



THE GOOD BOOK TAUGHT WRONG:

'BIBLE HISTORY' CLASSES IN

FLORIDA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**'Why is it hard for a
non-Christian to understand
things about God?'**

*— from 'Bible History' exams,
Vanguard High School,
Marion County,
and Williston High School,
Levy County*

SPECIAL REPORT

CONTENTS

PART ONE: THE GOOD BOOK TAUGHT WRONG

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Background: Lee County School District, Florida | 2 |
| How This Report Came About | 3 |
| Our Findings | 4 |
| The courses are framed and taught from Christian perspectives | 4 |
| The Bible is used as a history textbook | 6 |
| Students are assumed to be Christian and the Bible is taught accordingly | 8 |
| The Bible is used to promote Christian faith formation and religious values and lessons | 10 |
| Sunday-school and other religious training exercises are used to indoctrinate students in Bible content | 11 |
| Conclusions and Recommendations | 12 |
| Recommendations for the Florida Department of Education | 12 |
| Recommendations for the local school districts | 13 |
| Endnotes | 15 |

PART TWO: 'BIBLE HISTORY' COURSE PROFILES BY SCHOOL DISTRICT

| | |
|--|----|
| People For the American Way Foundation analyses of 'Bible History' courses by school district | 17 |
| Clay County | 17 |
| Columbia County | 23 |
| Escambia County | 24 |
| Gulf County | 27 |
| Hillsborough County | 29 |
| Indian River County | 32 |
| Levy County | 36 |
| Madison County | 38 |
| Marion County | 40 |
| Okaloosa County | 44 |
| Polk County | 46 |
| Santa Rosa County | 49 |
| Taylor County | 51 |
| Walton County | 52 |
| Endnotes | 55 |
| Appendix | 58 |

PART ONE:

THE GOOD BOOK TAUGHT WRONG

■ ■ Introduction

In recent years, in Florida and across the country, there has been increasing controversy over religion in public schools, including whether and how students may be taught about the Bible.¹ Most authorities agree that teaching students *about* religion is part of a good education. On the other hand, *teaching religion*, in the sense of proselytizing or attempting to inculcate students in the beliefs of a particular faith, or teaching religious subjects from a sectarian viewpoint, is unsound public education. Such instruction also violates the constitutional requirement that public schools must remain neutral toward religion and cannot endorse religion generally or any particular faith specifically.

People For the American Way Foundation strongly supports teaching students *about* religion, including the role that religion has played in history. Such instruction can and does take place in any number of classes, such as courses in comparative religion, the history of religion, world history, and American history. As the courts have made clear, however, there is a right way, and a wrong way, for public schools to present the subject of religion and related topics. When it comes to the Bible, the United States Supreme Court has held that public schools may teach students about the Bible, as long as such teaching is presented “objectively as part of a secular program of education.” *School District of Abington Township v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203, 225 (1963).

However, as revealed by cases in which the courts have found legal problems with “Bible” courses in public schools, a number of school districts around the country have ignored the Court’s admonition.² They have taught the Bible to their students not from an objective perspective as part of a truly academic and secular course, but from a religious perspective, generally from a particular sectarian perspective of Christianity. In such courses, the Bible is typically presented as factually true and students are required to engage in exercises more appropriate for a Sunday school than a public school, including exercises that emphasize rote memorization rather than critical thinking or analysis skills.

The U.S. Supreme Court has held that public schools may teach students about the Bible, as long as such teaching is presented ‘objectively as part of a secular program of education.’

Unfortunately, as this report discusses, a significant number of Florida school districts teach such unconstitutional classes. The state of Florida permits its public high schools to offer two semester-long “Social Studies” courses entitled “Bible History: Old Testament” and “Bible History: New Testament.” The Florida Department of Education has adopted a short “course description” for each, leaving it up to local school districts to develop their own curricula.³ In practice, this has turned out to be a recipe for disaster. As this report documents, the school districts teaching the “Bible History” courses are, with minor exceptions, doing so in a manner that violates the Constitution and the rights of their citizens. This conduct also deprives their students of sound academic instruction about the Bible, including instruction that would expose them to more than one particular sectarian view.

BACKGROUND: LEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT, FLORIDA

The school districts teaching the ‘Bible History’ courses are, with minor exceptions, doing so in a manner that violates the Constitution and the rights of their citizens.

The situation in Florida first attracted national attention in 1997, when a sharply divided school board in Lee County voted to adopt curricula for “Bible History” courses to be offered in the local high schools under the state’s course descriptions. The board’s action followed more than a year of controversy within the community during which a school-district-appointed Bible Curriculum Committee met repeatedly in an effort to develop curricula for new courses entitled “Bible History: Old Testament” and “Bible History: New Testament” to be offered in the Lee County high schools.

The controversy between those who advocated what was plainly a Christian Bible course and those who urged an objective, constitutional approach escalated and created great division within the community. According to press accounts, one of the Bible Curriculum Committee members characterized those on the Committee who he felt were not enthusiastic supporters of the course as “Jews ... and others who you wondered if they had any religion at all.” (*The Resurrection of “the Oldest Textbook,”* Washington Post, June 15, 1997.) He was also quoted as saying “they should appoint Christians to review a Christian curriculum. I wondered from the very beginning why Jews and others, I don’t know what they were, were on the committee.” (*Remarks Anger Lee County Jews,* Fort Myers News-Press, June 30, 1997.) Many local residents, as well as People For the American Way Foundation, urged the school board to reject an improper sectarian approach and instead adopt

a constitutionally and educationally sound curriculum for instruction about the Bible.

The “Old Testament” curriculum ultimately adopted by the Committee majority for recommendation to the school board was based in part on a curriculum from a private, Religious Right-affiliated organization called the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools (NCBCPS). The Committee majority adopted the NCBCPS “New Testament” curriculum without change. The curricula impermissibly used the Bible as a history textbook, and presented the Bible from the sectarian perspective of Christianity. The school district’s own lawyers recommended against adopting the “New Testament” curriculum, and had concerns about the “Old Testament” curriculum as well. Nonetheless, the school board majority adopted the curricula.⁴

People For the American Way Foundation attorneys, along with the Florida law firm of Steel, Hector & Davis and the Florida ACLU, then sued the school district in federal court on behalf of Lee County parents and other local citizens challenging the unconstitutional curricula. In ruling on the plaintiffs’ motion for a preliminary injunction to halt the teaching of the curricula pending a final ruling on the merits, the court ordered that the “New Testament” curriculum could not be taught at all, and that the “Old Testament” curriculum could be taught but with strict monitoring of the classes. *Gibson v. Lee County School Board*, 1 F. Supp. 2d 1426 (M.D. Fla. 1998).

After this ruling, the school board decided to settle the case by dropping the objectionable curricula and substituting a neutral, academic curriculum that does not present the Bible as fact or from a sectarian perspective. That curriculum uses as the course text *An Introduction to the Bible*, by James R. Beasley, *et al.*, and requires students to read appropriate portions of the text in conjunction with the covered topics.⁵ The course is divided into two parts, An Introduction to the Bible, Parts I and II, the first being a prerequisite to the second. In addition, students who take the course are required to take a world history or comparative religion course before graduation.

One of the Bible Curriculum Committee members in Lee County reportedly characterized other Committee members as ‘Jews ... and others who you wondered if they had any religion at all.’

HOW THIS REPORT CAME ABOUT

Based on information developed in the *Lee County* case about the existence of the Florida “Bible History” courses, we obtained from the Florida Department of Education the names of those of the state’s 67 school dis-

tricts that had taught the “Bible History” courses during the prior three academic years: 1996-97, 1997-98, and 1998-99.⁶ According to the state, during the past three school years, the following 14 school districts (not including Lee County) taught either or both semesters of “Bible History” during one or more of those school years: Clay County, Columbia County, Escambia County, Gulf County, Hillsborough County, Indian River County, Levy County, Madison County, Marion County, Okaloosa County, Polk County, Santa Rosa County, Taylor County, and Walton County.⁷

It appears that most of the school districts teaching ‘Bible History’ are doing so not objectively, but from a Christian perspective.

In 1998, we sent requests under the Florida Public Records Act to each of the school districts that had taught the “Bible History” courses during the prior two years.⁸ These requests sought copies of all curricular and other instructional materials used in connection with these classes. The requests were written broadly to cover all written materials used in the courses, including lesson plans, exams, reading lists and assignments, as well as identification of all books, videos and similar instructional materials, and everything else given to or shown to students. These materials provide written evidence of the course content and the nature of how the courses are taught. Exams, in particular, provide a good indication of what is taught in a course, since they reveal not only the course content but also what specific aspects of that content the teacher considers most important and wants to be sure the students learn.

OUR FINDINGS

Based on the instructional materials provided by the schools districts, all 14 of these school districts appear to be violating the Constitution by the manner in which at least some of the “Bible History” courses are taught.⁹ While some problems are unique to particular school districts, the majority are common to most or all of them. In Part Two of this report, we have included a description of each school district’s classes based on our review of the instructional materials that the school districts themselves provided to us.¹⁰ The primary constitutional problems common to most of the school districts include the following:

■ The courses are framed and taught from Christian perspectives.

The “Bible History” courses in virtually all of the school districts are called “Bible History: Old Testament” and “Bible History: New Testament” or a variation on those words.¹¹ These are Christian terms for the Bible, and framing the courses solely in these terms — without using the term

“Hebrew Scriptures” or “Hebrew Bible” — presents them at the very outset from a purely Christian perspective. As Bible scholar and teacher T.W. Lewis, III testified in the *Lee County* case, “Old Testament” is a Christian term, while “Hebrew Scriptures” is the term “commonly accepted by scholars.”¹²

Despite the Supreme Court’s admonition that the Bible must be taught about “objectively,” it appears that most, if not all, of the Florida school districts teaching the “Bible History” courses are doing so not objectively, but from a Christian perspective. This perspective extends beyond the titles to the course content, which typically presents the Bible according to particular Christian (usually Protestant) interpretations.

For example, it is common in the instructional materials to find the story of Adam and Eve referred to as “the Fall of Man,” and the serpent in that story referred to as “Satan” — Christian interpretations of Genesis 3 that are not shared by other faiths. The Bible classes at issue in the *Herdahl* case also described Genesis 3 as “the Fall of Man.” As Professor Lewis testified in that case, “That phrase, however, does not appear *anywhere* in the Bible; it is a purely theological, Christian interpretation of the story — further evidence of the religious nature of the instruction. Moreover, Jews, who also regard the Book of Genesis as religious scripture, do not interpret the story of Adam and Eve in the same way.”¹³ And, as Professor Lewis testified in *Lee County*, “the Serpent” of Genesis 3 is “interpreted in Christian faith, but not Jewish faith, as Satan.”¹⁴

Likewise, a number of the Florida school districts present the “Old” Testament as predictive of, or in light of, the “New” Testament. For example, an exam used in the Indian River County school district asks, “Where is a prophecy in the Old [T]estament about the birth of Jesus?” This is a purely Christian reading of the Bible, since Judaism does not recognize a “New” Testament, nor interpret the Hebrew Scriptures as predictive of it. And in some school districts (e.g., Escambia County), the course materials even use the oxymoronic phrase “Hebrew Old Testament.”

Apart from the impermissible sectarian perspective of such courses, they present obstacles for those students who do not share that particular religious view. A Jewish student, for example, who is asked where the “Old Testament” contains a prophecy about the birth of Jesus would have obvious difficulty in answering such a question. As discussed below, many of the school districts appear to assume that all of the students taking these courses are Christian.

One exam question asks, ‘Where is a prophecy in the Old [T]estament about the birth of Jesus?’ This is a purely Christian reading of the Bible.

In many of the school districts, the students are required to study, if not memorize, the Ten Commandments. However, although the arrangement of the Ten Commandments is different among Christians and Jews (and among Christians as well), it does not appear that the students are made aware of this. In most instances, the course materials refer generally to “the Ten Commandments”; however, when the course materials do make clear which version of the Ten Commandments is taught (*e.g.*, in Levy County), it is a Christian version.

The Christian perspective of these courses is typically a Protestant one. For example, these courses generally do not include certain books

The courses generally do not include certain books of the Bible that Catholics consider to be canon but Protestants do not. If these books are mentioned at all, they are described as the ‘Apocryphal Books.’

of the Bible that Catholics consider to be canon but Protestants do not. If these books are mentioned at all, they are described as the “Apocryphal Books” and not as scripture. For example, a curriculum that has been used in Santa Rosa County and in Escambia County calls these books “The Apocrypha” and describes them as “Intertestament Writings.” In the Levy County school district, while students reportedly are permitted to use “biblical translations of their choice,” that choice must be from “an original King James Translation” — a Protestant version of the Bible. This would appear to exclude Bibles recognized by religious traditions other than Protestantism, *e.g.*, the New American Bible accepted by Catholics, which has 73 books, while the King James Version has 66.¹⁵

The problems inherent in this sectarian approach are compounded by the fact that the teachers generally do not appear to inform the students that they are learning only one particular religious interpretation of the biblical text (*e.g.*, that “the Fall of Man” is a Christian reading of the Bible). Such non-objective instruction deprives the students of a truly meaningful, academic education in which they would be exposed to, among other things, the rich and diverse interpretations of the Bible.

■ ■ The Bible is used as a history textbook.

As the courts have recognized, “ ‘the Bible is a religious book, or, more accurately stated, a collection of religious books and writings which have been selected and assembled for the religious teachings and messages therein conveyed ... Thus, to simply read the Bible without selectivity is to read a religious book and to teach the Bible literally without interpretation is to convey a religious message or teach a religious lesson.’ ”

Herdahl v. Pontotoc County School District, 933 F. Supp. 582, 596 (N.D. Miss. 1996) (quoting *Wiley v. Franklin*, 468 F. Supp. 133, 149 (E.D. Tenn. 1979)).

In addition, the courts have also recognized that “much of the Bible is not capable of historic verification (such as divine creation, the ‘pre-existence’ of Jesus, Jesus’ miracles and the resurrection), and can only be accepted as a matter of faith and religious belief.” *Herdahl*, 933 F. Supp. at 596. Teaching this biblical content as true in a public school improperly crosses the line of neutrality and objectivity by endorsing religion and inculcating students in religious beliefs.

For these reasons, the courts have held that the Bible cannot be taught in a public school “as if [it] were actual literal history.” *Herdahl*, 933 F. Supp. at 600. *See also Lee County*, 1 F. Supp. 2d at 1434 (“[t]his Court ... finds it difficult to conceive how the account of the resurrection or of miracles could be taught as secular history”). Accordingly, the court in *Herdahl* ordered that students, in a “Bible” course purportedly about ancient Near East history, “must be assigned reading from non-biblical sources of ancient Middle East history.” *Herdahl*, 933 F. Supp. at 600.¹⁶

Nonetheless, most of the Florida school districts teaching the “Bible History” courses appear to be using the Bible as though it were a history textbook and presenting the Bible as an historical record. The course title itself, “Bible History,” suggests from the outset to students that they will be learning what happened in the past — that is, learning history — by reading the Bible. This is further underscored by the Florida Department of Education’s placement of these courses in the “Social Studies” group entitled “World and Eastern Hemispheric Histories,” which also includes such high school courses as “World History,” “African History,” “British History,” and “European History.”¹⁷

In a number of the school districts, the only “textbook” used in these courses is the Bible, sometimes in combination with secondary Bible resources (such as a Bible handbook). Often, these secondary resources are not standard academic texts published for public school use but rather products of religious publishing houses. For example, at Keystone Heights High School in Clay County, the course “text” is the Bible, with *Halley’s Bible Handbook* listed as a “resource.” *Halley’s* is published by Zondervan Publishing House, which, according to its web site, is a “member of the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association” and “an international Christian communications company ... dedicated to meeting the needs of people with resources that glorify Jesus Christ and promote

Most of the districts appear to be using the Bible as though it were a history textbook and presenting the Bible as an historical record.

Course materials from Plant City High School in Hillsborough County call the Bible ‘the most reliable source for history we have.’

biblical principles.”¹⁸ Generally, there is no indication that the students are assigned reading from any non-biblical sources of history.

