

Introduction

THE DEMOCRATIC CRISIS OF RELIGION AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

Over four years had passed since the Hindu temple where he worshiped had been the victim of vandalism, but Parmanand Tiwari, a respected leader in the Hindu community in Modesto, California, vividly recalled the details of the event in our phone conversation. In the days and months following 9/11, any hint of foreignness turned out to be a liability for many religious minorities around the country. Vandals in Modesto—a city that residents describe routinely as part of the California Bible Belt but that is also home to a large and growing number of immigrants belonging to many faiths—took little time to consider the differences between Muslims and Hindus as they inflicted significant property damage on the temple.

My own trip to Modesto's Hindu temple took me from my hotel at the city's center past ever more remote subdivisions to an exurban fringe where residences blend into farmland. A dairy farm's silos cast shadows nearly reaching across the street to the temple's entrance. The temple's location struck me as a metaphor for the community's cultural standing on the edge of the mainstream. But if the temple's location was an attempt to avoid attention, the desire for an oasis was not successful on the day of my visit. On the grass right outside of the temple's decorated iron gates lay a grotesque sacrifice to America's worse angels. A dead baby calf held a placard between its hoofs containing a derogatory crack too moronic and despicable to bear repetition. The culprits apparently understood just enough about Hinduism to realize that desecrating a cow would cause particular offense.

The religion reporter for Modesto's daily newspaper, Amy White, had

assured me previously that acts of overt religious discrimination in Modesto were relatively rare, and this accorded with what I heard from other sources. But I was also uncomfortable chalking up the dead baby calf on the very day of my visit to simple coincidence. Were Modesto's religious minorities wary about reporting all acts of vandalism to the media because this would only attract more attention and make them the fodder for additional attacks? Even if vandalism was indeed rare, Amy also reminded me of the more hidden costs of intolerance. Because they were wary of visibility, Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh leaders had shunned a public role in a 9/11 memorial event intended in part as a show of solidarity between faiths. The social science tools at my disposal could not measure fully the passing comments and looks that made Modesto's Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, and yet more religious minorities feel less than full members of their own community.

But when I returned to my hotel room the night of my visit to the Hindu temple, I also thought about my good friend Jerry. In my first year as a college professor at the College of William and Mary, I offered a seminar entitled "Religion and American Democracy." My views at the time were strongly secularist, and the course's approach emphasized the importance of neutrality in a democratic education. Recognition of sectarian beliefs, such as teaching about intelligent design, had no place in the public school curriculum, I argued, because it would violate the rights of secularists and vulnerable religious minorities.

Jerry was a student in that class. He had been an army chaplain for over 20 years and liked to refer to himself as a "fundie." In our class conversations, he not only challenged my position on specific church-state policies but objected to the neutrality approach I emphasized. An attempt to create a public school curriculum excluding all discussion of sectarian beliefs, he argued, would only succeed in creating a bland curriculum. Despite its alleged neutrality, it would be unfair to those who held robust beliefs related to religion and central to their belief systems, like those on human origins. Many conservative Christians like himself felt they had adapted their beliefs to satisfy democratic norms but still could not get a fair hearing from major public institutions like schools. The other 14 students in the seminar—none from conservative Christian backgrounds—were often persuaded by Jerry's arguments, which were presented invariably in a gracious manner.

At the course's conclusion, Jerry and I continued our discussions over coffee almost every month. I learned more about his beliefs and came to know Jerry's family. His pleas on behalf of teaching intelligent design were civil yet impassioned. He was genuinely anxious not only about the moral and religious implications of the evolution-only curriculum his children learned in public schools but that they were not being taught the scientific truth. He spent hours going over the science textbooks his children studied and discussing flaws in Darwin's argument with them.

Public schools should serve two crucial democratic functions when it comes to religion. To ensure a more inclusive American democracy in the future, they should teach students that a robust respect for religious freedom involves the right of all believers—especially those newest to America's religious landscape—not only to practice their beliefs but to express their religious identities, views, and values in public without inhibition. But the public school curriculum—what it includes and what it lacks—also sends a potent symbolic message to communities in the present. Public schools send a powerful democratic message when the curriculum models full inclusion and when they provide each group with a sense of ownership over the curriculum. But they fail to be truly public when any significant group feels its values and views are simply ignored.

