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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For over a year I have collected stacks of books about homeschooling and conservative Christians. Now that my bookshelves are full and it is time to pack up all the books and move them to a new home off-campus, I would like to pause for a moment and give thanks to the many people who helped me along the way. There are too many books to list in a bibliography and too many people to mention here by name. Yet, there are some significant individuals who deserve special recognition here.

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I hope I have done you all proud. Enjoy!
INTRODUCTION

From the founding of our country through today, a pervasive tension has existed in America between the values of freedom and unity. We pride ourselves on individuality, yet also subscribe to the national motto “E Pluribus Unum” – Out of many, one. Centuries later, Americans are still a diverse group of citizens with the explicit national goal of fostering the freedom to be different. But how can we be “one” when we are so different?

For centuries, Americans have looked to the public school system to help “Americanize” waves of immigrants so that by sharing in a common experience and learning the country’s values they could mature into “American” adults, regardless of how they came to this country. Homeschooling is, by definition, a rejection of this system of national socialization. Parents who homeschool their children choose to remove them from the public schools – and private schools – in order to give their children a “better” education. American traditions of individualism and laissez faire liberalism would suggest that parents should have the freedom to choose how to raise their children. But how can a liberal democracy achieve a longed-for unity when its children are being siphoned off into an illiberal subculture for their upbringing?

Until recently, I knew almost nothing about conservative Christian homeschooling. I grew up in liberal Portland, Oregon and hardly ventured across the Cascade Mountains to the Eastern side of the state, where the demographics change just as much as the landscape. The documentary “Jesus Camp” provoked my initial interest in the topic as I was roused to
the world of “the other.” Right away, questions abounded: How is it legal for a mother to teach her children using creationist textbooks? Isn’t it brainwashing when parents shelter their children from diverse viewpoints? Why haven’t I encountered people like this before in my own life? These questions spurred this Master’s thesis, a project that began as a way to satisfy my curiosity about conservative Christian homeschooling. After having read much of the existing literature about religious and non-religious homeschooling, I recognize that there is still a great deal more to investigate and learn about homeschooling in America. What follows is my attempt to contribute to this significant and pressing conversation.

The guiding research question for this thesis is: “Does conservative Christian homeschooling create good citizens for the United States?” After an in-depth analysis of the type of education currently being taught in conservative Christian homeschools, and after careful philosophical consideration of the issues at stake, I conclude that conservative Christian homeschooling, as it is currently practiced, is not good for citizenship in the United States. Granted, because homeschooling is so personalized, it may seem difficult to generalize about an entire population. It is possible that conservative Christian homeschooling could produce good citizens if done in specific ways; however, from my reading and research, there is great potential for conservative Christian homeschooling to create citizens whose worldviews are antithetical to American values. In this thesis I argue that it is necessary to enforce at least minimal regulation on homeschooling in order to prevent some children from being stuck in a harmful educational situation, and that this

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regulation is more important than any relative imposition it may cause to conservative Christians’ unique way of life.

Past scholars have conducted research about conservative Christian homeschooling in the areas of history, sociology, and philosophy. Yet, the curricula used in conservative Christian homeschooling have not been researched at any great length. Milton Gaither’s book, *Homeschool: An American History*, gives an overview of the history of homeschooling in the United States and mentions conservative Christian homeschoolers as a very influential majority within the broader homeschooling movement. The research of Jane Van Galen and Mary Anne Pitman provided some of the earliest evidence that religion was the main motivating factor for most parents in their decision to homeschool their children. Robert Kunzman’s book, *Write These Laws on Your Children: Inside the World of Conservative Christian Homeschooling*, provides information based on Kunzman’s interviews of several conservative Christian homeschool families across the United States and lends anecdotal evidence to support the broader sociological claims of other scholars. Mitchell Stevens, author of *Kingdom of Children: Culture and Controversy in the Homeschooling Movement*, conducted interviews of homeschoolers and used his research of homeschool organizations to make claims about the broader movement. Many political philosophers, including Rob Reich, Ian MacMullen, Eamonn Callan, and Stephen Macedo, have discussed the issue of homeschooling in relation to philosophical conceptions of citizenship in the United States. What these and other

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scholars have failed to do thus far is apply historical, empirical, and philosophical perspectives to the textbooks and curricular materials used by conservative Christian homeschoolers in order to determine whether this type of education is conducive to the goal of creating good citizens of the United States. It is this task that I have undertaken in this thesis.

Greater understanding of conservative Christian homeschooling is achieved through the historical lens of the first two chapters, while the last two chapters provide empirical and philosophical analyses of conservative Christian homeschooling and its future outlook. The first chapter presents the history of homeschooling in the United States as well as the limited data available about homeschoolers. It outlines the main reasons why parents choose to homeschool, identifies which states have the strictest or most lenient regulations, and discusses the curriculum and socialization options that exist for homeschoolers. I defend my choice to label the movement as “conservative Christian homeschooling” and provide a portrait of a few conservative Christian homeschooling families from Kunzman’s book.

Chapter two presents a brief history of conservative Christianity in the United States, focusing on the most recent century, in order to demonstrate how the growth of the homeschooling movement correlates with the growth of the conservative Christian movement in the United States. A brief discussion of ethnographic studies by Nancy Ammerman and Brenda Brasher informs readers about the daily lives of conservative Christians. The discussion of the historical, political, and social aspects of conservative Christianity come together to shape the movement’s worldview.
The third chapter is an analysis of five high-school level conservative Christian homeschool textbooks that are published by A Beka Books, one of the most widely used publisher of textbooks used in the conservative Christian homeschooling world, and representative of other similar publishers, such as Bob Jones University Press. The topics of the five textbooks – biology, American government, U.S. history, health, and world geography – were selected because they are subjects important to the contemporary conservative Christian ideology. This third chapter demonstrates the religious nature of the textbooks by sharing excerpts from the textbooks and shows that the entire curriculum is taught through a conservative Christian “Biblical worldview.”

The fourth and final chapter is a philosophical discussion about citizenship issues, the goals of education for citizenship, and recommendations for education policy changes. Ultimately, conservative Christians, like all Americans, should be allowed significant freedom to educate their children in the way that they choose, as long as they adhere to national minimum standards for education that are appropriate for contemporary America. Although people live their lives in different ways, there are still skills, knowledge, and values required of all American citizens. Some basic goals of citizenship outlined in chapter four should dictate the minimum standards for education in the United States of America, and no one should be able to claim religious exemption from them.

Throughout this thesis the term “homeschooling” is used to designate something separate from “conventional schooling.” “Homeschooling” is an effort to teach children primarily at home in a family setting and is a deliberate rejection of conventional or institutional schooling.\textsuperscript{6} “Conventional schooling” is conducted in either a public or a private school building outside of the home and is traditionally funded by either public

\textsuperscript{6} Gaither, 202; Van Galen and Pitman, 10.
money or private tuition.\textsuperscript{7} This thesis attempts to avoid discussing “conservative Christian homeschooling” as homogeneous because it is actually composed of a diverse group of families who practice homeschooling in somewhat different ways. However, the shared worldview that unites conservative Christians impacts the way that they choose to homeschool their children, and therefore conclusions can be drawn about conservative Christian homeschooling as a whole.