The presentation of the Bible as an historical record is routinely confirmed by the written instructional materials. For example, the “Santa Rosa County Curriculum” that is also used in Escambia County describes Genesis 1-11 as the “Early history of man,” and refers to “Creation” and “Flood” as “historical event[s].” Course materials from Plant City High School in Hillsborough County call the Bible “the most reliable source for history we have.” In the Walton County school district, the Gospels are described as giving “a complete picture of Jesus’ life and teaching.”

Some schools appear to teach the Bible content by prefacing it with “according to the Bible,” or “the Bible says.” Such qualifications, however, do not render a history course based on the Bible constitutional. Indeed, a claim that they do was specifically rejected by the court in *Herdahl*. As the court explained, “the daily teaching of the content of a book of religious proclamation does not become secular instruction merely by informing students that the content is only what the Bible says; indeed, for many students, that may well heighten the religious effect of the course.” *Herdahl*, 933 F. Supp. at 596-97.

■ Students are assumed to be Christian and the Bible is taught accordingly.

A number of school districts appear to assume that only Christian students would take the “Bible History” courses. A review of the instructional materials suggests an assumption by these school districts that the teachers and students are of the same (Christian) faith, with the Bible approached accordingly, rather than in an objective and secular manner.

One of the most striking examples is from the Columbia County school district, where students at Columbia High School are asked the following exam question:

- “If you had a Jewish friend who wanted to know if Jesus might be the expectant [sic] Messiah, which book [of the Gospels] would you give him?”

Similar examples exist in other school districts:

- “Compose an explanation of who Jesus is for someone who has never heard of Him.” (Final exam question at Madison County High School, Madison County)
- “Why is it hard for a non-Christian to understand things about God?” (Exam question concerning I Corinthians used at both Vanguard High School in Marion County and Williston High School in Levy County)

- “What is Jesus Christ’s relationship to God, to creation, *and to you?*” (Question asked of students at Niceville High School in Okaloosa County; emphasis added.)
- “Who, according to Jesus, is the father of the Jews? The devil.” (Lesson used in Levy County on John 8)

Clearly, these lessons and exam questions not only reinforce some Christian faiths, they would be problematic for students who are not Christians.

In the Levy County school district, students are directed to bring a Bible “from home,” and further told that they “may use biblical translations of their choice *as long [as] it is from an original King James Translation.*” (Emphasis added.) Not only does this appear to exclude Bibles not recognized by Protestants, it also assumes that all students have a Bible at home and, particularly, that they have the Protestant Bible in their homes.

In some school districts, the use of the first person plural in referring to “our” Bible or how “we” interpret the Bible also underscores the assumption of religious homogeneity and the lack of an objective approach to the courses. For example, the lessons plans at Port St. Joe High School in Gulf County call for the teacher to discuss “[h]ow *we got our* Bible.” Similarly, an exam question in Orange Park High School in Clay County asks, “Five great sermons of *our Lord* are recorded in: (a) Matthew (b) Mark (c) Luke (d) John.” At Mulberry High School in Polk County, one exam question asks students, “How do *we* believe Peter died?” At Columbia High School in Columbia County, students are asked, “What was the location of Abraham’s attempted sacrifice of Isaac and why do *we* believe he went to that location?” And at Williston High School in Levy County, the New Testament exams ask such questions as, “What reason does Jesus give for why *we* should not judge others?”¹⁹

The absence of an objective and secular approach to the courses also manifests itself in exam questions and answers that impermissibly depend upon and make assumptions about the students’ own (presumably Christian) religious beliefs. For example, at Niceville High School in Okaloosa County, students are asked, “Do you think Satan took Jesus literally and physically to the temple and the mountain? Why or why not?” At Bartow High School in Polk County, students are required to “[p]ut yourself in the shoes of Cain and tell me if you would do the same as him [sic] or different than him [sic] and why.” Similarly, at Middleburg High School in Clay County, students are asked, “Is it important to have faith in a religion?”²⁰

A lesson on John 8 in Levy County’s course stated: ‘Who, according to Jesus, is the father of the Jews? The devil.’

At Port St. Joe High School in Gulf County, students are asked whether the following is “true or false:” “The Old Testament prophecies were not fulfilled in the New Testament.” The answer to this question, of course, is a matter of religious faith, not fact. Similarly, at Walton High School in Walton County, students are asked, “What eight aspects of Christ’s life are prophesied in Isaiah?” — which is a book of the Hebrew Scriptures. This question likewise assumes the Christian belief that the Hebrew Scriptures foretell parts of the New Testament. In fact, there really are no “correct” answers to such questions; rather, the answers depend entirely on the particular sectarian perspective and interpretation that one brings to the Bible.

■ ■ The Bible is used to promote Christian faith formation and religious values and lessons.

While public school students may be taught about the different beliefs of different religious groups, a public school cannot proselytize to its students or train them in a particular religion. Likewise, while students may learn about civic values and be taught that religious groups believe in certain values as a matter of their religious faith, they may not be encouraged to adopt such values as a matter of faith or because they are found in the Bible. Nonetheless, some of the school districts teaching the “Bible History” courses appear to be using the Bible as a basis for Christian faith formation and life lessons, which is religious teaching, not secular instruction.

For example, in the Indian River County school district, students taking the “Bible History” course have been required to engage in “challenging group and individual work to figure out what the parables [of Jesus] are telling us today,” and to explain, “Why do you think God says to love your enemies?” At Madison County High School, the “New Testament” final exam asks students to write an essay, “[u]sing Scripture reference to support [their] thoughts,” about each of the following topics: “God’s Plan For The Family; Living A Victorious Life In The World Which Is So Dark; and God’s Directions For Righteous Living.” And course materials used in the Levy County school district state in the “study guide” for Joshua: “God is not content with our doing what is right some of the time. He wants us to do what is right all the time. We are under his orders to eliminate any thoughts, practices, or possessions that hinder our devotion to him.”

At Middleburg High School in Clay County, students are given “one section of the Sermon on the Mount” every other week during the “New

An exam question in Orange Park High School asks: ‘Five great sermons of *our Lord* are recorded in: (a) Matthew (b) Mark (c) Luke (d) John.’

Testament” semester (e.g., “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God”) and required to write an essay in which they answer the questions: “How is it relative [sic] to their life? [and] How is it relative [sic] to the world we live in?” During the “Old Testament” semester, students are given “one Commandment” every other week (e.g., “You shall have no other gods before me”) and required to write an essay discussing “How is the Commandment relative [sic] to you and your life? [and] How is the Commandment relative [sic] to the world we live in?” And at Columbia High School in Columbia County, students are asked this exam question: “We can see in the Temptation Story of the 3rd Chapter of Genesis that we of the 20th Century haven’t changed much from the days of Adam and Eve. What stages in the Temptation and Fall of Man do we still find ourselves [in] today?”

Such instruction is constitutionally problematic in public schools. As the court held in *Herdahl*, “to inculcate students ... into the beliefs and moral code of fundamentalist Christianity [is] an admirable goal perhaps for some private citizens or for a private religious school, but a forbidden one for the government.” 933 F. Supp. at 595.²¹

■ ■ Sunday-school and other religious training exercises are used to indoctrinate students in Bible content.

Many of the school districts require their students to engage in the type of rote memorization of the Bible that one would find in a Sunday school, or to engage in other Sunday-school type activities clearly intended to inculcate students in Bible content. For instance, some school districts require students to memorize the names of the 27 books of the “New Testament,” in order. At Walton High School in Walton County, one of the exams requires students to identify, “from memory — all Old Testament books with the appropriate divisions.” Some school districts require students to be able to identify the source (Bible book, chapter and verse) of specified Bible quotes. At Vanguard High School in Marion County, some exams require students to find specified Bible verses and then “copy them in full” from their Bibles.

And in some school districts, the teacher uses games or puzzles to further students’ memorization of Bible content. For example, at Port St. Joe High School in Gulf County, the students “Play Bingo w/Gospels,” and the teacher also uses seemingly juvenile puzzles requiring regurgitation of

A ‘study guide’ in the Levy County school district says, ‘God is not content with our doing what is right some of the time.... We are under his orders to eliminate any thoughts, practices, or possessions that hinder our devotion to him.’

At Port St. Joe High School, students ‘Play Bingo With Gospels’ and the teacher uses puzzles requiring regurgitation of Bible content — exercises that do not seem age-appropriate for high school students.

Bible content. These exercises also do not seem age-appropriate for high school students, another indication that their purpose is not objective or secular, but to inculcate students in the content of the Christian Bible.

Similar exercises were required of students in the *Lee County* case. That school district’s New Testament curriculum, for example, called for the students “to memorize ‘the order of the books of the New Testament’ (27 total) as well as to memorize ‘the Beatitudes and/or Similitudes (e.g., the pronouncement of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount that ‘Blessed are the merciful...’).” *Declaration of Professor T.W. Lewis, III*, at 9. According to Professor Lewis, “[i]n my opinion, there is no legitimate pedagogic purpose to such rote memorization in a secular history class. These tasks are typical of what children do in Sunday school, and are a means of further inculcating children in the Christian Bible.” *Id.*, at 9-10.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

School districts across the state of Florida are violating the Constitution by the manner in which they are teaching the “Bible History” courses. Their actions contravene the separation of church and state and misuse public funds to advance religion and support sectarian education. In addition, these courses deprive students of the well-rounded, academic education to which they are entitled, and deny them access to the richness that a truly objective study of the Bible would give them. These problems can and should be addressed promptly at the state and local levels:

■ ■ Recommendations for the Florida Department of Education

The presence of the “Bible History” courses on the state-approved course list, the Christian course titles, the lack of adequate guidance in the state’s course descriptions, and the problematic “Bible History” title have proved to be an open invitation to local school districts to violate the Constitution under the guise of teaching state-sanctioned courses. Given the information documented in this report, the state Department of Education should step in and remove the “Bible History” courses as currently configured from the state’s course list.

Of course, this does not mean that a school district may not teach students about the Bible. The Bible may be studied as a work of literature, and students may also learn about the Bible in comparative religion classes,

world religion classes, and similar courses. The Florida Department of Education can and should encourage local districts to use such approaches. But the “Bible History” approach that has been followed in Florida has shown itself to be unworkable and should be discontinued.

■ ■ Recommendations for the local school districts

Those school districts that are teaching the “Bible History” courses, and that are doing so in violation of the Constitution, are exposing themselves to costly and needless litigation.²² They should not wait to be sued, nor wait for the state Department of Education to act. They should revise their courses immediately to comply with the Constitution.²³ In developing proper curricula, they should be guided by the case law, and first and foremost by the Supreme Court’s admonition that the Bible can only be taught about in a public school “objectively as part of a secular program of education.” This means, among other things, that the Bible cannot be taught about from a sectarian perspective, that it cannot be used as a basis for faith formation, and that the instruction cannot be premised upon an assumption about the religious beliefs of the students. If a course is properly designed — educationally as well as legally — any student should feel comfortable taking it.

For purposes of devising proper curricula, we recommend to these school districts *The Bible & Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide* (hereafter *The Bible & Public Schools*), recently published by the Freedom Forum’s First Amendment Center and the National Bible Association, and endorsed by a diverse group of educational, religious and religious-liberty organizations, including the Christian Legal Society, the National Association of Evangelicals, the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the Council on Islamic Education, the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and People For the American Way Foundation. This “common ground” guide is intended to assist public school officials in developing proper ways to teach students about the Bible, and also points out the educational and legal problems with particular approaches, including the “Bible History” approach.²⁴

The evidence in this report shows the extreme difficulty — if not impossibility — at the high school level of using a “Bible History” approach to teach students about the Bible. Public schools may not present the Bible

**The ‘Bible History’
approach that has
been followed in
Florida has shown
itself to be
unworkable and
should be
discontinued.**

Public schools are on much firmer constitutional ground if they teach students about the Bible in literature classes in which the Bible is studied as a literary text.

to students as though it were a history textbook. They may not use it to teach lessons in faith formation, or present it solely from one sectarian perspective. For all of these reasons, and in light of the problems discussed above, public schools are on much firmer constitutional ground if they teach students about the Bible in literature classes in which the Bible is studied as a literary text. As stated in *The Bible & Public Schools*:

[M]ost public schools that have offered a Bible elective have found it safer and more age-appropriate to use the Bible literature approach ... Schools must keep in mind that the Bible is seen by millions of Jews and Christians as *scripture*. For adherents of these faiths, the Bible makes sense of events in terms of God's purposes and actions. *This means that the Bible may not be treated as a history textbook by public-school teachers* but must be studied by examining a variety of perspectives — religious and non-religious — on the meaning and significance of the biblical account. *The Bible & Public Schools*, at 8 (additional emphasis added).

And, again, the Bible may also be taught about in broader courses, such as courses in comparative religion or the history of religion.

Teacher training is also important when dealing with the Bible in public schools. Teachers should have an educational background in the academic study of religion and be competent to teach about the Bible objectively and not from a sectarian perspective.²⁵ Clearly, this requires a teacher to know much more than his or her own religious interpretation of the Bible. Obviously, we could not tell from the written course materials the nature of the training and education that the particular teachers in these school districts have received. However, the non-objective, sectarian instruction that we have documented does raise questions about the adequacy of that training. A school should ensure that teachers are fully and properly qualified to teach about the Bible in accordance with the Constitution *before* it offers such instruction.²⁶

Like all public school districts, the school districts that are the subject of this report owe their students a sound education. And they owe their citizens — who pay for the public schools — instruction that complies with the Constitution. The “Bible History” courses in the state of Florida fall short on both counts.

¹ There is, of course, no single “Bible,” but rather different versions and translations that are considered to be scripture by different religious groups. In this report, we use “the Bible” to refer to all versions. (This is generally not the case, however, in the Florida public school courses that are the subject of this report, where “the Bible” typically means the Bible as recognized by Christians.)

² See *Hall v. Board of Commissioners of Conecuh County*, 656 F.2d 999 (5th Cir. 1981); *Gibson v. Lee County School Board*, 1 F. Supp. 2d 1426 (M.D. Fla. 1998); *Herdahl v. Pontotoc County School District*, 933 F. Supp. 582 (N.D. Miss. 1996); *Doe v. Human*, 725 F. Supp. 1503 (W.D. Ark. 1989), *aff’d without opinion*, 923 F.2d 857 (8th Cir. 1990), *cert. denied*, 499 U.S. 922 (1991); *Crockett v. Sorenson*, 568 F. Supp. 1422 (W.D. Va. 1983); *Wiley v. Franklin*, 468 F. Supp. 133 (E.D. Tenn. 1979), *supp. op.*, 474 F. Supp. 525 (E.D. Tenn. 1979), *supp. op.*, 497 F. Supp. 390 (E.D. Tenn. 1980); *Vaughn v. Reed*, 313 F. Supp. 431 (W.D. Va. 1970).

³ A copy of the state’s course descriptions for each of the “Bible History” courses is included as an appendix to this report, and is also available on the Florida Department of Education’s web site, <http://www.firn.edu/doe> (visited Aug. 23, 1999).

⁴ The NCBCPS attempts to promote its curricula to school districts around the country, and in 1998 claimed that no fewer than 53 school districts in 22 states had approved them. See *Affidavit of Elizabeth Ridenour*, ¶ 5 (Jan. 2, 1998), filed in support of NCBCPS’s memorandum in opposition to Plaintiffs’ Motion for a Preliminary Injunction in *Gibson v. Lee County School Board*, 1 F. Supp. 2d 1426 (M.D. Fla. 1998). According to the president of the NCBCPS, the organization is “trying to expose kids to the biblical Christian worldview.” NCBCPS President Elizabeth Ridenour on *Truths That Transform* radio program (Sept. 14, 1995).

⁵ A copy of the curriculum is available from People For the American Way Foundation. James R. Beasley is a former professor in the Religious Studies Department of Stetson University in DeLand, Florida.

⁶ The state maintains this public information, by semester and school district, for each of the state-approved high school courses, along with the number of students enrolled in each course per district for each semester.