Public schools, to be sure, are not solely or primarily responsible for the feelings of religious exclusion many Americans feel. Still, they are in a unique position to address them. At a time when Americans of different religious, ethnic, and ideological backgrounds increasingly live apart (Bishop 2008) and get their news from different and polarized sources (Sunstein 2007), public schools are one of the few remaining places where Americans from different backgrounds gather together and learn about views other than their own. Implementing the right type of public education about religion can promote more democratic behavior toward religion among future citizens and can send a powerful symbolic message about democratic inclusion to people of all different faiths and none. *To be fully inclusive of religion, American public schools should promote robust tolerance for those of all faiths and none, and provide a special recognition of conservative Christian beliefs. Schools must encourage consensus about the civil rights of each and every perspective about religion and allow ample room for faiths to express their conflicts about politics and eternal salvation.*

But the preceding stories highlight that public schools are currently

meeting neither of these goals. The trepidation Muslims and Hindus felt about participating in Modesto's 9/11 memorial is hardly compatible with the right to robust religious free expression for all. Public schools have expanded their treatment of religion and minority religions over the last quarter century. Still, this treatment is too cursory and unalloyed with the promotion of religious liberty to ensure a flourishing respect for it at a time when religious diversity is expanding. The exclusion Parmanand Tiwari and members of religious minorities like him feel did not begin in public schools, but public schools have done precious little to combat it. The beliefs of conservative Christians like Jerry may differ greatly from those of Parmanand Tiwari, but the sense of exclusion from the mainstream is similar. The symbolic message that public schools send conservative Christians by ignoring their views is an important cause of this exclusion.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE EXTREMISTS

Perhaps challenging public schools to help America fulfill its democratic commitments to religious liberty is asking too much. Many Americans—more crucially, most public school administrators and teachers—believe that accommodating religious minorities and conservative Christians at the same time would be too controversial or impossible practically. Several years ago, I asked an adviser on social studies curriculum in the Richmond, Virginia, area if his public school district would consider adding world religion or Bible courses to the elective curriculum. “Why would we want to trouble with all that?” he responded. To him and those who share his views, stories like Parmanand Tiwari's and Jerry's are less causes for action than reasons for inaction, as they suggest what appear to be the deep gulfs dividing Americans about what religious freedom and inclusion mean.

To be fair, holding this belief is quite reasonable. A mainstream media increasingly fractured along partisan lines and religiously based interest groups on the right and left revel in stories of religious and cultural conflict. Civil conversations between moderates attract few readers and viewers, but controversies generate advertising revenue. Groups such as the Family Research Council and People for the American Way can drum up greater financial contributions by convincing members that their core values are under siege.

Synergy between these two forces often results in perfect media storms. Not only do the media focus on the most sensational stories, but they invite the most partisan and polarizing voices to comment on these stories. Shouting among extremists, after all, produces better ratings than civil conversations between moderates. The most prominent headlines in recent years about religion and schools have focused on controversies and the most strident views on these controversies. Teaching about evolution and its alternatives has sparked controversy in Kansas; Texas; Dover, Pennsylvania; and Lebec, California. A challenge to the recitation of the phrase “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance provoked a firestorm nationally and in California. Residents of Odessa, Texas, battled over the teaching of a controversial elective course on the Bible. Meanwhile, moderate voices and civil cease-fires are ignored. Our best may not lack conviction, but they too often lack the access extremists have.

Public schools, this narrative of conflict tells us, must choose between accommodating secularists¹ and non-Christian minorities who want greater tolerance or accommodating conservative Christians who want special recognition of their beliefs, because these groups are implacable foes. In fact, what this narrative really does is convince schools to accommodate neither, because a robust teaching about religion in any form would only deepen our cultural divide. Like the Richmond social studies adviser I interviewed, school administrators are understandably reluctant to bring controversy on themselves.

