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A Mixed Bag: *A Review of the Presentation of Religion in Proposed Textbooks for Middle and High School World Geography in Texas*

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*A report from the Texas Freedom Network Education Fund
September 2014*



About the Author

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David is the author of two books, both published by Palgrave Macmillan: *No Longer the Same: Religious Others and the Liberation of Christian Theology* (2011); and *Dialectical Democracy through Christian Thought: Individualism, Relationalism, and American Politics* (2013). He is also co-editor, with Ruben L. F. Habito, of *The Gospel Among Religions: Christian Ministry, Theology, and Spirituality in a Multifaith World* (Orbis Books, 2010).

In addition to his teaching work, David is a member at St. Luke's in the Meadow Episcopal Church, in the Fort Worth Diocese of the Episcopal Church. He has served on several diocesan boards, including the Commission on Ministry and the Board of Examining Chaplains.

A native Texan, David is the descendant, on one side of his family, of people who settled near Fort Bend before the Texas Revolution. David attended public school in Grand Prairie, Texas.

He and his wife Eleanor, also a teacher, live in Fort Worth with their border collie and parakeet.



Overview

The Texas Freedom Network Education Fund (TFN) asked me to review proposed world cultures and geography textbooks (or online textbook packages) publishers submitted this year for middle and high school in Texas. Since I am a religion scholar, I focused on accuracy and balance in each textbook's coverage of religion generally and of particular world religions.

A necessary part of the review process was to examine the state standards for world geography instruction with which publishers are expected to comply – the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). I found the TEKS for both sixth-grade and high school world geography to be generally sound, lacking the severe flaws that plague the standards for high school world *history*.¹

All of the textbooks I reviewed cover religion with acceptable accuracy and even-handedness, though they varied widely in quality and content.

The Project

This review was part of a larger effort undertaken on behalf of TFN. I assessed the presentation of world religions in a wide range of social studies textbooks under consideration for adoption by the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE). The assignment covered three textbook categories: sixth-grade world geography, high school world geography, and high school world history.

This document summarizes my findings regarding the first two categories: sixth-grade world cultures/geography and high school world geography textbooks. It is broken into two parts, one for each grade level.

My Interest in These Issues

Before moving to a summary of what I found in the textbooks, I should make clear my own interest in the issues at stake. I am a scholar in religious studies and a Christian theologian. In both capacities I have an interest in how religions are presented in public school textbooks here in Texas.

In my capacity as a religious studies scholar, I recognize the profound role religion has played in the story of humankind. Even if one is not personally religious, one cannot understand humanity without understanding the religions of humanity. Religion calls out what is best in humans – for example, our vision of a reality beyond ourselves and our narrow political or economic interests; and our sense that we are accountable to a law higher than our own. And, sadly, religion all too often calls out what is worst in us – our self-righteousness, our prejudice, our intolerance for those who are different. To truly understand the human story, it is necessary to understand the religious traditions that have shaped worldviews and aspirations, motivated people to action (or inaction), transformed the landscape, influenced political and economic institutions – and, yes, often divided people into opposing camps. Consequently, world geography textbooks have a golden opportunity to introduce public school students to the ways religious beliefs and practices have shaped the human story and continue to shape it today.

Another reason for my interest in how public school texts present religion comes from my role as a religious studies instructor. I teach a range of undergraduate courses in world religions and Asian



religions at Southern Methodist University. Many of my students come from Texas public schools. What they have learned about world religions directly affects their readiness for my courses and thus their performance. Students who bring to SMU a basic familiarity with the beliefs and practices of major world religions are better prepared to tackle the deeper and more complex issues we cover in my courses than are those who must spend time either catching up, or correcting prejudices and misinformation. Students who have a basic familiarity with world religions are also better equipped to handle life at SMU, which is home to an increasing religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity. Their classmates or dorm roommates may well be Sikh or Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist, Christian or Jew, members of some other religious tradition, or have no religious affiliation whatsoever.

Finally, as a Christian theologian, I have a vested interest in seeing that my own religious tradition is presented fairly and accurately in the textbooks. That means highlighting its failures as well as its successes – as eminent theologians from Augustine of Hippo to Martin Luther to Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer have done. And as a Christian theologian, I am equally interested that my neighbors’ religious traditions be presented fairly and accurately. Christians are expected to speak truthfully (Dt 5:20; Mt 19:18). That must include representing our neighbors’ religious beliefs and practices as they truly are, neither sugarcoating nor slandering them. Indeed, much of my own theological work explores how Christians can deepen their own faith by respecting and learning from the witness of their non-Christian neighbors.²

Some Americans are quite legitimately wary of any instruction about religion in the public schools. One writer recently noted that teaching “about” religion can too easily become religious instruction, even indoctrination, in the dominant religion: “If we teach religion, whose religion? It’s nearly always the dominant religion that is ‘taught,’ with token references to other religions thrown in.”³ While I agree that such an approach to the teaching of religion violates the basic right of citizens to be free from government establishment of religion, I believe that there is a right way to teach religion in the public schools. When religions are presented fairly and accurately, warts and all, and when this applies to the majority religion as well as others, then public schools can cover religions without infringing on our right as citizens to be free of government attempts to establish one religion over others.



Sixth-Grade World Cultures and Geography Textbooks

Note: The spelling of certain terms, such as Quran and Muhammad, vary from publisher to publisher. I tried to use a consistent spelling of such terms in my own comments but kept the spelling used by the publishers in passages directly quoted from the textbooks themselves.

The Role of Religion in the Standards

While religion features less prominently in the sixth-grade social studies TEKS than in its high school geography counterpart – and much less prominently than in the high school world history TEKS – I applaud the SBOE for ensuring at several points that it is covered. The introduction to the sixth-grade standards specifies: “Students compare institutions common to all societies such as government, education, and religious institutions.”⁴ Although the reference to religious institutions is only a suggestion, it shows the SBOE’s intent to ensure that religion is covered in sixth-grade social studies.⁵

Several explicit references to religion appear in the sixth-grade standards relating to “Culture.” TEKS 16(A) includes religious institutions under “institutions basic to all societies,” while 16(C) requires that students be able to “analyze the efforts and activities institutions use to sustain themselves over time,” for instance, through “the use of monumental architecture by religious institutions.” 16(D) requires that students be able to “identify examples of art, music, and literature that have transcended the boundaries of societies and convey universal themes such as religion, justice, and the passage of time.” TEKS 19 specifies that students understand “the relationships among religion, philosophy, and culture.” This includes being able to explain “the relationship among religious ideas, philosophical ideas, and cultures” (A), and “the significance of religious holidays and observances” (B). The SBOE appends to 19(B) a suggested list of holidays and observances to be covered: “Christmas, Easter, Ramadan, the annual hajj, Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, Diwali, and Vaisakhi in various contemporary societies.”

Since TEKS 19 indicates that the SBOE considers religion an element of culture, it could be also covered under other culture-related standards that do not mention religion explicitly. TEKS 2(B) expects students to be able to “evaluate the social, political, economic, and cultural contributions of individuals and groups from various societies, past and present.” TEKS 15 specifies that students “understan[d] the similarities and differences within and among cultures in various world societies,” while 16(B) specifies that students be able to “compare characteristics of institutions in various contemporary societies.” TEKS 20(B) calls upon students to “explain how resources, *belief systems*, economic factors, and political decisions have affected the use of technology” (emphasis mine). I assume that religion could be covered under any of these rubrics.

Generally, the sixth-grade social studies TEKS lack the severe problems of balance that plague the high school world history TEKS. The latter fail to encourage balance and accuracy in the coverage of world religions, as I discuss in my review of world history textbooks. Instead, the basic western civilization orientation of the world history standards, and their privileging of Christianity’s role, tell a triumphalist and at times historically inaccurate story of the rise of the West, guided by its dominant religion. Fortunately, the sixth-grade social studies standards lack most aspects of the history standards’ western civilization and Christian slant, at least in its coverage of religions.⁶

My only major difficulty with the standards has to do with the list of suggested religious holidays in 19(B). That list, again, is: “Christmas, Easter, Ramadan, the annual hajj, Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah,



Diwali, and Vaisakhi.” The political donnybrook surrounding this list is well-documented elsewhere, and I will not replay it here.⁷ While the list is only a suggestion, it reflects an imbalance in the treatment of major world religions. It includes two holidays/observances each for Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, but only one each for Hinduism and Sikhism, and none for Buddhism or primal religions. Also, it is odd that the list does not include the Jewish festival of Hanukkah and the Hindu festival of Holi, both of which are prominently celebrated by their respective religious communities here in Texas. This list should be revisited in the next adoption cycle, even if it means opening another can of political worms.

How the Textbooks Perform

I reviewed sixth-grade world geography textbooks from the following publishers: Cengage⁸, Discovery Education⁹, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt¹⁰, McGraw-Hill School Education¹¹, Pearson Education¹², Social Studies School Services¹³.

(Due to the modular nature of the Social Studies School Service online package, there is no “sixth-grade geography package” or “high school geography package” as such; any lesson or activity is available for any grade.¹⁴ Consequently, some of my comments on the sixth-grade Social Studies School Service package will be duplicated in the review of the high school Social Studies School Service package.)

In general, I found that the textbooks display an acceptable degree of balance and accuracy in their presentation of the world’s major religions. Students using any of these six textbooks will become aware of the diversity of global religious life and will come away with a basic understanding of the beliefs, practices, and material cultures of the major world religions. Yet these textbooks are not always as balanced and accurate as they should be, and they vary significantly in the quality and extent of their coverage of religions.

I restrict my comments here to seven themes that arose in the course of my review. For a detailed discussion of pro’s and con’s of each textbook, please see my detailed reviews.

(1) Noteworthy Positive Features

Occasionally, a few of the textbooks move from acceptable content to true excellence. Here are a few noteworthy examples:

- **Cengage:** Three features of this package are particularly worthy of mention. First, this Cengage package brings to the instructional task the resources of an educational media giant – in this case, National Geographic. Although most of the information is presented via a standard textbook layout, the authors enliven the user’s learning experience by incorporating eye-catching photos and engaging video excerpts from National Geographic’s immense library. This Cengage product has a sophisticated, 21st-century look and feel that should appeal to today’s media-savvy middle schoolers.

A second noteworthy feature is a cause-effect exercise that asks students to describe the impact of the imposition of Roman Catholicism on the indigenous peoples of the Americas. The suggested answer: “Some were forced to practice the new religion, which meant they had to give up their own beliefs. This is a negative impact. Others may have found aspects of Christianity that



created for them a positive blend of religious practice.”¹⁵ Given the prevalence of Evangelical Christianity in Texas, the authors are courageous in noting the fact that conversion to Christianity would be anything other than positive. However, evangelicals, too, must admit that forced conversion is contrary to the Gospel.

Third, I appreciate the authors’ reminders, scattered throughout the text, of the history of religious tolerance in Islam. For example, the text treats contemporary Istanbul and Dubai as multicultural and religiously tolerant, and it notes that the Ottoman Empire was known for its religious tolerance.¹⁶ Since the Western popular imagination often mistakenly links Islam with intolerance, these reminders in the Cengage package should help students get a clearer and more balanced picture of Islam.