⁷ A 15th school district, Duval County, taught the “Bible History: New Testament” course during the fall of the 1996-97 school year, but has not taught either “Bible History” course since then. For this reason, and because the school district reported that it no longer had any instructional materials for these courses, we have not included it in this report.

⁸ After the close of the 1998-99 school year, we sent the same requests to those school districts that had taught the classes only during that year but not in the prior two years. We also confirmed in writing with the school districts that had taught the classes in both 1997-98 and 1998-99 that the courses were taught the same way using the same materials during both years.

⁹ Although problems exist in all of the school districts, it appears from the instructional materials that the teacher at Chamberlain High School in the Hillsborough County school district (one of two schools in that district teaching its new “History of the Bible” course) has had the most success in an effort to approach the course in an objective manner. The instructional materials used in that school, though not free from all problems, do reflect a conscious attempt to differentiate between the Bible as history and teaching *about* the Bible. See Part Two, Hillsborough County School District. We note as a general matter as to all of the school districts that while many of the materials (such as exams, assignments, course outlines and lesson plans) presumably were given to the students or used directly in instructing them, it is not possible to determine precisely how and to what extent other materials (such as Bible study guides and excerpts from other Bible-related secondary resources) were shared with the students.

¹⁰ The instructional materials were analyzed by Judith E. Schaeffer and Elliot M. Minberg, the Deputy Legal Director and Legal Director, respectively, of People For the American Way

Foundation. Ms. Schaeffer and Mr. Mincberg were co-counsel to the plaintiffs in the *Herdahl* and *Lee County Bible-class* cases.

¹¹ Even in Hillsborough County, which calls its one-semester course “History of the Bible,” the course outline used in one of its high schools still refers to the “Old Testament.”

¹² *Declaration of Professor T.W. Lewis, III*, at 4, Exhibit 1 in support of Plaintiffs’ Motion for a Preliminary Injunction, filed Dec. 12, 1997 in *Gibson v. Lee County School Board*, 1 F. Supp. 2d 1426 (M.D. Fla. 1998). (Professor Lewis, an Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies at Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi, had previously testified in the *Herdahl* case concerning the Bible and the use of the Bible in public school classes and curricula and was accepted by the court as an expert witness in those areas. Professor Lewis is an ordained United Methodist Minister with a Ph.D. in Biblical Studies and a Bachelor of Divinity degree who taught biblical studies and related subjects in religion for more than 30 years at the college level. In addition, Professor Lewis has regularly taught Sunday school and vacation Bible school, and has been employed as a pastor.)

¹³ *Report of Professor T.W. Lewis, III*, at 20, Exhibit 15 in support of Plaintiff’s Motion for Summary Judgment, filed Dec. 13, 1995 in *Herdahl v. Pontotoc County School District*, 933 F. Supp. 582 (N.D. Miss. 1996).

¹⁴ *Declaration of Professor T.W. Lewis, III*, at 8.

¹⁵ See <http://www.nccbuscc.org/nab/bible/index.htm> (Oct. 21, 1999). It should also be noted that Protestants and Catholics arrange the Ten Commandments differently. As the United States Catholic Conference explains, “[t]raditionally among Catholics Exodus 20:1-6 is considered as only one commandment, and Exodus 20:17 as two.” See <http://www.nccbuscc.org/nab/bible/exodus/exodus20.htm> (Oct. 21, 1999). In those Florida school districts where the instructional materials reveal the specific arrangement of the Ten Commandments studied (e.g., Levy County), it is the Protestant version.

¹⁶ As Professor Lewis testified in *Lee County*, “the Bible is uniquely unsuited to be used as though it were a secular history textbook, as a source for teaching public school students about past events.” *Declaration of Professor T.W. Lewis, III*, at 4-5.

¹⁷ See <http://www.firn.edu/doe> (Oct. 13, 1999).

¹⁸ See <http://www.zondervan.com/us.htm> (Oct. 19, 1999).

¹⁹ All emphasis in these examples added.

²⁰ The course materials from the school districts do not explain how answers to these sorts of questions are graded.

²¹ See also *Doe v. Human*, 725 F. Supp. at 1506 (holding Bible class to be unconstitutional where “many of the songs and parables taught in the class endorse Christianity, and have very little, if any, secular effect”).

²² Some of the school districts defensively pointed out to us that their “Bible History” courses are electives, apparently as though that should excuse any constitutional violation. In fact, and as the Supreme Court has made clear, the voluntariness of student participation “furnishes no defense to a claim of unconstitutionality under the Establishment Clause.” *Schempp*, 374 U.S. at 225. Indeed, the high school Bible classes at issue in *Lee County* and *Herdahl* were, like these Florida classes, also electives.

²³ Some of the school districts may not be teaching the “Bible History” courses this school year, 1999-2000. For example, the Indian River County school district informed us that it is not teaching these courses in either its regular high schools or its charter high school this year.

²⁴ *The Bible & Public Schools* is available from the Freedom Forum in Arlington, Virginia, and is also reprinted on its web site, <http://www.freedomforum.org>.

²⁵ See *The Bible & Public Schools*, at 6-7.

²⁶ *Id.* at 6 (“Electives in biblical studies should only be offered if there are teachers academically competent to teach them”).

PART TWO: 'BIBLE HISTORY' COURSE

PROFILES BY SCHOOL DISTRICT

CLAY COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT*

Four high schools in the Clay County School District teach or have taught the "Bible History: Old Testament" and "Bible History: New Testament" courses. With hundreds of students enrolled in these courses during the past three school years, the student enrollment in these courses in Clay County is among the highest in the state.

| | |
|--|---|
| CLAY COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT FACTS & FIGURES | BIBLE HISTORY: OLD TESTAMENT |
| | Total students: 383 |
| | 1998-99: 131 |
| | 1997-98: 145 |
| | 1996-97: 107 |
| | BIBLE HISTORY: NEW TESTAMENT |
| | Total students: 299 |
| | 1998-99: 135 |
| | 1997-98: 89 |
| | 1996-97: 75 |

It appears that the course is taught by different teachers in each of the four high schools; the lesson plans and course materials vary from school to school. For this reason, each of the schools is discussed separately below. None of the classes appears to be taught in compliance with the Constitution.

■ Clay High School

The course appears to be a Bible survey course in which the students read the Bible from beginning to end. It does not appear that any other books are used in the course, nor does it appear that students are assigned reading from any non-biblical sources of history.

According to a note from the teacher, "The Book used is the Bible." The students are permitted to choose their own Bible; if they don't have one, the teacher asks their parents "which type they would prefer." It is doubtful that students in other "history" courses are using different texts or selecting their own version of a text, suggesting that this course is not being approached as a normal, secular, "history" course. Asking for this type of book choice from parents may well suggest that a religious choice is being made in the "text" that is used, since different religious faiths believe in different versions of the Bible.

*The enrollment figures for each school district listed are from information provided by the Florida Department of Education. The "total students" number in the "Facts & Figures" boxes refers to the aggregate number enrolled from fall 1996 through spring 1999.

The Protestant perspective comes through in a test that asks: 'How many of the 66 books of the Bible are found in the Old Testament?' The Protestant Bible has 66 books, the Catholic Bible 73.

The lesson plans present a religious interpretation of the Bible. For example, during the "Old Testament" semester, a study of the book of Judges refers to "the sin cycle." This is a religious interpretation and presentation of the biblical text. In addition, it appears that the "Old Testament" is taught from a Christian perspective. For example, during the "New Testament" semester, in connection with a study of Matthew 1-2 and "Jesus the long awaited *Messiah*" (emphasis in original), the students are asked "How did the O.T. record His coming[?]"

Reading the "Old Testament" in light of the New Testament or as a prediction of the New Testament is a Christian interpretation of the Bible. The Christian perspective of the course is a Protestant one. For example, a test entitled "Who Wrote the Bible (Old Testament)" asks the students: "How many *of the 66 books of the Bible* are found in the Old Testament?" (Emphasis added.) The Protestant Bible has 66 books, the Catholic Bible 73.

The exams in particular suggest that the perspective of the course is a religious one in which the content of the Bible is accepted as true. Students are asked such "factual" questions as "On which day was [sic] the sun and stars created [?]" Moreover, some of the exams may well put students who do not accept the Bible as true in an awkward position. For example, one "true or false"

question given to students is: "The first three commandments deal with our relationship with God." The teacher here is assuming that "we" have a relationship with God, bringing a religious perspective to the course, and also putting a student who does not believe in God in a very difficult position in terms of answering this question as "true" or "false."

■ ■ Keystone Heights High School

The course in this school also appears to be a Bible survey course in which the students read the Bible from beginning to end. The only "text" listed is "Bible: King James, NIV, Student Bible, Living Bible." *Halley's Bible Handbook* is listed as a resource.¹

The lesson plans appear to present the Bible from a Christian perspective. For example, they refer to the story of Adam and Eve as the "Fall of Man," which is a Christian interpretation of Genesis 3.

The exams relate primarily to Bible content, including the religious aspects of the Bible. Questions include, for example, "What are the three results of the Fall of Man[?]" Students are also asked questions such as this on an "Old Testament" test: "How was man created?" It is not known

what grade would be given to a student who writes that man evolved over time, but it does not appear that this is the answer that the teacher was seeking. Similarly, a “New Testament” exam asked the students: “Being raised from the dead is best defined as _____[?]”

■ Middleburg High School

The teacher for the course in this school stated that he does not keep his old lesson plans, making it difficult to know exactly what particular lessons have been covered in the classes. However, from the exams and other materials produced, it appears that the course is being taught at least in part as a Sunday school course, with emphasis on the religious and life lessons to be learned from the Bible.

For example, during the “New Testament” semester, the teacher uses puzzles requiring students to know the names of the books of the New Testament (a Sunday school task), as well as a handout entitled “How to Live with God, Self, and Others” that contains advice from the Bible. Another handout for the “New Testament” semester asks: “Just how should our historical view of Jesus and the account of His life in the New Testament touch our lives today[?]” This handout concludes with the following: “A good verse to finish with is Hebrews 13:8, ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever.’ ”

In addition, every other Thursday during the “Old Testament” semester, “one Commandment is given to students. They are to write a five paragraph essay answering these questions: *a. How is the Commandment relative [sic] to you and your life? b. How is the Commandment relative [sic] to the world we live in?*” (Emphasis added.)

Similarly, every other Thursday during the “New Testament” semester, “one section of the Sermon on the Mount is given to students. They are required to write a five paragraph essay answering the following questions: *a. How is it relative [sic] to their life? b. How is it relative [sic] to the world we live in?*” (Emphasis added.)

The teacher also gives exams that probe the students’ own personal and religious beliefs, not proper in a secular, public school course. For example, one of the “Old Testament” exams asks the students: “Is it important to have faith in a religion?” The students are also required to “Write a five paragraph essay on what or who god is. Based on individual beliefs.”

There are some indications from the course materials that the teacher recognizes that the Bible was written for a religious purpose and there-

An ‘Old Testament’ test asks: ‘How was man created?’ It is not known what grade would be given to a student who writes that man evolved over time.

The teacher's exams improperly probe the students' own personal and religious beliefs with questions like this one: 'Write a five paragraph essay on what or who god is. Based on individual beliefs.'

fore cannot be taken as literally true. One note entitled "Separating Interpretation from History" states "It is important to distinguish between the Old testaments [sic] interpretation of what happened and critical history. In order to write a reliable account, the historian needs more or less objective sources contemporary with the events themselves.

The major source of information concerning Israel's history is the Old Testament, and its writers generally are concerned primarily with the theological meaning of the past." Nonetheless, biblical stories are still referred to in the course materials as "events." For example, during the "Old Testament" semester, students are required to give an oral report about one of eleven listed "events," including "Creation" and "Expulsion from the garden." The assignment requires the use of three references: "Bible, History Book, Choice [apparently meaning a reference of the student's choice]." It is difficult to understand what "history book" could be used to do a report on "Creation" or "Expulsion from the garden," and also problematic that the teacher refers to them as "events" and lists them as topics for a report calling for the use of a history book. Similarly, during the New Testament semester, students are given a list of "events" and directed to "ID [their] significance" or pick another "of your interest." The listed "events" include: "Baptism of Jesus"; "Temptation [sic] of Jesus"; "Announcement of the Great Commandment"; "Resurrection [sic]"; and "Ascension."

It is also worth noting that one of the course documents (from the A&E Classroom Bible Series) refers to "Judeo-Christianity" as a "major world religion," an inaccurate description of Judaism and Christianity as a "world religion."

The teacher noted that a number of books and other printed materials are "[r]eference material used for class discussions [and] also may be used for projects." These include *Halley's Bible Handbook*,² *The Bible as/in Literature*; *A History of God*; *The Holy Qur'an*; *Bible Almanac*; *Understanding the World of the Bible*; and *The Jews of the Bible*.

■ ■ Orange Park High School

The course syllabus for the "Old Testament" course identifies two textbooks for the course: Lawrence Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction*, published by Paulist Press,³ and "A Bible: The teacher recommends the NIV version if you have one."⁴ On the "Course

Requirements” attached to this syllabus the teacher states, “I am a Christian but I will not present my personal views. Never will doctrinal, denominational, or theological points of view be discussed in the class. What we discuss must be factual history or literature.” Unfortunately, the classes appear to miss the mark, despite this disclaimer.

First, attached to the syllabus for the “Old Testament” class is a list of “Course Requirements,” including the requirement that the students “[m]emorize the books of the Old Testament in order.” Not only is this a Sunday school task, but the “order” of the books in the Old Testament is different than it is in the Hebrew Scriptures. Thus, from the outset, a religious choice is being made in the “Course Requirements.” The Christian perspective of the course (and assumption of religiosity on the part of the students) is underscored by such exam questions as: “Five great sermons of *our Lord* are recorded in: (a) Matthew (b) Mark (c) Luke (d) John.” (Emphasis added.) Additionally, one of the course documents (apparently an exam) uses the Christian arrangement of the Ten Commandments, which is different from the arrangement in Judaism. It also appears that the course is approached not just from the sectarian perspective of Christianity, but from the particular perspective of Protestantism. For example, a final exam question asks “the name of the 66 inspired books.” The Protestant Bible has 66 books, the Catholic Bible 73.

Forty-five percent of the student’s grade in the “Old Testament” course is based on the student’s completing a “reference card” for each book of the “Old Testament” on which the student is required to write down such information as the name of the book, the author, when it was written, the purpose or theme, and “major *historical* events” and “major *historical* individuals.” (Emphasis added.) Particularly given the requirement that the students memorize the names of the books of the “Old Testament” in order, this course requirement further suggests a Sunday school course.⁵ Moreover, given the fact that some of the required information (such as author and date written) is not known, there is a possibility that the students are being asked to state religious tradition (*e.g.*, that Moses wrote the first five books) rather than objective fact. It is also problematic that the teacher uses the word “historical” to refer to biblical events and persons, since much of the Bible is not capable of historic verification or falsification (*e.g.*, divine

One course required students to ‘memorize the books of the Old Testament in order,’ which imposes a religious choice because the ‘order’ of books is different in the Hebrew Scriptures.

creation, miracles) and can only be accepted as true as a matter of religious belief, not objective, historical fact.

One of the apparent assignments is entitled “Time Line Project: New Testament.” The students are asked to “[p]repare an illustrated time line of events *mentioned in the New Testament or referred to by prophecy*. Some events are important to the Jewish people. If you think I have omitted an important event please feel free to add it to your time line.” (Emphasis added.) The teacher then lists 18 events, including “Birth of Christ”; “Crucifixion”; “John Writes Revelation”; “Discovery of the AIDS virus”; “Desert Storm”; and “Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin.”

In her lesson plans, the teacher has a reference to the “fall” in Genesis, a Christian interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve. She also asks the students to “Compose a 1-page essay on what you have learned from David’s life that you might be able to benefit from in your future.” Using the Bible for life lessons is religious, not secular, study.

The teacher uses the word ‘historical’ to refer to biblical events, even though much of the Bible cannot be historically verified.

