sometimes people don't see that. That could be another example, possibly of some misinformation that they are different.

To clarify James's assertion that claiming that all religions are really one is an example of religious information, the follow-up question, "Would you say that it would be misinformation to suggest that all these religions are really just one?" was asked. James paused to think and then said:

Yes, I would say so. Yes. I feel like if you say they're all one, then what do you with apparent contradictions. It's like Christianity isn't Islam. Both disagree on their beliefs about Jesus Christ themselves. They can't be the same if they disagree on something so major or even Judaism. There are some big very issues here that don't match up. I feel like, 'How can you say they're all together when there's so many differences that you just can't reconcile?'

There are many beliefs and practices shared among the major religions of the world, such as the origins or the practice of prayer. These similarities, however, do not mean that all religions are

one. Prothero (2010) argued that declaring all religions as the same fundamentally is a misunderstanding of the nature of religious faiths and beliefs.

Mike, a veteran teacher with experience as a coach and administrator as well, mentioned several examples of misinformation:

I guess a lot of students are just amazed what's in the Bible. Because I do a pretest beginning of the year. I think there's 44 questions. Because I teach a wide variety, I teach kids that have been in church all their lives, and then I teach kids who, 'What's the Bible?' They don't have any idea. What I try to do is to find a basis, as to where do I need to start? Am I talking to kids who have a lot of background, know all the stories, or am I talking about somebody who has no clue? Because I have both students. Because being an elective they think, 'Well, I just think it might be easy.' Have no background at all, and then some that have. Even the kids that have a lot of church background, obviously this generation, they don't read a whole lot. They say, 'Really, that's in there?' I try to stress as well in regards to, if you know the Bible, then you also know when somebody is speaking the truth. Instead of being fed this, 'That's in the Bible.' Maybe no. I tried to give him good example. I say, 'How many wise men were there?' [More than one.] Okay, most of them say three. I say, 'Well, the Bible doesn't tell us there's three.' Now we use three because of the three gifts. I'm not saying they're one, but do you go along with what society has told you in the nativity story, or do you know what's in the Bible? The same thing with Jonah. What was Jonah swallowed by?' 'A whale, no it's not. It wasn't a whale, it might've been a whale. I don't know that, it doesn't say that.' In today's world, a whale is not a fish. I don't think it's category is a fish. This is a big fish, so even the kids who have a lot of training and they felt, 'Maybe I don't know as much as I thought I did.' Again, that's hopefully to get them to, 'Maybe I do need a little bit of this as well.'

Another example Mike mentioned was not related specifically to his class, but was more so an example of public misinformation. Mike said:

I thought it was cardiac arrest and when you have the Bishop up there would not even give communion to the former vice president, because of his feel on abortion. Again, went back to what I thought about being Catholic. I'm Catholic. Are you Christian? I'm Catholic. That's good enough, I guess, but they don't necessarily have a relationship. That's why I hate the term with religion. It's like saying we're in a religious country. What do we do? Allow for abortions? No, I think there's a difference.

The specific story Mike referenced occurred in a southeastern state where a Catholic bishop denied the former vice president communion over his stance on abortion. Denying communion to individuals who hold teachings contrary to the Catholic church has happened on several

occasions, most notably in 2004 when a presidential candidate was denied communion for his stance on abortion (Jenkins, 2019). The bishop who denied communion said that an individual who advocated for beliefs in contradiction to the teachings of the Church place themselves outside the church. Communion is not available to those who are outside the Church (Jenkins, 2019). There are varying individual opinions regarding abortion in the Catholic Church; however, a Catholic Church belief is that abortion is antithetical to the teaching of the Church and is an unchangeable belief (“Respect for Unborn Human Life: The Church's Constant Teaching,” n.d.). Because of the official teaching of the Church related to abortion, Mike was surprised that there was such public shock about this denial of communion. Providing students with more information on the teachings of the largest Christian tradition in the world would help people understand events such as this.

Two participants explicitly referenced misinformation about Islam to identify the need for higher religious literacy levels. Jane, a Muslim educator, first mentioned the Dutch cartoonist who drew offensive cartoons of Muhammad in the mid-2000s, which induced riots and demonstrations in some countries. More recently, a Dutch politician revived a competition to draw pictures of Mohammad to further promote his ideas of free speech, despite many Muslims’ belief that such images are forbidden and idolatrous (Osborne, 2019). Jane said:

I would think of the cartoon, the offensive cartoon, I think it was in Holland about the prophet Mohammad and the people who supported the illustrator. I mean I think he's a journalist and he just drew very offensive and made over a billion persons unhappy. But on the flip side also some of the Muslim community reacted in a inappropriate way or in an integrated way, which they are not. And they acted this way because of lack of understanding of the proper way to act. This incident is comical because the prophet himself was faced with all this bigotry, all this hate, all this the mocking. But he was not violent, he did not respond with violence at all. So this is from some of them, Muslim groups, they need more education about the Abrahamic teaching and how to act in those sorts of circumstances. And on the other side, we need more education for the authors or journalists that those are honorable figures. And those are red lines for other religions. And we don't mess with that, we should not. I mean that's not freedom of speech. This is

hate and bigotry. You are free to say what you want, but as long as you're not encroaching on other people's secret beliefs and honor figures.

