

Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know--And Doesn't

By Stephen Prothero

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The United States is one of the most religious places on earth, but it is also a nation of shocking religious illiteracy.

- Only 10 percent of American teenagers can name all five major world religions and 15 percent cannot name any.
- Nearly two-thirds of Americans believe that the Bible holds the answers to all or most of life's basic questions, yet only half of American adults can name even one of the four gospels and most Americans cannot name the first book of the Bible.

Despite this lack of basic knowledge, politicians and pundits continue to root public policy arguments in religious rhetoric whose meanings are missed—or misinterpreted—by the vast majority of Americans.

"We have a major civic problem on our hands," says religion scholar Stephen Prothero. He makes the provocative case that to remedy this problem, we should return to teaching religion in the public schools. Alongside "reading, writing, and arithmetic," religion ought to become the "Fourth R" of American education.

Many believe that America's descent into religious illiteracy was the doing of activist judges and secularists hell-bent on banishing religion from the public square. Prothero reveals that this is a profound misunderstanding. "In one of the great ironies of American religious history," Prothero writes, "it was the nation's most fervent people of faith who steered us down the road to religious illiteracy. Just how that happened is one of the stories this book has to tell."

Prothero avoids the trap of religious relativism by addressing both the core tenets of the world's major religions *and* the real differences among them. Complete with a dictionary of the key beliefs, characters, and stories of Christianity, Islam, and other religions, *Religious Literacy* reveals what every American needs to know in order to confront the domestic and foreign challenges facing this country today.

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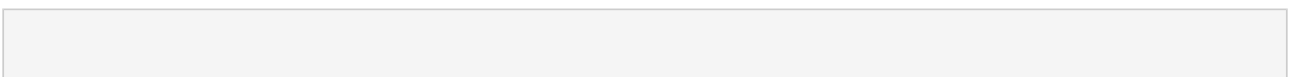
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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Prothero (*American Jesus*), chair of the religion department at Boston University, begins this valuable primer by noting that religious illiteracy is rampant in the United States, where most Americans, even Christians, cannot name even one of the four Gospels. Such ignorance is perilous because religion "is the most volatile constituent of culture" and, unfortunately, often "one of the greatest forces for evil" in the world, he writes. Prothero does more than diagnose the problem; he traces its surprising historic roots ("in one of the great ironies of...history, it was the nation's most fervent people of faith who steered Americans down the road to religious illiteracy") and prescribes concrete solutions that address religious education while preserving First Amendment boundaries about religion in the public square. Prothero also offers a dictionary of religious literacy and a quiz for readers to test their knowledge. This book is a must-read not only for educators, clergy and government officials, but for all adults in a culture where, as Prothero puts it, "faith without understanding is the standard" and "religious ignorance is bliss." (*Mar.*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review The author of *I[^] American Jesus* (2003) opens this important book with a paradox. To wit, Americans are deeply religious *I[^]* and profoundly ignorant about religion; that is, one of the most religious countries is also a nation of "religious illiterates." Prothero calls religious illiteracy dangerous because religion is one of the greatest forces for good--as well as evil--in the world. Nowadays, standing on shaky religious ground can be literally a matter of life and death. To cite two brief examples of America's religious illiteracy: only half of American adults can name one of the four Gospels, and 10 percent of Americans believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. Prothero defines religious literacy--what it is, and what it is not. He also discusses the two great religious revivals in U.S. history, the Second Great Awakening of the nineteenth century and the postwar revival of the 1940s and 1950s. He argues both the constitutionality and the necessity of teaching--with an emphasis on spreading knowledge, not inculcating values--about religion in public schools and higher education. He suggests that every U.S. public high school should require a course on the Bible and another on the religions of the world. And he devotes an entire chapter to "a modest list" of a hundred or so religious terms that he deems essential, from *I[^]* Abraham to *I[^]* Zionism, to any American's religious knowledge. A must-read on its subject. *June Sawyers*
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Review

"This book is a must-read not only for educators, clergy and government officials, but for all adults."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Mildred Yen:

Do you have favorite book? For those who have, what is your favorite's book? E-book is very important thing for us to understand everything in the world. Each publication has different aim or perhaps goal; it means that book has different type. Some people truly feel enjoy to spend their the perfect time to read a book. They may be reading whatever they take because their hobby will be reading a book. Think about the

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