Similarly, questions are posed to the students that depend for their answers on the students’ own religious beliefs. For example, students are asked to “Imagine that God appears on earth and says: ‘Hear this! I am going to make sin impossible.’ In writing, explain your reaction: — Would this be a good thing? — How might God do it?” Likewise, in a lesson entitled “History of Miracles,” it appears the students are shown a Time-Life video, “Miracles of Faith.” The end of the written instructional materials state: “Now that you have seen this compelling evidence....decide for yourself. WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT MIRACLES? Do you believe they happened or not. On a separate sheet of paper explain how you feel about miracles.” (Ellipsis and emphasis in original.)

The teacher has on at least two occasions invited to class a “guest speaker” from the “High School Outreach of Campus Crusade for Christ.” According to the teacher’s materials, on his first visit, this speaker was to show “Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure,” “which is a video on our teenage culture today. [The speaker] will relate today’s teenagers with the Biblical Old Testament teenage characters.”⁶ The teacher also invited a rabbi as a guest speaker to “present Jewish cultural history including current events,” and to show “slides, videos, and [teach] Jewish historical/cultural songs.”

COLUMBIA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Columbia County School District teaches the “Bible History: Old Testament” and “Bible History: New Testament” courses at Columbia

COLUMBIA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT FACTS & FIGURES

BIBLE HISTORY:

OLD TESTAMENT

Total students: 38

1998-99: 12

1997-98: 10

1996-97: 16

BIBLE HISTORY:

NEW TESTAMENT

Total students: 29

1998-99: 11

1997-98: 6

1996-97: 12

High School. According to the school district, in 1998-99, under a dual enrollment arrangement, some of the students taking these courses at the high school simultaneously earned college credit at Lake City Community College. Interestingly, the description of the “Old Testament” course in the Lake City Community College schedule places it under “Religion.”

The courses appear to be courses in Bible content. According to the materials produced, the “textbook” for these courses is “the Bible,” with the classes covering

“Genesis thru 1st Samuel” in the “Old Testament,” and “The Gospels + Acts” in the “New Testament.” According to a letter from Columbia High School, “the version of the Bible used in our Bible History courses” is the Revised Standard Version. The Preface to the RSV used at Columbia High School states that it is “an authorized revision of the American Standard Version, published in 1901, which was a revision of the King James Version, published in 1611.” The King James Version is a Protestant version of the Bible. There is no indication that any other books are used in the courses or that students are assigned reading from non-biblical sources of history. Several films reportedly are shown in the classes, most pertaining to Bible content (*e.g.*, “Abraham,” “The Day Christ Died”).

The lesson plans produced by the school district are very sketchy, but some contain lessons devoted to particularly religious subjects. For example, during the “New Testament” semester, one lesson is devoted to “Jesus’ Baptism” and “Jesus’ Temptation.”

The exams suggest that the content of the Bible is taught as true, as well as from the sectarian perspective of Christianity. For example: “We can see in the Temptation Story of the 3rd Chapter of Genesis that we of the 20th Century haven’t changed much from the days of Adam and Eve. What stages in the Temptation and Fall of Man do we still find ourselves [in] *today?*” (Emphasis added.) Describing Genesis 3 as the “Fall of Man”

An exam question asks: 'If you had a Jewish friend who wanted to know if Jesus might be the expectant [sic] Messiah, which book [of the Gospels] would you give him?'

is a Christian interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve. Moreover, the teacher's use of the first person plural "we" is also problematic, since it assumes a particular religious belief on the part of the students. Another

exam question asks: "What was the location of Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac and why do we believe he went to this location?" (Emphasis added.) Again, the Bible is taken as true, and, again, the assumption is made that the students believe it. There even seems to be an assumption that all of the students in the course are Christians; one exam question asks: "If you had a Jewish friend who wanted to know if Jesus might be the expectant [sic] Messiah, which book [of the Gospels] would you give him?"

Unlike the course materials at most of the other schools, the materials at this school do refer to the "J, E, P, D" theory of biblical authorship, as well as mention the interpretation of Genesis as containing two different creation stories. The J, E, P, D theory of authorship is the belief of many scholars that the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures) originated from four different writings — "the Jahwehist, the

Elohist, the Priestly, and the Deuteronomic"—that is, four different authors or groups of authors.⁷

ESCAMBIA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

According to the Escambia County school district, the "Bible History: Old Testament" and "Bible History: New Testament" courses are taught at the Beggs Educational Center, which the school district describes as "a self-contained alternative center for at-risk students which uses non-traditional methods of instruction and counseling in order to stimulate learning. Students work through a competency-based curriculum at their own pace." Letter from the School District of Escambia County (August 26, 1998). According to the school district, *none* of the students who began the course in March 1998 finished it.

The Beggs School uses a curriculum for this course that, according to the Escambia County school district, the district obtained from the Santa Rosa County school district. The Escambia County school district provided a copy of

ESCAMBIA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT FACTS & FIGURES

**BIBLE HISTORY:
OLD TESTAMENT**
Total students: 78
1998-99: 26
1997-98: 7
1996-97: 45

**BIBLE HISTORY:
NEW TESTAMENT**
Total students: 12
1998-99: 1
1997-98: 0
1996-97: 11

this curriculum to us. The teacher who taught this course at Beggs in 1996-97 has since left the district, and the teacher for 1997-98 reportedly used *The Bible As/In Literature* by J. Ackerman and T. Warshaw. (According to the school district, the students did not even complete Unit I.) The school district stated that it would provide the teacher for 1998-99 with the Santa Rosa County curriculum.⁸ Because no students completed the “New Testament” course in 1997-98, and because the Escambia County school district states that it uses the Santa Rosa County curriculum for this course, the following discussion is based on that curriculum.⁹

■ The Santa Rosa County Curriculum¹⁰

This document presents a Christian interpretation of the Bible, as well as a course in which the content of the Bible is taken as historical fact.

For example, Genesis 3 is referred to as the “Fall,” a Christian interpretation of the Adam and Eve story. The serpent in that story is referred to as “Satan,” also a Christian interpretation. The biblical text is presented not just from a religious perspective, but from the sectarian perspective of Christianity: “In his original state, man was innocent and perfect. Through the temptation of the serpent (Satan), sin entered the heart of man. *Physical* and spiritual death followed as the penalty for disobedience. The promise of redemption closely follows the fall.... The key word of the book is *election*. God personally chooses individuals with whom he will work out his redemptive plan for the fallen race.” (Emphasis in original.) Interestingly, however, the curriculum claims that this is a summary of “Facts from Genesis 1-11 As Believed by the Hebrew People,” even though this is a Christian and not a Jewish interpretation.

The curriculum is clearly Christian in its focus. For example, not only does the “Old Testament” portion of the curriculum refer repeatedly to the “Old Testament” without mention of the Hebrew Scriptures, it also actually uses the oxymoronic phrase “Hebrew Old Testament.”¹¹ The curriculum also approaches the Bible from the particular sectarian perspective of Protestantism, referring to certain books of the Bible that Catholics believe to be scripture but Protestants do not as “The Apocrypha” and “Intertestament Writings.”

The curriculum treats the Bible as true. For example, it refers to “Creation” and “Flood” as “historical event[s] chronicled in the Old

The curriculum tries to convince students that the Bible is true, stating that ‘[a]rcheology continues to prove the accuracy of the Genesis account. The account of creation. The account of a family. The account of a nation.’

This curriculum appears to take the clearly religious position that 'the Jews' killed Jesus.

Testament,” and it describes Genesis 1-11, specifically including “Creation,” “Fall to the flood,” “Flood,” and “Flood to Abraham,” as the “Early history of man.” The cover page of the “Old Testament Introduction and Overview” states that “[A]ll the events of the Bible occurred in an historical context as well [as] a geographical context.” The curriculum makes an effort to convince students that the Bible is true, stating that “[a]rcheology continues to prove the accuracy of the Genesis account. The account of creation. The account of a family. The account of a nation.” (No extra-biblical sources are identified for such “proof.”) The curriculum identifies Moses as “the author of the Pentateuch” — a traditional religious belief — and does not present students with scholarly theories of authorship, such as the J, E, P, D theory. To the contrary, the curriculum further states that the “Books of Law — Pentateuch [were] [a]uthored by Moses, *a fact confirmed by Jesus* (John 5:46-47).” (Emphasis added.)

The “New Testament” portion of the curriculum states in its preface that it is a “history course designed for high school students.” While there is a vague reference to the use of “background material and primary source material (maps, charts, etc.)” (emphasis omitted), there is no evidence that students are asked to read any non-biblical sources of history. Defensively, the curriculum states that “[j]ust as a study of Mohammedanism [sic] would of necessity have to be built around the life, claims, teaching, and influence of Mohammed, so must the study of Christianity be structured around the founder using primary source material. Thus, this study will take the form of a biographical study of the life, teachings, claims, and *influence* of the person from whom Christianity takes its name. This course is built on primary source material of historic record. This course does not ask whether it is true, but simply looks at all the facets that make up Christianity.” (Emphasis in original.)

The curriculum is referring, of course, to the “New Testament,” and appears to treat it as a factual record of the life of Jesus, regardless of the disclaimer. For example, the curriculum states that: “All events in the Bible are identified with a specific place. If we understand something of the place — we will better understand the event. Jerusalem. ... — Jesus rose again from the dead here. Jesus ascended to heaven in this city. To this city, Jesus is coming back to rule as King of Kings.”

There is no evidence in the curriculum that students are presented with any viewpoints other than those in the New Testament, and no evidence that the Gospels are treated as other than biographical fact. To the

contrary, the curriculum states that “Four different biographies are written of Jesus: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. When the four are understood and combined they give a *perfect picture*.” (Emphasis added.) The non-objective, sectarian perspective of the curriculum is clearly stated: “Christianity is one of the most amazing movements in all of history ... Socially, the inspiration for *all humane legislation* has come from New Testament teaching.” (Emphasis added.)

Another problematic aspect of this curriculum is that it appears to take the clearly religious position that “the Jews” killed Jesus: “Why, then, did Pilate finally give in to the demand for the death penalty? John gives the answer to why Pilate was forced to do what he did in his Gospel. ‘From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.” ’ (John 19:12) ... It should be noted that regardless of how history characterizes Pilate with his evil ambitions — and regardless of the political pressure that Pilate, who understood Roman law completely, knew the Pharisee and Sadducee leaders could bring to bear — Pilate still tried very hard to side-step the crucifixion of Jesus. Three times Pilate said, ‘I find no fault in Him.’ ”

GULF COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Gulf County school district teaches the “Bible History” courses at Port St. Joe High School.

The course outlines identify *Pictorial Introduction to the Bible* and *Holy Bible* as the “text” for the Old and New Testament courses.¹² There is no indication that students read any other books. The list of teacher resources identifies *Pictorial Introduction to the Bible* as the “textbook of the course.” The identification in the course outlines of the Bible as “Holy Bible” suggests that the book will be approached from a religious rather than secular perspective.

The materials produced by the school district indicate that it teaches the “Bible History” courses as courses in Bible content, and that it does so from the sectarian perspective of Christianity. For example, the lesson plans call for teaching that “[p]rophecies of Isaiah are fulfilled in Matthew.” Isaiah is a book of the Hebrew Scriptures. Reading the Hebrew Bible as prophetic of, or in light

GULF COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT FACTS & FIGURES

| |
|---|
| BIBLE HISTORY: OLD TESTAMENT |
| Total students: 48 |
| 1998-99: 23 |
| 1997-98: 25 |
| 1996-97: 0 |
| BIBLE HISTORY: NEW TESTAMENT |
| Total students: 51 |
| 1998-99: 25 |
| 1997-98: 26 |
| 1996-97: 0 |

An exam asks this true or false question: 'The Old Testament prophecies were not fulfilled in the New Testament.' The answer, of course, depends on one's religious perspective.

of, the "New" Testament is a Christian reading of the Bible. Similarly, one of the exams contains the following: "The Old Testament prophecies were not fulfilled in the New Testament. This statement is: a. false. b. true." The answer to this question depends on the religious perspective that one brings to the Bible; it is not a proper question for a secular, objective, public school course. The teacher's lesson plan for the very beginning of the semester calls for the teacher to "[d]iscuss [h]ow we got *our Bible*," (emphasis added), further suggesting a sectarian approach to the course.

In addition, the course content appears to focus on topics of particular religious significance, as well as impermissibly to seek students' own religious views. For example, the lesson plans call for the teacher to "[d]iscuss Laws of Walk w/God" and to "[a]nswer questions concerning Laws of Approach to God." Regarding the creation story, the students are asked to write an essay in which they "[d]iscuss each day of the Creation as recorded in Genesis. Can you see any logic to the order? Explain. Why do you think human beings were created last?" Apart from seeking students' religious views, this question appears to assume that Genesis contains only a single creation story, with one order of creation, not two. This is an evangelical, fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible; others interpret Genesis differently, and also believe that the existence of two different creation stories suggests that different authors wrote different parts of Genesis.¹³

Some of the exams or student assignments appear to suggest that the Bible is being taught for its religious "truths." For example, a list of questions about "Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther" asks the students to "List the five great truths of Ezra." Similarly, separate assignment forms for the "Poetical Books of the Old Testament," the "Major Prophets," and "The General Epistles of the New Testament" direct the students to "Use your textbook and Bible to complete the following information," including "Great Truths or Events of Book."

The teacher often uses games (e.g., "Play Bingo w/Gospels") and seemingly juvenile puzzles requiring regurgitation of Bible content, the sort of tasks that are typical of Sunday school instruction but not of a secular, high school history course. Some of the puzzles contain religious messages, such as: "To show Pharaoh God's power, *God sent ten plagues on the nation of Egypt*," and "Peter did many important things in helping to start the Christian church *after Jesus went back to heaven*." (Emphasis added.)

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

The school district states (in an August 6, 1998 memo from Secondary Social Studies Supervisor Kathy Taylor) that a course entitled “History of the Bible” was developed to be taught at Plant City High School and Chamberlain High School, and that it was first taught during the 1998-99

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT FACTS & FIGURES

BIBLE HISTORY:

OLD TESTAMENT

Total students: 53

1998-99: 17

1997-98: 0

1996-97: 36

BIBLE HISTORY:

NEW TESTAMENT

Total students: 42

1998-99: 42

1997-98: 0

1996-97: 0

school year. The school district states that it was aware of the lawsuit against the Lee County school district, that it took steps to comply with the court’s decision in that case, and that it adopted guidelines for that purpose, including: “The Bible will not be referred to as a factual document, only as an artifact subject to interpretation (like other historical documents).” The school district also states that it purchased and had the teachers review the textbook that Lee County agreed to use in settlement of the lawsuit (*An Introduction to the Bible*, by Beasley, et al.), but that the teachers “are

of the opinion that the text is excellent, but above the average high school student’s interest level.” (It does appear, however, that the school board approved this book for use in the course, along with *Bible Then and Now*. However, there is no indication in the written instructional materials produced by the school district to what extent the students are assigned reading from either book.)

Since course materials were produced from each school, the discussion below is separated accordingly.

■ Plant City High School

The teacher of the course at Plant City High School describes the course as “a one semester (elective) course that covers the history of the Bible. That means we will cover *some of the major historical events described in the Bible* and the history of the creation of the book itself.” (Emphasis added.) The italicized portion of this statement not only reveals the ambiguity in the course title itself, but seems to contravene the school district’s guideline that the Bible will not be “referred to as a factual document.” The guideline is further contravened by course materials that include a chapter entitled “Chronology of Bible History” from

an unidentified book that calls the Bible “*the most reliable source for his - tory we have.*” (Emphasis added.) The teacher’s outline of topics for the course uses the term “Old Testament.”

The course materials are a combination of apparently objective and secular materials (such as information about archeology),¹⁴ plus religious materials that are inappropriate for use in a public school. For example, some of the materials are clearly written from a Christian perspective that refer to “[o]ur English Bible” and describe the Bible as being divided into “two great parts, called the Old Testament and the New Testament.”