Bill, a teacher of religious studies for four years, focused his initial response on a particular faith about which misinformation is often spread. Bill shared:

Any news article in the world related to, anything that comes from the United States and is about Islam. Because I think that people have such a mystery about what Islam actually means. And we have 15, 20 Muslim students in our high school, and to see them on a daily basis navigate those stereotypes. So it is both on a societal perspective but then for me, it's also vital for these students in our schools to feel safe and to have their peers know about who they are. Like, what does their Muslim life look like? Why are they taking Arabic classes after school every single day, so that they can access the Quran in the native Arabic? Right? That's I think it's a really cool thing for our students to know.

The focus of both Jane and Bill on Islam presents a good reason for more religious literacy. In the United States, the Islamic narrative Islam is often portrayed in a one-directional manner, particularly the claim that misrepresentation of Islam is a significant problem in the United States (Elbih, 2015). Misrepresentation of Islam occurs both within and outside education. For example, media portrayal of Islam, whether via news outlets or entertainment, often represents the religion as inherently violent (Nimer, 2007; Revell, 2012). Such oversimplifications of religion are ignorant of the reality that religions are not monolithic and cannot be properly given universal adjectives (Marcus, 2019). Furthermore, Elbih (2015) wrote, “For young and impressionable minds, these representations can foster ignorance, misunderstanding, and hatred” (p. 112).

Andrew commented that misrepresentation is a product of the “shallow” media. He also addressed the ways misinformation can be a factor within a religious tradition—even for those who practice it:

Well I think ... Hey, I don't want to pick on the media. Okay. But, the media is very shallow. I think it's important because it's what the kids are exposed to now, especially with social media. So, it's very shallow. Everything is shallow that I see. That's certainly the ways in which our kids engage in, is very shallow. That would be one. Any religious

modeling that's done on social media. Any religious ideas that are discussed in social media. Everything itself, but it's certainly within the question you're asking me, it's all going to be very shallow. So, I think one, is the media. By that I specifically mean ... I'm specifically talking about social media. They going to engage ... You know, Instagram, they'll see a picture of someone religious, whatever it is, it's going to be very shallow. They're going to see something on Facebook where the person that's trying to put themselves up as a religious model. It's going to be shallow. Okay. That's number one.

After sharing his perception on the role of the “shallow” media in disseminating religious misinformation, Andrew discussed how misinformation can also be a problem with practitioners regarding their religious traditions, in this case, Judaism.

...when our students go out into what's called the real world. Whether it be university or whether they're going into the marketplace, they will encounter people who really don't have a very strong basis of understanding of Judaism. So to answer your question, I think that going into the quote, unquote real world, out of school and all the places that they go, they need to be prepared to have answers to questions that people will have for them. Lest they encounter people who will say, ‘This is what your religion says isn't it?’ And they will not really have an answer and they will end up becoming very confused. I think that's another ... So, getting out into the real world, I think would be another place where they would encounter such people with religious misinformation. I don't think it's disinformation, it's just misinformation. They just don't know. Again, that would apply to other religions as well. I could see how someone who was religiously educated in a specific stream of Christianity or Catholicism or whatever, Islam or whatever it is, that they would same kind of thing. That people, Mormon, whatever it is, people just don't know. so kids get out there and they would not be able to ... very confusing to encounter people who are kind of messing them up. Not intentionally, but messing them up about their own beliefs. I think those two areas, media and out in the real world.

All participants agreed that misinformation can be harmful to individuals and to society.

Addressing misinformation, which can inculcate fear, bigotry, and hatred, requires school officials to more closely investigate the benefits of religious literacy education as a means of civic preparation (Elbih, 2015; Haynes, 2019; Marcus, 2019; Moore, 2007; Nord, 2010; Nord & Haynes, 1998; Prothero, 2007).

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore religious studies teachers' perceptions regarding the importance of religious literacy in a student's civic preparation. Scholars such as Prothero (2007) and Moore (2007) are leading voices for religious literacy in education as a civic necessity. Prothero (2007) defines religious literacy as "the ability to understand and use the religious terms, symbols, images, beliefs, practices, scriptures, heroes, themes, and stories that are employed in American public life" (p. 17). Moore (2007) similarly, more elaborately defined the concept:

Religious literacy entails the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses. Specifically, a religiously literate person will possess 1) a basic understanding of the history, central texts, beliefs, practices, and contemporary manifestations of several of the world's religious traditions as they arose out of and continue to be shaped by particular social, historical and cultural contexts' and 2) the ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social and cultural expressions across time and place. (p. 56-57)

Existing literature as well as data from religious studies teachers from five different school types and representing five education perspectives were collected in this study. The school types included an independent Jewish school, an independent Christian school, an independent Islamic school, an independent nonsectarian school, and a public school. The five teacher participants were purposefully selected to ensure that each perspective had equal representation. Data sources included semistructured interviews, field notes, and an in-depth literature review, and three themes emerged from the interview data. These identified themes are presented in this chapter, and implications of the study results for religious literacy education are also included. In addition, there are recommendations for future research.

The Three Common Themes

Three common themes were shared among the data provided by the religious studies teacher participants: (1) Religiously literate students should be familiar, at least, with the three major religious traditions, i.e., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; (2) Religion can be a catalyst for evil as well as for good; and (3) Religious studies can inculcate civic values. These themes correspond with Prothero's (2007) *Religious Literacy*, Moore's (2007) *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy*, and Nord's (2010) *Does God Make a Difference*, all of which are leading publications in the field of religious literacy.

