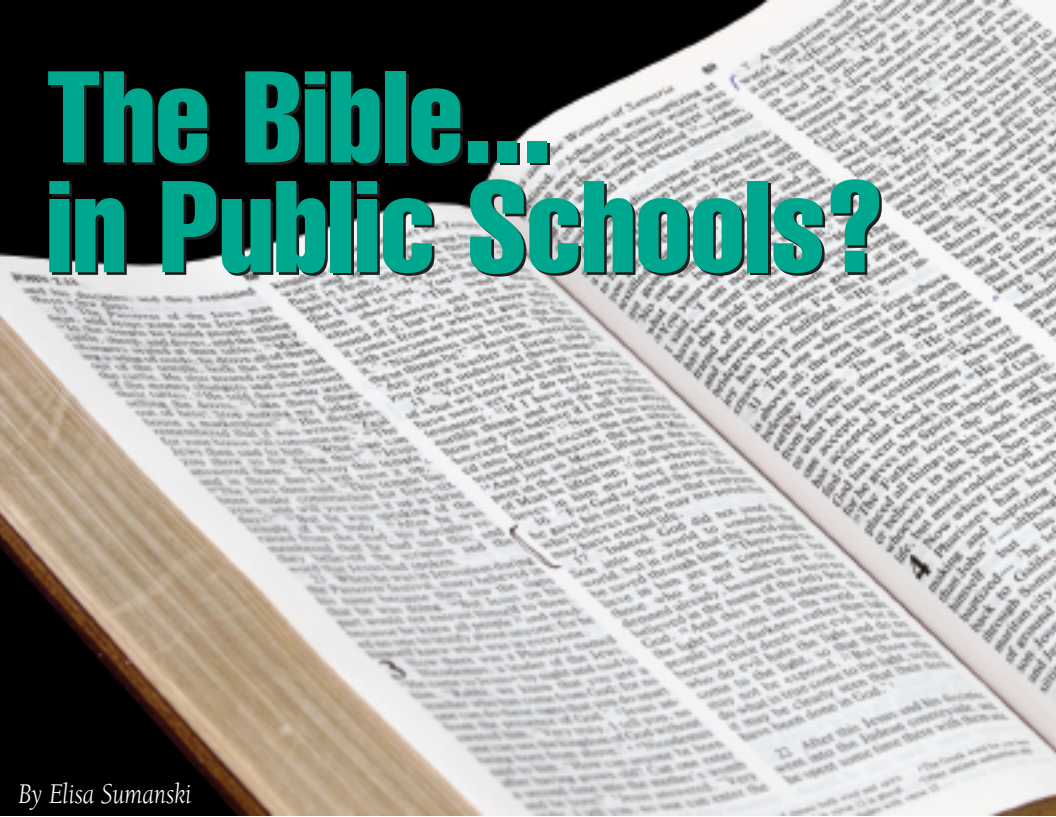


The Bible... in Public Schools?



By Elisa Sumanski

For decades anti-Christians have been fighting tooth and nail to destroy the moral foundation of our country. We've seen battles over displays of the Ten Commandments and nativity scenes, or what we can wear and display in the workplace.

Nowhere has this hurt our culture more than in the education of the next generation of Americans. Stripping public schools of any mention of Christianity and all discussion of the Bible leaves them lacking a fundamental understanding of the history and fabric that made our nation the great country it is today.

The Supreme Court agrees that instruction on the Bible is both important and legal. The same 1963 decision that barred *devotional* Bible recitations in school, *Abington v. Shempp*, also stated,

"[T]he Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities" as long as it is "presented objectively as part of a secular program."

Essential for modern education

The High Court is not alone in declaring the Bible "worthy of study." The Bible Literacy Project (BLP), a nonpartisan group seeking to encourage academic study of the Bible in public schools, has published two detailed reports (*Bible Literacy Report* and *Bible Literacy Report II*) showing that high school teachers and college professors concur: Knowledge of the Bible is *essential* for a complete education.

"Overwhelmingly, professors in this survey indicated that a lack of basic Bible literacy hampers students' ability to understand both classics and contempo-

rary work,” said Dr. Marie Wachlin, researcher and author of *Bible Literacy Report II*.

The Bible’s cultural impact goes beyond the billions of people around the world who consider it sacred Scripture — it is, simply put, the most influential published work of the Western world.

Stripping public schools of all discussion of the Bible leaves students lacking an understanding of what makes our country great.

Western literature, from Chaucer to Shakespeare to modern-day Toni Morrison, is rife with Biblical references and allusions. The Bible has affected, sometimes quite dramatically, American and European history, culture and political theories. Even the English language owes a debt to the Bible as the source of many words and idioms still commonly used today.

It is not only the best-selling book in the world (ever), it is an ancient work of literary and historic significance—at least as worthy of study as Homer’s *Iliad* or Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Teachers and professors assert that any understanding of literature, history, politics, philosophy, art, music or culture is incomplete without a basic knowledge of the Bible.

The BLP reports also show that the number of students who lack an adequate background in the subject has continued to rise, making urgent the need for academic instruction on the Bible.

Although aware of the growing need, a vast majority of public school teachers shy away from the subject. Uncertainty on where the legal boundaries lie causes them to avoid it altogether. Innovative

groups are working to change that.