Even more problematic, other course materials (apparently published by Gospel Light Publications) entitled “When Events Happened” approach the Bible as a history text, with a Christian perspective, and summarize “Main Events.” One such summary states: “The first eleven

Course materials state:
‘Those who believe in
God and the sending
of His only Son to die
on the cross will
be saved.’

chapters of Genesis tell about the beginning of the world, people, nations and languages. These chapters set the stage for what God plans to do through one nation — the nation of Israel. You will read about that part of God’s plan in Chapter 12.” “[Genesis] Chapters 12-38: God began a great nation — the nation of Israel. God’s plan was that through this nation ALL people on earth would be blessed. God gave His people a land. *It was in this land and through this people that God would keep His promise — hundreds of years later — to send a Saviour.*” (Emphasis added.) These materials identify

periods of “Bible History” (such as “Creation to Call of Abraham”) and list “events” that occurred during those periods (such as “Creation,” “Fall and Promise,” “Flood”). Apart from the use of the Bible as a history text, referring to the story of Adam and Eve as the “Fall” is a Christian interpretation of Genesis 3.

These same materials also interpret Hebrew Scripture in light of the “New Testament” and as predictive of the coming of Jesus, which is a purely Christian interpretation of the Bible. For example, referring to Numbers, which is a book not only of the “Old Testament” but also of the Hebrew Bible, the materials state: “Numbers and the Coming of the Saviour: The bronze serpent (Numbers 21:1-9) *gives us a picture of Jesus.* The serpent high on the pole before the people makes us think of how Jesus on the cross was made to bear our sins. Those who believed God’s promise to heal them looked at the bronze serpent and were saved. *Those who believe in God and the sending of His only Son to die on the cross will be saved.*” (Emphasis added.)¹⁵

The course materials include a list of “Internet Archeology Sites,” including one with the notation (apparently from the teacher): “great questions/answers” (the only site on this list so described). The site is published by “Christianity Explained” and seeks to use archeology to prove the truth of the Bible.

It is not possible to tell whether all of the instructional materials produced to us are actually shared with the students. If, however, the course is taught in accordance with the materials discussed above, there are significant constitutional problems.

■ Chamberlain High School

The teacher of the course at this high school also notes in her introductory materials that “Bible history is about two separate, but related things,” but does not identify what they are. From a “true/false” test, however, it appears that she considers them to be: “Bible history covers the history that happened during Bible times,” and “Bible history covers the history of how we got the Bible.” To the extent the former statement suggests that the Bible is an historical record and that the matters described therein occurred, it appears to contravene the school district’s guideline that the Bible will not be “referred to as a factual document.”

It is worth noting that some of the materials used in this school (including the teacher’s outline) refer not just to the “Old Testament” but also to the “Hebrew Bible,” an approach not found in most of the other school districts. In addition, the course materials indicate that students are learning about versions of the Bible other than the Protestant version. For example, one question on a “reading comprehension/follow-up” sheet asks: “What are the differences between the Catholic and Protestant Old Testament?” Other questions ask for the definition of “Tanach” and “Torah.” The Resurrection appears to be approached not as fact but as a matter of religious belief: “28 A.D. Jesus is crucified. Christians believe in 3 days He arose from the dead.”

On the other hand, some of the course materials appear to approach the content of the “Old Testament” as history. For example, one “Old Testament Test” asks students to identify the man who “actually led the Jewish people *into* the Promised Land” (emphasis in original) and the man who “heard God’s voice in a burning bush.” Other materials contain Sunday-school type tasks, such as asking students to put the names of

One ‘Old Testament Test’ appears to treat the Bible as history, asking students to identify the man who ‘actually led the Jewish people into the Promised Land’ and the man who ‘heard God’s voice in a burning bush.’

the 27 books of the New Testament in correct order, or to identify the different Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount.

The course materials identify as “textbooks” *The Christian Bible and An Introduction to the Bible* by Beasley, *et al.*, and describe *The Pageant of World History* as “World Hist. Text.”

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

According to the school district, a “Bible History” course was taught during 1998-99 only at the Indian River Charter High School, which began

operation that academic year.¹⁶ The charter school was described to us as having been created primarily to retrieve dropouts and take in students not doing well in other schools. The school district identified the Sebastian River High School as the regular high school where the courses had been taught prior to 1998-99.¹⁷

Since the school district produced materials pertaining to the course as it was taught during the school years 1996-97 and 1997-98 at the regular high school, as well as materials pertaining to the teaching of the course at

the new charter school, the discussion below is separated accordingly.

■ School years 1996-97 and 1997-98

The instructional materials, particularly from the 1996-97 school year, portray a course taught from the sectarian perspective of Christianity, with a heavy emphasis on religious lessons to be learned from the Bible. The exams refer to the course as “Bible Studies”; there is no pretense that this is a “history” course. Students were permitted to “bring [their] own Bibles or ... use the classroom set provided by First Church of God, 16th Street, Vero Beach.”

In particular, the course materials contain repeated references to reading or interpreting the “Old Testament” in light of, or as predictive of, the “New,” which is a Christian interpretation of the Bible. For example, one of the lesson plan “objectives” is “[t]o look at the Old Testament as a foreshadowing of things to come in the [N]ew.” Similarly, one of the exam questions concerning the Book of Matthew asks: “Where is a prophecy in the Old [T]estament about the birth of Jesus?” Another exam question asks: “Give one *prophecy* in the Old Testament about the Messiah that

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| INDIAN RIVER COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT FACTS & FIGURES | BIBLE HISTORY: |
| | OLD TESTAMENT |
| | Total students: 28 |
| | 1998-99: 4 |
| | 1997-98: 24 |
| | 1996-97: 0 |
| | BIBLE HISTORY: |
| | NEW TESTAMENT |
| | Total students: 53 |
| | 1998-99: 0 |
| | 1997-98: 21 |
| | 1996-97: 32 |

Jesus fulfilled.” (Emphasis in original.) Apart from the non-objective, Christian perspective of the course, questions such as these present obvious and impermissible obstacles for students who do not share that religious perspective.

The course materials devote a great deal of attention to the study of religious and life lessons to be drawn from the Bible. For example, under the topic of “Parables” is the lesson: “Does Jesus still call his disciples today? How does he teach them? There will be challenging group and individual work *to figure out what the parables are telling us today.*” (Emphasis added.) Another lesson calls for students to “devise an instrument to judge the amount of love they have.” An exam question asks students to state “Which two characteristics of love are most important to you?” Another asks them to explain “Why do you think God says to love your enemies?” These lessons and questions are suitable for a Sunday school, not for a secular public school course. Students were required to memorize the books of the New Testament, and to “learn drill and practice skills in memorizing the books of the Bible,” also typical of Sunday school lessons. The teacher also appears to consider everyone who is not a Christian as belonging to a single religious group; one exam contains these questions: “In North America, the largest religious group is the _____. The second largest group in North America is the Non-Christians. (I answered this one for you).”

One teacher’s exam contains these questions: ‘In North America, the largest religious group is the _____. The second largest group in North America is the Non-Christians. (I answered this one for you).’

It appears that different materials were used during 1997-98. The syllabus for the “Old Testament” semester describes the course methodology as “designed around site visits to archeological sites throughout Israel using video excerpts.” It further claims that “[q]uestions of theology and doctrine are referred back to the student.” Nonetheless, it appears that one week of lessons was devoted to a study of the film “Who is God?” with this stated objective: “Students will learn about the confrontation between the prophet, Elijah, and priests of Baal at Mt. Carmel *to determine, ‘Who is God?’*” (Emphasis added.) The syllabus states that the “New International Bible, as needed, as well as other translations,” would be provided in class, and identifies *Perspectives on the Past: World History* as a “text reference.” The syllabus also identifies “[v]ideo excerpts from: *That the World May Know*, Focus on the Family.”¹⁸

The syllabus included a video by Focus on the Family, a Religious Right organization whose mission is: 'To cooperate with the Holy Spirit in disseminating the Gospel of Jesus Christ to as many people as possible...'

The course appears to cover the content of the "Old Testament," particularly by having the students watch films. Students apparently watched the films and then answered questions about them. For example, after viewing a film about Jericho, students were asked, among other things, "What did God tell the Hebrews to do or not do to the city?"

The syllabus and approach of the "New Testament" semester are similar. The course appears to cover the content of the New Testament, principally through the use of films, although there is a detour to the 11th-13th Centuries for a week of lessons about the Crusades, which the students were taught were "misguided, not what Jesus preached, love." One of the films shown during this semester was "Arad: God With Us." According to the teacher, one of the learning objectives for watching this film was "[s]tudents will learn ... the role of the priests and then the blood sacrifice of Jesus' death on the cross." Questions asked of students after this film included "What time did Jesus die on the cross[?]" and "What was [the] purpose of the death of Jesus[?]" The students were shown the film "No Greater Love" in order to "learn about the saying [sic] of Jesus, the Beatitudes," and then asked the "purpose" of the Beatitudes.

■ 1998-99

The charter school taught only the "Old Testament" course during 1998-99. Although the teacher has an introductory course questionnaire that claims the course will be "non-sectarian," the course materials refer only to the "Old Testament (Holy Scriptures)"; no mention is made of the Hebrew Scriptures. Indeed, the teacher's materials state that she will bring to class "[o]ther books," including "non-Christian religious texts," indicating her view of the Bible as a "Christian religious text." The description of the "Old Testament" as "Holy Scriptures" also suggests a religious rather than secular approach to the Bible. Moreover, the syllabus suggests that the course is a Bible content course in which the Bible is treated as true. For example, the materials state that "The Pentateuch was written as biography, autobiography, and narrative history. In these books God talked directly with man, giving His pronouncements and laws." The teacher's materials state that, in terms of "text books," the student "can use the Bible of his or her choice." She claims that she will bring to class other books, "rang[ing] from poetry, art books,

literature, and non-Christian religious texts.” No mention is made of non-biblical sources of history.

The course also appears to emphasize religious or life lessons to be learned from the Bible. For example, half the student’s grade is based on three writing assignments, one of which is to “Paraphrase the best advice chapter from Proverbs. Discuss how the advice would shape a person’s life if followed.” The second writing assignment requires each student to write a “500 word minimum character essay on [his/her] favorite Old Testament character. Possible topics to cover: Why does he/she interest you? What does their story adds [sic] *to the reader’s knowledge of God and humanity?* What is the historical and/or prophetic significance of the character? *What is the lesson the character learns or teaches the reader?*” (Emphasis added.)

At the start of the course, the teacher asked the students to fill out a questionnaire, without giving their names, so that she could “get an idea of the class composition in order to design topics which may be of interest to the class.” Among the five questions was one calling for the students’ “religious background or faith,” and another asking “[d]o you have a Bible that you can bring to class?” A truly objective, secular course would not be designed around the students’ religious faiths, nor, in such a course, would the students be asked to bring Bibles from home.

After the school year ended, the school district provided us with a letter from the director of the charter school containing a statement from the teacher (who is no longer employed by the charter school) claiming that the class was “an inquiry class using a variety of sources from Christian, Buddhist, Judaic, Islamic and secular books ... The premise for the class was open inquiry with no doctrinal agenda. Many of the enrolled students dropped the class because it was not a Sunday school format.” In her letter, however, the school director stated “[t]here were no books used by the students except the Bible and the books they chose to use for their written assignments.” Based on her observations of the class, the director said, “it was primarily a discussion class. Students were assigned to read various books of the Bible and then those books were discussed in class. It was very much a discussion of the historical and the literary significance of the books.” According to the teacher, “[o]nly two students finished the course as outlined in the syllabus.”

Half the student’s grade is based on three writing assignments, one of which is to ‘Paraphrase the best advice chapter from Proverbs. Discuss how the advice would shape a person’s life if followed.’

LEVY COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

The school district teaches the “Bible History” courses at Williston High School.

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| LEVY COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT FACTS & FIGURES | BIBLE HISTORY: |
| | OLD TESTAMENT |
| | Total students: 24 |
| | 1998-99: 24 |
| | 1997-98: 0 |
| | 1996-97: 0 |
| | BIBLE HISTORY: |
| | NEW TESTAMENT |
| | Total students: 25 |
| | 1998-99: 25 |
| | 1997-98: 0 |
| | 1996-97: 0 |

According to the materials produced, the only “textbook” for the “Old Testament History” course is the Bible, with a directive that “[s]tudents will bring one from home.” This of course assumes that each student has a Bible. Moreover, Williston High School informed us that for both the “Old and New Testament History classes ... students may use biblical translations of their choice *as long [as] it is from an original King James Translation.*” Memorandum from Williston High School to People For the American Way Foundation, Sept. 17, 1999 (emphasis added).

The King James version of the Bible is a Protestant Bible; the school district’s requirement appears to prohibit the use of Bibles recognized by other religions, such as the Catholic Bible, which contains 73 books as compared with the 66 books of the King James Version. Moreover, the prohibition on the use of other versions indicates that the courses are not approached academically or objectively but from a single sectarian perspective. Also, given the directive that the students bring a Bible “from home,” it appears that the school district assumes that everyone taking the course not only has a Bible at home, but is Protestant.

The sole stated objective of the “Old Testament” course is: “Students will understand *basic historical facts of the Old Testament.*” (Emphasis added.) Each of the eighteen weeks of the course is devoted to a study of specific books of the “Old Testament.” Given these materials, it appears that the Bible is impermissibly used as a history textbook in this course, and from a Christian perspective. The lesson plans reveal very little in the way of student assignments, although the lessons for Leviticus 18 and Leviticus 19 state: “list 15 sexual sins” and “list 15 misc. sins,” respectively.

The exams and written lessons confirm that the classes are courses in Bible content from a Christian perspective. For example, the story of Adam and Eve is described as the “Fall of Man,” a Christian interpretation of Genesis 3. The Ten Commandments, which are arranged differently by Christians and Jews, are presented here in the Christian version. The Protestant perspective of the courses, evidenced by the required use of

Bibles based on the King James Translation, is underscored by such exam questions as: “How many books are there in the Bible? a. 44, b. 666, c. 84, d. 66.” (As noted above, the Protestant Bible contains 66 books, the Catholic Bible seven more.)

The religious rather than objective perspective of the classes is evident also in such exam questions as: “Who wrote the Pentateuch? A. Jacob. B. Moses. C. Joshua. D. Abraham.” Some religious faiths believe as a matter of tradition that Moses was the author of the first five books of the Bible. However, in an objective and secular course, students would be taught that the author or authors of these books are unknown. They would learn about scholarly theories of authorship, such as the J, E, P, D theory. While they could also be taught that some religious faiths believe Moses wrote these books, they would not, in an objective and secular course, be asked an exam question in this form.¹⁹

The Bible also appears to be taught as an historical record, with biblical stories referred to as “events.” One exam on Genesis, for example, requires students to “[n]umber the following events in the order that they occurred,” and then lists, among other things, “God created woman. God created the Earth. Man sinned. God created man. Cain killed Abel.” A “Bible History: Matthew Test” contains such questions as: “When the angel told Joseph that Mary, his espoused wife, was going to have a baby, he was: a. extremely happy, b. very concerned for her and her reputation, c. concerned for his own reputation, d. probably both b. and c.”

The Bible is also used as a basis for religious lessons and faith formation. For example, a lesson on Rebekah states: “Lessons From Her Life: 1. God’s Word must guide our actions. 2. God even makes use of our mistakes in his plan. 3. Parental favoritism hurts a family.” A commentary concerning “Achan’s Sin” (part of the “study guide” for Joshua) states: “God is not content with our doing what is right some of the time. He wants us to do what is right all the time. We are under his orders to eliminate any thoughts, practices, or possessions that hinder our devotion to him.” A lesson concerning I Samuel states: “in the midst of reading all the history and adventure, determine to run your race as God’s person from start to finish.”