Theme 1: Religious Literacy and Familiarity

The first theme identified through data analysis was “religiously literate students should be knowledgeable of major religions and traditions, specifically the Abrahamic religions.” All five of the teachers interviewed indicated that religious literacy includes knowledge of the three Abrahamic religions. Teachers eluded that pedagogical strategies (e.g., lecture, engagement with primary religious texts, media, and field visits to places associated with religious traditions) are ways students can learn about the different religions. These teachers' emphasis on the Abrahamic religions mirrors research conducted by Prothero (2007). However, Prothero and others, such as Nord (2010), argue that students in America should be most familiar with Christianity due to its historical and cultural influence in the nation.

In the context of the United States, Prothero (2007) argued that Christianity is the most important religion for students to be familiar with because while “the United States is one of the most religiously diverse nations on earth,” it “is also the world's most Christian country. With a Christian population of about 250 million, there are more Christians in the United States today than there have been in any other country in the history of the world” (p. 16). Similarly, Nord

(2010) explained that “in the context of American and Western education, and in the lives of most students, Christianity will be much more influential and relevant to a wider range of educational purposes than other religions” (p. 237). The belief that all U.S. students should be religiously literate in Christianity is shared by several scholars (Moore, 2007; Moore, 2015; Prothero, 2007; Schweikart & Allen, 2004). Participants also acknowledged the importance of Christianity. For example, James, an experienced world religions teacher, asserted that religious literacy begins with Christianity, but includes Judaism and Islam as well.

The definition of religious literacy is not limited to Christianity or to the other two Abrahamic religions. Prothero’s standard definition of religious literacy is inclusive by referring to the religions “that are employed in American public life” (Prothero, 2007, p. 17). As Eck (2001) shares, America may be the world’s most religiously diverse nation. Some of the religions practiced in America include the three Abrahamic religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, Native American religions, and Sikhism, to name a few. These religions are not monolithic and display diversity of thought within each religious tradition (Marcus, 2019). Notwithstanding America’s religious diversity, Christianity is America’s most represented religion, with nearly 71% of the population identifying as such (Eck, 2001, Pew Research, 2014). Following Christianity, the next two largest religions, with 1.9% and .9% respectively, are Judaism and Islam (Pew Research, 2014). On a global scale, Christianity and Islam are the largest religions, representing 31.5% and 23.2%, respectively (Pew Research, 2012). As one of the teacher participants, James, asserted, globally, Islam is growing exponentially. By 2050, Christianity is projected to remain relatively static at 31.4% of the world’s population while Islam is projected to increase from 23.2% to 29.7% (Pew Research, 2015).

Despite scholars, such as Moore (2007), Nord (2010), and Prothero (2007) promoting greater inclusion of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in education, there is no universal, official agreement on the particular religions that should be covered in schools. As the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) (2014) shared:

The National Council for the Social Studies re-affirms that study about religions should be an essential part of the social studies curriculum. Knowledge about religions is not only a characteristic of an educated person but is necessary for productive and engaged citizenship in a diverse nation and world. Religious literacy dispels stereotypes, promotes cross-cultural understanding, and encourages respect for the rights of others to religious liberty.

Even with respect to the constitutionality and civic necessity of religion in education, religion is still mostly absent in the public education attended by the majority of students in the United States (Haynes, 2019; Kunzman, 2005; Marcus, 2019; Nord 2010; Nord & Haynes, 1998; Prothero, 2007). Schools are a means of civic preparation, and religious perspectives should be included education-related conversations. As Kunzman (2005) wrote, “schools should include religious perspectives in the conversation, not only because such contributions can often prove illuminating and valuable, but because they are an undeniable part of the civic conversation in pluralistic society” (p. 166). Schools, whether public or private, must include religious perspectives to adequately prepare students for engagement in society.

Most of America’s students attend public schools, despite the significant percentage of students attend private schools. As of the 2014–2015 term, the Council for American Private Education (CAPE) identified 34,576 private schools at which 10% of the student population was educated. Nearly 60% of private schools are affiliated with Christianity, 21.8% are nonsectarian, 6.1% are Jewish, and .08% are Islamic (capenet.org). While many private schools are religiously affiliated, religion may be minimized, if included at all, for many students in public education. And even when religion is included, it is a peripheral topic embedded within social studies

courses. In such an approach, religion is not taken seriously enough, which Nord (2010) deems problematic.

Nord (2010) noted that students who encounter topics in religion in social studies or literature courses might develop rudimentary religious literacy. Such an approach is unlikely to cultivate within these students “any significant religious understanding—the kind of understanding that people within a religious tradition have of their own tradition and of the world as it appears from the vantage point of their tradition” (Nord, 2010, p. 82). Nord advocated a kind of understanding that can dispel stereotypes and cultivate civility, unlike the more traditional, albeit limited, “dates and doctrines” approach to religion employed in many schools (Goldschmidt, 2019; Nord, 2010). With 78% of the population identifying as religious, especially associated with one of the Abrahamic religions, studying religion should be required in secondary education (Feinberg & Layton, 2014; Marcus, 2019; NCSS, 2014; Noddings, 2008; Nord, 2010; Nord & Haynes, 1998; Pew Research, 2014).