The Bible and Its Influence

The Bible and Its Influence, a new textbook published by BLP, is designed to teach public high school students about the Bible.

“This textbook makes educators more confident about teaching the subject,” says Sheila Weber, BLP vice president. “It is legal to teach the Bible in public schools, and this course helps alleviate teachers’ concerns by guiding them on how to properly and legally present the material.”

A pilot program tested the course in nearly 30 schools during the 2004-2005 terms, but this upcoming school year will be the first time it is available to the general public. The response so far has been impressive, with over 800 schools across the country evaluating the textbook for inclusion in their curricula.

Respects religious views, meets legal standards

The Bible and Its Influence has been endorsed by scholars and leaders from the Protestant, Catholic and Jewish faiths, as well as university professors and high school English teachers across the country. It provides an impartial framework, and students choose their own Bible to accompany it.

While the textbook necessarily discusses religious content, without which a study of the Bible would be wholly incomplete, it remains objective and doesn’t encourage or discourage religious views.

National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools

The National Council on Bible Curriculum (NCBC) offers public schools another option. Last year, 350 schools

across 37 states offered this curriculum as an elective.

Instead of a textbook, they offer educators a curriculum and lesson plans.

Without a textbook, it is less costly to implement.

President Elizabeth Ridenour states, “The curriculum for the program shows a concern to convey the content of the Bible as compared to literature and history. ... The central approach of the class is simply to study the Bible as a foundation document of society, and that approach is altogether appropriate in a comprehensive program of secular education.”

A sample unit is available for review on NCBC’s Web site. This program also offers an impressive list of endorsements.

“Both of these Bible literacy programs provide a solid curriculum and good education about the Bible without usurping the parental and church role of teaching faith,” says Dr. Janice Crouse, Senior Fellow of Concerned Women for America’s Beverly LaHaye Institute, who is a former college professor and administrator. “The Bible continues to be relevant to any understanding of history or contemporary events, but for the past three decades it has gone missing in public schools.”

Released Time

Another option worth considering is “released time.” This is a constitutionally allowed program where students may leave school grounds for one hour a week to attend a Bible class. While such programs are usually designed for primary grades, it is possible to put one in place at a high school.

This is the only option that can be considered Christian outreach—and indeed, it is usually just that. In fact, “released time” programs are often run through a church and not taught by public school teachers. Most remain

nondenominational in order to serve a larger number of students, but their essential nature is evangelical and not scholastic.

If the goal is not simply to encourage the Bible from an academic standpoint, but to actually teach Christianity, this is

The Bible has affected Western literature, American and European history, culture and political theories, and is the source of many English words and idioms still used today.

the only program that can legally fulfill the requirements.

“It is essential for American students to understand and appreciate the critical role the Bible has played in the history, culture and literature of our nation and the Western world,” Dr. Crouse concludes. “Education is one of CWA’s core issues in part because public schools no longer instill knowledge of the Bible and Judeo-Christian values in the curriculum.

“It’s time to bring back the Bible as essential literature for an educated American. With that foundation, all of society will be stronger. These resources have the potential to fill a fundamental void in today’s public education system, and I encourage educators and parents to review them and approach their local school boards about adding one to their school curricula.”

For more information:

Bible Literacy Project
122 W. 14th Street PMB 332

Front Royal, Virginia 22630
540-622-2285

<http://www.bibleliteracy.org>

National Council on Biblical
Curriculum
P.O. Box 9743
Greensboro, North Carolina 27429
336-272-3799

<http://www.bibleinschools.net>

Released Time:

Public School Bible Outreach Ministries
P.O. Box #152

Hatfield, Indiana 47617-0152
812-359-4569

[http://www.psci.net/bibleinschool/
PublicSchoolBibleStudyOutreach
Ministries.htm](http://www.psci.net/bibleinschool/PublicSchoolBibleStudyOutreachMinistries.htm)

*Elisa Sumanski is the Planned Giving Officer
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CWA of Louisiana Helps Pass Divorce Reform Bill

By Kylan Lamont

Through prayer and action, CWA of Louisiana won a major victory for families with the passage of H.B. 1379, which passed the state Senate 67 to 20 on June 29.

This bill extends the waiting period for divorce from six months to a year, offering an increased opportunity for reconciliation and possibly motivating couples to undergo counseling. It also provides for a more rapid divorce in proven cases of child abuse and domestic violence.

CWA of Louisiana State Director Deborah Young testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee regarding divorce's impact on children.

"The atrocities of Hurricane Katrina led our state to the realization that families are our most precious commodity," she told *Family Voice*. "I believe one year ago this legislation would have been defeated, but the storm gave us renewed appreciation for our children and families."

On July 19, CWA of Louisiana presented the Pillar of Excellence Award to state Rep. Ernie Alexander (R) of Lafayette for his work on the bill. The annual award honors someone who "promotes the family and upholds righteousness."

Congratulations to CWA of Louisiana. May the Lord continue to bless your work! ■



CWA of Louisiana presented the Pillar of Excellence Award to state Rep. Ernie Alexander (R) for his work on the divorce reform bill. Shown left to right: Gail Andrus, Records Correspondent; Deborah Young, CWA of Louisiana State Director; Sancha Smith, Legislative Liaison; and Rep. and Mrs. Alexander.