- **Discovery Education:** Given the connection to the Discovery Channel, it is not surprising that a major strength of this Discovery Education lies in its plentiful links to documentary videos that illustrate or expand on topics in the text. The videos also offer examples of religious practices, art, and architecture (satisfying TEKS 16(C)). Here are just two examples from the host of helpful video segments:
 - The chapter on contemporary Europe links to a four-minute excerpt from a video in which Thomas Friedman explores the causes for the anger felt by many Muslims in Europe, anger that in a few cases has led Muslims to join radical organizations such as al-Qaida.¹⁷
 - Various chapters link to excerpts from the 27-minute video *The Way We Live: In God We Trust: Religion*. This video surveys the contemporary diversity and historical place of religion in America, using Catholic Christianity and New Orleans Vodoun as case studies. This balanced, accurate, and thought-provoking video includes interview excerpts by religious leaders and noted scholars such as Nancy Ammerman, Peter Berger, Wade Clark Roof, and Robert Wuthnow. In addition to highlighting the increasing variety of religious belief and practice in U.S., the video also notes that with the growth in religious diversity has come an increase in religious tolerance, as well as an increase in the number of Americans who consider themselves spiritual, but do not affiliate with any organized religious tradition or community.
- **McGraw-Hill:** The suggested lesson plans in the Teacher Edition offer many thought-provoking critical thinking exercises and discussion questions. I particularly appreciated one exercise related to the discussion in the Student Edition of the central role Islam plays in daily life in North Africa. The Teacher Edition asks students to consider the following issues: “Review the principle of separation of church and state as found in the United States Constitution. Discuss the different roles religion plays in our government and the governments of the countries in North Africa....Why would some strict Muslims want to see an end to Western influences on their culture?...How might our government respond to outside influences on American culture?”¹⁸ This excellent activity not only helps students understand the perspective of conservative Muslims, but also prompts them to consider the very different understanding of church-state relations in the United States.
- **Pearson:** Among many outstanding features in this excellent product are several videos that bring to life issues mentioned in the text. One particularly instructive video illustrates the role religion plays



in the daily lives of two people living in Israel: a young Jewish woman and a Palestinian Muslim teenager. The narrator concludes the video by stressing what these two young people have in common: “Both are devoted to their family and their religion. Both are passionate about their work and education. And they both hope for peace from different sides of the conflict.”¹⁹ This video will help students see that there are human faces behind news stories about conflict in the Middle East.

- **Social Studies School Service:** The lesson “From God-Kings to World Religions” gives students an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the transition from local to global religion. Students compare and contrast visual sources (e.g., an image of Tutankhamen’s sarcophagus and a Torah scroll) and written sources (e.g., excerpts from the prologue to Hammurabi’s Code, from the biblical book of Nehemiah, and from Confucius’ *Analects*). The Hammurabi reading is accompanied by a particularly good “close reading” question: “From what you know about Hammurabi’s Code, how successful do you think he was in living up to the principles he expresses here?” Similarly, after reading a passage from Nehemiah (9:32-33), students are asked: “In this passage, does ‘God’ appear to be seen here as the only true god, or merely the god of the Hebrew people?” The answer to the question is not obvious, and this fact should help students learn to separate preconceptions from the evidence at hand. Also, the authors note the majority scholarly position that the ancient Israelites were not originally monotheistic but gradually became so by the time of the prophets. Students should be aware of this scholarly view, whether or not they choose to accept it.

(2) Understanding of Religion

Religion is a contested term among scholars of religion as well as other disciplines, and a number of definitions are available. Some definitions are better than others, however. Due to the importance Christians give to belief in a single God, Westerners often define religion principally in terms of a set of beliefs in one or more gods. The “belief” element in such definitions tends to marginalize or exclude religions in which what one *believes* may be less important than what one *does* (e.g., Judaism, Confucianism), or the *perspective* one has on reality (e.g., Buddhism), or one’s *relationships* to spirits, ancestors, and other beings (e.g., Shinto). The theistic (“god”) element of such definitions leaves out non-theistic religions such as Theravada Buddhism and possibly religions such as Daoism in which the Ultimate is not so much a deity as a cosmic principle.

The Cengage and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt packages contain this definitional problem. The other textbooks offer broader, more nuanced, and more helpful definitions of religion.

- **Cengage:** The authors give two somewhat contradictory definitions of religion at different points in the package. The first that a student is likely to encounter is the following: “A religion is a set of beliefs and practices focused on one or more deities, or gods, and on a code of conduct that guides behaviors and ways to live.”²⁰ This is problematic in that it excludes non-theistic religions. However, the “World Religions Handbook” offers a more nuanced definition: “A religion is an organized system of beliefs and practices....Most [religions] teach that one or more gods, or supreme powers, exist. To help people relate to the divine power, most religions teach a set of beliefs and a moral or ethical code.”²¹ Unlike the definition in the main body text, this one does not focus narrowly on beliefs and deities.



- **Discovery Education:** The definition in this package neatly avoids the pitfalls of restricting religion either to theism or to a matter of belief: “Religion refers to the relationship that people have with anything that they consider holy or spiritual, such as their God or gods.”²² However, the following description gravitates toward theism: “For most people, religion includes their beliefs about God, the ways they choose to worship that God, other actions they perform to express their faith, and the values that they hold as a result of their beliefs.”²³
- **Houghton Mifflin Harcourt:** The authors problematically define religion in terms of “beliefs in one or more gods or spirits.”²⁴ Yet the authors’ descriptions of religions in the body text are much more inclusive, mentioning practices, ways of living, and material culture, as well as beliefs. Besides abandoning the theistic element, the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt authors should bring their definition into line with their more nuanced descriptions of the religions themselves.
- **McGraw-Hill:** Instead of defining religion, the authors offer a functional description. Religion “affects social life and customs” and “shapes the way societies and individuals see the world.”²⁵ While this description avoids the pitfalls of restricting religion either to theism or to a matter of belief, it begs the question of what distinguishes religion from everything else. Many other aspects of human life, such as economic relations, also affect social life and shape perspectives.
- **Pearson:** The authors define religion as “a system of worship and belief, including belief about the nature of a god or gods.” The authors go on to describe various functions of religion: it “can help people answer questions about the meaning of life,” and it can “guide people in matters of ethics, or standards of acceptable behavior.”²⁶ Since the authors’ definition of religion does not restrict it either to theism or to a matter of belief, I find it sufficient.
- **Social Studies School Service:** I could find no overall definition of religion in the various lessons and activities of this package. The closest thing to a definition comes in short video introduction to religion.²⁷ The speaker, Dr. Alexander Murphy, offers a functional description of religion (i.e., he talks about religion in terms of what it *does* rather than what it *is*). Religion deals “with the most fundamental questions of meaning, purpose, and existence.” It is one of the ways people “make sense the world, to understand who they are.” It also “identifies non-believers,” and in doing so serves a source of “conflict, suffering, and war for thousands of years.” This construal of religion avoids the definitional problem described above.

(3) Christian slant or bias

Several textbooks showed signs of a subtle slant toward Christianity or, in a few cases, a pro-Christian bias. This type of imbalance tends to manifest in two ways in the textbooks: (a) in the assumption that students either are Christians or are familiar with Christian terminology; or, more problematically, (b) in painting too rosy a picture of Christianity by omitting historical evidence to the contrary.²⁸

(a) Assumption of a Largely Christian Audience: Textbooks show a subtle tilt in a Christian direction when the authors fail to define Christian terminology but define terms from other religions: for example, leaving “Catholic” or “Protestant” undefined, while defining “Sunni” or “Shiite.” This suggests that the authors assume that the readers are either Christians or are familiar with Christian language.



Why does this pose a problem? Isn't it a virtue for authors to "know their audience"? True, most Texas sixth-grade students will have at least a passing familiarity with key Christian terms. However, given the increasing number of Texas students who come from outside the Christian tradition, authors should not assume that their readers are familiar with key Christian terms and concepts. Moreover, failing to define Christian terms can give non-Christian students a sense of being outsiders, of not being members of "the club."

The Discovery Education package is largely free of this problem: its Reference contains lengthy entries for "Christianity," "Catholicism," "Protestantism," and "Eastern Orthodox Christianity," as well as comparable terms for other major religions. The other textbooks, however, all display a subtle Christian slant.

- **Cengage:** The authors seem to assume that students are already familiar with Christianity and its major divisions. When "Roman Catholicism" first appears, it is not defined.²⁹ It crops up repeatedly in the discussion of the Americas, each time without definition.³⁰ In each case the Teacher Edition does not prompt the instructor to help the students understand what Roman Catholicism is or why some Christians are Catholics and others are Protestant or Orthodox. By contrast, the first time students encounter the term "Protestant," the authors define it: "Christians who separated from the Catholic church – a very minimal definition, but at least a definition."³¹ Of course, since students may not have a clear sense of what constitutes Catholicism, it will be equally unclear what makes Protestants different. Students finally learn more details about Catholicism when they get to the chapter on Russia – but then only by comparison and contrast with Eastern Orthodoxy, and only if the instructor chooses to use this optional exercise in the Resource Bank.³² The definition problem is not helped by the Glossary. While the major divisions of Islam (Shiite and Sunni) have Glossary entries, there are no entries for Catholicism (or Roman Catholicism), Orthodoxy, or Protestantism. (To be fair, I should note that the Glossary also has no entries for Mahayana and Theravada.)
- **Houghton Mifflin Harcourt:** While the text includes brief, accurate, and helpful definitions of most religions discussed, it does not offer similar descriptions for Christianity, or for Catholicism, Protestantism, and Orthodoxy (or, oddly, for Judaism). In the discussion of North America, for example, the authors introduce the terms "Catholic" and "Protestant" without defining them; later chapters use the term "Orthodox" with only minimal definition. By contrast, the section on India offers brief (though simplistic) descriptions of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, and (in the Teacher Edition only) Sikhism.³³ The section on China offers similar short descriptions of Daoism and Confucianism.³⁴
- **McGraw-Hill:** The Glossary does not offer definitions for Catholicism, Protestantism, or Orthodoxy. In the chapter on Mexico, the authors note that most people in Mexico are Catholics, without defining what "Catholic" means.³⁵ An associated activity in the Teacher Edition suggests that teachers "Activate students' prior knowledge of Catholicism" by asking students questions about the current pope and asking them to identify the religion to which Catholicism belongs.³⁶ While this is an interesting approach, many Protestant and non-Christian students may have little prior knowledge of Catholicism. Similarly, in the lesson on Central America, the authors refer to Catholics and Protestants without defining what those terms mean.³⁷ I also detect a slight bias toward Christianity in a passage on religious holidays. The authors conclude that passage as follows: "Religious holidays and observances provide a time for prayer and celebration. For Christians, Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, their religion's central figure. Easter celebrates the day, when according



to Christian belief, Jesus rose from the dead, signifying the eternal life his followers would attain.”³⁸ The lack of a complementary example from another religious tradition (along with the fact that the authors do not mark the “Christmas” sentence as an example) is inconsistent with the otherwise generally balanced treatment of world religions in this textbook.