The group of Abrahamic religions share a common spiritual heritage as well as a similar core of beliefs and practices (Douglass, 2019). While Judaism represents .2% of the world’s religious population, it is the historical source from which the rivers of Christianity and Islam flowed into their own distinct paths (Pew Research, 2012). Jane, the Islamic school educator, said as much when she said first that a religiously literate person should know the Ten Commandments and also be familiar with the shared scriptural history and ethical framework of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Familiarity with the Abrahamic religions would mean that students should recount the basic history, central religious texts, beliefs, practices, and contemporary manifestations of these religions as well as the social and political influence of these religions across time and space

(Moore, 2007). One or more of these elements was present in the responses of each of the teachers participating in the current study. For example, Andrew, an educator with over two decades of experience, specifically mentioned “the Old Testament,” which is central to Judaism, figures prominently in Christianity, and has many parts woven into the fabric of the Qur’an. Along with the Old Testament, Andrew included the “basic philosophy of Islam, basic philosophy of Christianity,” and “some of the religious figures of the New Testament.” Similar to Andrew, Jane specifically mentioned the Ten Commandments, presented in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 of the Bible, and scattered throughout the Suras of the Quran (i.e., 2, 4, 5, 14, 17, 24, 42, and 47). Mike specifically mentioned “the history of the Jewish people,” which functions as the historical origins of each of the Abrahamic religions. James, the Christian school educator, emphasized the theological distinctives of each of the religions. At the same time, Bill’s responses included both “dates and doctrines” as well as a phenomenological element in which students gained insight into the lived experiences of those who practice the various religions.

The participants’ responses mirrored the literature regarding the components of religious literacy. Despite inroads in religious literacy by Prothero (2007) and Moore (2007), additional scholars support the notion of greater civic harmony (Feinberg & Layton, 2014; Haynes, 2019; Marcus, 2019; Moore, 2015; Nord, 2010; Rosenblith, 2010). The purpose of the religious information that religious literacy demands of students is to promote greater civic harmony. As Marcus (2019) wrote:

Students who study the many ways individuals and communities experience religion in their own lives will not only gain a more nuanced understanding of religion but will also cultivate a stronger commitment to work with and protect the rights of religious groups - a hallmark of constitutional, civic education. (p. 14)

Moore (2015) shared that “the study of religion should promote tolerance, respect for diversity, and student knowledge and understanding, not conformity.” The NCSS (2014) further acknowledged that “Religious literacy dispels stereotypes, promotes cross-cultural understanding, and encourages respect for the rights of others to religious liberty” (Paragraph 1). The information that students should learn about the various religions is a means of granting students an “insider’s understanding” of the religion under study. This insider understanding is important so that students are equipped to evaluate life as religious insiders rather than external observers (Nord, 2010).

Scholars (such as Marcus, 2019) and organizations (such as the Pluralism Project at Harvard University, 2019) alike have noted that studying religions, including the Abrahamic religions, means that students should investigate the differences both between religions and within each religion. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam neither are the same faith nor are they internally monolithic (Douglass, 2019; Friedman, 2019; Marcus, 2019; Prothero, 2010).

Furthermore, students should move beyond accumulating facts about a religious tradition and gain an insider understanding so that they can learn to view the world from within the religions they study rather than merely observing the religion externally (Nord, 2010).

Ideally, students would encounter this religions information in a separate world religions course during their secondary studies (Feinberg & Layton, 2014). World religions courses are importantly both educationally and civically. As Feinberg and Layton (2014) wrote:

World-religion courses have two important roles to play in the shaping of a civic public. First, they can provide accurate information about different religions, correcting misinformation, and stereotypes. Second, they can prepare future citizens for engagement as members of a multi-religious liberal democracy.” (p. 106)

Similar to Feinberg and Layton (2014), Jane mentioned how misinformation can be addressed by religious literacy. Commenting specifically on misinformation about the Abrahamic religions,

Jane said the relationship between the religions is “definitely misunderstood, and we need to do more work to highlight the commonalities.” While the Abrahamic faiths are only three among the world’s most influential religions, these religions have historically been most influential in Western and American history (Moore, 2015; Nord, 2010; Prothero, 2010).

Theme 2: Religion is Complex, but Necessary

The second theme identified via data analysis was, “religion is complex in that religion is responsible for good and evil, but it is educationally necessary.” This theme directly addressed the research question, “What are the civic consequences for a society without religious literacy?” At the outset of the study, it was hypothesized that educators from different religious perspectives might agree that religion is necessary for students, but they might not accept the statement that religion is a catalyst for social ills. All of the study participants affirmed the educational necessity of religion. Interestingly, all participants, including participants representing religious, educational perspectives, agreed that religion is and has been a catalyst for social problems like bigotry and hatred. The participants emphasized that religion can be a catalyst for good as well. The essential issue regarding religion and evil were with religious individuals rather than the religious system. According to the teacher participants, religion itself is not to blame.