To those fed a constant diet of stories about controversies, this book’s central claim that a fully democratic and inclusive public education about religion could heal our divisions over religion may come off as almost laughably naive. Democratic inclusion of religion in schools may appear a worthy goal, but it does not fit with the facts on the ground. Schools, according to this view, can teach either consensus around robust tolerance for civil rights or conflicts about politics and salvation, but they cannot do both. The American experiment may prove that Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1987, 220) was wrong to conclude that “it is impossible” for a believer “to live in peace with those one believes to be damned.” But given America’s division over religion, it is impossible to *teach* students to live in peace with everyone and that some believe others are damned. The current inadequate treatment of religion may be neither fully democratic nor as neutral as alleged, but it is the least of all evils.

But is this dire story right, or is this a case where blaming the messenger—the mainstream media—is actually fair? To see if schools can fulfill the democratic mission this book charges them with, we must return to the stories of Parmanand Tiwari, Jerry, and Modesto and see if they contradict the lessons about our religious disputes that are proclaimed so insistently by the mainstream media and the culture warriors who comprise its frequent collaborators.

DEFYING THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

Parmanand Tiwari's and Jerry's stories could, to be sure, provide rich fuel for the familiar narrative of religious conflict. The Hindu temple's vandals in 2001 were never identified. The vandals could have been motivated by religious extremism or could simply have been mindless miscreants engaged in a thoroughly despicable prank. Still, some secularists have not been shy about blaming instances of vandalism like this on extremists of the religious right who preach hate. Meanwhile, the religious right has used stories like Jerry's to rail against allegedly godless public schools dominated by secular humanists.

If I had held the same views as I did when I first started teaching the "Religion and American Democracy" seminar, I would probably have drawn these conclusions. But the second time I taught the seminar, I invited Charles Haynes, a senior scholar at the First Amendment Center in Washington, D.C., to speak to my students. Charles has spent almost a quarter century defying the conventional wisdom by working in the trenches of our religious and cultural conflicts to achieve fair and reasonable cease-fires. Aided by First Amendment legal expert and Baptist minister Oliver Thomas, Charles has mediated disputes in some of the most divided communities about some of the most culturally and religiously divisive issues.² He works from the faith that for all their disagreement, most Americans share a connection to America's democratic ideals and will realize this when they talk to, rather than past, each other. Charles admits freely that some of his reconciliation efforts have fallen short of their goals and that his pleas for common ground and common sense occasionally fall on deaf ears. But he has also defied conventional wisdom about public

schools by successfully mediating school district disputes and enacting consensus policies in states like Utah and Alabama. Inspired by Charles's example of locating common ground, my discussions with Parmanand Tiwari and Jerry and my investigation of the religious climate in Modesto looked beyond their potential value as fodder for a culture war. This approach yielded a more complex and hopeful portrait than the media's narrative of religious conflict allows.

After relating the details of the 2001 vandalism, for instance, Tiwari proceeded to tell me about how the Modesto community responded. Newspaper reports of vandalism were followed by numerous letters to the temple expressing regret about the incident and friendship for Hindus in Modesto. Many letters included cash and checks to help repair the damage. Tiwari concluded our phone conversation by telling me how the community's response reminded him why America "can be a great country."

Jerry may have stressed to his children what he believed their textbooks missed about evolution, but he has never contemplated removing his children from public schools. He draws a sharp line between teaching about intelligent design and the teaching of literal biblical creationism, which he deems too sectarian for discussion in the public school curriculum. He believes that a world religions course teaching respect for other faiths would be a welcome addition to the public school curriculum.

Unlike the strong-voiced extremists who have quit on common institutions and exploit controversies—often manufactured—to encourage others to do the same, Parmanand Tiwari and Jerry represent the less prominent majority of Americans who combine strong religious beliefs with an equally strong commitment to basic democratic values. Despite their struggles, Parmanand Tiwari and Jerry were not driven by bitterness into the arms of radicalism or separatism. Neither had lost hope in the promise of American democracy. Both shared a faith in public schools. This faith was not a blind trust in the status quo but a hope for things not yet seen.

