

Who is Censoring Whom in Public Schools?

Christians should be concerned about what's in textbooks today.

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The Chronicle-Tribune for Sept. 2 featured a front-page article called "Group Alleges Religious Censorship." I am glad the word "alleges" was included in the title. However, I am concerned that people reading the article might have received a false impression about conservative Christians who are involved in trying to make an impact on society, whether in politics, education or elsewhere.

The article talks about a report sponsored by People for the American Way (PAW) that "accused the religious right ... of waging a national censorship campaign in public schools." PAW is described as a free-speech advocacy group. This is the same organization that waged an intensive media campaign against Robert Bork to keep him from serving on the Supreme Court. Many commentators consider that campaign to have been one of the biggest distortions of a man's judicial record ever conceived.

I have read a number of statements by Arthur Kropp, PAW's president, and have concluded that PAW seems preoccupied with the elimination of conservative Christian thought and action from the public arena. This is free-speech advocacy?

Parents who send their children to public schools have a right to be heard. Their taxes pay the administration and faculty. When parents are concerned about the content of the curriculum, they are actually acting in the best educational tradition—parental involvement in the education of their own children. And parents who maintain orthodox Christian belief or who hold to traditional definitions of the family have reason to be concerned about what is currently taking place in American education.

I would like to raise this question: who is censoring whom?

Dr. Paul Vitz, an educational psychologist, already has done original research on this question. Dr. Vitz completed a study for the National Institute of Education to determine if public school textbooks were biased or censored. He concluded, "The answer to both is yes. And the nature of the bias is clear: Religion, traditional family values, and conservative political and economic positions have been reliably excluded from children's textbooks."

In his study of 40 social studies texts for grades one through four, Vitz found that religion was usually treated as old-fashioned and unimportant to modern life. There was almost a total

blackout on Christianity in America beyond the colonial period. He found it disturbing "that not one of the 40 books totaling 10,000 pages had one text reference to a primary religious activity occurring in representative contemporary American life."

A significant instance of bias against religion was a text that had 30 pages on the Pilgrims, but not one word that even mentioned their religion. Vitz relates, "One mother whose son is in a class using this book wrote to say that he came home and told her that 'Thanksgiving was when the Pilgrims gave thanks to the Indians.' The mother called the principal ... to point out that Thanksgiving was when the Pilgrims thanked God. The principal responded by saying, 'that was her opinion'—the schools could only teach what was in the books!"

Vitz also discovered that the definition of family was broad, in one case simply described as "a group of people." Not one text called marriage the foundation of the family and not one featured a woman as a homemaker.

On the political front, Vitz concluded that three issues always came to the forefront in texts: minority rights, feminism and environmentalism. He says, "There are no conservative positions identified or supported in any way in any of these books. For example, there is simply no mention of the anti-ERA movement, the pro-life movement, or opposition to affirmative action, or the tax revolt. The idea that government might be too big, too controlling, is never mentioned."

The situation did not improve with fifth and sixth grade texts. Not one of the fifth grade books on American history mentioned the Great Awakening of the 18th century, the great revivals of the 19th century, or the Holiness and Pentecostal movements. Treatments of the 20th century showed profound neglect of anything religious.

The sixth grade world civilization texts were even worse. Mohammed's life gets considerably more coverage than the life of Jesus. Two texts talk about Mohammed, but never mention Jesus at all. In another, "The rise of Islam, Islamic culture, and Mohammed himself gets an 11-page section, plus other scattered coverage. The rise of Christianity gets almost nothing (a few lines on p. 116). In these books, then, it is not that great religious figures are totally avoided—it is that Jesus is avoided."

It is not necessary to give examples of what Vitz discovered in high school texts—they were identical to the elementary texts. In all cases the Christian worldview was either missing or sadly neglected, and the type of family life, morals and government encouraged by Biblical principles was denigrated.

Who is censoring whom?