Religion has been a means through which evils have occurred. Nord (2010) summarized the ways religion could cause evil:

Of course, religions are responsible for considerable oppression and injustice quite apart from warfare. We need only remember anti-Semitism, anti-Catholicism, and the complicity of white Christians in segregation (and earlier, of course, in slavery) in America. Religious conservatives would no doubt point to the complicity of liberal churches in abortion (which they sometimes liken to the Holocaust). Liberals would point to the complicity of religious conservatives in the oppression of women and gays. (p. 28)

Examples of evil acts committed in the name of religion are can be found in both the recent and distant past (Parker, 2014). For example, Christians embarked on a series of “holy wars” in the 11th through 13th centuries to “reclaim” Palestine for the Roman Church. Pope Urban II promised those who participated in the crusades forgiveness of sin. Individuals claiming to be Christian supported the institution of slavery and, following the Civil War, maintaining segregation (Knoll, 2006). Another example, Tisby (2019) noted that roughly 40,000 Christian ministers were members of the Ku Klux Klan. However, Christianity is not the only religion with such atrocities in its history. Similarly, Islam had self-identified Muslims carry out the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001 and the London bomb blast in 2005 (Riley, 2018; Tan, 2008). More recently, the rise and expansion of the violent Islamic State (ISIS) represents the violence capable for those within the Islamic religion (Gagné, Loumakis, & Miceli, 2016; Ryan, 2015).

While religion has brought forth suffering in high numbers, the relationship between religion and social ills is complicated. Some scholars attribute the problems caused by religion less with religion in general and more with religious fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is not precisely defined, but a general definition of fundamentalism includes religious traditions that are militantly and sometimes violently opposed to modernism and explicitly literal readings of scriptural texts. Fundamentalists of any religious tradition view the world as in war between good and evil, often leading to a demonization of their enemies (Nord, 2010; Prothero, 2007).

Nord, however, noted that nonreligion could also be a catalyst for evil. Nord (2010) continued, stating that “I should also mention that religious violence pales by comparison with violence caused by entirely secular (sometimes militantly antireligious) movements of the last century-particularly communism, and fascism” (p. 28). Interestingly, James noted this when he referenced what he perceived as dangerous misinformation about popular ideologies, such as

Marxism. James indicated that the nonreligious, communist, and fascist governments of the 20th century were responsible for 80 million deaths.

Religion may be a source of social ills, but it is equally a source of social healing. For example, movements such as the Civil Rights Movement were launched by Martin Luther King, Jr. who was motivated by his religious convictions (King & Carson, 1998). Other religiously motivated movements of nonviolence are noted, too, such as with Gandhi and the Dalai Lama.

Nord (2010) noted:

...peace movements are never so well publicized as are wars and terrorism, but it is the everyday work of most religious organizations to promote peace. Indeed, humanitarian efforts are central to the role of religion in the world: soup kitchens, homeless shelters, hospitals, schools, relief and welfare programs, and emergency aid, are the heart and soul of much religious work both in the United States and around the world. (p. 28)

Appleby (1999) noted the ways in which religion could also be a source of militant goodness across the globe. He said, “countless people, serving in the relative anonymity of religious orders and communities, perform difficult and dangerous socially constructive ministries of compassion and healing” (Appleby, 1999, p. 199). While religious individuals have caused and continue to cause evil for society, the opposite is true as well.

The world benefits, moment-by-moment, by religious individuals, often unaware of the individual’s existence and, much less, their service. For example, James, a world religions teacher at a Christian school, indicated love for other people as a sign of a genuine religious faith. For James, love for others is rooted in his belief that he is loved by God regardless of his *goodness* or *badness*. As such, his motivation is to love others regardless of their perceived goodness or badness. Mirroring James, Jane explained that a religious person is “not judgmental, not harsh. There is mercy, there is compassion to other people, regardless.” Similar to James and Jane, Andrew associated an authentic religious experience with humility, a slowness to anger and

vitriol, and a slowness to judgmental attitudes. Students should know both the evil and the good that results from religious motivations as well as the possibility of abject secularism causing mass suffering, too.

Responding with a quick “yes” to a question about religion and social ills, Andrew affirmed the general possibility that religion leads to social ills, but he was not comfortable in allowing a simplistic answer that suggests religion itself evil. While Andrew found truth in the association between religion and social ills, he elaborated:

But there are a number of people who will hold themselves up as religious people. They are either hypocritical or they are misinformed, or they speak arrogantly, or they have an agenda. Yeah, the use religion to beat other people over the head or to self-aggrandize, whatever the situation may be.

Jane affirmed the possibility, but differentiated where the problem lies. As Jane said:

I would say the misinterpretation and lack of knowledge of the religion, yes, leads to hatred and intolerance. So, lack of proper education, proper dialogue between different religions and lack of understanding of different religions might lead to hatred. But religion itself and people that really, truly follow their religion will never produce a hateful person.

Bill identified Eliade (d. 1986), who indicated that religion only exists in the hands of human beings, meaning it is not religion that is responsible for social ills. Instead, evil comes through the acts of individuals and their understanding of religion.