- **Pearson:** In the discussion of the Americas, the authors refer repeatedly to Roman Catholics and Protestants without defining either term.³⁹ It is possible that the Glossary for this package will contain entries for those terms; however, the Glossary was unavailable at the time of review.
- **Social Studies School Service:** At the beginning of a discussion of the Quran, the authors address the reader: “You may have heard of the Koran. It is the sacred book of the Islamic religion. It is as important to Muslims as the Bible is to Christians.”⁴⁰ Clearly the authors assume that the readers are Christians.⁴¹

(b) Instances of Pro-Christian Bias: The most common manifestation of this more serious problem involves errors of omission: the authors paint a more favorable portrait of Christian behavior than is warranted by leaving out evidence to the negative. All of the textbooks manifest this problem to various degrees.

In the Cengage “World Religions Handbook,” Islam is described as spreading by conquest.⁴² This is a half-truth, since Islam spread to sub-Saharan Africa and much of Asia principally by trade and missionary work (as the text itself notes elsewhere).⁴³ On the other hand, the authors describe Christianity’s spread in much more benign terms: “during the period of colonization, Europeans spread Christianity around the globe.”⁴⁴ In fact, the sad legacy of both religions is that they spread in part by conquest.

All of the textbooks soft-pedal the European Christian practice of evangelizing by conquest in the Americas. For instance, the Discovery Education package’s discussion of the Christianization of the Americas sounds benign: “When Europeans arrived, they brought Christianity with them and spread it among the indigenous people. Over time, Christianity became the main religion in Latin America.”⁴⁵ The description in the Pearson package has a similarly benign ring: “Priests came to Mexico to convert Native Americans to the Roman Catholic religion. The Church became an important part of life in the new colony. Churches were built in the centers of towns and cities, and church officials became leaders in the colony.”⁴⁶ The Christianization process is painted in equally rosy colors in the Social Studies School Service package. In a video on religion, the narrator notes that “religion” – here meaning Catholic Christianity – played an important role in the development of Latin American culture, due to the Spanish missionaries’ commitment to “convert their New World indigenous subjects to Catholicism. Their many missions became focal points for early population centers, which grew through intermarriage with indigenous population.”⁴⁷

All but one of the textbooks fail to mention the Spaniards’ forced conversions of the indigenous peoples to Christianity (e.g., the Spanish *Requerimiento* of 1513) and their often systematic destruction of indigenous religious institutions.⁴⁸ The sole exception, the Cengage package, delays this grim news until a chapter on South America, where the authors note somewhat understatedly: “Some conversions were forced.”⁴⁹ Better late than never, I suppose.



Two texts – McGraw-Hill and Pearson – do mention the *encomienda* system, in which Spaniards were given the slave labor of indigenous peoples in exchange for ensuring their instruction in Catholic Christianity.⁵⁰ Pearson characterizes it accurately as “a system of slavery” in which the Christian *encomenderos* had “as little concern for [the Indians’] souls as for their bodies.”⁵¹ The McGraw-Hill text fails to communicate the brutality of the system. For example, a McGraw-Hill lesson says that the Conquistadors forced the indigenous people to work “and converted them to Catholicism.”⁵² This leaves the forced conversion aspect ambiguous. Yet, interestingly, the McGraw-Hill Glossary defines *encomienda* as “the Spanish system of enslaving Native Americans and *making* them practice Christianity” (emphasis mine).

In the Pearson text, an error of omission in the discussion of Christianity’s rise to official religion in the Roman Empire similarly results in a more favorable picture of the religion than it deserves. The authors write that in the century after Christianity became the empire’s official religion, “Christianity spread and most Romans became Christians.”⁵³ Missing is the fact that after the adoption of Christianity, the Roman Empire actively persecuted competing faiths, with the active encouragement of Christian leaders.⁵⁴

(4) Other noteworthy instances of imbalance and/or inaccuracy

Despite the slant toward Christianity in all of the textbooks, I detected no systematic bias against other religions in any of them. However, on occasion the textbook authors present religions unfairly and/or inaccurately.

- **Cengage:** Three problems stand out. First, the discussion of the Arab-Israeli conflict is troubling. Although the authors do a good job of laying out the conflicting motivations of Israelis and Palestinians, they ascribe the violence one-sidedly to the Palestinian side, skimming over the Palestinian civilian casualties resulting from Israeli military interventions.⁵⁵ Second, the Cengage “World Religions Handbook” says: “In the centuries after Muhammad’s death, Muslims spread their religion by conquest. Islamic rulers took control of Southwest Asia, Central Asia, North Africa, and parts of India and Spain.”⁵⁶ Of course, Muslims did not spread their religion *only* by conquest – a fact made clear in other parts of the package. Finally, in the summary of Buddhism’s Four Noble Truths in the “World Religions Handbook,” the Second Noble Truth is wrong: suffering is caused not by selfishness, but by desire.⁵⁷
- **Discovery Education:** While this package is admirably balanced and free of errors, I did notice two problems. First, the authors claim that Hindus are “strict vegetarians.”⁵⁸ This is incorrect and is in fact a stereotype. Many Shaivites are not vegetarian, and some Brahmins eat fish and other meat. Second, the authors describe Shamanism as “a kind of nature worship.”⁵⁹ That shorthand description strikes me as misleading since many shamanistic religions worship the spirits associated with nature rather than nature itself, and “worship” may not be quite the right word, either. (In contrast, the description of Shamanism in the Reference for this package is quite accurate.)
- **Houghton Mifflin Harcourt:** The authors claim that “(m)ost human rights abuses occur under unlimited governments.”⁶⁰ This overlooks the fact that in the United States, slavery, lynchings, and the oppression of American Indians took place under a “limited” government.



- **McGraw-Hill:** As I worked through this package, I had the impression that Islam receives somewhat more coverage than other religions. (I should underscore that this is an impression; I have not done a word count study to verify it.) For instance, whereas the lesson on Southwest Asia mentions that “(t)he teachings of Jesus led to the rise of Christianity,” it does not explain what those teachings were or how Christianity spread.⁶¹ In contrast, the authors devote a full page to the teachings of Muhammad, Muslim practices (Five Pillars), and the spread of Islam.⁶² Similarly, the package contains an interactive map showing the spread of Islamic empires out of Southwest Asia, but I could not find equivalent maps for the spread of Christianity or the Jewish Diaspora.⁶³ The chapter on North Africa discusses both the spread of Islam and Muslim practices once again.⁶⁴ I did not find coverage of equivalent detail for any of the other major world religions.

However, if my impression is correct, the coverage given to Islam cannot be a matter of pro-Muslim bias. First, the coverage is region-appropriate: Islam dominates Southwest Asia and North Africa; if one wishes to understand those regions, one must understand Islam. Second, given the attention to Islam in the news recently, students need a basic understanding of what Muslims believe and how they live. Finally, the authors present the blemishes as well as the beauty of Islam. They discuss Muslim fundamentalism in some detail and cover the attempt of the Muslim leaders of Sudan to impose Sharia law, which (along with economic factors) was at the heart of the civil war in that country.⁶⁵

(5) Coverage of Primal Religions

Coverage of primal religions varies widely, in both extent and quality, in all of the textbooks. Only the Discovery Education package covers primal religions with anything approaching adequacy.

- **Cengage:** Primal religions receive scanty coverage in this package. Neither the discussion of world religions in the main text nor the “World Religions Handbook” mentions primal religions (though there is a Glossary entry for “animism”). The authors’ discussions of the Maya and Amazon basin peoples do not discuss their religion.⁶⁶ The discussion of Aymara, Quechua, Guaraní and Munurukú peoples mentions only that the religious practices of the Quechua “are a blend of Catholicism and native beliefs.”⁶⁷ The text leaves unanswered the question of what these “native beliefs” are, as well as the character of the “blending.” The same skimpy coverage is given to African primal religions.⁶⁸ For example, the authors discuss “traditional healers” and “traditional healing methods” in Africa, but they do not mention the primal religious systems in which those healers and methods are embedded and from which they derive their significance and efficacy.⁶⁹ The discussion of the Bantu migrations and languages does not cover their religious beliefs and practices, or, for that matter, those of the other indigenous African peoples.⁷⁰ Consequently, when the authors mention the arrival of Islam, it appears to arrive in a religious vacuum.⁷¹

Explicit coverage of primal religions finally emerges in the chapters on East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. The authors discuss the presence of animist beliefs and practices in Mongolia, Southeast Asia, Australia, and Polynesia.⁷² Indeed, the section on Australian Aborigines in the Teacher Edition includes a short but illuminating description of the key concept of the Dreamtime and its role in Aboriginal life.⁷³ Yet one wonders why the authors elect to delay the discussion of primal religions until comparatively late in the package.



- **Discovery Education:** Unlike the other textbooks, this package does not favor other world religions over primal religions. The authors cover the indigenous religions of the Americas, Africa, and Oceania in some depth. For example, the package includes an interesting discussion of Khoisan and Zulu traditional religious beliefs and practices; it also provides a helpful video that introduces the San people and their religious beliefs and practices and shows them performing a ritual dance before a hunt.⁷⁴ The package also does a fine job of describing how indigenous peoples have blended their own primal religious beliefs and practices with “imported” religions such as Christianity and Islam. For example, a lesson on Latin America notes that while Roman Catholic Christianity is the dominant religion throughout the region today, Latin American Catholicism “incorporates native and African influences too. Indigenous peoples attend Catholic mass and practice Catholic ceremonies, such as baptism, but they also visit shrines for traditional native deities.”⁷⁵ The authors give an example of Maya syncretism and note that most Maya do not see this practice as inconsistent with Catholicism. This section also discusses the Black Atlantic religions Candomblé, Santería, and Vodoun, and links to a segment of the video *Mystic Lands: Haiti, Dance of the Spirit*. An excellent Document-Based Investigation allows students to investigate the diversity of religious belief and practice in Latin America, including Catholicism, indigenous religions, and Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Brazilian religions.⁷⁶ Similarly, the chapter on Sub-Saharan Africa notes the dominance of Christianity and Islam in the region, but it also notes that more than one quarter of sub-Saharan Christians and Muslims bring indigenous religious elements into their religious life.⁷⁷
- **Houghton Mifflin Harcourt:** The numerous examples of religious material culture in this textbook tend to focus on Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism (as well as, to a lesser extent, Shinto in Japan, and Hinduism in Cambodia [Angkor Wat]). The text gives little attention to the material culture of primal religions.
- **McGraw-Hill:** Although the text mentions that the ancient Maya “erected pyramids with stepped sides and temples on top,” there is no further discussion of Mayan religious beliefs.⁷⁸ The subsequent discussion of the ancient Maya also mentions that they built “pyramid-temples,” but it does not discuss Mayan religious beliefs.⁷⁹ Similarly, the discussion of South America mentions indigenous peoples, including the Incas, but does not discuss their religions.⁸⁰ A discussion of traditional healers in Bolivia (*Kallawaya*) mentions that they use traditional herbs “and rituals,” but it does not discuss religious beliefs associated with these rituals.⁸¹
- **Pearson:** In its overview of world religions, this package places primal religions on an equal footing with other world religions.⁸² In the rest of the package, however, the attention to primal religions is quite uneven. While the authors have relatively little to say about Olmec, Maya, and Aztec religions, they do include brief discussions of Santería and Vodoun, and an entire lesson on Inca religious belief and practice, via an interactive gallery on the Inca festival of the Sun God (*Inti Raymi*).⁸³ Quite skimpy coverage of ancient Greek religion is offset by unusually extensive coverage of ancient Egyptian religious beliefs and practices.⁸⁴ The unit on Africa mentions the existence of primal religions there, but it does not discuss their beliefs and practices.⁸⁵ Similarly, the unit on Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific contains very little information about indigenous religious beliefs and practices in those regions.⁸⁶ However, the coverage of Japan includes an informative, if brief, discussion of Shinto.⁸⁷
- **Social Studies School Service:** The module on early African society includes a discussion of African traditional religions, which covers, briefly but adequately, the concepts of animism, ancestral spirits,



and ancestor worship.⁸⁸ My only concern about this lesson is the authors' use of the loaded term "magic" to refer to spiritual practices of African traditional religions. "Magic" has overtones of Western chauvinism, and it is ambiguous: one person's "magic" is another person's spiritual experience or healing.