To be sure, the differences in their preferred policies are significant and should not be overlooked. Tiwari, like many members of non-Christian minorities, wants a curriculum favoring robust tolerance, while conservative Christians like Jerry favor some form of special recognition of their beliefs. But there is a common strand even in their apparent differences. Both Parmanand Tiwari and Jerry are united by a sense that they do not enjoy full

participation and respect in the American center and that their faiths are the victims of misunderstanding. They believe that current school policies reflect this exclusion and misinterpretation.

If Parmanand Tiwari's and Jerry's stories suggest that the conventional wisdom about Americans' differences over religion is often wrong when it comes to individuals, the story of Modesto teaches the same lesson about communities. In the late 1990s, religious divisions in Modesto produced controversy about an attempt to promote respect for homosexuality in Modesto's public schools. Out of this conflict and in part through Charles's mediation, however, grew a consensus about the need for schools to ensure the religious liberty of all students. In 2000, Modesto became the first public school district in the nation to require all high school students to take an extended and independent course in world religions. Research that Patrick Roberts and I conducted about the course shows that it brought students from diverse religious backgrounds closer together. The course may not have prevented the vandalism that Tiwari described or I witnessed, but the research suggests that similar incidents are likely to be rarer in the future.

Even more remarkable is that the course's implementation received support from all of Modesto's religious communities. Tiwari described the course as a "wonderful idea," and the pastor of a major evangelical megachurch told me he was pleased his daughter would be taking the course and learning respect for other religious traditions. Just as crucially, Modesto's diverse communities largely agreed on the need to teach consensus and conflict. Modesto's conservatives may have stressed recognition of religion and religious differences in schools more, but liberals thought it was a good idea, too. Liberals may have wanted tolerance more, but conservatives valued civil rights and student safety. The course has not been the subject of a single lawsuit or significant opposition from the community.

TEACHING CONSENSUS AND CONFLICT

By portraying conservative Christians, secularists, and religious minorities as implacable foes, the conventional narrative about our religious differences has conditioned Americans to think of curriculum disputes as a zero-sum game. For religious minorities and secularists to win, conservative Christians must lose, and vice versa. Increased tolerance for religious mi-

norities cannot coexist with a special recognition of sectarian beliefs, such as a curricular discussion of intelligent design. Teaching both consensus about tolerance and conflict about contentious political issues and salvation is a contradiction in terms.

This narrative, to be sure, is not pure illusion spun out of thin air. It may be full of sound and fury, but it signifies something. The division of Americans into religious conservatives, on the one hand, and secularists and religious minorities, on the other, does have some justification. The differences between these groups produce genuine and occasionally deep disagreements over the proper role of religion in politics and the place for religion in the public square.

But the stories of Modesto, the vandalism at its Hindu temple, and Jerry refute the excessive pessimism of the conventional wisdom by demonstrating that democratic commitments can coexist alongside strong sectarian beliefs. These stories are far from unique. For instance, the most in-depth and nuanced research available on the political beliefs of evangelical Christians—such as Christian Smith’s national survey (2000) and Alan Wolfe’s interviews (2003)—shows that most evangelicals have a solid commitment to democratic values of fairness and tolerance. Although they may have different priorities concerning the public school curriculum, religious minorities and conservative Christians are far from inevitable enemies.

If these groups are not inevitable enemies, the public school curriculum need not be a zero-sum game.³ The commitment to civility by most on both sides of our religious divide and shared beliefs—an alienation from the current public school curriculum, yet a continued commitment to the ideal of fair public schools—are resources that public schools can draw on to accommodate the interests of both sides *at the same time*. The acceptance of Modesto’s world religion course—by religious minorities because it promotes robust tolerance and by conservative Christians because it recognizes religion—provides crucial confirmation that the school curriculum can be a positive-sum game. It also inspires this book’s contention that the adoption of required world religions courses at the high school level must be at the center of a democratic education about religion.⁴

