

RELIGION'S ROLE CITED IN FLORIDA CURRICULUM

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on Florida's social studies curriculum:

Last spring, several critics of Western Civilization, mostly atheists, took aim at Florida's proposed social studies curriculum. Their phobia of religion was on grand display as they railed against supposed religious indoctrination. Over the summer, the draft of the curriculum was revised. Some changes were made, though none were substantial.

Critics were particularly exercised over any mention of the Judeo-Christian roots of Western civilization and American history.

Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) is one of the nation's premier Christian-bashing organizations. The atheists were upset with the draft curriculum which they said emphasized "how Judeo-Christian values influenced American's founding ideals and documents"; they also objected to asking students to identify "Judeo-Christian values." An attorney for FFRF, Ryan D. Jayne, opined that "Public schools cannot present the government as a Christian or 'Judeo-Christian' entity."

American Atheists also expressed its outrage over the alleged emphasis on the "Judeo-Christian" roots of the American founding, and the need to identify "Judeo-Christian" values.

Jocelyn Williamson of the Central Florida Freethought Community wrote a piece for the Orlando Sentinel where she feared students would learn of "Judeo-Christian" exceptionalism in American history.

These critics are all dishonest. In the draft curriculum, the term "Judeo-Christian" is never mentioned. They made it up.

The final version makes one mention, saying it is important for ninth grade students to recognize the historical and religious roots of Western civilization, including the "Judeo-Christian influence."

FFRF does not like the term "God-given rights" in reference to the Declaration of Independence. It should be happy knowing that it was deleted in the final document (though reference to "In God We Trust" and "one nation under God" remained). Similarly, the word "Creator" in the Declaration initially was mentioned twice but was cut to one.

All of these critics were unhappy with mentioning the Ten Commandments, and some were angered over the term "Protestant work ethic." The former appeared once in the draft and was excised from the final document; neither the draft nor the approved version makes any reference to the "Protestant work ethic."

The fact is America has benefited from the Protestant work ethic, and indeed those who do not embody it tend to be at the bottom of the socio-economic scale. Importantly, our rights as Americans do not come from government—they are "God-given," the result of our "Creator," as noted by Jefferson in the Declaration. Moreover, the Ten Commandments are the moral edifice of Western civilization, which is based on our "Judeo-Christian" values.

The assault on the religious roots of our heritage is not something we should tolerate. The truth can never be sacrificed on the altar of radical secularism.