One huge limitation on both my research and the research of others who are interested in homeschooling is the lack of comprehensive data measuring homeschooling. Due to factors such as the diversity of the movement, differences in state regulations, and the reluctance of many homeschool families to cooperate with researchers, there are no reliable statistics with which to analyze the homeschool community. With this limitation in mind, I refrain from making generalizations about homeschoolers as a group and instead refer to “some” or “many” homeschoolers or focus on anecdotes about individual families that have already been recorded by trustworthy scholars. Because I do not have first-hand experience with conservative Christian homeschooling, I rely on the studies of historians, social scientists, and philosophers to learn about this movement. However, the nature of homeschooling makes it such that outsiders can never really know what goes on inside homeschools. Do parents rely heavily on textbooks? Do they supplement with other materials and activities? Chapter one will go into more detail about curricular options for homeschoolers and argue that although many families do not strictly follow textbooks in their homeschools, textbooks do form a significant basis for guiding the students’ education, otherwise they would not be purchased and used by parents at all. My own

\textsuperscript{7} Amanda Soczka, “The Challenges of Researching the Homeschool Population” (research paper for master’s degree, University of Wisconsin-Stout, 2007), 12.
research of textbooks used by conservative Christian homeschoolers shows how their religious worldview significantly shapes their educational materials – to the point that it hinders the citizenship development of children educated in conservative Christian homeschooms.
I. HOMESCHOOLING IN THE UNITED STATES

Historical Background

In order to understand the phenomenon of conservative Christian homeschooling, one first needs to understand the history of the homeschooling movement in general. During Revolutionary America, much of children’s education and learning took place outside of formal schooling. It was not until the 1860s, when reformed common schools became institutionalized, that the concept of homeschooling became an abnormal one.\(^8\)

The goal of elementary education during the founding of the United States was to give children the practical skills necessary for their adult lives, which often included learning trades instead of reading or mathematics, and to ensure that they would vote intelligently.\(^9\)

The turn of the 20\(^{th}\) century brought with it new challenges for America (immigration, industrialization, and urbanization, just to name a few), and compulsory school attendance for all children helped education reformers achieve some of their goals for the country. Americans put their faith in the public schools to “Americanize” the youth of their country and prepare them for adult life in modern American society.\(^10\)

By 1918, compulsory school laws had been set in every state, but the laws differed in each state as to what ages children were required to attend school and whether domestic education would satisfy the schooling requirement.\(^11\) Because the majority of states failed to explicitly address the

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\(^9\) Kaestle, 5.


\(^11\) Gaither, 179; Kunzman disagrees: “…by 1880, school attendance was mandatory in all states” (2009, 12).
issue of domestic education, many homeschoolers fell through the cracks of state regulation and were able to homeschool their children either by calling their homeschool a “private school,” by appealing to local school boards for permission, or by avoiding the notice of state officials.\textsuperscript{12}

Beginning with the Scopes trial in 1925,\textsuperscript{13} a series of court cases\textsuperscript{14} about public and private education caused many families to lose trust in institutionalized schools. Some people decided that the best way to deal with their complaints was to try to change the system. Both liberals and conservatives critiqued the institutional school system in the 1960s and proposed improvements for American education.\textsuperscript{15} When those attempts failed, many families gave up on the idea of ever changing the educational system and instead chose to withdraw from mainstream society and educate their children at home according to their own standards. Families who homeschooled their children before the 1980s were charged with truancy. In order to protect themselves, learn about the legality of homeschooling in their area, and share resources, many homeschoolers organized themselves into local support groups.\textsuperscript{16} Until the 1980s, most states rejected homeschooling as an adequate form of education or as an excuse for not sending one’s children to either public or private school, and most of the courts’ arguments against homeschooling rested upon claims that children would not be adequately socialized unless they attended school outside of the home.\textsuperscript{17} During the 1980s, pressure from the growing homeschool movement caused thirty-seven states to update their compulsory school laws

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Gaither, 180-182.
\item \textsuperscript{13} The State of Tennessee v. Scopes (1925).
\item \textsuperscript{14} McCollum v. Board of Education 333 U.S. 203 (1948); Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka 347 U.S. 483 (1954).
\item \textsuperscript{15} Kunzman, 3.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Gaither,141.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Gaither,180.
\end{itemize}
to mention home education explicitly.\textsuperscript{18} Since 1980, the homeschooling population has grown significantly and gained the national spotlight. Later in this thesis I will discuss why this shift in the educational landscape of our country has taken place.

The currently unregulated nature of homeschooling in this country makes it very difficult for researchers to gather adequate data. Homeschooling laws differ by state, there is no national organization that conducts unbiased studies, and many homeschoolers are already predisposed to avoid researchers for various reasons. Research based on voluntary survey responses is inadequate because the self-selecting participants are likely to volunteer information because they have passionate beliefs or strong academic records to report and are most likely not representative of the general population. In what follows, I will cite the best research available and describe what homeschooling is and has been like in this country.

To begin with, I will discuss who these homeschoolers are and pinpoint whom I am talking about in this study. Gaither points out an important distinction between homeschoolers and “domestic educators.”\textsuperscript{19} Domestic educators, he claims, are those who homeschool out of necessity or circumstance. Examples of domestic educators are famous celebrities who are constantly on a movie set or performing at concerts worldwide, or world-ranked athletes who are on the road most of the time. These people do not have a lifestyle conducive to eight hours a day in the same classroom. They find it easier to educate themselves or their children “at home”. Homeschoolers are different from domestic educators because they choose to do homeschooling as a form of protest against formal or institutional schooling. The reasons they choose to homeschool are extremely

\textsuperscript{18} Gaither, 184.
\textsuperscript{19} Gaither, 224.
varied, and I will discuss some of them below. The most important thing they have in common is that they homeschool by choice. Even homeschoolers in rural areas, who have very little choice about what school to attend because of the lack of options, usually respond to researchers that, given the option to attend successful private and public schools, they would still choose to homeschool.

Because parents choose to homeschool their children for very different reasons, it may seem surprising that the movement gained such strength and popularity. The formation of a “movement” of homeschooling is actually a very recent phenomenon, and some of the success can be pinned on a few individuals who have been heralded as “saints” of the homeschool movement. But before I laud them too much, I must point out that Milton Gaither, homeschool researcher and professor of education, reminds us that these individuals became influential for the most part because of grass-roots support and the larger social movements that took place during their lifetimes. Gaither encourages us to give credit to the mothers who homeschooled their children, because truly it was the women of the movement who kept it going and helped it grow. Nevertheless, the influence of these homeschooling advocates should not be overlooked, and a failure to recognize their contributions would be remiss in this kind of study. Therefore, I shall discuss briefly the contributions of John Holt, Raymond and Dorothy Moore, Rousas Rushdoony, Gregg Harris, Michael Farris, and Mary Pride.