Similarly, during the “New Testament” semester, students are given a list of “Vices and Virtues” along with the citation to various biblical

**In connection with
I Corinthians,
Chapter 2, the
teacher asks:
‘Why is it hard for
a non-Christian
to understand
things about God?’**

verses and directed to identify the vice or virtue “mentioned” in those “scriptures.” (“Vices” include: “sexual immorality, impurity, lust, ... wild living, cheating, adultery, [and] homosexuality....” “Virtues” include: “love, joy, peace, ... [and] faithfulness....”) A lesson entitled “New Testament Introduction” contains this fill-in-the-blank statement: “No other text book answers so many _____ about how to live life successfully.” New Testament exams frequently use the first person plural in reference to lessons to be drawn from the Bible, *e.g.* , “What reason does Jesus give for why we should not judge others?” “What attitude did Jesus say we should have instead of wanting revenge?” Apart from using the New Testament as a foundation for Christian faith formation and life lessons, such language assumes that the teacher and all of the students are Christians. That assumption is also evident in a New Testament lesson on John 8, which says: “Who, according to Jesus, is the father of the Jews? The devil.” And the teacher asks the following in connection with I Corinthians, Chapter 2: “Why is it hard for a non-Christian to understand things about God?”

Sunday-school type tasks are also used in the course. For example, one lesson requires students to give the correct order of the 27 books of the New Testament. Exams ask students to identify, by specific biblical book, the source of specified quotes. And crossword puzzles with such titles as “The Genealogy of Jesus” are used to drill students in Bible content.

MADISON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

The “Bible History” courses are taught in this school district at Madison County High School. According to the principal, the teacher who taught the courses in 1998-99 has retired, but the school district was able to produce the final exams for each course. The principal informed us that the students used the King James Bible as the “textbook” for the courses; there may have been other books used on a supplemental basis, but she was not sure. (Also according to the principal, the teacher who is teaching the courses this year, 1999-2000, has never taught them before.)

The final exams for the courses plainly reveal that they are not objective, secular courses but rather courses in Christian faith

MADISON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT FACTS & FIGURES

| |
|---|
| BIBLE HISTORY: OLD TESTAMENT |
| Total students: 68 |
| 1998-99: 68 |
| 1997-98: 0 |
| 1996-97: 0 |
| BIBLE HISTORY: NEW TESTAMENT |
| Total students: 69 |
| 1998-99: 69 |
| 1997-98: 0 |
| 1996-97: 0 |

formation and use of the Bible for religious lessons. For example, two thirds of the “New Testament Final Exam” consisted of the following:

“I. Using Scripture reference to support your thoughts, write a short essay about each of the following topics:

A. God’s Plan For The Family

B. Living A Victorious Life In The World Which Is So Dark

C. God’s Directions For Righteous Living

* * *

III. Compose an explanation of who Jesus is for someone who has never heard of Him. (Use your reference sheets and Scripture references)”

The “Semester Exam” for the “Old Testament” was a take-home exam in which the students were required to select one of 24 specified persons, events and topics or “discuss with [the teacher] another area of particular interest” to the student and then “write a paper in which a view of the person, event or topic selected is presented.” Among the 24 “persons, events and topics” suggested by the teacher were several biblical figures (including Moses, Abraham and Isaac), as well as “Sin,” “The Giving of The 10 Commandments,” “God’s Revelation of Himself to His People,” “Family Relationships According to God,” “Forgiveness,” “Passover,” “10 Plagues,” “Sodom and Gomorrah,” and “The Cross Present From the Garden.”

The school district also produced the teacher’s lesson plans, which further confirm that the courses are taught from the sectarian perspective of Christianity. For example, one lesson concerning Genesis refers to “Creation, Fall, Flood.” Describing the story of Adam and Eve as “the Fall” is a Christian interpretation of Genesis 3. Another lesson is entitled: “O.T. Prophecy Concerning the Messiah. Problem with recognizing Jesus! Messianic Scriptures in O.T.” Judaism does not recognize a “New” Testament. Interpreting the Hebrew Bible/“Old Testament” as predictive of, or in light of, the New Testament is a Christian interpretation. A lesson on the “Life of Jesus” is broken down into: “Birth Event & Childhood. Early Ministry; Choosing the Twelve. Death & Resurrection Event,” apparently treating the New Testament as historical fact.

The final exam asks students to write an essay using Scripture to describe ‘God’s Plan For The Family’ and ‘God’s Directions For Righteous Living.’

MARION COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Overall, the Marion County school district student enrollments in the two “Bible History” courses — 173 in the “Old Testament” course and 107 in the “New Testament” course during the past three years — are among the highest in the state.

MARION COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT FACTS & FIGURES

| |
|---|
| BIBLE HISTORY: OLD TESTAMENT |
| Total students: 173 |
| 1998-99: 22 |
| 1997-98: 46 |
| 1996-97: 105 |
| BIBLE HISTORY: NEW TESTAMENT |
| Total students: 107 |
| 1998-99: 0 |
| 1997-98: 22 |
| 1996-97: 85 |

According to the school district, there are six high schools in Marion County, but only two offer the “Bible History” courses, Vanguard High School and Lake Weir High School. The school district reported that Vanguard High School taught the “Bible History” courses during 1996-97 and 1997-98, and also taught them during 1998-99 “to one class of 23 students.” Lake Weir High School taught the “Bible History” courses in 1996-97

and 1997-98, but did not teach them during 1998-99. (The courses are, however, listed in the school’s curriculum guide for that year, with a statement that the classes would only be taught if enough students were enrolled.) The school district informed us that the “Bible History” courses are not being taught this year, 1999-2000, in any of its high schools. Because different materials were produced for each school, the discussion below is separated accordingly.

■ Vanguard High School

This school’s curriculum guide states that “Students are expected to supply their own Bible.” This may impermissibly assume a certain religiosity on the part of the students.

Among the materials produced is a typewritten list entitled “Books used in Bible History.” The list consists of “The Bible” and six Bible-related books: *Bible History Old Testament*, by A. Edersheim, Hendrickson Publishers;²⁰ *An Introduction to the Bible: A Journey Into Three Worlds*, by C. Hauer and W. Young, Prentice-Hall; *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*, by R. Gower, Moody Press;²¹ *The New Testament — An Introduction to its Literature and History*, by J. Gresham Machen, published by The Banner of Truth Trust;²² *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, by E. Young, William Eerdmans Publishing Co.,²³ and *Atlas of the Bible Lands*, by H. Frank, Hammond Inc.

A handwritten addition to the book list is *An Introduction to the Bible*, by Beasley. In a cover letter from the teacher, the teacher states that he has “attempted to teach the class in the same manner that I teach World History. I also realize that I am not a lawyer and am not aware of all the legal implications involved. Because of this, however, I have made substantial changes in the course materials each time I am advised of potential problems with the course. I have recently included an additional textbook entitled ‘An Introduction to the Bible,’ authored by Beasley and four others.” Interestingly, this is the college-level textbook that helped form the basis of the settlement of the lawsuit challenging the “Bible History” curricula adopted by the Lee County School District. (See Part One above, “Background: Lee County School District, Florida.”) In settlement of that case, the Lee County school board agreed to drop the unconstitutional, sectarian curricula and adopt the Beasley book and an academic curriculum based on it, with required reading assignments from that book. Nothing in the written materials produced by the Marion County School District for the “Bible History” courses at Vanguard High School indicates that students have been assigned reading from the Beasley book (or of any book but the Bible), at least as of the October 1998 date on which those documents were produced.

The teacher’s statement that he teaches the class “in the same manner that I teach World History” is problematic. In a high school world history class, students learn about what has occurred in the past. However, using the Bible as a history textbook in a public school is impermissible. Course materials do appear to present the Bible as a record of history. For example, in a list of “reading questions” for Acts, Chapter 7, the students are told: “Throughout the *history* of the people of Israel they had demonstrated a tendency not to follow God’s leading. Stephen gives a quick review of the main characters of Israel’s *history*. Name the six people he refers to and make a short summary of each story. v. 1-50.” (Emphasis added.)

The instructional materials depict a course in Bible content taught from a Christian perspective. For example, the course materials refer to Genesis 1-3 as “Creation and Fall.” The “Fall” is a purely Christian interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve. And an exam called the “Jewish Background of Christianity” refers to the “Hebrew Old Testament.” There is, of course, no such book, since Judaism does not recognize an “Old Testament.” The use of such terminology reflects a lack of objectivity

One exam question asks: ‘I Corinthians ... Why is it hard for a non-Christian to understand things about God?’

The teacher uses Sunday school-style exercises, such as exam questions requiring students to find specified Bible verses and 'copy them in full' from their Bibles.

about the course and underscores the Christian perspective from which it is taught. And in one of the written assignments, the teacher sends a clear message to the students that there is only one Bible, the Christian Bible: "The apostle Paul wrote many letters to various people and churches to encourage them to live lives consistent with the principles of scripture (the Old Testament) and those letters eventually became *part of the Bible which we now have*." (Emphasis added.)

This language also appears to assume that the all of the students are Christian, as do such exam questions as:

"I Corinthians ... Why is it hard for a non-Christian to understand things about God?" Some of the lessons focus on Christian faith formation. For example, a "Study Sheet" on Matthew asks such questions as: "When it came to giving to the poor, praying and fasting, what phrase did Jesus use in each case *to tell how we should do it?*" (Emphasis added.) "What reason does Jesus give for why *we should not judge others?*" (Emphasis added.) And an exam on "Roman History" during the New Testament semester ends with this statement (lined through in the copy produced by the school district): "IT WAS NO ACCIDENT CHRISTIANITY STARTED AT THIS TIME IN HISTORY."

The course also appears to emphasize religious and life lessons, particularly lessons to be drawn from the Bible, again an unconstitutional use of the Bible in a public school. For example, one lesson is called "Seven Major Principles of Life," identified as "authority, design, responsibility, suffering, ownership, freedom, and identification." Another is "What Happens to Complainers? Studies in the book of Numbers." After reading the story of Rehoboam, students are asked "Why do you think he accepted the advice he did? What insight does this give you about advice from your contemporaries? What does the story teach you about the principles of Design and Authority? It is important not only that you start out well but that you finish well. Using the lives of Saul, David, and Solomon, Rehoboam and Jeroboam, can you explain *the truth of this statement?*" (Emphasis added.)

Other exams and lessons also appear to have the students approach the Bible from a religious perspective. For example, students are asked such questions as "I Corinthians ... Chapter 7. When a person says, 'I just can't help myself. The temptation to sin is too great.' What verse in this chapter could you give him that would help him to see it is not true?"

“What is the image of God in man? (It makes us different from the other animals.)” “In I Kings 12:23-24, why do you think the God of Israel said this dividing of the kingdom of Israel was from Him? Why would this happen at this time in history?”

The teacher also makes use of what are generally considered to be Sunday school exercises to drill Bible content into the students. For example, some exams require students to find specified Bible verses and “copy them in full” from their Bibles. Students are also given the names of “the [27] books of the New Testament” and asked to put them in order. And the “Final Evaluation” project requires each student to create a “lap pack” of 25 “booklets,” each apparently with a title, such as “Paul’s Journeys,” “Noah’s Ordeal,” “Trouble in the Church.” The booklets are to include illustrations using such materials as stickers, drawings, and stamps.

■ Lake Weir High School

According to the school district, the teacher who taught this course in 1996-97 has left the district, and his instructional materials could not be located. The discussion below pertains to the materials apparently supplied by the successor teacher, and hence the course as taught in 1997-98.

A handwritten list of books was produced with the “Old Testament” materials; the list includes several translations of the Bible (including the King James Bible and the Living Bible) as well as Bible-related books (such as the *Readers Digest Atlas of the Bible and Who’s Who in the Bible*), and a book called *Heath’s World History*.²⁴

The lessons and exams appear to describe a Bible content course in which students are required to learn biblical content, without critical analysis. For the most part, students are asked to refer to their biblical materials and answer questions based on them. For example, “According to *Who’s Who in the Bible* ... Explain how Abraham bargained with God. ... What signs of power did God give Moses? ... How many plagues did God release on Egypt?” “According to Mark 3:21, how did Jesus’ own family regard him?” “Where did Jesus make all his appearances after Resurrection according to Luke?”

Thus, the teacher appears to teach the Bible content essentially by prefacing it with a qualification: “according to the Bible,” or “the Bible says.” As noted above in Part One, however, such qualifications do not render a history course based on the Bible constitutional. Indeed, a claim

The lessons and exams appear to describe a Bible content course in which students are required to learn biblical content, without critical analysis.

that they do was specifically rejected by the court in *Herdahl v. Pontotoc County School District*, 933 F. Supp. 582 (N.D. Miss. 1996). As the court explained, “the daily teaching of the content of a book of religious proclamation does not become secular instruction merely by informing students that the content is only what the Bible says; indeed, for many students, that may well heighten the religious effect of the course.” *Herdahl*, 933 F. Supp. at 596-97.

The teacher does appear to present and test the students on some instruction concerning the history *of the Bible*, including instruction concerning different translations and versions. The teacher also appears to mention the J, E, P, D theory. In addition, the “New Testament” semester appears to contain instruction in certain aspects of what the teacher refers to as Church History, apparently based on *Heath’s World History*, as well as some instruction concerning works of art depicting biblical stories and figures (*e.g.*, the Last Supper). These all appear to be part of an effort to teach the courses objectively, although the materials produced from this high school are themselves not sufficient to determine definitively whether there were constitutional problems in the courses as they were taught at this school.

OKALOOSA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

According to the school district, the “Bible History” courses are taught at Niceville High School.

The course description used in this school district candidly states that “Bible is a survey course with special emphasis on the *historical aspects of the Bible*. First semester is devoted to a study of the Old Testament and the second semester is devoted to the New Testament.” (Emphasis added.) The outlines for the two semesters make clear that the Bible is the only book the students are required to read. Unlike most secular high school history courses, the students in the “Old Testament” semester are not tested. Rather, their grades are earned by “participation in class and by completion of a journal which can consist of either a summary of course content or personal responses and questions about discussions.” In the “New

OKALOOSA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT FACTS & FIGURES

| |
|---|
| BIBLE HISTORY: OLD TESTAMENT |
| Total students: 119 |
| 1998-99: 39 |
| 1997-98: 53 |
| 1996-97: 27 |
| BIBLE HISTORY: NEW TESTAMENT |
| Total students: 162 |
| 1998-99: 60 |
| 1997-98: 68 |
| 1996-97: 34 |

Testament” semester, students are tested but are also required to keep a notebook “to be graded.”

Very few materials were produced dealing with the “Old Testament” semester apart from a brief summary of the topics covered during each of the seventeen weeks of the course. The summary is consistent with the course description indicating that the Bible is used to teach history. For example: “Week Five — The problem of oppression and exploitation. How the Exodus experiences shaped the life and faith of the Hebrew people. Reading from Exodus.” “Week Fourteen — The period after the Babylonian exile. The Hebrew community attempts to live a righteous life, believing that God will reward right living and punish disobedience. Readings from Psalms, Proverbs, Ezra and Nehemiah.” To the teacher’s credit, and in contrast to most of the other school districts in which this course is taught, the lesson that covers Genesis, at least in writing here, presents the students with the possibility that the Bible is not literally true: “Week Two — The problem of creation. Various interpretations of Genesis are presented ranging from ‘absolute truth’ to ‘cultural story.’ Other cultural views of creation are also presented. Reading is in Genesis.”

During the “New Testament” semester, a workbook entitled *90 Days Through the New Testament* is used. This book assigns readings from the New Testament for each of the 90 days, followed by “read and answer” questions for each Bible reading. The “read and answer” questions make clear that the book is intended for Christian faith formation, and that it is not an academic, objective approach to the study of the New Testament. For example, one question during the study of Colossians asks “What is Jesus Christ’s relationship to God, to creation, *and to you?*” (Emphasis added.) Another question asks “What does Jesus’ claim in verse [John 11:]25 mean to you?” (John 11:25: “Jesus said unto her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.’”) John 11:26 states: “And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” This reading in John is followed by: “Answer the question He asks in verse 26.” Further readings in John are followed by the question “How does God enable us to love and how did He show us His love?” And one of the questions asked during the study of 2 Corinthians is: “Why should believers remain separated from nonbelievers?”