(6) Presence or absence of a "World Religions Handbook" feature

Three of the textbooks – Cengage, McGraw-Hill, and Pearson – include a module that introduces the subject of religion in general and then offers brief summaries of the major characteristics of the world religions.⁸⁹ Such a "World Religions Handbook" feature gives students a handy guide to this important area of human life and history, and it allows students to compare and contrast religions. This is important because it is difficult for students to keep track of the similarities and differences of the various religions when the authors distribute descriptions of them throughout the text, as is the case with the other textbooks. I recommend that the SBOE require that social studies and world geography textbooks include a "World Religions Handbook" or similar feature in the next adoption cycle.

Although Cengage, McGraw-Hill, and Pearson offer this feature, they differ in the religions covered. All three cover Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism. Cengage adds a discussion of Confucianism; Pearson adds primal ("Traditional") religions, but it omits Confucianism; the McGraw-Hill package includes neither. The three textbooks also differ significantly in the amount of information provided. The Cengage "World Religions Handbook" devotes one page to religion in general; for each religion, the authors offer a brief summary of its historical origins and central beliefs, and a brief account of how it spread beyond its place of origin. The Pearson feature offers a general discussion of religion, then provides one paragraph per religion, each paragraph discussing basic beliefs and approximate number of followers worldwide. The equivalent feature in the McGraw-Hill textbook is far more limited in content. The "Major World Religions" chart gives one row to each religion, listing number of followers, key religious figures, basic beliefs, and main geographic areas.

The other packages do not offer a "World Religions Handbook" feature; instead, they distribute religion-related content across the text. The Discovery Education package offers entries for all major religions, and many minor ones as well, in its Reference. These entries discuss the respective topic accurately (with a few exceptions) and with an admirable degree of detail. Since these entries are mixed in with entries on other subjects, however, it remains difficult for students to keep track of the similarities and differences of the various religions. The Houghton Mifflin Harcourt textbook offers brief descriptions of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism in the section on India, and similarly short descriptions of Daoism and Confucianism in the section on China.⁹⁰ However, it does not give the same treatment to Judaism and Christianity. Instead of a central introduction to religion and the world religions, the Social Studies School Service authors instead offers a short video introduction to religion and then distribute religion-related content throughout various modules.⁹¹ A major problem with this distributed approach to religion is that it tends to keep students from noticing overall similarities and differences between religions. However, one module, on so-called "Big-Era Four," covers several world religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, and Judaism) in the course of a discussion of the "Axial Age."⁹² The lesson goes on to draw helpful comparisons and contrasts among these world religions. However, this otherwise informative module does not cover Islam, primal religions, or Sikhism.



(7) Content and Organization Problems

In three of the textbooks the presentation of religions is significantly flawed in content and/or organization.

- **Cengage:** The authors of this package have surprisingly little to say about religion. The section on culture in the United States and Canada offers essentially no information about religion in the region.⁹³ The same goes for the discussion of Central America and the Caribbean, which begins with a section on the impact of tourism, then moves to a section on food and music.⁹⁴ Similarly, the discussion of “Africa’s Borders and Cultures” covers ethnic groups, languages, and “customs,” but not religions.⁹⁵ The chapters on Oceania likewise have remarkably little to say about religious life in that region.⁹⁶ Texas sixth-graders using this package may well come away with the impression that religion is pretty much absent from the United States, Canada, Central America, the Caribbean, Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands. Given that the Cengage package does not have the space limitations of a hardcopy textbook, the minimalist approach to religion is surprising.
- **McGraw-Hill:** The McGraw-Hill package also has surprisingly little to say about religion – at least in the Student Edition. The Glossary contains no entry for religion and no entries for Catholic/Catholicism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Protestant/Protestantism, Shi’ism, Sikhism, or Sunna.⁹⁷ Second, when the authors mention a particular religious tradition in the Student Edition, they keep their comments to a minimum. For example, the McGraw-Hill text gives only six sentences to Judaism’s origins, and I could not find a discussion of the Diaspora.⁹⁸ By contrast, the Discovery Education package devotes an entire page to the origins of Judaism, as well as three video excerpts and a map of the Diaspora.⁹⁹ Given that the McGraw-Hill package does not have the space limitations of a hardcopy textbook, the minimalist approach is surprising.

Interestingly, the Teacher Edition of the McGraw-Hill package contains a bit more background information on religions than is found in the Student Edition and thus makes up somewhat for this deficit. Take, for example, the treatment of African traditional religions. The Student Edition limits its account of these religions to their oral transmission, and their belief in a creator god and spirits.¹⁰⁰ The Teacher Edition adds: “Followers believe that the spirits of dead ancestors provide guidance in their lives. Rather than worship a Supreme Being directly, followers ask ancestors to communicate for them because they do not feel worthy to address God directly.”¹⁰¹ I wonder if the authors felt that since religious matters are prone to controversy (especially here in Texas), they are best handled with instructor guidance.

- **Social Studies School Service:** Where religion does appear in this package, it generally plays a fairly minor role compared to other aspects of human life such as ethnicity, popular culture, or human use of the landscape. For example, the video-based activities on European feudalism and the emergence of modern nations make no mention of the role of religion in these phenomena – even though the video in the feudalism activity shows some graphics of medieval Christian art.¹⁰² In a major exercise on Latin America, the Fact Sheets provided to the instructor include some basic religion-related information about each country, including percentages of religious affiliation.¹⁰³ However, the information on the Fact Sheets is quite sketchy. For instance, the Fact Sheet on Brazil includes this piece of information: “Catholic religion has been modified by African and Indian spiritualism and animism; Protestant sects, Jews, pagan folk worshippers all enjoy freedom of religion”,¹⁰⁴ yet it does



not give further explanation of how Catholicism has been modified or what constitutes spiritualism and animism.



High School World Geography Textbooks

The Role of Religion in the High School World Geography Standards

The introduction to the §113.43 World Geography Studies curriculum standards does not mention religion specifically; it differs in this respect from the introduction to the sixth-grade TEKS standards, which mentions “religious institutions” as a suggestion.¹⁰⁵ However, religion plays a bigger and more explicit role in the high school world geography TEKS than in its sixth-grade counterpart. TEKS 9(A) includes religion among a number of “physical and/or human factors...that constitute a region.” Several explicit references to religion appear in the standards relating to “Culture.” TEKS 16(B) requires that students be able to “describe elements of culture, including...religion, [and] beliefs and customs.” 17(A) expects students to “describe and compare patterns of culture such as...religion...that make specific regions of the world distinctive.” TEKS 17(B) prescribes instruction about specific major world religions “and their spatial distribution.” The following religions are to be covered: “animism, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism.”

Since TEKS 17(A) makes clear that the SBOE considers religion to be an element of culture, it could also be covered under other culture-related standards that do not mention religion explicitly. TEKS 16(C) specifies that students be able to “explain ways various groups of people perceive the characteristics of their own and other cultures, places, and regions differently.” 17(C) covers “economic, political, or social opportunities in different cultures for women, ethnic and religious minorities, and other underrepresented populations”; 17(D) requires that students be able to “evaluate the experiences and contributions of diverse groups to multicultural societies.” TEKS 18 requires that students understand “the ways in which cultures change and maintain continuity,” including diffusion, conflict, and efforts to “maintain traditional ways.” I assume that religion could be covered under any of these rubrics.

As I have noted, the high school world geography TEKS specify a list of world religions to be covered. Interestingly, this list differs from the list in the world *history* TEKS 23(A). Both sets of standards include Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism. But only the geography standard includes “animism,” whereas only the world history standard includes Confucianism and “the development of monotheism.” It seems that the definition of major world religions differs from one high school subject to the next! This is an odd quirk that I hope the SBOE will correct prior to the next adoption cycle.

Generally, the high school world geography TEKS lack the severe problems of balance that plague the standards for high school world history. The latter, as I discuss in my TFN review of world history textbooks, do not encourage balance and accuracy in the coverage of world religions. Instead, the basic western civilization orientation of the TEKS, and their privileging of Christianity’s role, tell a triumphalist and at times historically inaccurate story of the rise of the West guided by its dominant religion. Fortunately, the standards for high school world geography lack the history standards’ slant toward western civilization and Christianity, at least in the coverage of religions.¹⁰⁶ My only major difficulty with the geography standards has to do with the use of the term “animism” in 17(B); I give my reasons in the discussion of coverage of primal religions, below.



How the Textbooks Perform

I reviewed high school world geography textbooks from five publishers: Edmentum¹⁰⁷, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)¹⁰⁸, McGraw-Hill (McGraw-Hill)¹⁰⁹, Social Studies School Services (Social Studies School Service)¹¹⁰, and WorldView Software.¹¹¹

In general, I found that all five textbook packages display an acceptable degree of balance and accuracy in their presentation of the world's major religions. Students using any of these textbooks will become aware of the diversity of global religious life and will come away with a basic understanding of the beliefs, practices, and material cultures of the major world religions. Yet these textbooks are not always as balanced and accurate as they should be, and they vary significantly in the quality and extent of their coverage of religions.

I restrict my comments here to seven themes that arose in the course of my review. For a detailed discussion of pro's and con's of each textbook, please see my detailed reviews.