Many religious and non-religious people consider John Holt to be the “father” of homeschooling. Although John Holt succeeded as a student in prestigious boarding

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20 Gaither, 2.
21 Gaither, 2; Stevens, 83.
schools, he considered them worthless.\textsuperscript{22} As an adult, his experiences teaching in a private school were the basis for his 1964 book \textit{How Children Fail} and its 1967 sequel \textit{How Children Learn}. In Gaither’s words, “Holt’s basic contention, richly illustrated by anecdotes from his classrooms, was that compulsory schooling destroys children’s native curiosity and replaces it with a self-conscious and fearful desire to please the teacher.”\textsuperscript{23} Holt’s books spread his convictions, in simple language and to many parents, that the safe and nurturing environment of home education was far superior to the stifling and stressful environment of formal schooling. In the 1970s, Holt became even more radical in his condemnation of schooling and began inspiring people to “liberate” their children from schools by choosing to homeschool instead. When he began to publish \textit{Growing Without Schooling} in 1977, the magazine helped spread his philosophy of “unschooling” as a progressive alternative form of education. As the first national leader of the homeschooling movement, Holt spent much of his own money advocating for the cause, and most homeschoolers today acknowledge him as the mastermind behind the movement, although not the specific brand of conservative Christian homeschooling. Holt’s vision of homeschooling was not motivated by religious convictions, but instead by his negative view of formal schooling in general. After Holt’s appearance on \textit{The Phil Donahue Show} in 1978, his popularity and subscriptions to his magazine skyrocketed among the religious homeschoolers. Holt acknowledged the diversity of the homeschooling movement and wanted all homeschoolers to work together based on their mutual agreement that people have the right to remove their children from institutional schools.\textsuperscript{24} However, the current

\textsuperscript{22} Gaither, 122.
\textsuperscript{23} Gaither, 123.
\textsuperscript{24} Gaither, 127.
statistic that “unschoolers” constitute about ten percent of the homeschooling population,\(^\text{25}\) shows that religious homeschoolers ultimately became the dominant presence in homeschooling, despite Holt’s non-religious foundation of the movement.

In contrast to Holt’s secular background and motivation for supporting homeschooling, Raymond and Dorothy Moore were Seventh-Day Adventists, a religion which, since its founding by Ellen White in 1844, believes in a particular “theology of the family” that works well with the concept of homeschooling.\(^\text{26}\) Based on her experiences in the 1930s and 1940s working in public schools, Dorothy Moore developed the philosophy that entrance into formal schooling at too early an age was damaging to children because they were not developmentally ready or mature enough to succeed in that environment. The Moores openly criticized institutional schooling because of its rigidity and standardization.\(^\text{27}\) With Raymond Moore’s scientific research backing up his wife’s argument, the couple published their first book in 1975, entitled *Better Late than Early*.\(^\text{28}\) The couple’s philosophy gained rapid support from Christians after James Dobson invited them in 1977 to appear on his radio program *Focus on the Family*, which broadcast to Christian radio stations all over the country. Raymond and Dorothy’s conception of homeschooling broadened to advocate for home education for older students as well as young children, and in 1981 the couple published their most influential book, *Home Grown Kids*, which was more of a manual for parents about how to homeschool than a research document in support of their cause. Because the book was “published by a mainstream evangelical press, and plugged heavily by Dobson… [t]he Moores captured perfectly the

\(^{25}\) Kunzman, 3.
\(^{26}\) Gaither, 128.
\(^{27}\) Kunzman, 4.
\(^{28}\) Gaither, 131.
emerging evangelical consensus on the importance of family values for the Nation’s well-being.”

The couple remained public figures and active advocates for homeschooling through the 1980s and 1990s, often appearing in court to testify on behalf of homeschoolers, and also continuing to publish and appear on television.

Rousas Rushdoony, the next homeschooling “saint,” also had a religious background. Rushdoony was ordained by the Presbyterian Church in 1957 and served in a conservative church for many years. He believed that “the Bible should serve roughly the same function in a Christian society as the Koran does in a Muslim one. The Bible is the divinely revealed template for governing every aspect of human life.” In the political realm, Rushdoony supported a restoration of “Christian America,” which he perceived to be at the true roots of this country. His belief that the Bible should govern all aspects of human life was the foundation for his ideas about education, as well as politics. For example, because Rushdoony thought that history was a “revelation of God’s sovereign will,” he believed that it is impossible to teach about history without talking about God’s influence in human affairs. Rushdoony criticized the public schools for their secular approach to education and instead argued that children should attend private Christian schools or be taught at home where their parents could instill in them Christian values during their education. In 1981, Rushdoony published a book entitled *The Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum*, which outlined his version of a curriculum that was based on the

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29 Gaither, 133.
30 Gaither, 133; Kunzman cites Raymond Moore as endorsing the founding of the HSLDA (2009, 4).
31 Gaither, 135.
32 Gaither, 135.
Bible. Rushdoony died in 2001, but his son continues to represent his biblical views in the homeschooling movement today.\(^{33}\)

Gregg Harris converted to Christianity as a teenager and was later ordained and married. When he and his wife started sending their son Joshua to a Christian school, they realized that formal education was not set up to meet the needs of children and so they began homeschooling.\(^{34}\) Gregg worked for the Moores for a while, but then left under questionable circumstances\(^{35}\) and traveled the country as a speaker for conservative Christian homeschool conventions and seminars. He is now a best-selling author and advocate for homeschooling and resides in Oregon with his family.

Still an important and influential leader, Michael Farris began his career as a lawyer who fought against the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). After becoming a public figure through taking action against abortion clinics and pornographers, he got involved in Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority. In 1979 he became the executive director of the Bill of Rights Legal Foundation, an organization that was meant to be the “Christian counterweight to the ACLU” and, among other things, fought to prevent the “religion of secular humanism in public schools.”\(^{36}\) After networking with some of the other homeschooling leaders discussed above, Farris began to homeschool his own children and fight for the legal rights of Christian homeschooling, specifically. In 1983, Michael Farris co-founded the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), a conservative Christian organization whose mission is to advocate for the legal right of parents to direct their children’s education. Michael Farris also founded Patrick Henry College, which

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\(^{33}\) Gaither, 139.
\(^{34}\) Gaither, 147.
\(^{35}\) Gaither, 148.
\(^{36}\) Kunzman, 159.
trains homeschooled children to become Christian leaders of America. These two organizations are the main players on the American public stage, and I will go into more detail about them below. Farris’s radio program, *Homeschool Heartbeat*, is broadcast nationally every day, and through his strong advocacy work on behalf of homeschoolers and family values, he has become well known for his belief that Christians in America should engage their country through politics in order to shape the future for everyone. Michael Farris was selected by *Education Week* magazine as one of the top one hundred people who have shaped American education in the twentieth century.\(^{37}\)

Another contemporary homeschool leader, Mary Pride, was a veteran homeschooler by the time she joined a review board for Christian homeschool curricula. She was inspired by Christian scripture to encourage women to embrace their God-given roles as wife and mother in the home. Pride wrote one of the first “how-to” books about homeschooling in 1986, entitled “Big Book of Home Learning,” and that manual, including its many revisions, has sold over a quarter of a million copies.\(^{38}\) She is a figurehead for conservative social and family values whose rhetoric, including her magazine *Practical Homeschooling*, has transformed her into a role model for many homeschooling mothers.