**The ‘New Testament’
workbook asks,
‘What is Jesus
Christ’s relationship
to God, to
Creation, and to
you?’ and ‘Why
should believers
remain separated
from nonbelievers?’**

Exam questions during the “New Testament” semester likewise reveal a course in which the Bible is read for its religious messages and teachings. For example, students are asked “How does Jesus fulfill the covenants made to David and Abraham?” “How is Jesus the ultimate Passover lamb? a. He is perfect. b. He was a sacrifice. c. His blood atones for all. d. All of the above.” (The document produced to us shows “d” as the correct answer.) Students are also asked “Do you think Satan took Jesus literally and physically to the temple and the mountain? Why or why not?”

POLK COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

According to the school district, Mulberry High School is the only school at which both “Bible History” courses have been taught during each of the last three academic years. The “Old Testament” course was taught at Bartow High School during the past two years. Lake Gibson High School taught both the “Old Testament” and “New Testament” courses through 1996-97 and has offered them since then, but not enough students have enrolled. The school reports that it “plan[s] to continue to offer the course.” Kathleen High School taught both courses in 1996-97 but has not taught them since, and Haines City High School planned to teach both courses in 1998-99.²⁵ The school district produced materials only from Mulberry and Bartow High Schools. The discussion below is divided accordingly.

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| POLK COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT FACTS & FIGURES | BIBLE HISTORY: |
| | OLD TESTAMENT |
| | Total students: 128 |
| | 1998-99: 45 |
| | 1997-98: 57 |
| | 1996-97: 26 |
| | BIBLE HISTORY: |
| | NEW TESTAMENT |
| | Total students: 112 |
| | 1998-99: 28 |
| | 1997-98: 49 |
| | 1996-97: 35 |

■ ■ Mulberry High School

According to a handwritten note, the “text” for the “Bible History: Old Testament” course is *The Old Testament Speaks*, by Samuel Schultz, with “student reference to the Bible of their choice.”²⁶ The course materials refer to “the Hebrew Old Testament.” Hebrew Scripture does not recognize an “Old” or “New” Testament. The use of such oxymoronic terminology suggests a lack of objectivity of the course and indicates that the course is approached from a Christian perspective, although it should be noted that there is also a reference in the materials to the “Hebrew Bible.”

The written materials present a course in which the Bible is used as a history text, and one with a religious message. They also convey religious value judgments inappropriate for a public school class. For example: “What is especially tragic in the story of the Northern Kingdom is the nation’s rejection of their religious heritage and their refusal to repent ... *No wonder God destroyed this nation.*” (Emphasis added.) “[O]ne discovers many insights into God’s judgment and mercy in the book of Jonah, God’s call for justice and faithfulness in the book of Amos, and God’s covenant love in the book of Hosea. These prophecies are still very relevant in a world *that needs to come to God in repentance.*” (Emphasis added.) “The history of ancient Israel reads like a modern day novel, except that there is a much stronger moral to the biblical story — it is important to obey God!” “Marvelous insights can be gained by carefully reading these prophets [the ‘Minor Prophets’]. Nahum teaches *us* that judgment does come to those who oppress and harm God’s people. . . Habakkuk teaches *us* that God is not afraid of the honest prayer, and that new insights can come through one’s struggles over the will of God.” (Emphasis added.)

One exam asks the students to engage in the Sunday school exercise of listing the Ten Commandments in order. They are also asked to identify “the Author of Exodus.” (It is not stated what answer is expected here, or what grade would be given to a student who answered “unknown.”)

The “New Testament” semester appears to use a book entitled *New Testament Survey*, by Merrill C. Tenney, published by Wm. B. Eerdmans.²⁷ Written materials regarding the lessons identify learning objectives and set out discussion material. The first part of the course includes a study of Judaism during the 1st Century, apparently because, according to the course materials, “some ‘understanding of Judaism is indispensable to the student of the New Testament, for Christianity is the child of Judaism.’ ” The remainder of the course is a study of the content of the New Testament. The course first proceeds to a study of the Gospels, which the written materials acknowledge were written “many years after the events they describe ...” The textbook therefore makes the chronological distinction between when the Gospels were written and the period dealing with “the actual events of the life of Jesus.” The course includes a lesson unit on “The Life of Christ,” one learning objective of which is for the students to

As in other school districts, the teacher apparently assumes that the students are all Christians. For example, one exam question asks: ‘How do we believe Peter died?’

Genesis 3 is referred to as the 'Fall of Man,' a purely Christian interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve.

“demonstrate a knowledge of the purpose and content of Jesus’ teaching.” One of the study questions asks: “What was the greatest single topic that Jesus discussed?” (The question calls for a religious value judgment; the materials identify “kingdom” as the answer the teacher is seeking.)

A number of the New Testament units include a discussion of Christian faith lessons to be drawn from the biblical material. For example, a lesson unit on Acts concludes: “Paul shows then that a person must realize his sinfulness before God and that salvation can never be earned. It rests solely on the death of Christ on the cross.” Another lesson states: “Paul and James both teach that the proper response to God’s grace is obedience.” Yet another states that I Peter 2:21 “teaches that Christ does not exempt the Christian from suffering, but shows him how to suffer.” “God uses suffering to test faith (I Peter 1:6, 7), to mature character (5:10), to purge conduct (4:16, 17) and to bring praise and glory to Christ (1:7). Christians then need to realize that their sufferings are no strange mistake (4:12), but may suffer according to the will of God (4:19) ... *The church neglects this biblical doctrine to its own detriment.*” (Emphasis added.)

As in other school districts, the teacher approaches the biblical material with the apparent assumption that the students are all Christians. For example, one exam question asks: “How do we believe Peter died?” (Emphasis added.)

■ ■ Bartow High School

As noted above, during the past two years, only the “Bible History: Old Testament” course has been taught at this school. The materials produced reveal a course in Bible content, taught from a Christian perspective. For example, Genesis 3 is referred to as the “Fall of Man,” a purely Christian interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve.

In addition, the student assignments indicate that the course focuses on religious lessons to be drawn from the Bible. For example: “Assignments: Gen. 1-11: Put yourself in the shoes of Cain and tell me if you would do the same as him [sic] or different then [sic] him and why.” “What do the following mean to you? 1. The Ten Commandments. 2. Life after death. 3. The Passover.” “Assignment: Put yourself in the shoes of Jonah and tell me if you would do the same as him [sic] or different then [sic] him and why.”

SANTA ROSA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

With 183 students taking the “Bible History: Old Testament” course during the past three years and 181 enrolled in the “New Testament” course during that same period, the Santa Rosa County school district’s enrollments in its “Bible History” courses are among the highest in the state.

SANTA ROSA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT FACTS & FIGURES

| | |
|---|-----|
| BIBLE HISTORY: OLD TESTAMENT | |
| Total students: | 183 |
| 1998-99: | 97 |
| 1997-98: | 30 |
| 1996-97: | 56 |
| BIBLE HISTORY: NEW TESTAMENT | |
| Total students: | 181 |
| 1998-99: | 95 |
| 1997-98: | 30 |
| 1996-97: | 56 |

The school district reported to us that Pace High School is the only school in the district offering what the school district itself called a “Bible/Religion course.” According to the school district, the teacher who taught the course prior to 1997-98 left the school district, and took most of her materials. However, the school district did state that the instructional resources it produced were not only current

but “typical of past ones used also.” Memorandum from H. Frank Lay, Pace High School, to Bill Price, Director, Secondary Education (August 8, 1998). Because the Escambia County school district obtained what appears to be the earlier “Santa Rosa” curriculum (by Dr. Roberta Chapman) for its own review and use and produced it to us, we do have a very good indication of how the “Bible History” courses have been taught over the years in the Santa Rosa County school district. That curriculum is discussed above in the course profiles for Escambia County. As discussed in those profiles, the curriculum presents a Christian interpretation of the Bible, as well as courses in which the content of the Bible is taken as historical fact. The other and more current materials produced by the Santa Rosa County school district are consistent with this unconstitutional approach.

The course materials identify *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament* by Norman L. Geisler as the “student text.” This book is published by Baker Book House, which states that its mission is to “publish writings that promote historic Christianity, irenically express the concerns of evangelicalism, and reflect the diversity of this movement. Its books ... furnish resources to all — from individuals to families, from laypeople to pastors, from collegians to seminarians — who seek to live for the Lord and worship him.” See <http://www.bakerbooks.com> (Nov. 2, 1999). The publisher states that *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament* “will be enjoyed by all Christians who want to enrich their understanding of Old Testament people and events.” *Id.* (emphasis added).²⁸

The exams and other instructional materials produced by the school district further confirm that the course teaches the Bible from the sectarian perspective of Christianity. For example, in a test covering Genesis 1-11, students are asked “What does Satan appear as in Genesis 3?” In an “Old Testament-Genesis” test, students are asked to fill in the blank: “Satan makes his entrance in Genesis _____. ” Calling the serpent of Genesis 3 “Satan” is a Christian interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve. A worksheet entitled “Jesus and the Cross” asks the students to “List the reasons given for Christ’s suffering found in Isaiah 53:4-6.” Isaiah is one of the books of the Hebrew Bible. Reading that scripture as predictive of the “New” Testament, or in light of it, is a Christian interpretation of the Bible.

The author of *A Simplified Study of Revelation* says, ‘I am seeing an outbreak of satanic activity around me that my mind is having trouble comprehending.’

The course materials appear to use the Bible as a history text, and there is little in the way of objective, secular analysis. The exams also reflect the fact that the course places emphasis on Christian faith formation. For example:

- “Old Testament History — 1st nine week test”: “Sin entered into the world in Genesis _____” “What was God’s judgment on man?”
- “Old Testament — Genesis”: “List the things created by God on each of the 6 days of Creation”
- “Old Testament History Test — Job”: “What did God do to bless Job?”
- “New Testament History Test — Matthew”: “How did Mary get pregnant?” “List 3 things Satan did to tempt Jesus.” “What is the greatest commandment?”

The course materials also include a guide to the book of Revelation by Dr. Roberta Chapman entitled “A Simplified Study of Revelation.” Consistent with her Christian course curriculum, the author takes a religious approach to the book of Revelation, which she describes as “The cap-stone to all of History.” In the introduction, she states, “As we look at the world around US the scene is bleak. We are seeing sin today that 20 years ago we could not have imagined. I am seeing an outbreak of satanic activity around me that my mind is having trouble comprehending. *If ever there was a time to understand God’s message from the book of Revelation, it is now.*” (Emphasis added.) Also according to this student guide: “It would appear *that God wants this book understood and studied* because at the beginning of the book and again at the end of the book God promises Blessing to those who read and keep the words of the

book.” (Emphasis added.) Finally, the guide states that “We will approach this book from the Futurist interpretation. This interpretation accepts the book of Revelation as primarily yet to be fulfilled *We will accept the book as literal* unless the facts are to the contrary.” (Emphasis added.) This approach to the Bible clearly teaches it as literally true and from a religious perspective.

TAYLOR COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

According to the school district, the “Bible History: Old Testament” course was taught last year at Taylor High School. According to the information from the school district, the teacher used the “Old Testament” portion of the curriculum of the private, National Council

| | | |
|--|---------------------------------|---|
| TAYLOR COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT FACTS & FIGURES | BIBLE HISTORY: OLD TESTAMENT | on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools (NCBCPS) as a “guide only to develop his lesson plans for Bible I.” The NCBCPS is a religious right-affiliated group whose curriculum presents a Christian approach to the Bible and uses the Bible as a history text. For example, the NCBCPS materials used by the Taylor County school district refer to “Creation, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and Flood, and Tower of Babel” as “Universal History.” The materials also require students to “research the origin of Satan” in connection with a study of |
| | Total students: 24 | |
| | 1998-99: 24 | |
| | 1997-98: 0 | |
| | 1996-97: 0 | |
| | BIBLE HISTORY: NEW TESTAMENT | |
| | Total students: 0 | |
| | 1998-99: 0 | |
| | 1997-98: 0 | |
| | 1996-97: 0 | |

Genesis 1-11. Calling the serpent of Genesis 3 “Satan” is a Christian interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve.²⁹

Apart from the NCBCPS curriculum, the school district produced only the lesson plans and the final exam, entitled “Final Exam — Old Testament History.” There is no indication that the students are assigned reading from any non-biblical books. Consistent with the NCBCPS curriculum, the lesson plans suggest that the Bible is used as a history textbook. One lesson early in the semester calls for the teacher to “[e]xplain *events* that will occur in Bible compared to *other historical events* of same time period.” (Emphasis added.) The final exam includes questions which, in this context, raise troublesome concerns regarding the treatment of the Bible’s contents as historical fact. For example, students are asked to identify the “Mountain where Moses went to get Commandments” and the “Type of wood that the ark was made of,” and to state the “Number

of days the Flood lasted” and the “Number of people to survive the Flood.” Some lessons during the semester appear to focus on faith formation. For example, “List the Ten Commandments” and “Memorize 23rd Psalm.”

WALTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

According to the school district, the “Bible History” courses are taught at Walton High School in DeFuniak Springs. The instructional materials produced by the school district reveal courses in which the Bible is used as a history text, and from a Christian perspective.

| | | |
|--|---------------------------------|--|
| WALTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT FACTS & FIGURES | BIBLE HISTORY: OLD TESTAMENT | For example, an “Overview” of the “Old Testament” used in the course states that “The first five books of the Bible tell the origins of the Jewish race [sic] and culture... The next 12 books continue <i>the history of the Israelites</i> .” (Emphasis added.) Similarly, an “Overview” of the “New Testament” describes the Gospels and Acts as “History Books” and states that: “Almost half of the New Testament consists of four accounts of the life of Jesus and the good news he brought to earth. Each of these four books, or Gospels, has a different focus and a different audience; taken together, they give <i>a complete picture of Jesus’ life and teaching</i> . About a third of their pages are devoted to the events of his last week on earth, including the crucifixion and resurrection. <i>Acts continues the history into the period after Jesus left earth</i> .” (Emphasis added.) ³⁰ |
| | Total students: 36 | |
| | 1998-99: 22 | |
| | 1997-98: 14 | |
| | 1996-97: 0 | |
| | BIBLE HISTORY: NEW TESTAMENT | |
| | Total students: 39 | |
| | 1998-99: 24 | |
| | 1997-98: 15 | |
| | 1996-97: 0 | |

The Christian perspective of the course is readily apparent from such examples in the course materials as the references to the story of Adam and Eve as “the Fall of Man,” a Christian interpretation of Genesis 3. In addition, one exam asks students “What eight aspects of Christ’s life are prophesied in Isaiah?” Isaiah is a book of the Hebrew Scriptures. Reading the Hebrew Bible as prophetic of the “New” Testament is a purely Christian interpretation. The sectarian approach is not only impermissible in a public school, it presents obvious difficulty for a student who does not view the Bible with the same sectarian perspective.

The Christian perspective of the course is a Protestant one. For example, under the heading “Three Facts about Scripture,” the course materials

describe the following as two of “three significant events” that occurred during the “Intertestamental Period”: “The Old Testament was compiled and preserved as *the 39 books we have today*... The Apocrypha was penned. This was a collection of noncanonical writings....” (Emphasis added.) The Protestant Old Testament contains 39 books; the Catholic version contains 46. Protestants refer to the books that they do not consider to be scripture but Catholics do as the Apocryphal books. The use of the first person plural in the course materials (“the 39 books we have today”) also suggests an assumption that all of the students are Protestant.

The students are asked to engage in Bible-memorization activities generally associated with Sunday school. For example, one exam calls for the students to “[g]ive the book, chapter and verse” of different biblical quotes. One of the “nine-week” exams requires the students to identify, “from memory — all Old Testament books with the appropriate divisions.” Another gives them extra points if they can “name the first 27 books of the Old Testament.”

In addition, it does not appear that the students are taught about objective, rather than religious, theories of biblical authorship. To the contrary, apparently overlooking modern academic theories of authorship and the bases for them, including those that postulate that more than one author wrote the book of Genesis, one exam asks students “Who is the author of Genesis?” There is no indication what grade would be given to a student who answered that the author or authors are persons unknown.³¹

The course also appears to make impermissible assumptions about the students, *i.e.*, that they are familiar with and believe in the Bible as scripture. One exam contains an essay question requiring each student to “[c]hoose a favorite psalm or proverb. After identifying the scripture, explain why you particularly like that specific passage.” And some essay questions appear to have been selected for purposes of Christian faith formation. For example: “Using one of Jesus’ parables in Luke, briefly summarize the parable and then give possible interpretations of the parable on a spiritual level. In other words, reveal the message Jesus was trying to communicate to the listeners.” And: “Jesus had many things to say about wealth and earthly treasures. What were His general instructions about money and its purpose?”