(1) Noteworthy Positive Features

Occasionally, a few of the textbooks move from acceptable content to true excellence. Here are a few noteworthy examples:

- **Edmentum:** A video excerpt on Diwali gives the viewer a vivid sense of the beliefs behind the festival and the practices associated with it.¹¹² Another activity has students view an excellent five-minute PBS *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly* story on the ancient Islamic scholarly center, Timbuktu. Students are then prompted to “(w)rite one or two paragraphs explaining the connection between Timbuktu and the spread of Islam.”¹¹³ This exercise will give students a vivid sense of the architecture of Timbuktu and a solid idea of the kind of scholarship Muslims did there in the city's classic period.
- **Houghton Mifflin Harcourt:** This textbook does a particularly good job of drawing connections between religion and political life. For instance, it contains a helpful discussion of the interplay of religion, politics, and economics in the conflict between England and Ireland.¹¹⁴ The discussion of the Central Asian republics notes that while the people of the region are divided by numerous ethnic and political loyalties, Islam acts as a unifying force.¹¹⁵ At several other points, the authors encourage students to reflect on the role of religion in contemporary issues. For example, the authors include an interesting discussion of divergent opinions in the U.S. and Canada on how to balance cultural (including religious) diversity with national unity. This section includes a case study project with a talk show format that prompts students to explore arguments for and against cultural assimilation.¹¹⁶
- **McGraw-Hill:** This textbook package features an excerpt from a BBC video on the Ottoman Empire, Turkey's move toward Europe and secularism under Attaturk, and the recent resurgence of Muslim identity in Turkey.¹¹⁷ To accompany this video, the Teacher's Edition offers some thought-provoking discussion questions: “Lead a class discussion on what it means for many in Turkey today to practice their Muslim beliefs. Ask students whether they believe it is possible for this region to have a balance between religion and politics in the modern era”; “Have students think about the meaning and importance of religion in their own lives as residents of the United States. Ask them to write their answers to the following questions: Do your religious beliefs (or lack of them) color your sense of identity as an American? Do you consider yourself an American first or a member of a religious



faith?” Another thought-provoking exercise has students consider recent French laws prohibiting Muslim women from wearing the veil: “Have students imagine they are women living in France and think about how they would react to the new law. Organize students into small groups....Then divide each group in half, with one half in favor of the law because it promotes equality and the other half opposed to the law because it criminalizes self-expression. Then have students verbally debate the issue within each group.”¹¹⁸

- **Social Studies School Service:** This package includes a video from the *What’s Going On?* TV series, on the plight of Aboriginal children in Australia. This half-hour video contains a helpful discussion of the Dreaming and how it is expressed in dance and chanting. This video will help students identify with the struggles of a minority people both to preserve their traditional ways and to adapt to the dominant culture.
- **WorldView:** The Resources/Documents tool in this package includes informative excerpts from a number of important religious texts from various traditions: the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Quran, the writings of radical Muslim theorist Sayyid Qutb, the *Analects* of Confucius, the Laws of Manu, the Buddha’s First Sermon, and the *Doctrine of Jainism*. Each excerpt is accompanied by a short, helpful introduction and a set of questions for students.

(2) Understanding of Religion

Religion is a contested term among scholars of religion as well as other disciplines, and a number of definitions are available. Some definitions are better than others, however. Due to the importance Christians give to belief in a single God, Westerners often define religion principally in terms of a set of beliefs in one or more gods. Such definitions have two problems. First, the “belief” element in such definitions tends to marginalize or exclude religions in which what one *believes* may be less important than what one *does* (e.g., Judaism, Confucianism), or the *perspective* one has on reality (e.g., Buddhism), or one’s *relationships* to spirits, ancestors, and other beings (e.g., Shinto). Second, the theistic (or “god”) element of such definitions leaves out non-theistic religions such as Theravada Buddhism and possibly religions such as Daoism in which the Ultimate is not so much a deity as a cosmic principle. In short, to define religion solely in terms of belief in one or more gods is to define religion too narrowly.

Three of the textbooks run into one or both problems in their definitions of religion. The Edmentum text defines simply religion as a “set of beliefs”;¹¹⁹ yet, arguably, non-religious (or anti-religious) ideologies like Marxism could also fit that definition. The Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and the WorldView textbooks fall prey to both problems: the former defines religion as “belief in a supernatural power or powers that are regarded as the creators and maintainers of the universe”; the latter, as “a system of beliefs involving God and a moral code.”¹²⁰

The McGraw-Hill textbook, on the other hand, offers a nicely balanced definition that avoids both theism and overemphasis on belief: “A religion is a set of beliefs in an ultimate reality and a set of practices used to express those beliefs.”¹²¹

I could find no explicit definition of religion in the various lessons and activities of the Social Studies School Service package. However, in a short video introduction to religion, the speaker, Dr. Alexander Murphy, offers a functional description of religion (i.e., he talks about religion in terms of what it *does* rather than what it *is*). Religion deals “with the most fundamental questions of meaning,



purpose, and existence.” It is one of the ways people “make sense the world, to understand who they are.” It also “identifies non-believers” and in doing so serves a source of “conflict, suffering, and war for thousands of years.”¹²² This construal of religion avoids the definitional problems described above.

(3) Christian slant or bias

Several textbooks showed signs of a subtle slant toward Christianity or, in a few cases, a pro-Christian bias. This type of imbalance tends to manifest in two ways in the textbooks: (a) in the assumption that students either are Christians or are familiar with Christian terminology; or, more problematically, (b) in painting too rosy a picture of Christianity, by omitting historical evidence to the contrary.¹²³

(a) Assumption of a Largely Christian Audience: Textbooks show a subtle tilt in a Christian direction when the authors fail to define Christian terminology but define terms from other religions: for example, leaving “Catholic” or “Protestant” undefined, while defining “Sunni” or “Shiite.” This suggests that the authors assume that the readers are either Christians or are familiar with Christian language.

Why does this pose a problem? Isn’t it a virtue for authors to “know their audience”? True, most Texas high school students will have at least a passing familiarity with key Christian terms. However, given the increasing number of Texas students who come from outside the Christian tradition, authors should not assume that their readers are familiar with key Christian terms and concepts. Moreover, failing to define Christian terms can give non-Christian students a sense of being outsiders, of not being members of “the club.”

There are many instances of this problem in the textbooks. Here are a few examples:

- **Edmentum:** In a discussion of the three Abrahamic religions, the authors explain that Jews worship in synagogues and that Muslim places of worship are called mosques; however, they do not explain that Christians worship in churches.¹²⁴
- **Houghton Mifflin Harcourt:** While this textbook includes brief definitions of most religions discussed, and while it describes the difference between the Sunni and Shiite branches of Islam, it does not offer similar descriptions for Catholicism, Protestantism, and Orthodoxy. The authors introduce those terms without defining them in either the text or the glossary.
- **McGraw-Hill:** In the chapter on the U.S., the authors note that most Americans are Protestant Christians, without defining “Protestant.”¹²⁵ Similarly, in the chapter on Mexico, the authors note that most people in Mexico self-identify as Catholics – again, without defining what “Catholic” means.¹²⁶ By contrast, the authors are careful to define the major divisions of both Buddhism and Islam in the World Religions Handbook.¹²⁷
- **Social Studies School Service:** At the beginning of a discussion of the Quran, the authors address the reader: “You may have heard of the Koran. It is the sacred book of the Islamic religion. It is as important to Muslims as the Bible is to Christians.”¹²⁸ Clearly the authors assume that the readers are Christians.¹²⁹



- The **WorldView** Master Glossary contains no entry for Protestantism. It does contain an entry for Catholicism, but it is woefully inadequate. It defines Catholicism as “a religion based on the belief in Jesus Christ; the major religion of Latin America.” Of course, “belief in Jesus Christ” also characterizes every other Christian sect.

(b) Instances of Pro-Christian Bias: The most common manifestation of this more serious problem involves errors of omission: the authors paint a more favorable portrait of Christian behavior than is warranted by leaving out evidence to the negative. Four of the textbooks manifest this problem, all in their discussions of the European colonization of the Americas.

The Edmentum textbook soft-pedals the European practice of evangelizing by conquest. In their discussion of the Spanish conquest, the authors note that in the wake of the conquest, “The majority of survivors became Catholic.”¹³⁰ This is misleading in that it suggests that the conversion to Catholicism was voluntary; it undoubtedly was in some cases, but not in all. Similarly, later in the same discussion, the authors write that in Central America “Native American societies that survived colonization often adopted Catholicism and learned Spanish.” Again, this phrasing is misleading in that it suggests that the conversion to Catholicism was voluntary. In neither case do the authors mention the Spaniards’ systematic destruction of indigenous religious institutions and practices, nor their forced conversions of the indigenous peoples to Christianity (e.g., the Spanish *Requerimiento* of 1513).

The Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and the McGraw-Hill textbooks make the Christianization of Mexico seem wholly benevolent. The McGraw-Hill text mentions only the use of “Catholic missions as religious outposts to help spread Christian ideas.”¹³¹ The Houghton Mifflin Harcourt authors write: “The Spanish brought their language and Catholic religion, both of which dominate modern Mexico.”¹³² There is no account of *how* Catholicism came to dominate Mexico, or at what cost. To their credit, however, the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt authors do note in a later section on South America: “The Spanish forced their own language and religion on the conquered peoples.”¹³³ Yet why is that bit of information delayed?

The Christianization process is painted in equally rosy colors in the Social Studies School Service package. In a video on religion, the narrator notes that “religion – here meaning Catholic Christianity – played an important role in the development of Latin American culture due to the Spanish missionaries’ commitment to “convert their New World indigenous subjects to Catholicism. Their many missions became focal points for early population centers, which grew through intermarriage with the indigenous population.”¹³⁴ Besides implying that the indigenous religious traditions played little or no role in the development of Latin American culture, this portrayal of the conversion process soft-pedals Europeans’ practice of evangelizing by conquest.

(4) Other noteworthy instances of imbalance and/or inaccuracy

Despite the slant toward Christianity in all five textbooks, I detected no systematic bias against other religions in any of the five. However, in a few cases the textbook authors present religions unfairly and/or inaccurately. These involve presentations of Islam, Hinduism, religions in Africa, and Judaism.

Islam suffers in one case. The McGraw-Hill textbook presents an image of three Muslim women wearing chadors. The image is accompanied by two discussion questions. The first asks how wearing the chador affects women’s interactions in public. The suggested answer is: “The chador limits women’s



interactions in public as it makes them indistinguishable from one another and inhibits *any kind* of contact.”¹³⁵ This is incorrect. Unlike the full-body burqa, the chador leaves the face uncovered, and thus does not inhibit facial “contact,” such as eye contact, facial expressions, or touching/kissing the face.¹³⁶ The second question asks what the chador reveals about the status of women in Muslim society. The suggested answer: “The chador reveals that even in countries that claim there is equality for women, religious law still hinders women’s rights.”¹³⁷ Again, this is not the case. The chador is not required by Muslim law, but by local custom. Furthermore, some Muslim women in the West wear the chador entirely voluntarily, for religious reasons; thus one cannot infer that the chador per se hinders women’s rights. This passage offers a highly misleading picture of the status of women in Islam – an anomaly in this package, which otherwise treats Islam in a fair and accurate manner.