These seven individuals are well known in the homeschooling world as leaders of the movement. They have dedicated their lives to the cause of homeschooling – both personally, by educating their children at home, and professionally, by founding organizations and media outlets that encourage others to homeschool. Their influence can be seen on our bookshelves, on the World Wide Web, in the courthouse, and in the homes


\(^{38}\) Kunzman, 155.
of many American families. Whether by the contributions of these famous homeschool leaders, or by the daily practices of dedicated Americans, homeschooling has changed immensely in just the past few decades. In order to gauge just how much homeschooling has changed in our country, it will be important to discuss the existing research and data that attempts to characterize homeschooling.

Characteristics of Homeschooling

Since regulation of education does not directly fall under the purview of the federal government, each state must develop its own laws regulating homeschooling.\footnote{Van Galen and Pitman, 197; Soczka, 49.} By 1993, homeschooling was legal in all fifty states.\footnote{Rob Reich, \textit{Bridging Liberalism and Multiculturalism in American Education} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 145; Kunzman, 4; “The Politics of Survival: Home Schoolers and the Law,” \textit{HSLDA}, http://www.hslda.org/docs/nche/000010/PoliticsofSurvival.asp (accessed May 12, 2011); Soczka disagrees: “By 2003, homeschooling was legal in all 50 states” (32).} In 1991 Richardson and Zirkel presented a classification of three main types of state statutes regarding homeschooling, but it is now outdated because state laws have become much more lenient over the last twenty years.\footnote{Van Galen and Pitman, 173-4, 178.} Instead, I will rely on the tracking of state regulations by the HSLDA, which, although an extremely partisan organization, makes sure to provide helpful and current information for prospective homeschoolers.

The HSLDA divides states into four categories. (See Figure 1 for a map of states and their category of regulation). The first category of states is extremely lenient in their tracking of homeschooling and do not even require parents to notify the state of their decision to homeschool. There are ten states that currently do not require notice. The
second category is called “low regulation” because the states require only notification from homeschooling parents. Currently, fourteen states require parental notification only. There are currently nineteen states with “moderate regulation,” which require parents to “send notification, test scores, and/or professional evaluation of student progress.” The remaining states are deemed by the HSLDA to be “high regulation” states because they require “parents to send notification or achievement test scores and/or professional evaluation, plus other requirements (e.g. curriculum approval by the state, teacher qualification of parents, or home visits by state officials).” There are seven states with “high regulation,” and six of them are in New England. In addition to making room for homeschoolers within existing state education statutes (for example, allowing homeschoolers to register as private schools), since 2000, seven states have adopted statutes specifically to address homeschooling.\(^{42}\) This change reflects the enormous efforts of the HSLDA and other supporters of homeschooling to lobby for the freedoms of homeschoolers in the courts and state legislatures.

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Due to the lack of consistent regulation by states, it is impossible to gather complete and accurate data about homeschooling in the United States. Individual researchers have surveyed a few small samples of homeschoolers, but their data are usually biased and not representative enough of the diversity of homeschoolers to allow for general conclusions to be drawn because they rely on self-selecting participants who volunteer for the studies. The most trustworthy data come from the National Center for Education Statistics, a federal organization that collects and analyzes data related to education in the United States. However, their estimates may be too conservative; other researchers have noted that there are probably more homeschoolers in America than these surveys suggest because many homeschoolers actively try to avoid the notice of federal or state researchers. Unfortunately, Patricia Lines’s hope of gathering accurate data about homeschooling by including a question about it in the census was not fulfilled in the 2010 Census.

The three most recent sample surveys conducted by the NCES that addressed the phenomenon of homeschooling took place in 1999, 2003, and 2007, and show the growth of homeschooling over that time span as well as changes in the demographic characteristics of homeschoolers. In 1999, the NCES sample survey estimated that there were around 850,000 homeschoolers, which represents about 1.7% of the school-age population in the country. In 2003 there were roughly 1.1 million homeschoolers, or about 2.2% of the school-age population. In 2007 there were about 1.5 million homeschoolers, or about 2.9% of the school-age population. Compared to public schools, which grew

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43 Kunzman, 4-5; Reich, 145, 251; Soczka, 34, 52-53; Gaither, 203-4.
44 Van Galen and Pitman, 20.
from serving 88.7% of the school-aged population in 1999 to 91.1% in 2003 and to 92.8% in 2007, homeschooling did not grow as quickly when measured as a percent of school-aged population. However, when measured as a percent increase of the homeschooling population itself, the NCES data show how homeschooling increased by almost 30% from 1999 to 2003 and then increased another 30% from 2003 to 2007. These statistics were strong enough to convince Reich that homeschooling is “probably the fastest-growing segment of the education market.”

Why and how has homeschooling grown so much? Aside from the widely acknowledged contributions of the individuals mentioned above, there were other historical, sociological, technological, and religious factors that influenced homeschooling. Chapter two will discuss in more detail the religious environment in which homeschooling has flourished, so I will not address that issue at length here. Historically and sociologically, the move of Americans into suburbia helped homeschooling grow because large houses and the separation of families contributed to a modern lifestyle of “privatized living.” Technological advances and the influence of the media have helped homeschooling families practice homeschooling and have helped those who do not homeschool to understand those who do. Talbot has argued that the homeschooling movement can be called “modern” because homeschoolers use the Internet to download curricula and share tips with each other in online support groups. She also argues that homeschooling is modern in “deeper ways” because it serves the needs of socially

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46 “Historical summary of public elementary and secondary school statistics: Selected years, 1869–70 through 2006–07,” NCES, http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/tables/dt09_033.asp (accessed May 8, 2011): in 1999 there were 46,857 public school students (88.7% of 52,811 total school-age population), in 2003 there were 48,540 public school students (91.1% of 53,303 total school-age population), in 2007 there were 49,316 public school students (92.8% of 53,158 total school-age population.


48 Gaither, 203.
conservative families as they react to “a [modern] commercial culture they regard as soulless, acquisitive, overly sexualized, and corrosive of family ties.”

As homeschooling grew immensely in popularity after the 1980s, the nation’s perceptions of homeschooling also grew more favorable. Gaither also notes that increased practice of homeschooling corresponded with an increased acceptance of homeschooling by all Americans: “A 1985 Gallup poll found that 70 percent of Americans thought homeschooling should not be legal. A decade later, however, Gallup found that 70 percent of Americans believed homeschooling to be a valid educational alternative.”