But schools should not stop there. Many Americans assume that world religions courses accommodate some conservative Christian interests, but their inevitable bias toward relativism, syncretism, and ecumenism is inimical to conservative Christian views about the mutual exclusivity of reli-

gious truth claims. The rights to disagree with other religions and even to believe that other believers will suffer damnation are critical to religious freedom, and even the least intrusive of world religion courses imperil these rights. Recognizing this crucial but commonly ignored truth is necessary for reconciling the teaching of consensus and conflict in theory. Many Americans assume that teaching religious tolerance is synonymous with teaching religious liberty, implying that the teaching of conflict and conservative Christian views teaches the opposite of liberty. But expressing profound disagreement with other religions when accompanied by a respect for religious civil rights is not a species of religious tyranny but an essential part of religious liberty. *To teach religious consensus and conflict is not to teach liberty and its opposite but to teach the two sides of the same religious liberty coin.* A truly inclusive education about religion must balance required world religion courses with carefully constructed and balanced elective courses on intelligent design and the Bible that involve special recognition of crucial conservative Christian beliefs.

Reconciling the teaching of conflict and consensus in theory is, of course, not the same as reconciling them in practice. The interests and hopes they share does not, of course, mean that conservative Christians will ever support world religions courses as strongly as non-Christian minorities do or that non-Christian minorities will ever support an elective course concerning intelligent design as strongly as conservative Christians do. But realizing that both approaches are based on a shared desire for greater inclusion in the American center, religious minorities can and should accept elective courses involving special recognition of Christian beliefs as long as these courses are sufficiently balanced, and conservative Christians can and should accept required world religions course as long as they do not impose ecumenism. Even if they do not back each part of the package with equal devotion, they can realize that a curriculum devoted to both robust tolerance and special recognition, to teaching both consensus and conflict, is just overall.

Transforming the school curriculum might do more than lead all sides in our religious divide to merely acknowledge the legitimacy of each others' concerns. The current view of curricular attention as a scarce resource that the sides in our religious divide must compete for engenders ill will and hostility. But when both sides are secure that victory by others does not imply their own loss, generosity is likely to triumph over hostility. Once

conservative Christians realize that tolerance of religious minorities does not mean they must abandon their own religious commitments or their rightful place in the curriculum, they are more likely to extend respect toward religious minorities and the nonreligious, as conservative Christians in Modesto did. Having their more moderate concerns met, they are likely to forgo more extreme, divisive, and illegitimate demands for teaching conflict, like discussions of intelligent design in the required curriculum. The best research on evangelical views suggests that giving evangelicals a half mile will not inspire the taking of a mile but, rather, the giving of a half mile in return.

As these points suggest, the benefits of transforming education about religion into a positive-sum game are likely to extend beyond schoolhouse doors and have a large effect on the health of American democracy. The current failure of public schools to provide an inclusive education about religion empowers extremists. Right-wing extremists, for instance, seize on the exclusion of conservative Christian concerns as evidence of a secular humanist conspiracy and to recruit many with otherwise moderate dispositions and beliefs into their ranks. By exploiting this exclusion to call for the introduction of unabashedly sectarian, divisive, and impractical changes to the school curriculum, however, they only ensure that no action is taken. So the cycle goes. The laws of physics may dictate that perpetual motion machines are impossible, but our conflicts over religion seem to constitute an unfortunate exception.

Public schools are in a unique position to reverse this vicious cycle and empower the civil majorities on all sides of our religious divide against the extremists who currently dominate. By providing reasonable accommodation of conservative Christians in the public school curriculum, schools can rid right-wing extremists of their talking points and expose as dangerous nonsense the claim that the public school curriculum reflects a secular humanist plot against religion. By stressing robust tolerance for those of minority faiths and no faith at all, they can help prevent alienation and inspire inclusion of all views about religion. But this is not the only benefit to secularists and the nonreligious of the curricular changes this book recommends. Secularists and the nonreligious are concerned rightly about the proliferation of sectarian arguments in political discourse. By discouraging the use of purely sectarian arguments and encouraging secularists to take seriously the more moderate and nonsectarian claims that believers use in

political discourse, the democratic education about religion this book recommends can produce a more inclusive and democratic dialogue about politics. By doing so, schools can help to create a more consensual politics even as they provide ample room for political conflict related to religion.