As Marcus (2019) noted, students should understand that religion is complex. The American Academy of Religion’s (2010) document *Guidelines for Teaching About Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the United States* delineated six critical concepts when teaching about religion. The first three concepts were related to the inherent complexity in studying religion. First, religions are not internally consistent, but rather diverse. For example, while individuals or groups of Christians or Muslims committed evil in the name of their religion, this first concept reinforces the reality that no individual or group within a religion provides a normative

representation of religion (AAR, 2010). Second, religions are not fixed entities, but are changing and adaptive (AAR, 2010). Students should understand that ideas emerging early in religious tradition are situated in a time and place, and religions have adapted to the cultures in which they exist (Marcus, 2019). Third, religions are part of the cultures they inhabit, not isolated from these cultures (AAR, 2010). As Marcus (2019) explained, “individuals and communities interpret and reinterpret religion according to cultural context; these same groups interpret and reinterpret culture according to religion” (p. 15) For example, Saada and Gross (2017) described the ways that Muslims living in America adapt to American, predominantly Christian, democratic perspectives while maintaining Islamic identity.

Notwithstanding the complexity inherent in studying religion, the inclusion of religion in a student’s education is essential. Students are not prepared for postsecondary life without studying religion. Without religion, it is not possible to understand the forces that shape our world. Marcus (2019) elaborated on the necessity of religion for today’s students:

Students who cannot describe religion’s influence on all aspects of life are ill-prepared for college-level courses, which require both content knowledge about religion and the critical thinking skills necessary to parse the elements of culture. Young professionals entering the workforce need to understand the role of religion in private and public life if they are to work with -- and potentially within -- religious communities to improve society as leaders in government, business, non-profits, education, and more. And as citizens of a religiously diverse democracy, young Americans must learn about religion in order to develop a stronger commitment to religious liberty, a cornerstone of our democracy. (p. 11)

The lack of religious literacy among citizens is not only an educational problem; it is a civic problem (Prothero, 2007). Warren Nord (1995) argued if students are not taught secular and religious ways of understanding the world, then students are systematically and uncritically taught only secular ideas, which is borderline indoctrination. Education should introduce

students to the variety of worldviews present in society while not favoring or silencing any particular perspective, be it secular or religious (Murray, 2019; Nord, 2010).

Theme 3: Religious Studies Inculcating Civic Values

The third theme identified via data analysis was, “religious studies can inculcate civic values.” This theme directly addressed the research question, “How can religious studies inculcate religious values?” Civic dispositions identified by the Center for Civic Education (1991) include civility, respect, individual responsibility, self-discipline, civic-mindedness, open-mindedness, compromise, toleration of diversity, patience and persistence, compassion, generosity, and loyalty to the nation and its principles. All five teacher participants asserted that the civic values that students need could be gained from taking religious studies courses. Tolerance was the civic value most affirmed among the participants. Civic education provides students with perspective on the multiplicity of societal views and encourages students to engage in independent thinking and responsible social criticism, none of which can be done well when religion is marginalized (Metzger, 2002; Noddings, 2006; Nord & Haynes, 1998).

Religious literacy is necessary to develop tolerance because of the variety of religious individuals and groups engaging with public issues (Patrick, Gulayets, & Peck, 2017). In a nation where almost 75% identify themselves as religious, ignoring religion in education is illogical and civically irresponsible (Marcus, 2019; Nord, 2010; Nord & Haynes, 1998; Prothero, 2007). When the influence of religion in civic and political life is ignored, it hinders efforts to prepare students for their real-life roles as citizens because without religious studies, students are unable to make critical judgments about anything religiously contested (Kunzman, 2005; Metzger, 2002; Nord, 1995). For example, with no religious literacy, students may not understand statements and terms unique to a given faith or religion, such as “In their heart of hearts, all

Muslims are terrorists,” “Homosexuality is a sin,” or “Religion and reason are incompatible” (Moore, 2007, p. 27). Ignoring religious studies is a civic problem (Prothero, 2007).

Part of the challenge of religion for society is the significant differences between the major religions. All religions are not fundamentally one religion (Prothero, 2010). While there are many similarities between religions, particularly the Abrahamic religions, fundamental dissimilarities exist. For example, Christians believe that God is a personal being who is ontologically Trinitarian; on the contrary, Judaism and Islam share the belief that God is personal although they both adamantly deny the Trinitarian perspective and adhere to a strict monotheism (Parker, 2014). The ways that the perspectives on God are articulated in the Abrahamic religions are not the only difference. Parker (2014) included several other important differences:

There are many competing truth claims—the nature of creation (and, if relevant, the identity of the Creator), the acceptability of many gods, the nature of truth, the nature of God as personal or impersonal, the truth of the Holy Book, and so forth. (p. 491)

The challenges inherent in religious literacy education can be addressed, however. Studying religion to gain an insider’s perspective is one way to promote tolerance among students. Goldschmidt (2019) described this pedagogy as a means of studying the ways religion is lived rather than its intellectual approaches. Goldschmidt (2019) explained that this approach to studying religion explores “how doctrines rituals and texts may shape—and be shaped by—the practical concerns and political aspirations of historically specific, local communities” (p. 54). Moore (2007) identified the phenomenological approach as another approach toward promoting tolerance among students. According to Moore (2007), this approach

...seeks to expose students to the uniquely religious dimensions of human experience without critique in an effort to foster deeper understanding of religious life and practice. The aim of a phenomenological approach is for the student to suspend judgment and approach the study of religion in a spirit of empathy. (p. 69)

Bill specifically described the phenomenological approach he utilized while studying religion.