Why such a reversal of attitudes toward homeschooling? Gaither again notes the importance of homeschoolers’ public relations skills and their use of the media. Through television shows that have broadcast sympathetic interviews and reports about homeschooling, the movement has successfully “depicted homeschooling in a positive light.” Homeschoolers have “won over the average American” by developing good arguments to support their case and by advertising those arguments across the country.

Gaither emphasizes the new place that homeschooling holds in American education when he claims that recent trends “have turned homeschooling into a major, and increasingly mainstream, force in American education.” He argues that homeschooling has moved steadily “from the fringes to the mainstream of American life.”

If homeschooling is now in the mainstream, then scholars should know something about who these homeschoolers are. Unfortunately, the lack of national data makes it

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50 Kunzman, 4.
51 Gaither, 198.
52 Gaither, 198.
53 Gaither, 198.
54 Gaither, 200.
55 Gaither, 202.
impossible to accurately describe the demographic characteristics of homeschoolers. It is difficult to generalize about the characteristics of homeschooling families because each study reports different data depending on the year, location, and population surveyed.\textsuperscript{56} Part of the reason that data about homeschooling seems to be contradictory is because we cannot talk about a single homeschool movement, as if it were a unified group of like-minded families. In truth, each homeschooling family is different and, in keeping with one of the main motivations to homeschool that I will explore in more detail below, each homeschooling family practices an individualized style and curriculum that is aimed to fit the needs of individual children. However, patterns can be discerned from what little data scholars do have, and therefore I will present the most appropriate and widely accepted findings.

Patricia Lines, a federal Department of Education official, studied findings from the late 1980s of a handful of researchers and found that “the typical home schooling family is white, a two-parent family, likely to be somewhat more affluent and of a somewhat higher education attainment than families nationally, and Protestant.”\textsuperscript{57} The homeschooling movement has changed considerably during recent decades of rapid growth, and Gaither notes that “recent research has also revealed a considerably more heterogeneous population of homeschoolers than earlier and more limited studies had found.”\textsuperscript{58} In 1990, conservative Christians comprised between 89 and 90 percent of homeschoolers.\textsuperscript{59} In 2006, the documentary “Jesus Camp” claimed that 75% of homeschoolers were

\textsuperscript{56} Van Galen and Pitman, 14-15.
\textsuperscript{57} Van Galen and Pitman, 14; Gaither, 204.
\textsuperscript{58} Gaither, 204.
\textsuperscript{59} Van Galen and Pitman, 12; Gaither, 142.
evangelical Christians. In general, mothers are usually more involved in teaching their children than fathers are. Also, the “typical family utilizes community and other resources, such as other home schoolers, a church, a local school, the local library, and/or a distant school or organization offering material or services for home schoolers.” The NCES report comparing homeschooling data from 2003 with data from 1999 supported Lines’s claims that the majority of homeschoolers were white and living in two-parent households and added that the homeschooling rate was higher for households where only one parent was working in the labor force. The report claimed that the “homeschooling rate was also higher for students in families with three or more children in the household than for students in families with fewer children.” In 1999, the US Department of Education estimated that “almost two thirds of homeschooling families had three or more children.” The 1999 NCES data showed that 54% of homeschoolers lived in a “city,” 14% lived in a “town,” and 33% lived in “rural” areas. While some of this data may be surprising, I suspect that a comprehensive national study would reveal even more surprises.

With such a diverse group of homeschoolers, it makes sense that the reasons parents choose to homeschool their children are just as varied as the different identities of homeschoolers, if not more. After studying a handful of diverse homeschooling families in depth for multiple years, Robert Kunzman, now an associate professor at the Indiana University School of Education, identified one commonality between all homeschooling parents: a belief that they can “provide a better educational experience for their child, and

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60 Ewing and Grady, Jesus Camp.
61 Van Galen and Pitman, 14.
63 Gaither, 204.
are willing to sacrifice their time, money, and/or careers to make that happen.”

Homeschooling is a big commitment and sometimes an overwhelming project to take on, so parents do not make the decision to homeschool lightly. Homeschoolers also “generally view education as more than just formal schooling” — homeschooling becomes their way of life. Some homeschoolers choose to homeschool primarily for religious reasons, but “they are now joined by many who do so for all sorts of reasons, ranging from concerns about special education, to bad experiences with teachers or school bullies, to a proliferation of time-consuming outside activities, to worries over peanut allergies.” One of the most common reasons that families choose to homeschool is the ability to be flexible and customize their children’s education to meet their individual needs. It is important for many parents that their children are able to learn at their own pace without the pressure of competition, or that their children have a part in directing their own education.

Homeschooling parents might argue that a student should not have to be labeled “special needs” because of a mental or physical disability just to benefit from a specialized education; instead, all children should receive an education that fits their individual needs. Reich agrees that “no other education arrangement offers the same freedom to arrange an education designed for an individual student; in homeschools, parents are responsible not only for selecting what their children will learn, but when, how, and with whom they will learn. In this sense, homeschooling represents the apex of customization in education.” Later I will discuss the potential harms that go along with these benefits from receiving a

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64 Kunzman, 5.
65 Kunzman, 5.
66 Gaither, 204.
67 Soczka, 1.
customized education, but Reich is correct that homeschooling is the most individualized form of education in America – and possibly in the world.

The desire for a customized education reflects in homeschooling parents a lack of faith that other schools will adequately educate their children – including public, charter, and private schools. Some homeschooling families believe that only parents are qualified to make decisions about the education of their children and therefore reject professional teachers in favor of homeschooling, which allows parents to have full control. Some parents distrust the government so completely that they would not even consider sending their children to public school. Others do not distrust the government in principle, but instead have found particular reasons to dislike the education or experience that most students today receive in public schools. Although private schools are not under government control, they are often perceived by homeschooling parents as not different enough from public schools to justify sending their children to them.

The NCES 2007 report about homeschooling claimed that “to provide religious or moral instruction” was among the top three reasons that the majority of parents marked as their motivations for homeschooling. The report also claimed, “From 2003 to 2007, the percentage of students whose parents reported homeschooling to provide religious or moral instruction increased from 72 percent to 83 percent.” Lines similarly found that in the typical homeschool family, “religion is likely to be the most important motivation for home schooling, but it is rarely the only motivation.”

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69 Gaither, 5.
71 Van Galen and Pitman, 14.
schools is one of the many reasons why some parents feel dissatisfied with American public schools. Since school-sponsored prayer was banned and the teaching of evolution became nationally mandated, many conservative Christian parents believe that their children will not receive correct religious or moral training in American public schools. For some of these parents, even private schools are not religious enough, possibly because they often conform to nation-wide curricula by teaching for the Advanced Placement exams and college entrance requirements.