Course materials reflect a Protestant viewpoint when they say, ‘The Old Testament was compiled and preserved as the 39 books we have today’ — not the 46 books of the Catholic Old Testament.

The school district states that it gives students “extra topics,” including the Bible’s influence on the arts. However, there is no indication that the students are assigned any reading other than from the Bible (and perhaps Nelson’s book of Bible maps and charts), and at least part of the quizzes entitled “Bible in the Arts” and “Bible Cultural Literacy” seem to require little more than a regurgitation of Bible content.³² In addition, even on these quizzes, bonus questions ask the students to provide answers based on Sunday school-type Bible-memorization, such as listing, in order, various numbers of the books of the “Old Testament” (*e.g.*, “List the first 17 books of the Old Testament in order”), identifying the books of the Bible in which specified Bible verses can be found, etc.

¹ This book is published by Zondervan Publishing House, which is a “member of the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association” and describes itself as “an international Christian communications company ... dedicated to meeting the needs of people with resources that glorify Jesus Christ and promote biblical principles.” See <http://www.zondervan.com/us.htm> (Oct. 19, 1999).

² See note 1, above.

³ The Paulist Press states that its “Mission” is: “Striving to stand at the intersection of faith and culture, Paulist Press is committed to publishing quality materials that: bring the good news of the Gospel to Catholics and people of other religious traditions; support dialogue and welcome good scholarship and religious wisdom from all sources, across denominational boundaries; [and] foster religious values and wholeness in society, especially through materials promoting healing, reconciliation, and personal growth.” See http://paulistpress.com/unlinked_pages/Mission/mission.html (Oct. 19, 1999).

⁴ The teacher appears to use additional resources for particular lessons.

⁵ Again, the course perspective appears to be Protestant. The materials state that “[t]he 39 Old Testament Bible Content cards are worth one test grade.” The Catholic Old Testament has 46 books.

⁶ According to its Mission Statement, “Campus Crusade for Christ is an interdenominational ministry committed to helping take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all nations... [O]ur goal for the year 2000 is to help give every man, woman, and child in the entire world an opportunity to find new life in Jesus Christ.” See <http://www.ccci.org/mission.html> (Nov. 5, 1999).

⁷ *Report of Professor T.W. Lewis, III*, at 14, Exhibit 15 in support of Plaintiff’s Motion for Summary Judgment, filed Dec. 13, 1995 in *Herdahl v. Pontotoc County School District*, 933 F. Supp. 582 (N.D. Miss. 1996). See also James R. Beasley, *Introduction to the Bible*, at 39-40 (1991).

⁸ It is unclear whether the teacher would also be using *The Bible As/In Literature*.

⁹ Whether or not *The Bible As/In Literature* could form the basis for a constitutional course teaching public school students about the Bible, if the course were taught in accordance with the Santa Rosa County curriculum it would not be an objective, secular course, as discussed below.

¹⁰ This document appears to have been authored by Dr. Roberta Chapman, Pace High School, Pace, Florida. (According to information that we obtained from the Santa Rosa County school district, which also teaches the “Bible History” courses, it appears that Dr. Chapman may have left that district after the 1996-97 school year.)

¹¹ The cover pages of the “Old Testament” sections of the curriculum are decorated with menorahs and Stars of David.

¹² *Pictorial Introduction to the Bible* by William S. Deal is published by Hendrickson Publishers, which described itself to us as a “nonsectarian religious publishing house” whose books are written “from a religious perspective.” Hendrickson’s catalogue page for *Pictorial Introduction to the Bible* describes this book as follows:

“Anyone who wants to become better acquainted with the Bible will find a wealth of material in here in an easy-to-understand format. This simplified introduction to the Bible provides a descriptive background on each book of the Bible, *with special emphasis on the great stories and truths* of the individual book. Over 160 photos and illustrations help the reader see and better understand Bible information.” (Emphasis added).

¹³ There appears to be some ambiguity in the teacher’s approach. In a separate lesson plan on Creation, the teacher says “The students will discuss the ‘Creation’ steps as presented in Genesis once using the Bible to locate those steps. The discussion will include another interpretation of Creation of man, etc.”

¹⁴ The course materials also contain the title pages of *The Gifts of the Jews* by T. Cahill and *A History of God* by K. Armstrong.

¹⁵ The teacher’s outline of course topics includes: “Old Testament — Structure and *New Testament Support*, Hebrew Chronology, Authorship of Books.” (Emphasis added.) While we cannot tell from the emphasized language alone if this means the “Old Testament” will be

presented as predictive of the “New” — a common problem in the school districts teaching these courses — the instructional materials quoted in the text above do utilize that Christian approach to the Hebrew Scriptures.

¹⁶ In its initial response to our Public Records Act request the school district stated, “We do not include any courses on Bible History in our curriculum at any grade levels.” After we presented the school district with the data from the state showing the school district’s own enrollment figures for these courses, the school district produced the instructional materials to us.

¹⁷ According to the school district, the “Bible History” courses are not being taught during the 1999-2000 school year in either of the high schools.

¹⁸ Focus on the Family is a Religious Right organization that describes its mission as follows: “To cooperate with the Holy Spirit in disseminating the Gospel of Jesus Christ to as many people as possible, and, specifically, to accomplish that objective by helping to preserve traditional values and the institution of the family.” See <http://www.family.org/welcome/about-fof/a0005554.html> (Oct. 22, 1999).

That the World May Know is a Focus on the Family video series. The videos have subtitles and content descriptions such as: “Maximize Your Spiritual Journey” (content: “The unforgettable series on Israel includes faith lessons 1 to 5”); “Revel in the Discoveries” (content: “Uncover remarkable insights from God’s beloved Israel... Covers faith lessons 6 to 10”); “Discover Life-Changing Relevance”; “Rediscover Why You Believe” (content: “Unearth more insights into our spiritual heritage”); and “Uncover the Full Meaning” (content: “Perfect for Bible studies, home groups and Sunday schools, this all-inclusive study package features faith lessons 11 to 28”). See <http://www.family.org/resources> (Oct. 22, 1999) (end of URL differs for each page cited).

¹⁹ Somewhat inconsistently with the foregoing exam question, one of the “think about it” lessons asks the students: “What do you think explains the difference between the accounts of creation in chapter one [of Genesis] compared to chapter two.” This interpretation of Genesis indicates to some scholars that more than one author wrote Genesis.

²⁰ Hendrickson described itself to us as a “nonsectarian religious publishing house” whose books are written “from a religious perspective.” Its catalogue page for *Bible History Old Testament* describes this book as follows: “Grasping ‘the big picture’ of *God’s story* in the Old Testament helps readers understand *what the Bible really teaches* and prevents misunderstanding of the often confusing Old Testament text.” (Emphasis added).

²¹ According to its web site: “The mission of Moody Press is to educate and edify the Christian *and to evangelize the non-Christian* by ethically publishing conservative, evangelical Christian literature and other media for all ages around the world; and to help provide resources for Moody Bible Institute in its training of future Christian leaders.”

See <http://www.moodypress.org> (Oct. 27, 1999; emphasis added). Moody Press states that *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* “[r]eveals the lifestyles and customs of the Bible’s writers and characters, *giving you a clearer understanding of God’s Word.*” *Id.* (emphasis added).

²² “The Banner of Truth Trust originated in 1957 in London. The founders believed that much of the best literature of historic Christianity had been allowed to fall into oblivion and that its recovery under God *could well lead not only to a strengthening of the Church today but to true revival.* The origins of the work were closely connected with the prayer that God would be pleased to visit the land again in true awakening...The Banner of Truth Trust...was aimed to publish what we believed honoured God and what people needed rather than what they might initially want.” See <http://www.banneroftruth.co.uk> (Oct. 27 1999; emphasis added). According to The Banner of Truth Trust, *The New Testament — An Introduction to its Literature and History* “succeeds in bridging the gap of twenty centuries to bring *the history* of the New Testament alive today in a fascinating way.” *Id.* (emphasis added).

- ²³ Eerdmans Publishing described itself to us as a “religious publishing house.” According to Eerdmans, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* is out of print.
- ²⁴ According to the school district, the publisher of this book, Heath, was acquired by McDougal Littell. The latter’s web site describes it as “the nation’s leading secondary education publisher.” See <http://www.mcdougallittell.com> (Oct 28, 1999).
- ²⁵ A note from the teacher at Kathleen High School states that his course materials are now being used at Mulberry High School.
- ²⁶ *The Old Testament Speaks* is published by HarperSanFrancisco, an “imprint” of HarperCollins Publishers. According to Harper’s web site, HarperSanFrancisco publishes “Inspired books for mind, body and soul.” See <http://www.harpercollins.com/imprints> (Oct. 25, 1999). The publisher describes *The Old Testament Speaks* as “A *theologically accurate* and clear picture of the archeological, geographical, historical, and linguistic dimensions of God’s covenant with his people.” See <http://harpercollins.com/catalog> (Oct. 25, 1999; emphasis added).
- ²⁷ Eerdmans Publishing described itself to us as a “religious publishing house.” Its publisher’s description of the paperback edition of *New Testament Survey* on Amazon.com calls it “the textbook for the ETA [Evangelical Training Assn.] course, New Testament Survey.” See <http://www.amazon.com> (Oct. 25, 1999, via search engine). According to Amazon.com, the back cover of the paperback edition states: “Studying the Bible is a fascinating experience for all who desire to more clearly understand how God works with His people...You will benefit most from this study if you first read the portion of the Word of God being considered as many times as possible from various good translations. Then ask yourself, ‘What does the Word say to me?’ Applying what the Bible says to current living will result in a truly rewarding experience.” *Id.*
- ²⁸ A customer review of this book on Amazon.com states that the author “approaches the Old Testament *from a uniquely Christ-centered point of view*. The whole outline of his survey is based on Christ the substance of the OT shadows. He divides the OT in mainly 4 parts, the books of the Law: The foundation for Christ. The books of History: The preparation for Christ. The books of Poetry: The aspiration for Christ, and the books of Prophecy: The expectation of Christ.” See <http://www.amazon.com> (Nov. 2, 1999, via search engine). Also included in the course materials is the title page of *The Bible as History* by Werner Keller, published by Bantam Books, although there is no indication to what extent this book is used. The publisher describes this book as containing “the latest scientific and archeological breakthroughs in biblical investigation, including [r]evolutionary new evidence that confirms some of the most monumental and controversial events in the Bible — including the destruction of Sodom and Gomorra [sic].” See <http://www.borders.com> (Nov. 2, 1999, via search engine).
- ²⁹ As discussed in Part One above, it was the “New Testament” portion of the NCBCPS curriculum that was adopted by the Lee County school district, and which a federal court prohibited the school district from teaching. According to the President of the NCBCPS, Elizabeth Ridenour, the organization is “trying to expose the kids to the biblical Christian worldview.” *Truths That Transform* Radio Program (Sept. 14, 1995).
- ³⁰ The only book other than the Bible identified in the course materials is *Nelson’s Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts: Old and New Testaments*, which the school district states is “In-class student text used.” This book is described as follows: “Full visual aids make this book a powerful resource for teaching others. By using the reproducible maps and charts, you can help others *visualize the events, places and people* in the Old and New Testaments.” See <http://www.amazon.com> (Nov. 2, 1999, via search engine; emphasis added).
- ³¹ It appears that the teacher is looking for the answer “Moses”; it is a traditional religious view that Moses wrote the first five books of the “Old Testament.” Indeed, another exam question asks “At what point in Moses’ life did he probably write Leviticus?”
- ³² For example, one question on a “Bible in the Arts” quiz requires the students to identify who “asked if he was his ‘brother’s keeper.’” Another requires students to state what begins with “The Lord is my shepherd.”

Florida Department of Education Course Descriptions for "Bible History: Old Testament" and "Bible History: New Testament."

Note: The course descriptions below are reprinted verbatim from the Florida Department of Education's website (visited Aug. 23, 1999). The descriptions are available at the following addresses:

<http://www.firn.edu/doe/bin00001/crscode/basic912/sstudies/descript/2109390.htm>

<http://www.firn.edu/doe/bin00001/crscode/basic912/sstudies/descript/reqrment/2109390.htm>

<http://www.firn.edu/doe/bin00001/crscode/basic912/sstudies/descript/2109400.htm>

<http://www.firn.edu/doe/bin00001/crscode/basic912/sstudies/descript/reqrment/2109400.htm>

1992

Florida Department of Education Course Description — Grades 9-12, Adult

Subject Area: Social Studies

Course Number: 2109390

Course Title: Bible History: Old Testament

Credit: 0.5

A. Major concepts/content. Students acquire an understanding of the Bible as a historical document through an overview of significant events that have affected the people of the Old Testament.

The content should include, but not be limited to, the following:

- maps and spatial relationships
- process of the canonization of the Bible
- role of the Bible in the development of western and world culture
- Bible as an historical document
- archaeological evidence and Biblical studies
- sequencing of the development of nations

B. Special Note. None

C. Course Requirements. After successfully completing this course, the student will:

1. Understand and appreciate the relationships between past and present.
2. Recognize the importance of physical and cultural geography on the development of Biblical peoples.
3. Identify the major individuals, events and characteristics of the Old Testament period.
4. Recognize that there are multiple interpretations of any historical event.
5. Identify the major belief systems (political, economic and social) and their effects on those events chronicled in the Old Testament.

6. Recognize how international and dynastic changes have impacted historical development.
7. Apply research, study, critical-thinking and decision-making skills and demonstrate the use of new and emerging technology in problem solving.

1992

Florida Department of Education

Course Description — Grades 9-12, Adult

Subject Area: Social Studies

Course Number: 2109400

Course Title: Bible History: New Testament

Credit: 0.5

- A. Major concepts/content.** Students understand the relationship between historical events and their interpretations and the development of religious and ethical beliefs as described in the New Testament. Students assess the historical development to better understand the correlation between history and the New Testament.

The content should include, but not be limited to, the following:

- maps and spatial relationships
- lands, people and institutions described in Biblical writing
- use of the Bible as an historical document
- archaeological evidence and Biblical studies
- development of the early institution of the Church through the Protestant Reformation
- conflicts with other cultures in the region

- B. Special note.** None

- C. Course Requirements.** After successfully completing this course, the student will:

1. Understand and appreciate the relationships between past and present.
2. Understand the significance of physical and cultural geography on the development of Biblical peoples.
3. Identify major individuals, events and characteristics in the New Testament period.
4. Recognize that these [sic] are multiple interpretations of any historical event.
5. Understand the characteristics and development of New Testament cultures.
6. Apply research, study, critical-thinking and decision-making skills and demonstrate the use of new and emerging technology in problem solving.



THE GOOD BOOK TAUGHT WRONG:

'BIBLE HISTORY' CLASSES IN

FLORIDA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

AUTHORS:

Judith E. Schaeffer

Deputy Legal Director

Elliot M. Mincberg

Legal Director

People For the American Way Foundation

Copyright 2000 by People For the American Way Foundation.
All rights reserved. First printing, January 2000.

For more information on this report or other reports from
People For the American Way Foundation, please contact
the Andrew Heiskell Library at 202/467-4999.

Many reports also can be read on the
PFAW Foundation website at www.pfaw.org.

Other reports available from the Andrew Heiskell Library:

"Right-Wing Outreach to Communities of Color," January 2000

"Sabotaging Science: Creationist Strategy in the '90s," November 1999

"Privatization of Public Education: A Joint Venture of Charity and Power,"
April 1999

"The Religious Right's Agenda and Strategy for 1999 and 2000: A Brief
Analysis and Overview," March 1999

"The Religious Right and the Republican Party: How One Decade
Changed the Face of American Politics," January 1999

"Anti-Gay Politics and the Religious Right," September 1998