He explained his use of the phenomenological approach to studying religion:

The second part that I would add is what I teach my students as the phenomenological approach, which is the idea that, how does a practitioner in this religion practice that religion in their daily life? What does it look like? When you wake up, how does religion order your life? When you go to sleep, how does religion order your life? On a holiday, how does religion order your life? So, that's an important piece of understanding. And then I also do the big questions that religion helps us understand about: where did we come from, why are we here, where are we going? I think those are the fundamental questions that religions help us answer, on a daily basis.

Bill's approach corresponds with Moore's (2007) assertion that the phenomenological approach is an essential method for building religious literacy. The goal of the phenomenological approach is to create tolerance for others by gaining experience of others' lived experiences. An example of the ways a lived experience can cultivate tolerance is through field trips to places of worship, which is something Bill does with his classes. Visits to places of worship is included in other world religions classes (Feinberg & Layton, 2014). Farrington and Jamison (2019) suggested an alternative way to share a lived experience, writing that students could "meet people from different faith traditions and encourage them to engage in dialogue about their beliefs, traditions, and experiences" (p. 78). Through the use of media, religious literacy educators can expose students to different perspectives while never leaving the classroom.

Media is another medium through which students can develop a tolerance for diversity by learning about the lived religions of other individuals. Mike, the most experienced teacher of the participants, contended that media could be a valuable tool for education. Similarly, Murray (2019) claimed:

...the use of the right films can enhance the objective of teaching about lived religions in ways that engage and fascinate students. Films are also an effective means of diminishing the stereotypes that students might hold about religions that are different from their own. (p. 67)

Murray advocated the use of film for both education and civic purposes. Not only are religions represented in interesting ways, but the content of films can help address extant stereotypes in students' minds.

Due to the preponderance of religious perspectives in society, ignoring religious ideas as if they do not exist or mentioning that they are unimportant marginalizes the vast majority of the nation's citizens. Murray (2019) wrote:

It is more important than ever for our students to explore the amazing tapestry of religious beliefs and customs that have made the United States the home of religious liberty. By bridging the gulf of illiteracy and ignorance of religions, teachers can play a vital role in advancing interreligious understanding, cultural awareness, and global collaboration. (p. 67)

Haynes (2019) similarly asserted that “absent religious literacy, people are unprepared to live with one another across deep difference—and unlikely to respect the rights of others to practice a religion they do not understand” (p. 5). Religious literacy can enhance the critical thinking skills necessary to be active participants in society as well as to better understand the complexities of religious ideologies (Nord, 2010). Religious literacy may not end all religious bigotry or violence, but it can reduce discrimination and aid in the development of a stronger commitment to protecting all citizens' rights, whether in the religious majority or minority (Marcus, 2019).

Another instance of the importance of religious literacy is the fact that it fosters critical inquiry. Students that possess broad ideological perspectives and critical thinking are more likely to be catalysts for a more tolerant and participatory society by inspiring loyalty to the many ideas that unite Americans while also recognizing existing differences (Metzger, 2002). Religious studies courses can be a means to develop broader perspectives and critical thinking. Moore (2007) wrote:

Promoting religious literacy in the schools will enhance intellectual rigor, sharpen critical thinking skills, and further advance deep multiculturalism by giving students the tools to

understand religions and the plurality of religious experiences across the curriculum and within the school community itself. (p. 33)

Similarly, Nord (2010) argued that critical thinking bridges religious studies and civic education. He explained that religious studies foster critical thinking by enabling not only an examination of religious perspectives, but also by giving students a “critical perspective on any of the secular ways of making sense of their lives” (Nord, 2010, p. 188). According to Nord and Haynes (1998), when religious ideas are ignored in education and only secular perspectives are allowed, students are being indoctrinated and missing opportunities to critically reflect on the variety of perspectives in society.

Several participants mentioned critical thinking. Andrew explained that an important element of Jewish education is

...to produce a student who can think very critically can write critically, can think critically, can read critically. I think that's highly important for a person who is an engaged citizen. A person who can discuss. A person who can ask questions. A person who can look at the world. Who can look at the media critically.

Similarly, James emphasized the importance of students thinking for themselves—even if they do not agree with him. He said, “I’ve got my bias obviously, but I don’t want that to impede in their thinking because I want them to find it themselves. I want them to think for themselves and look and search.” The perspectives of both Andrew and James regarding critical thinking and religion are supported in scholarship. For example, Moore (2007) noted that religion “invites students to identify and question underlying foundations of assumptions in ways that inspire engaged reflection and critical thinking” by having students as “the ‘why’ of human agency as well as the ‘why’ of existence itself” (p. 30).

Conclusions and Implications

During this study, five religious studies teachers from five different school types and perspectives on education described their perceptions about the importance of religious literacy in a student's civic preparation. Teachers supported the notion that religious literacy is a vital aspect of students' civic preparation. The teacher participants also suggested that the study of religion, especially the Abrahamic religions, should be required for students. Their perceptions about the importance of religious literacy were well supported in the literature.