Biblical literalist Christians believe that “educating their children is a God-given right and responsibility, and one they can delegate only at great moral and spiritual peril.” These fundamentalist parents believe that they need to instill in their children a “Biblical worldview” in order for their children to be saved. Conservative Christian parents often quote Deuteronomy 6:6-7 as justification for their choice to homeschool. This Biblical passage reads: “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” Conservative Christian homeschoolers interpret this to mean that it is the job of parents, alone, to teach “God’s will” to their children during every activity of the day – a job that would be impossible if parents gave up the job of educating their children and instead sent their children off to school for eight hours a day. Another factor that contributes to the popularity of homeschooling among conservative Christian families is “the conservative Protestant celebration of the stay-at-home mom,” which made it easier for Christians to

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73 Kunzman, 6.
74 Kunzman, 13.
75 Deut 6:6-7 (New International Version).
homeschool because the choice requires at least one “full-time houseparent.” 76 When something as important as the salvation of their children is at risk, we begin to understand the passion and dedication of religious homeschooling parents.

Studies have found that there are other reasons – besides religion – for homeschooling parents to feel dissatisfied with other schooling options. 77 Some parents believe in a different philosophy of education from the philosophies practiced most commonly in schools. Some parents believe that education should be about forming children’s characters, not just their intellects, and therefore schooling should also include moral and values education that is currently lacking in the institutional schools available to them. 78 Some parents place more importance on the strengthening of family bonds than socialization with non-family members and therefore decide to homeschool so that they can spend more time with their children. 79 By keeping the family together for the majority of the day, these parents believe that their family will develop stronger relationships.

Some parents feel strongly that it is important for children to learn how to interact with people of all age groups, whereas children in formal schools spend the majority of their time socializing almost exclusively with their peers. Socialization with peers also brings with it many negative influences, according to some parents. Homeschooling parents often want their children to avoid the negative aspects of peer interaction, such as peer pressure and bullying, which some parents feel are not monitored closely enough in formal schools. 80 By attending school with strangers, many homeschooling parents worry that

76 Gaither, 142.
78 Kunzman, 6.
children in formal schools will be exposed to dangers such as physical assault, weapons, sexual assault, drugs, alcohol, gangs, and pop culture. One example of the importance of this factor in a parent’s choice to homeschool is evidence that homeschooling in Colorado increased ten percent after the shooting at Columbine High School in 1999.\footnote{Soczka, 37-38; “Columbine spurs interest in home schools,” Associated Press (May 25, 1999); Scott Somerville, “Politics of Survival: Home Schoolers and the Law,” HSLDA (2007), http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/detail?accno=ED461177 (accessed May 8, 2011).} All parents – homeschooling or otherwise – fear to some degree the lack of control that they feel when sending their children outside the home for schooling; the difference is that homeschooling parents choose to act on that fear by taking control of every aspect of their children’s education. What is clear from this description of parental motivations is that the choice to homeschool is \textit{not} based on convenience or lack of other options. As Lines notes, “most home schooling families could easily send their children to public or private school” but they choose not to for some combination of the reasons mentioned above.\footnote{Van Galen and Pitman, 12.}

Homeschooling is by no means the easiest option for most parents, but it is something they feel strongly enough about – for religious, philosophical, or environmental reasons – to adopt it as a lifestyle.

\textbf{Curriculum Options}

The unique reasons that inform parents’ choice to homeschool affect the type of homeschooling they practice. When parents choose to begin homeschooling, one of the first things they need to do is decide what to teach their children and how. Widely defined, “curriculum” can mean “everything that happens in the school setting.”\footnote{Soczka, 24.} For homeschoolers, since the school is the home, curriculum can mean everything that happens at home. This definition is troublesome because it becomes difficult to distinguish...
between parenting and teaching, although some parents would say that getting rid of that distinction is exactly the reason why they chose to homeschool in the first place. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the term “curriculum” to represent the answer to a homeschool parent’s question of “what” to teach. Curriculum could come from a textbook or from a family dinner conversation. I will refer to the “style” of homeschooling to represent the “how.” Since there are many different ways to use a single textbook, it will be important to identify the different educational styles that homeschoolers tend to adopt. Some families like to replicate a schoolroom in their home by moving tables and chairs into a room with a chalkboard, whereas other families prefer to let their children study wherever they feel most comfortable. Some families have a routine similar to that of a typical school day, whereas other families prefer to have varied schedules that depend on the different activities available at the time.\textsuperscript{84}

The curricula available to homeschool families are varied and numerous to the point of overwhelming many parents. Especially in today’s world where learning can happen through new technological media, the resources for parent teachers are much more readily available than when the first homeschooling pioneers began developing strategies. However, many of their original philosophies of education can be seen in today’s curricula. For example, John Holt’s view of education as “unschooling” is still practiced by some homeschoolers who let their children’s curiosity determine which subjects they learn and at what pace. The typical “unschooling” style of instruction is not very structured and

\textsuperscript{84} Stevens, 57.
looks very different from a typical school day because it comes from a philosophy of trying to avoid stifling a child’s natural desire to learn.\(^5\)

Other types of curricula include religious teachings in many subjects or use religious texts as a vehicle for teaching them. Rushdoony’s belief that the Bible should be the basis for every subject of learning is still emphasized today in many examples of conservative Christian curricula. For example, the mission of Lighthouse Christian Academy (LCA), the distance learning provider for the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum, is to provide Biblically based, individualized, self-instructional curriculum, involving diagnostic testing, goal setting, and mastery of subject content and to accomplish this in a learning environment with informed family members assisted by experienced LCA advisors who supervise the educational process and challenge students to develop a relationship with Jesus Christ, incorporating the character traits of the Lord.\(^6\)

Christian curricula providers such as LCA are clearly following in the footsteps of the first pioneers of Christian homeschooling, such as Rushdoony.

Conservative Christian homeschoolers tend to favor a style that incorporates a traditional understanding of a daily learning schedule with set times for instruction about each subject. To an outside observer it may seem that the only difference between a child’s experience of education in a home compared to what the child would experience in a formal school is that the homeschooled child attends class at the dining room table and has parents as teachers and siblings as classmates. Kunzman argues that conservative Christian homeschoolers tend to choose “structured replications of institutional schooling” because that style of teaching reflects “their belief that human nature is inherently sinful

and in need of regular guidance and correction, particularly during childhood.” In fact, conservative Christian homeschoolers might even be stricter than formal schools because they believe that children need constant training in order to follow the “right” path.

Sociologist Mitchell Stevens notes this pattern as well:

For many believers children are not pedagogical free agents but subjects of parental authority, and appropriately so, since their fragile selves require strong hands to keep a questionable world at bay. Children need to be trained because they are, like all persons, prone to sin. …This relative emphasis on child discipline and parental authority is in keeping with conservative Protestant beliefs about human nature.

However, Stevens reminds us that while conservative Christians view human beings as essentially sinful, they also view God as essentially loving and, although they may implement a strict style of homeschooling, they also “love more expressively.” Through incorporating Biblical training into their children’s education, conservative Christian parents believe they are fulfilling a God-given duty.