Making the treatment of religion more democratic will establish public schools as crucial and unique public institutions that recognize diverse beliefs and believers rather than largely ignoring diversity out of fear of controversy, as public schools currently do. On a more far-reaching and symbolic level, public schools that are more democratic can play a crucial role in ensuring the triumph of civility and moderation over the manufactured prominence of rigid ideologues and extremists. The goal of these changes is not to preclude conflict or impose uniformity. Religious diversity and differences over values related to religion are crucial for a robust democratic discourse. But democratic discourse also suffers when uncivil views are exaggerated, especially when more measured views are more widely held. It is time for schools to hinder, rather than help, this exaggeration.

Given the prominence of extremist voices, this book understands the powerful resistance that transforming public school curriculum concerning religion is likely to meet. Moreover, for all they share, the consensus among moderates on all sides is more inchoate than realized. Shared principles must be made more elaborate and concrete. Specific, carefully constructed and nuanced policies must be developed that demonstrate to secularists, religious minorities, and conservative Christians how their central concerns will be met in practice.

As vital as humility is to the approach this book takes, Parmanand Tiwari's and Jerry's stories, Modesto's example, and the frequent successes of Charles Haynes's reconciliation efforts suggest that leavening caution with hope is not utopian and that history need not be destiny. More crucially, given the way American society and schools currently fail to honor religious liberty, America's core democratic commitments demand that schools try to honor the wary faith most Americans have in them. This book is thus dedicated to vulnerable religious minorities like Parmanand Tiwari who hold out hope in the ultimate inclusiveness of America, conservative Christians like Jerry who plea for the inclusion of those with robust and often countercultural beliefs, and mediators like Charles who are striving to create public schools that are truly public and where Americans of all religious backgrounds and none feel included. They have not quit on

the American dream of full inclusion for all religions, and public schools should not continue to quit on them.

WHAT POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY HAVE TO OFFER

A number of distinguished and valuable works on religion and public education have been published over the last 15 years. Although none make the distinctive claim that public schools should both teach tolerance and provide special recognition of conservative Christian beliefs, several of these works have addressed the civic benefits of a more robust teaching about religion. This book is an attempt to build on the work of these eminent scholars.⁵ Its aim is less to oppose than to supplement, by bringing the resources of political science to bear on an already flourishing discussion.

For all their considerable virtues, there are two crucial oversights in previous works on religion and public schools. First, the literature lacks a robust elaboration and defense of the democratic ideals public schools should be serving when they teach about religion. Without such a discussion, we cannot appreciate the central role that teaching about religion in the right way can play in bringing America closer to fulfilling its central democratic commitments. But public schools will also fall short of fulfilling their democratic commitments if implementing policies consistent with them is deemed impractical. Second, the literature lacks robust empirical evidence suggesting that the major groups in our cultural conflicts might accept curricular reforms regarding religion.⁶ Without such evidence, the conventional wisdom that greater discussion of religion will breed controversy will continue to prevail. This book aims to address both oversights.⁷

The first two chapters use the resources of political philosophy to identify two guiding democratic principles for treating religion in democratic public schools. They spell out the terms of consensus that Americans should and often do share about the proper treatment of religion by public institutions. Chapter 1 focuses on the model of tolerance appropriate for religion in democratic societies and ours in particular. The model of tolerance proposed—active tolerance—is a mean between the two models of tolerance prevalent in the political science literature: passive tolerance and tolerance as recognition. Unlike passive tolerance, active tolerance stresses

that citizens have an obligation to take positive action to make religious minorities feel included in American society in public and semipublic arenas. Active tolerance, however, is careful to avoid encouraging citizens to explore the objective validity of other religions. Its aim is to enhance respect for the civil status of religious minorities rather than to increase appreciation for these minorities' beliefs themselves.