It was the researcher's belief that the teachers' perspectives were aligned with leading scholars (Moore, 2007; Nord, 2010; Prothero, 2007) in the field of religious literacy. Whether or not the teachers were explicitly familiar with religious literacy literature, they expressed concerns found throughout the literature. For example, all study participants affirmed the Abrahamic religions as essential elements of religious literacy. While the definition of religious literacy is more inclusive than the Abrahamic religions, their importance in the United States is evidenced by these religions being the three largest faiths in society (Pew Research, 2014; Prothero, 2007). Also, study participants acknowledged the evils committed in the name of religion while also emphasizing that religion is more complex, and evil is not an accurate descriptor of religions or religious individuals. It is the researcher's belief that religions are examined in light of their worst participants, without remembering the heroic acts of justice and love emerging from religious traditions (Moore, 2019). Two of the five teachers specifically mentioned field visits and media use as a means of exposing students to the multiplicity of religious perspectives. It is the researcher's belief that teachers would benefit from expanding their pedagogical toolkit to include more experiential means of encountering other lived religions (Moore, 2007; Murray, 2019).

The current study suggests that the significance of religious literacy is felt among educators from a variety of education perspectives. The research revealed the way concerns about religious illiteracy and misinformation are shared across education and religious perspectives. The research also revealed the teachers' perspectives toward the value of religious literacy education to help address misinformation about religion in society. Work should be done to give us a better understanding of varying education perspectives, mainly religiously affiliated perspectives, in which religious literacy is part of a student's civic preparation.

Directions for Future Research

Findings from the current study cast light on religious studies teachers' perceptions at a micro level. Findings from this study highlighted religious studies teachers' perceptions about the importance of religious literacy in students' civic preparation. As this study was exploratory in nature, numerous prospects for future research arose. The participants in this study were purposefully selected to ensure equality in the voices heard from different education perspectives and school types. A future study could expand the qualitative interviews to include a higher number of teachers from these same school types to investigate and compare emerging themes. Such a study could reveal whether or not the perspectives shared in this study represent the greater education community. Additionally, future researchers can examine the perspectives of participants from the Abrahamic religions, which would provide interesting data regarding religious literacy and/as civic engagement.

The current study revealed a need for more significant religious literacy education to address social ills, such as stereotypes and misinformation. With public education minimizing—if not ignoring religious perspectives—the responsibility currently falls on private schools to address stereotypes and misinformation. Most private schools are religiously affiliated (67%),

and most of the religious schools are affiliated with Christianity (60%) (CAPE, n.d.). The findings of this study suggest the need to investigate the ways religiously affiliated schools approach religious literacy as part of their students' civic preparation and as a means of addressing stereotypes and misinformation and cultivating civic values.

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APPENDIX
APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board
Division of Research and Innovation
Office of Research Compliance
University of Memphis
315 Admin Bldg
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

October 4, 2019

PI Name: John Grant

Co-Investigators:

Advisor and/or Co-PI: Jeffrey Byford

Submission Type: Initial

Title: Religious Studies Teachers' Perceptions of the Role of Religious Literacy in Students'
Civic Preparation

IRB ID : #PRO-FY2020-139

Exempt Approval:

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00006815, has reviewed your submission in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical principles.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

When the project is finished a completion submission is required

Any changes to the approved protocol requires board approval prior to implementation

When necessary submit an incident/adverse events for board review

Human subjects training is required every 2 years and is to be kept current at citiprogram.org.

For any additional questions or concerns please contact us at irb@memphis.edu or 901.678.2705

Thank you,
James P. Whelan, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair
The University of Memphis

APPENDIX B

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Religious Studies Teachers' Perceptions of the Role of Religious Literacy in a Students' Civic Preparation

WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being invited to take part in a research study about the importance of religious literacy for a student's civic preparation. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you were purposefully selected among religious studies teachers in West Tennessee. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of 5 people to do so.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The person in charge of this study is John Grant [*Lead Investigator*] of University of Memphis Department of Instruction and Curriculum Leadership. He is being guided in this research by Dr. Jeffrey Byford [*Advisor*]. There may be other people on the research team assisting at different times during the study.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

By doing this study, we hope to learn more about religious literacy, what religious literacy is, why religious literacy is important for a student to acquire, and what are possible consequences of not having religious literacy.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

None

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The research procedures will be conducted at your school in a private setting. You will need to come to a comfortable private room in your school 1 time during the study. The visit will take about 30 to 45 minutes. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 1 hour over the next two weeks.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

The interview will be scheduled for 45 minutes in length. It will take place in a private room within your school. The interview will consist of eight probing questions related to your experience teaching religious studies. During the interview, a digital recorder will be used and the entirety of the interview will be transcribed by an independent transcription service. All 5 participants will review [their own] interview transcripts for accuracy and approval.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no guarantee that you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. Your willingness to take part, however, may, in the future, help society as a whole better understand this research topic.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?

We will make every effort to keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

This study is anonymous. That means that no one, not even members of the research team, will know that the information you give came from you. Data will be kept in a locked and secure location for the entirety of the study and destroyed at the completion of the study. Your information may be shared with U of M or the government, such as the University of Memphis University Institutional Review Board, Federal Government Office for Human Research Protections, if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the lead investigator, John Grant at 901-833-3338 or johnkgrnt@gmail.com, or advisor, Dr. Jeffrey Byford at 901-678-4883 or jmbyford@memphis.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at the University of Memphis at 901-678-2705 or irb@memphis.edu. We will give you a signed copy of this consent form to take with you.

What happens to my privacy if I am interviewed?

Information that you provide will be kept completely separate from all identifying information. Your school will be coded to protect anonymity. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of authorized person obtaining informed consent Date