In two cases it is Hinduism that receives imbalanced treatment. In a unit on South Asia, the Edmentum authors note that the Ganges River is both sacred and highly polluted. “Due to its sacred status,” they write, “there is a belief among many that it cannot be tainted. Convincing evidence shows otherwise. This belief is strong enough to cause reluctance among government officials to make serious strides to clean its waters.”¹³⁸ While this is no doubt true, what lesson do the authors wish students to take away from this? That Hindus are foolish and self-destructive? If not, what? Unfortunately, the authors do not offer further comment or clarification.

In a similar instance, the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt textbook shows a photo of a Hindu procession featuring the colossal temple car, the Juggernaut (*Jagannatha*). The Teacher’s Guide notes that some devotees have accidentally been crushed under its wheels. While this may (or may not) be true, what instructional purpose does the inclusion of this fact serve? As far as I can see, it serves only to perpetuate the Western prejudice that “Asians” do not value human life as much as “we” (Westerners) do.

The Houghton Mifflin Harcourt coverage of religion in the unit on **Africa** (Unit 6) is less balanced than it could be. Although this unit offers a quite informative discussion of Islam in Africa, it lacks a complementary discussion of African Christianity and traditional African religions, which constitute, respectively, the largest and the third largest religious communities on the continent. Since these two traditions receive sufficient attention in earlier units of the text, their comparative absence in Unit 6 likely results from space limitations rather than some anti-Christian or anti-primal bias on the authors’ part. Nonetheless, students will receive an unbalanced picture of religion in Africa in this unit.

A final example of imbalance crops up in the Social Studies School Service exercise in which students learn about Judaism through food – that is, through the typical diet of a Reform Jewish rabbi who lives in “a communal settlement outside of Jerusalem.”¹³⁹ The exercise teaches students about Reform Judaism and traditional kashrut as well as the newer Eco-kashrut, which focuses on sustainability. While this exercise offers students a vivid and accurate picture of what it means to live as a Reform Jew in Israel, its depiction of the political situation in Israel-Palestine lacks balance. In this activity’s opening discussion of the history of the state of Israel, the authors do a good job of describing Jewish claims to the land and Israel’s struggle to defend itself since 1948. What is missing is any sense of the Palestinian side of the issue, as well as any sense that the Jewish settlements themselves might be part of the problem.



(5) Coverage of Primal Religions

As noted above, TEKS 17(B) specifies that “animism” be covered. In religious studies, the term “animism” as a label for a religion is outmoded. Most scholars now refer to “primal religions” or “indigenous religions.” Animism is commonly understood not as itself a religion, but as a common *feature* of primal religions.¹⁴⁰

Accordingly, I construe the “animism” requirement to mean that primal religions should be covered. Coverage of primal religions varies widely, in both extent and quality, in all five textbooks.

- **Edmentum:** Coverage of primal religions is meager until relatively late in this package. When it first appears, under the label “animism,” the account is both overly brief and unhelpful. The authors describe the animism of the early cultural hearths as “believing in spirits outside of the human body.”¹⁴¹ This description fails to get at what separates “animism” from other religions. Many non-animistic religions also believe in “spirits outside of the human body” – e.g., Christianity’s angels, Islam’s jinns, Buddhism’s demons. The paucity of coverage of primal religions continues throughout the units on the Americas. The situation is finally rectified to some extent in the discussion of West and Central Africa. There the authors devote a full paragraph to traditional African religions and finally give an accurate account of animism: “Ancestors and spirits are said to be ‘nowhere, yet everywhere.’ They are believed to be present in rivers, mountains, trees, animals, people, and in all of nature. The belief that all natural things are spiritual is called animism.”¹⁴² A later unit offers quite helpful information about the Australian Aboriginal notion of the Dreamtime and the myth of the Rainbow Serpent. It is unfortunate that students using this package have to wait so long for exposure to primal religions.¹⁴³ Yet even in this unit the treatment of primal religions suffers. One exercise directs the students to a National Geographic article on “sorcery and witchcraft” among a primal people in Papua New Guinea. I have no reason to doubt the veracity of the article. Nevertheless, since this package gives students precious little exposure to primal religious beliefs and practices, could the authors not have chosen an article with a less sensationalizing topic, one likely to perpetuate students’ stereotypes of “primitive” peoples?¹⁴⁴
- **Houghton Mifflin Harcourt:** While this textbook offers one-paragraph descriptions of all major world religions, it slights primal religions.¹⁴⁵ The authors give “animism” only a cursory definition in the student text and a slightly longer description in the Teacher’s Guide.¹⁴⁶ Also, while the discussion of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlán mentions that Aztecs practiced human sacrifice, the authors do not discuss why the Aztecs believed such sacrifice was necessary.¹⁴⁷ The discussion of religions in the Caribbean defines Santería but then mentions Voodoo and Rastafari without defining those terms in the text or the Glossary.¹⁴⁸
- The **McGraw-Hill** “World Religions Handbook” includes a helpful section on primal (“Indigenous”) religions, covering Africa, Australia, Japan (Shinto), and Native Americans. However, in the chapters on Mexico and South America, the authors fail to discuss the religious beliefs of the Maya, Aztec, Inca, and other indigenous peoples.¹⁴⁹
- **Social Studies School Service:** The module on early African society includes a discussion of African traditional religions, which covers, briefly but adequately, the concepts of animism, ancestral spirits, and ancestor worship.¹⁵⁰ My only concern about this lesson is the authors’ use of the loaded term “magic” to refer to spiritual practices of African traditional religions. “Magic” has overtones of



Western chauvinism, and it is ambiguous: one person’s “magic” is another person’s spiritual experience or healing.

- **WorldView:** Like the Social Studies School Service package, the WorldView package introduces primal religion via a discussion of Africa. This chapter provides a brief discussion of traditional African religious beliefs, and provides membership percentages for traditional religions, alongside those of Islam and Christianity, on the African continent. The chapter on Oceania offers accurate but scattered coverage of religion in that region; this includes a one-sentence mention of Ratana (a blend of traditional Maori religion and Christianity), and the note that most Papuans are Christians but continue to practice traditional religion. However, I was unable to find a discussion of Australian Aboriginal religion.¹⁵¹

(6) Presence or absence of a “World Religions Handbook” feature

Two of the textbooks – Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and McGraw-Hill – include a module that introduces the subject of religion in general and then offers brief summaries of the major characteristics of the world religions.¹⁵² Such a feature gives students a handy guide to this important area of human life and history and allows them to compare and contrast religions. It is more difficult for students to keep track of the similarities and differences of the various religions when the authors distribute descriptions of them throughout the text, as is the case with the Edmentum, Social Studies School Service, and WorldView textbooks. I recommend that the SBOE require that world geography textbooks include a “World Religions Handbook” or similar feature in the next adoption cycle.

Although the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and McGraw-Hill packages offer this feature, they differ in the religions covered and in the quality of coverage. Technically, both packages cover the religions specified in TEKS 17(B): animism, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism. The Houghton Mifflin Harcourt text adds a paragraph on “Other Asian Practices” (Confucianism, Daoism, and Shinto), while the McGraw-Hill text adds Confucianism and Indigenous religions. The coverage differs considerably between the two texts. The Houghton Mifflin Harcourt textbook provides only brief, one-paragraph accounts of each religion and (as noted above) gives “animism” only a cursory definition. The McGraw-Hill text, on the other hand, devotes multiple-paragraph summaries to all major world religions *including* primal (“Indigenous”) religions, along with helpful photos that give students a sense of the people in the religious tradition and their material culture. For all but the Indigenous religions, the Handbook provides a summary discussion and sidebar features on sacred texts, symbols, sites, and celebrations. Although the section on Indigenous religions lacks those features, it makes up for that lack by providing greater geographical breadth, covering Africa, Australia, Japan (Shinto), and Native Americans.

The other three textbooks offer less-than-satisfactory substitutes for this feature:

- **Edmentum:** Instead of providing their own “World Religions Handbook” feature, the Edmentum developers instead point students to the Religions page on the BBC website.¹⁵³ This BBC resource contains short definitions of, and links to, much more information about, a large number of religions (and non-religions); each religion has its own webpage, containing numerous links to other information.¹⁵⁴ The Edmentum authors incorporate this BBC resource into an exercise that prompts students to gather information on Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism from the BBC Religions website.¹⁵⁵ Although this site partly makes up for the lack of a “World Religions Handbook” in the



Edmentum package, it has its own limitations. Students looking for information about Protestantism, for example, will find that the BBC site on Christianity has a page on Roman Catholicism, but not one on Protestantism per se. Furthermore, I seriously doubt that the BBC developers had the Texas public school students in mind as they were developing their Religions site.

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- **Social Studies School Service:** Instead of offering a central introduction to religion and the world religions, the Social Studies School Service developers offer a short video introduction to religion and then scatter religion-related content throughout various modules.¹⁵⁶ As noted above, a major problem with this distributed approach to religion is that it tends to keep students from noticing overall similarities and differences between religions. However, one module, on so-called “Big-Era Four,” covers several world religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, and Judaism) in the course of a discussion of the “Axial Age.”¹⁵⁷ The lesson goes on to draw helpful comparisons and contrasts among these world religions. However, this otherwise informative module does not cover “animism,” Islam, or Sikhism.
- **WorldView:** Although this package lacks a “World Religions Handbook” feature, its Master Glossary includes brief descriptions of all religions mentioned in TEKS 17(B), as well as Daoism, Jainism, Shinto, and several others. However, as with the Edmentum and Social Studies School Service packages, the lack of a central discussion of all major world religions makes it more difficult for students to compare and contrast them.

(7) Content and Organization Problems

In three of the textbooks the presentation of religions is significantly flawed in content and/or organization.

- The Edmentum package as a whole skimps on religion-related content, and what coverage the authors do provide is plagued by superficiality and poor organization. When discussing religion, the authors often just skim the surface and fail to get at deeper questions and implications. Consider, for example, this passage on the indigenous peoples of Central America: “Native Americans were the first to inhabit the land. Their cultures, religions, and languages are the oldest in this part of the world. Other cultures have had significant, long-lasting impacts on indigenous ways of life. Some remaining populations of indigenous people have been able to hold on to the ways of their ancestors despite no longer being a majority in Central America.”¹⁵⁸ This passage begs several questions: What beliefs and practices constitute “the ways of their ancestors”? What “other cultures” do the authors have in mind, and how have they affected native religions? How, specifically, have native peoples held on to their ancestral religions? Much later in the same Tutorial, the authors introduce the concept of syncretism, but they offer no further explanation; consequently these key questions remain unanswered. Similar problems crop up in the brief mention of the importation of enslaved Africans to the Caribbean: “When Africans were forced aboard slave ships and taken to the plantations of the Caribbean, they brought their religious beliefs with them. In some cases, these African religions have survived the hardships of slavery and blended with Christianity. One example of this is the practice of Vodou in Haiti, which evolved from West African and Christian traditions.”¹⁵⁹ While I applaud the authors for mentioning Afro-Caribbean religions at all (they are too often omitted in the textbooks under consideration), this passage once again begs some key questions: What beliefs and practices characterize these African religions?



What, specifically, is the nature of the “blending” with Christianity? The authors do not address these questions in the section on the Caribbean. There is a good summary of West African traditional religions in Unit B-3, but it does not appear until late in the second semester (the Caribbean is treated in Semester A). By that time, students likely will have forgotten Vodou, given how briefly and superficially it is covered in the earlier section.