While chapter 1 addresses the accommodation of vulnerable religious minorities, chapter 2 focuses on the disputes over religion in the public square that are at the heart of the conflict between secularists and conservative Christians. The increasing tendency of many evangelicals to eschew purely sectarian arguments makes possible a reasonable accommodation of secularist and conservative Christian views on religion and politics. Central to this compromise, chapter 2 proposes, is the principle of good faith. Good faith requires that when religious believers make a sincere and substantial effort to balance sectarian claims with secular logical and empirical claims, other citizens have an obligation to take these arguments at face value and engage with them. Good faith, unlike secularism, does not require religious believers to check their beliefs at the door to democratic politics. But it also reminds believers that participants in American politics act more democratically when they strive to present more universally appealing arguments for their positions.

While the first two chapters identify the democratic principles that should guide curricular treatment of religion, the next three focus on implementing them in practice. Chapter 3 draws on the original research Patrick Roberts and I conducted on Modesto's required world religions course—the first large-scale empirical examination of a course about religion in American public schools—to argue that all school districts around the nation should implement similar required world religions courses. Our surveys and interviews found that Modesto's course significantly increased students' knowledge about religion and passive and active tolerance toward religion and that it even exceeded our expectations by encouraging greater respect for First Amendment rights in general. Confirming chapter 1's claim that democracies can promote robust tolerance without illegitimately imposing acceptance of other religions' truth claims, students who began the course with strong religious beliefs generally retained their strong beliefs even as their religious tolerance increased.

Of all the controversies surrounding religion and public schools in re-

cent years, the one over teaching about evolution and intelligent design (ID) has been the most intense. While many secularist critics have argued that ID has no place in the school curriculum at all, chapter 4 argues that such critics overlook both the sincerity of many conservative Christians' beliefs in ID and the fact that many conservative Christians have made a good-faith transition from advocating the teaching of literal creationism to the more nonsectarian ID. ID is still sectarian enough that examining it in required biology courses would violate active tolerance. But public schools have an obligation to reciprocate conservative Christian good faith by offering a one-semester elective course that takes ID seriously as a scientific theory, as long as the course also includes critiques of ID as a scientific theory and examines ways in which Darwinian science and religion might be reconciled.

Elective Bible courses have experienced something of a renaissance in recent years, and Stephen Prothero (2007) has argued for implementing required Bible courses to improve biblical literacy. While his argument is elegant and eloquent, chapter 5 in the present study claims not only that a required course would send an alienating message to religious minorities but that the aim of Prothero's Bible course makes it unsuitable for the elective curriculum as well. Prothero's goal of having schools provide incontrovertible facts about the Bible may appear neutral in theory but is likely to prove unfriendly in practice to unpopular and countercultural beliefs, including those of conservative Christians. Chapter 5 instead advocates a one-semester elective course focusing on different faith commitments and views of the Bible and on the moral dimensions of conflicting Jewish and Christian beliefs in America today. Instead of viewing robust religious disagreements as a civic problem, the course's intent is to recognize that, more often than not, these disagreements benefit democracy by making room for countercultural beliefs that just might be prophetic.

As this book's conclusion argues, reminders of the value of political conflicts rooted in religion and even of some of their more extreme expressions are particularly useful at this moment in American history. Barack Obama's election in 2008 unleashed much speculation on the left that conflicts over religion and culture are winding down. Obama's emphasis on civility clearly struck a chord among a significant number of voters. Still, the zero-sum nature of many policy disputes related to religion leaves little room for common ground. More crucially, attempting to create consensus

and end conflict in the present by excluding cultural and religious concerns from political discourse, which some liberals support, is contrary to the democratic value of inclusion and would likely provoke a backlash in the future, as did the vital center politics of the 1950s and early 1960s.

The curricular recommendations in this book, the conclusion argues, are particularly fitted to our political moment. Since the public school curriculum is concerned with exposing students to different views rather than choosing between them, it is largely exempt from the zero-sum nature of disputes on issues like gay marriage and abortion. Schools are one of the few places in American society where the interests of each major group in our religious disputes can be accommodated. At the same time, teaching students that religious views are relevant to politics but must be expressed civilly will help to create a future where the democratic values of respect and inclusion can coexist. Hopes that the conflicts over religion and culture will end in the near future are inaccurate, and beliefs that these conflicts should end are misplaced, but removing the excessive vitriol that has plagued political discourse over the last 40 years is a realistic goal. Teaching about religion in a democratic way can help us reach it.