The unschooling method and the Biblical method are two extreme examples of homeschool curricula and styles, but many homeschoolers fall somewhere in between these two extremes. One benefit of homeschooling is that parents can choose to teach one subject using a certain publisher’s textbooks and also teach a different subject using a different curriculum or style. Just because a family chooses to use certain textbooks does not mean that they will follow the textbook’s lessons in order, chapter by chapter. In fact, “publishers and parents become partners in children’s training. Publishers create texts and provide a format for standardizing the learning process, while parents do the work of
personalizing the material for their children’s interests and needs.” As a general pattern, parents who are first beginning to homeschool will adhere more strictly to the curricula they purchase and are more likely to choose a full program of curricula from a single publisher. As parents grow more confident in their teaching abilities, they tend to deviate more from the prescribed program and are more likely to use a hybrid collection of curricula and homeschool styles. The flexibility inherent in homeschooling contributes to the fact that most homeschoolers do not use just one method.

Homeschoolers often use non-traditional materials when homeschooling their children. The 2003 NCES report investigated the sources from which homeschoolers obtained materials for homeschooling. The study found that a majority of homeschooled students had parents who used one or more of the following sources of curricula or books for their children’s home education: a public library (78 percent); a homeschooling catalog, publisher, or individual specialist (77 percent); a retail bookstore or other store (69 percent); and an education publisher that was not affiliated with homeschooling (60 percent). Homeschoolers on a tight budget can use free services at their public library, online resources, or discounted used books. Since many homeschool families have multiple children, they also save money by re-using materials for the younger children.

For homeschool parents who desire to give their children a Christian education or an education with Christian morals and values, it is popular to purchase curricula that are sold by Christian publishers. Stevens notes, “[e]vangelical and fundamentalist Christians have the most to choose from when shopping for homeschool curricula.” This fact is due in

90 Stevens, 59.
91 Stevens, 61.
93 Stevens, 54.
large part to the dominance of conservative Christians in the national homeschool movement. In 1982, Bob Jones University (BJU) Press was the first Christian textbook company to tailor its services for homeschoolers, and in 1992 BJU Press opened the Academy of Home Education, which offers testing and transcript services to homeschoolers in addition to its selection of online or DVD curricula and resources. Full curricula programs provide “parents with systematic instruction plans for lessons in mathematics, language arts, science, and social studies along with Bible lessons and primers for spiritual growth. These curricula often ingeniously meld the teachings of the faith with more conventional academic subjects.”

The A Beka curriculum offers “high school courses that include instruction in biology, physics, sex education, and foreign languages” and gives a systematic order to “the learning process while weaving Christian teachings into virtually every subject and lesson. In addition to a comprehensive pre-kindergarten to twelfth-grade Bible program… the texts integrate Christianity into subjects as diverse as mathematics, biology, and health.” Each curriculum is organized according to a different system, and some are more traditional than others. For example, the Weaver Curriculum “is organized around a sequential journey through the Bible rather than conventional school subject designations.”

The Christian Liberty Academy School System (CLASS), on the other hand, is a more traditional program that emphasizes “sequential learning and formal lessons” while integrating “training in the Bible and in Christian living into the fabric of academic instruction.” Through programs such as the A Beka Correspondence School, homeschooled children receive more than an education;

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94 Stevens, 54.
95 Stevens, 55.
96 Stevens, 55.
97 Stevens, 55-56.
they also “receive report cards and transcripts and can elect to earn a high school diploma.”

Today Christian publications for homeschoolers are so widely used that one publisher, CLASS, boasts, “Since 1967, over 100,000 dedicated families have enrolled their students in our proven Bible-based, character-building program.” Gaither notes, “as the movement has grown and matured, so have its institutions. Homeschooling is now big business.” A 2002 news article confirms Gaither’s claim, reporting that “Industry experts estimate home-schooling families spend $700 million a year on instructional supplies.” Even if a business does not agree with the philosophy of homeschooling, they may try to profit from the business of homeschoolers, and since the majority of homeschoolers spend between five hundred to one thousand dollars per student per year on homeschooling materials, there is definitely a market from which business can profit.

Compared to private schools, however, homeschooling can be a much cheaper option. Some homeschoolers prefer to use more mainstream publishers that are typically used by public schools, such as Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, McGraw-Hill, and Pearson Education. One benefit of using textbooks from mainstream publishers is an assurance that students will be able to meet state requirements and be eligible for admission into mainstream universities. It is important to note that this is a real worry for parents who want to prepare their students for life in mainstream America. For example, in 2008 the California Central District court upheld the University of California’s decision to deny

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98 Stevens, 54.
100 Gaither, 205.
102 Sweeney (2002).
admission to students who had been inadequately academically prepared for university because some of their courses were based on publications from popular Christian publishers (namely, A Beka and BJU). Some of the textbooks published by A Beka and BJU have been rejected by the University of California as adequate preparation for college because of “omission of important subject material and inadequate emphasis on developing critical thinking skills.” The danger of not having their children’s education taken seriously outside of their household is one worry that causes parents to take time and serious thought before deciding on the method and content of their homeschool.

Curricula are one area of concern for homeschoolers, but so is quality of instruction – especially since parents must teach every subject area. However, with the vast amount of help and resources available for parents, it is possible that some parents could become as good at teaching as professional instructors. Homeschool conventions held annually for different types of homeschoolers can attract tens of thousands of families from all over the country. There is also a huge circulation of periodicals about homeschooling and online proliferation of homeschooling material through various email newsletters and blogs. A Beka advertises that through grade six, “Parents can teach without formal training or experience! Easy-to-follow, step-by-step daily lesson plans make this possible.” With enough time, effort, and help, a dedicated parent can learn to teach.

One example of the help that parents can receive is the option to build a relationship with either a public or private school. If parents for some reason feel unable to teach a certain subject themselves (either because they do not have the knowledge or resources), there are some public and private schools that allow homeschooled students to take advantages of some of their services. Some students enroll part-time and take language classes or sports in a public school, and school districts may even encourage this behavior because it increases the amount of state funding they receive. Some homeschoolers who need more resources, but also want to avoid entanglement with an institutional school, instead form support groups or homeschooling co-ops that bring homeschool families together to share resources. For example, if one homeschool parent in a neighborhood can teach a foreign language, other homeschool students might take advantage of the unique opportunity to learn from another parent. However, homeschoolers who believe that children should only be getting instruction from their own parents need to find an alternative way of teaching difficult material.

Perhaps surprisingly, parents may not be the primary instructors in a homeschool setting. Many companies offer video lessons taught by a professional teacher that can be played on a television or a computer monitor at home. A similar option would be to sign up for online distance-learning programs of instruction that offer various curricula via the Internet in a similar fashion. Some of these are accredited distance learning programs, often affiliated with satellite schools, that offer other services in addition to curricula, such as standardized testing, attendance records, and state reporting for families who need to comply with various state laws. The 2003 NCES study found that 41% of homeschooled students...

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students “had engaged in some sort of distance learning.” With the advances of technology in the Internet age, it is becoming easier for parents to receive the materials they need to homeschool their children, and this is perhaps part of an explanation for the recent growth in the homeschooling movement.