Severe organization problems crop up in the introduction to the subject of religion in Semester A. The authors begin by noting that different religions have different beliefs, and they identify the religions with most followers worldwide.¹⁶⁰ Then, quite inexplicably, the authors devote one screen, with an embedded video, to Islam. Although the video is quite instructive, I am at a loss as to why a discussion of Islam appears at that point. Is it meant to serve as an example? If so, of what? Following the Islam screen, the introductory section then covers divisions within religions (using Christianity and Islam as examples), and it ends by briefly treating the phenomena of religious fundamentalism and religious violence. Students will be justifiably puzzled by all this zigging and zagging.

The Semester B sections do a good job of sketching the religious landscape of various regions, typically by giving percentages for each religion in an area. Yet these regional discussions often fail to go much below the surface. For instance, a Tutorial in Unit B-2 (Central & South Asia) mentions that “the gods Vishnu, Shiva, and Brahma...are considered the Hindu trinity.” Yet the authors do not go on to discuss *why* they are considered a trinity or what role each deity plays. In the same Tutorial, the authors write about the sacred river Ganges: “Bathing and drinking from its waters are considered sacred acts. The level of sacredness is enhanced when the bathing occurs at Veranasi [sic]...This is said to be the home of Shiva. Some Hindus will even go to the banks of the Ganges at Veranasi [sic] to die. It is believed that to pass away there and have your ashes scattered in the river afterward is the best possible way to end life.” Key questions go unanswered: Who is Shiva, and what are his characteristics? Why is it significant that Varanasi is the god’s home? Might there be some connection between Shiva and death?¹⁶¹ Once again, the authors leave the student hanging.

- **Social Studies School Service:** Where religion does appear in this package, it generally plays a fairly minor role compared to other aspects of human life such as ethnicity, popular culture, or human use of the landscape. For example, the video-based activities on European feudalism and the emergence of modern nations make no mention of the role of religion in these phenomena – even though the video in the feudalism activity shows some graphics of medieval Christian art.¹⁶² In a major exercise on Latin America, the Fact Sheets provided to the instructor include some basic religion-related information about each country, including percentages of religious affiliation.¹⁶³ However, the information on the Fact Sheets is quite sketchy. For instance, the sheet on Brazil includes this piece of information: “Catholic religion has been modified by African and Indian spiritualism and animism; Protestant sects, Jews, pagan folk worshippers all enjoy freedom of religion.”¹⁶⁴ Yet it does not give further explanation of how Catholicism has been modified, or what constitutes spiritualism and animism.
- **WorldView:** I could not find any substantial discussion of religion in the United States or Canada.¹⁶⁵ The chapter on the United States does note that some regional variations result from “religious beliefs,” but the authors do not offer further explanation.¹⁶⁶ The chapter on Canada discusses multiculturalism, but it does not mention religion as a factor.



¹ For my critique of the high school world history TEKS, see my other TFN review, “More Balanced Than the Standards: A Review of the Presentation of Religion in Proposed Textbooks for High School World History in Texas,” Texas Freedom Network Education Fund, September 2014.

² See David R. Brockman, *No Longer the Same: Religious Others and the Liberation of Christian Theology* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

³ Annie Laurie Gaylor, “The Dangers of Religious Instruction in Public Schools,” *Religion & Politics* January 7, 2014. URL: <http://religionandpolitics.org/2014/01/07/the-dangers-of-religious-instruction-in-public-schools>.

⁴ §113.18.a.1.

⁵ The sixth-grade social studies TEKS include the following note: “Statements that contain the word ‘including’ reference content that must be mastered, while those containing the phrase ‘such as’ are intended as possible illustrative examples.” §113.18.a.3 (sixth grade).

⁶ This is not say that a western slant are utterly absent. The sixth-grade social studies TEKS stress “the role of the U.S. free enterprise system” (§113.18.a.4), and how far the U.S. has lived up to the ideas in the founding documents (§113.18.a.8). TEKS 2(A) refers to classical Greece and the American and French Revolutions, and 9(B) stresses “the benefits of the U.S. free enterprise system.” These add up to a continuing bias toward the West.

⁷ Keith A. Erekson, “Culture War Circus: How Politics and the Media Left History Education Behind,” in *Politics and the History Curriculum: The Struggle over Standards in Texas and the Nation*, ed. Keith A. Erekson (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), [3-17] 11-12; Kate Alexander, “State board throws water on flare-ups over Cesar Chavez, ‘war on Christmas,’” *Austin American-Statesman*, September 18, 2009.

⁸ Cengage-National Geographic, *World Cultures and Geography: Texas* (Willard, OH: National Geographic Learning, Cengage Learning, 2015). I cite passages by chapter, section, and Teacher Edition page number. (For example, “Ch. 4, §2.1, 321” refers to page 321 in section 2.1 or chapter 4.) (Since page numbers in the Teacher Edition do not always match those in the Student Edition, I use the former).

⁹ Discovery Education, *World Geography and Cultures* (Discovery Education, 2014). I cite passages according to the chapter and section numbering used in this package (e.g., 1.1 refers to chapter 1, section 1).

¹⁰ Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, *Texas Contemporary World Studies: People, Places, and Societies*, Teacher’s Edition (2016).

¹¹ McGraw-Hill Education, *World Cultures & Geography, Texas*. All page number references are to the annotated Student Edition, available through the Teacher Edition.

¹² Pearson Realize, *Contemporary World Cultures Texas Grade 6* (rev. f30be5c). I use the following citation scheme: Topic number, then Lesson number, then item within the Lesson, then screen number (if applicable). So, for example, “3.2, Text 3: 4” indicates Topic 3, Lesson 2, Text 3, screen number 4. Some items, such as interactive galleries and document-based questions, do not have screen numbers.

¹³ Social Studies School Services (Social Studies School Service), *Grade 6*. The Social Studies School Service package does not use unit, chapter, or screen numbers, so my citations are to the name of the particular module within the package.

¹⁴ The instructor can filter the lessons and activities by grade and associated TEKS requirements.

¹⁵ Cengage, Ch. 7, §2.1, 207.

¹⁶ Cengage, Ch. 16, §1.2, 442; Ch. 16, §1.4, 446; Ch. 15, §2.4, 428.

¹⁷ Discovery Education, Ch. 4.3/Explore: The New Europe.

¹⁸ McGraw-Hill, Teacher Edition, Ch. 18, Lesson 3

¹⁹ Pearson, 6.Introduction, My Story Video: Israel and Its Neighbors.

²⁰ Cengage, Ch. 2, §3.2, 60.

²¹ Cengage, World Religions Handbook, R51.

²² Discovery Education, Reference.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, H18.

²⁵ McGraw-Hill, Ch. 3, Lesson 2, p. 3.

²⁶ Pearson, Culture Core Concepts: Religion: 1.

²⁷ Social Studies School Service, Human Geography: Making Sense of Planet Earth: Understanding Human Culture: Religion.

²⁸ A third form of pro-Christian tilt results when the authors give Christianity more coverage than other religions. Textbooks that attempt to follow the TEKS closely will inevitably do so. In several of the textbooks I had the impression that Christianity received more space than other religions. However, I did not have time to quantify that impression. I recommend that SBOE reviewers attend to this question in the next social studies textbook cycle.

²⁹ Cengage, Ch. 2, §3.1, 58.



- ³⁰ E.g., Cengage, Ch. 3, §2.2, 90; Ch. 3, §3.2, 104.
- ³¹ Cengage, Ch. 8, §1.3, 220.
- ³² Cengage, Ch. 11, §2.2, RB29.
- ³³ Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 486 (Islam), 648 (Hinduism and Buddhism), Teacher Edition 651 (Sikhism).
- ³⁴ Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 672.
- ³⁵ McGraw-Hill, Ch. 6, Lesson 3, p. 2.
- ³⁶ McGraw-Hill, Teacher Edition, Ch. 6, Lesson 3.
- ³⁷ McGraw-Hill, Ch. 7, Lesson 3.
- ³⁸ McGraw-Hill, Ch. 3, Lesson 2, p. 3.
- ³⁹ See, for example, the discussion of religions in the U.S., Pearson, 1.3, Text 3: 1.
- ⁴⁰ Social Studies School Service, Power Basics World History ELL Readings & Assessments: Life in the Islamic World.
- ⁴¹ This module is common to both the sixth-grade and high school world geography packages.
- ⁴² Cengage, R53.
- ⁴³ E.g., Cengage, Ch. 13, §2.2, 372.
- ⁴⁴ Cengage, R52.
- ⁴⁵ Discovery, 3.3/Explore, A Blending of Religious Beliefs.
- ⁴⁶ Pearson, 1.8, Text 1: 5.
- ⁴⁷ Social Studies School Service, Human Geography: Making Sense of Planet Earth: Understanding Human Culture: Religion.
- ⁴⁸ See the coverage of Mexico and Central America in Cengage, Ch. 3 & Ch. 6; Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 198; McGraw-Hill, Chapter 6, Lesson 2, p. 3; Pearson, 1.8, Text 1; Social Studies School Service, Human Geography: Making Sense of Planet Earth: Understanding Human Culture: Religion; and Sunburst/Ignite, Sunburst/Ignite, Recent Mexico & Central America, Topic 3, and The Decline of Native Cultures. The Caribbean, Topic 3, Caribbean Developments.
- ⁴⁹ Cengage, Ch. 7, §2.1, 206.
- ⁵⁰ See, for example, my brief discussion of the *encomienda* system in David R. Brockman and Ruben L.F. Habito, eds., *The Gospel among Religions: Christian Ministry, Theology, and Spirituality in a Multifaith World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 75.
- ⁵¹ Pearson, 2.2, Text 1: 4. The “as little concern” passage is from Bartolomé de las Casas, quoted in the text.
- ⁵² McGraw-Hill, Ch. 6, Lesson 2, Resources.
- ⁵³ Pearson, 4.3, Text 1: 8.
- ⁵⁴ See, for example, Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianity & Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 12-16. I should add, however, that to their credit, the authors do note that Christians’ brutal treatment of Muslims and Jews during the Crusades (6.8, Text 3: 3), a point sometimes omitted in other textbooks.
- ⁵⁵ Cengage, Ch. 16, §2.3.
- ⁵⁶ Cengage, R53.
- ⁵⁷ Cengage, R55. The same error occurs at Ch. 17, §2.3, 486.
- ⁵⁸ Discover Education, Ch. 8.3/Explore: Foods of South Asia.
- ⁵⁹ Discover Education, Ch. 9.3/Explore: Regional Religions and Philosophy.
- ⁶⁰ Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 106, 110.
- ⁶¹ McGraw-Hill, Ch. 17, Lesson 2, p. 2.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- ⁶³ McGraw-Hill, Ch. 17, Lesson 2, Resources. There is, however, an interactive map showing the distribution of Protestantism, Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Islam in Europe in the 1500s, along with cities with major Jewish populations (Ch. 13, Lesson 2, Resources).
- ⁶⁴ McGraw-Hill, Ch. 18 (North Africa), Lesson 2, pp. 4-5; Lesson 3, p. 1 and Resources.
- ⁶⁵ McGraw-Hill, Ch. 18, Lesson 3, pp. 3, 7-8, and Assessment 1; Ch. 19, Lesson 2, p. 9.
- ⁶⁶ Cengage, Ch. 3, §3.1, 102; Ch. 7, §2.1, 204-05. The discussion of the Maya does mention their use of a calendar to mark religiously important dates.
- ⁶⁷ Cengage, Ch. 8, §1.1, 216.
- ⁶⁸ See Cengage, Ch. 13, §2.1, 370; Ch. 13, §2.2, 372; and Ch. 14, §1.1, 384.
- ⁶⁹ Cengage, Ch. 14, §1.4, 390.
- ⁷⁰ Cengage, Ch. 13, §2.1, 370.
- ⁷¹ Cengage, Ch. 13, §2.2, 372.
- ⁷² Cengage, Ch. 20, §1.1, 562; Ch. 22, §1.1, 620; Ch. 23, §2.1, 656; Ch. 24, §1.3, 672.
- ⁷³ Cengage, Teacher Edition, Ch. 23, §2.1, 656.
- ⁷⁴ Discovery Education, Ch. 7.3/Explore: The Many Cultures and Traditions of Sub-Saharan Africa.



- ⁷⁵ Discovery Education, Ch. 3.3/Explore: A Blending of Religious Roots.
- ⁷⁶ Discovery Education, Ch. 3.3.
- ⁷⁷ Discovery Education, Ch. 7.3/Explore: A Diversity of Religions.
- ⁷⁸ McGraw-Hill, Ch. 6, Lesson 2, p. 2.
- ⁷⁹ McGraw-Hill, Ch. 7, Lesson 2, pp. 1-2.
- ⁸⁰ McGraw-Hill, Ch. 11, Lesson 2, p. 1.
- ⁸¹ McGraw-Hill, Ch. 11, Lesson 3, p. 3.
- ⁸² Pearson, Culture Core Concepts: Religion.
- ⁸³ Pearson, 2.3, Text 1; 3.5.
- ⁸⁴ On ancient Greek religion, Pearson, 4.3, Text 1: 5. Ancient Egyptian religion is covered in 6.2, Text 1; and Interactive Gallery: Abu Simbel
- ⁸⁵ Pearson, 7.3, Text 2: 1; 7.6, Text 1: 3; 7.6, Interactive Charts: Literacy and Religion in Southern and Eastern Africa.
- ⁸⁶ Pearson, Topic 11.
- ⁸⁷ Pearson, 9.6, Text 3: 5.
- ⁸⁸ Social Studies School Service, “Power Basics World History ELL Readings & Assessments: Early African Society.”
- ⁸⁹ Cengage, R51-R58; McGraw-Hill, “World Religions Handbook”; Pearson, “Culture Core Concepts: Religion.”
- ⁹⁰ Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 486, 648, 651, and 672. The information on Sikhism is found only in the Teacher Guide.
- ⁹¹ The video is at Social Studies School Service, Understanding Human Culture: Religion.
- ⁹² Social Studies School Service, The Big Eras: Big Era Four—Expanding Networks of Exchange and Encounter.
- ⁹³ Cengage, Ch. 4, §1.1, 116.
- ⁹⁴ Cengage, Ch. 6, §1.
- ⁹⁵ Cengage, Ch. 14, §1.1, 384.
- ⁹⁶ Cengage, Ch. 23 & 24.
- ⁹⁷ The Glossary does contain entries for monotheism, Mormon, pagan, polytheism, reincarnation, and syncretism.
- ⁹⁸ McGraw-Hill, Ch. 17, Lesson 2, p. 2.
- ⁹⁹ Discovery Education, 6.3/Explore: Judaism.
- ¹⁰⁰ McGraw-Hill, Ch. 21, Lesson 3, p. 2.
- ¹⁰¹ McGraw-Hill, Teacher Edition, Ch. 22, Lesson 3.
- ¹⁰² Social Studies School Service, Cities and Urban Land Use: Feudalism; Political Boundaries: The Emergence of Nations.
- ¹⁰³ Social Studies School Service, “*Amigos: A Simulation of a Race Through Latin America Developing Awareness of Its Lands, People, and History*,” 48-106 (Teacher’s Guide).
- ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.
- ¹⁰⁵ Like the sixth-grade social studies TEKS, the high school world geography TEKS include the following note: “Statements that contain the word ‘including’ reference content that must be mastered, while those containing the phrase ‘such as’ are intended as possible illustrative examples.” §113.18.a.3 (sixth grade); §113.43.b.3 (high school).
- ¹⁰⁶ This is not say that a western slant are utterly absent. The sixth-grade social studies TEKS stress “the role of the U.S. free enterprise system” (§113.18.a.4), and how far the U.S. has lived up to the ideas in the founding documents (§113.18.a.8). TEKS 2(A) refers to classical Greece and the American and French Revolutions, and 9(B) stresses “the benefits of the U.S. free enterprise system.” These add up to a continuing bias toward the West.
- ¹⁰⁷ Edmentum, *TX-World Geography, Semester A* and *TX- World Geography, Semester B*. In the citations below, I preface each lesson number with “A” for *Semester A* and “B” for *Semester B* (e.g., B-2 indicates lesson 2 of *Semester B*). Unfortunately, the developers do not number the screens. Given that the screen numbering may change, I elected not to supply my own screen numbers.
- ¹⁰⁸ Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, *Texas World Geography, Teacher’s Edition* (2016).
- ¹⁰⁹ McGraw-Hill Education, *World Geography, Texas*. All page number references are to the annotated Student Edition, available through the Teacher Edition.
- ¹¹⁰ Social Studies School Services (Social Studies School Service), *World Geography*. The Social Studies School Service package does not use unit, chapter, or screen numbers, so my citations are to the name of the particular module within the package.
- ¹¹¹ WorldView, *World Geography: An Interactive Approach* (2014).
- ¹¹² Edmentum, Unit B-2, Central & South Asia Tutorial.
- ¹¹³ Edmentum, Unit B-3, West & Central Africa Tutorial, Lesson Activities.
- ¹¹⁴ Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 305.
- ¹¹⁵ Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 378, 382.
- ¹¹⁶ Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 180-83.
- ¹¹⁷ McGraw-Hill, Ch. 17, Lesson 2, Resources.
- ¹¹⁸ McGraw-Hill, Teacher Edition, Ch. 12, Lesson 2.



¹¹⁹ Edmentum, Unit A-2, Human Geography Tutorial.

¹²⁰ Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 75; WorldView, Master Glossary.

¹²¹ McGraw-Hill, World Religions Handbook.

¹²² Social Studies School Service, Human Geography: Making Sense of Planet Earth: Understanding Human Culture: Religion.

¹²³ A third form of pro-Christian tilt results when the authors give Christianity more coverage than other religions. Textbooks that attempt to follow the TEKS closely will inevitably do so. In several of the textbooks I had the impression that Christianity received more space than other religions. However, I did not have time to quantify that impression. I recommend that SBOE reviewers attend to this question in the next social studies textbook cycle.

¹²⁴ Edmentum, Unit B-3, Middle East-North Africa Tutorial.

¹²⁵ McGraw-Hill, Ch. 5, Lesson 2, p. 7.

¹²⁶ McGraw-Hill, Ch. 7, Lesson 2, p. 6.

¹²⁷ Perhaps the Glossary for this McGraw-Hill textbook will have entries for the major Christian divisions, but it was empty at the time of my review.

¹²⁸ Social Studies School Service, Power Basics World History ELL Readings & Assessments: Life in the Islamic World.

¹²⁹ This module is common to both the sixth-grade and high school world geography packages.

¹³⁰ Edmentum, Unit A-3, Tutorial.

¹³¹ McGraw-Hill, Ch. 7, Lesson 2, p. 4.

¹³² Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 219.

¹³³ Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 231.

¹³⁴ Social Studies School Service, Human Geography: Making Sense of Planet Earth: Understanding Human Culture: Religion.

¹³⁵ McGraw-Hill, Ch. 17, Lesson 2, Resources. Emphasis mine.

¹³⁶ A helpful graphic on the various types of Muslim veils is available from BBC News:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/pop_ups/05/europe_muslim_veils/html/1.stm.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Edmentum, Unit B-2 Central & South Asia Tutorial.

¹³⁹ Social Studies School Service, What I Eat: Israel.

¹⁴⁰ Take, for example, this definition from a world religions textbook: “[animism is the] belief, common in indigenous religions, that all reality is infused with spirits or a spiritual force and is therefore alive.” William A. Young, *The World’s Religions: Worldviews and Contemporary Issues*, 4th ed. (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2013), 419.

¹⁴¹ Edmentum, Unit A-2, Human Geography Tutorial.

¹⁴² Edmentum, Unit B-3, West & Central Africa Tutorial.

¹⁴³ Edmentum, Unit B-4, the Australia-New Zealand Tutorial, Lesson Activities, “Aboriginal Culture and Modern History.”

¹⁴⁴ Edmentum, Unit B-4, Oceania-Antarctica Tutorial, Lesson Activities.

¹⁴⁵ Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 75-77.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 75.

¹⁴⁷ Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 218.

¹⁴⁸ Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 225.

¹⁴⁹ McGraw-Hill, Ch. 7, Lesson 2, p. 4; Ch. 9, Lesson 2, pp. 1-2.

¹⁵⁰ Social Studies School Service, “Power Basics World History ELL Readings & Assessments: Early African Society.”

¹⁵¹ WorldView, Ch. 21, Oceania: Human Geography: Overview.

¹⁵² Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 75-77; McGraw-Hill, “World Religions Handbook.”

¹⁵³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/>

¹⁵⁴ The site has entries for Atheism, Baha’i, Buddhism, Candomblé, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Judaism, Mormonism, Paganism, Rastafarianism, Santería, Shinto, Sikhism, Spiritualism, Taoism, Unitarianism, and Zoroastrianism.

¹⁵⁵ Edmentum, Unit A-2, Human Geography Tutorial, Lesson Activities.

¹⁵⁶ The video is at Social Studies School Service, Understanding Human Culture: Religion.

¹⁵⁷ Social Studies School Service, The Big Eras: Big Era Four—Expanding Networks of Exchange and Encounter.

¹⁵⁸ Edmentum, Unit A-3, Tutorial.

¹⁵⁹ Edmentum, Unit A-3, Tutorial.

¹⁶⁰ Edmentum, Unit A-2.

¹⁶¹ As the reader may know, Shiva is associated with the cycle of destruction and creation.

¹⁶² Social Studies School Service, Cities and Urban Land Use: Feudalism; Political Boundaries: The Emergence of Nations.



¹⁶³ Social Studies School Service, “*Amigos: A Simulation of a Race Through Latin America Developing Awareness of Its Lands, People, and History*,” 48-106 (Teacher’s Guide).

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁶⁵ WorldView, Ch. 4 and Ch. 5.

¹⁶⁶ WorldView, United States: Human Geography: Overview.



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