The various options for homeschool curricula and styles present parents with seemingly overwhelming choices, but modern technologies and new creative methods ultimately give homeschooling families the opportunities and tools for customization and success that previous generations of homeschoolers only dreamed of. Conservative Christian parents are less likely to take advantage of the non-traditional and secular avenues described above and must therefore work harder to ensure that their children receive an education that lives up to national standards in addition to their own religious beliefs. Chapter three will explore some of the textbooks used by conservative Christians in order to show how academic subject matter combines with a conservative Christian ideology in such interestingly blended curricula.

Socialization Options

Students in formal schools receive more than just academic content in their classrooms. Formal schooling is perhaps the most significant context for the socialization of American children. The concern for adequate socialization of homeschooled children has traditionally been one of the primary objections to homeschooling. Ironically, “better socialization” is also one of the reasons parents claim that homeschooling will benefit their children. The reason for this disagreement probably stems from outsiders’ failure to

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understand homeschoolers and from different conceptions of what socialization means. Psychologist Kevin Durkin defines socialization as “the process whereby people acquire the rules of behavior and the systems of beliefs and attitudes that equip a person to function effectively as a member of a particular society.” Various homeschool advocates, in order to counter objections, have reported studies that show how successful homeschooled students are in the realm of socialization, but the validity of most of those studies is questionable. Everyone would agree that the social experience of children is different in formal schooling than in homeschooling, but there are advantages and disadvantages to each method. Currently there exist a multitude of options available for homeschooled children to interact with other people and learn the social skills necessary to function well in our society. Although “home-schooling parents are not bent on isolating their children,” the extent to which parents take advantage of these various opportunities is perhaps a question for future research. Currently there are at least five different ways I have identified that parents can position their children in social situations.

First, homeschooled children spend the majority of their day with family members and have ample opportunity to learn social skills through interacting with their siblings, parents, grandparents, and extended family members. Given that the majority of homeschoolers come from large families, there are likely to be many relatives with a wide range of ages living together or nearby with whom homeschooled children can interact.

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Michael Romanowski, a professor of education, gives a common defense of homeschool socialization by claiming that peer socialization in formal schools is artificial compared to homeschoolers, who socialize in the real world:

> Because home school children spend most of their time around their parents in an accepting atmosphere, they, unlike their public school counterparts, are able to engage socially in multiage situations with a high level of confidence. Beyond the classroom walls, how often do people limit their interaction to individuals of their own age? That type of peer socialization inadequately prepares students for normal life situations, where they must interact with people of all ages.\(^{112}\)

Romanowski’s claim defends socialization of homeschoolers and at the same time reveals one of the common arguments of homeschoolers against formal schooling. Traditional educators defend formal schooling because they believe that

> the lack of peer interaction in the classroom is detrimental to a home school student’s education. To receive a complete education, students need to engage in discussions, share ideas, compete, and work with other students. This interaction helps determine how students confront problems, shapes the manner in which they see the world, and influences students’ goals and aspirations.\(^{113}\)

Where can homeschooled children receive this kind of peer interaction if they do not attend an institutional school?

The answer to this question is the second of my five modes of socialization for homeschoolers. In fact, there are many ways for homeschooled children to connect with peers who are also homeschooled. Peer interaction can take place in homeschool co-ops, support groups, or conventions. If parents allow their children to communicate online, then peer interaction can happen over the Internet as well. Through weekly, monthly, or even annual events, homeschooled children meet other homeschoolers and create friendships that span years. One complaint that the traditional educator might bring up is

\(^{112}\) Romanowski (2001).
\(^{113}\) Romanowski (2001).
the fact that these relationships are probably based more on interacting together socially
than learning and struggling together intellectually, and therefore the problem raised above
is not really solved.

The third mode of socialization is also with peers, but with children who are not
homeschooled. Now that homeschoolers are often welcomed in extra-curricular activities,
there are plenty of opportunities for homeschooled children to meet non-homeschooled
children through sports teams, musical activities, Scouts, or political groups. Given the
range of activities in which children can get involved outside of school, it would seem that
opportunities for peer social interaction are plentiful, even for homeschoolers.

The fourth mode of socialization occurs between homeschooled children and their
faith community. Religious organizations bring together people from all ages and also
provide opportunities for youth to spend time specifically with their peers. Many youth
groups volunteer together or travel on mission trips all over the world. Entire families will
often attend church events together as a form of family bonding to encourage each other’s
faith. Encounters with their religious community “frequently generate and sustain shared
moral cultures that facilitate social solidarity and trust. This too generates social capital.”
114 These religious opportunities are ways for homeschooled children to socialize with their
family, with community members of all ages, and also with their peers. The relationships
created in a faith community are sometimes very different from their relationships with
people from other faith backgrounds.

The final mode of socialization takes place in the homeschooler’s broader community.
Whenever a child leaves the house and encounters other people, whether it occurs at the

114 Christian Smith and David Sikkink, “Is Private Schooling Privatizing?” First Things (April 1999),
grocery store, library, park, or post office, social interaction is almost unavoidable. Some families may even go out of their way to create social situations with their neighbors or other community members in order to take advantage of an extra opportunity to teach their children the social skills needed to thrive in a community. Families who have the ability to travel and visit other communities gain even more exposure to different types of social situations.

These five different ways of socializing homeschooled children are easy ways for parents to ensure that their children will be ready to interact with other people once they are on their own. It must be admitted that children in formal schools have the same types of opportunities for socialization, especially in realms outside the classroom. Yet, the main difference between homeschooling and formal schooling remains: parents of children in formal schools have no control over their children’s social interactions during the school day. Whereas parents of homeschoolers can choose which of the above opportunities to take advantage of and exactly with whom to arrange play-dates for their children, parents of children in formal schools relinquish that control and usually do not know the people with whom their children spend time during the school day.

As mentioned above, one of the reasons some parents choose to homeschool is because they are afraid of the negative influences that their children will experience in formal schools where parents are not allowed to spend the entire day with their children. Homeschoolers “argue against traditional understandings of the socialization process and maintain that there are both positive and negative forms of socialization.”\textsuperscript{115} Homeschool

\textsuperscript{115} Romanowski, “Common Arguments about Homeschooling” (2001).
parents believe that some of these negative forms of socialization are too risky to accept, and that their job as parents is to protect their children from these negative experiences.

With such an attitude of protection, many critics of homeschooling imagine that the experience of being a homeschooled child would be one of extreme shelter or isolation. While this is true in some cases, a study by sociologists Christian Smith and David Sikkink found that homeschoolers are more likely than their public-school counterparts to be involved in their communities:

Of all types of nonpublic education, home schooling as a practice—by so closely uniting home, family, education, and (usually) religious faith—might seem the most privatized and isolated from the concerns of the public sphere. But in fact, most home schoolers are not at all isolated. Indeed, most are embedded in dense relational networks of home schooling families; participate in local, state, regional, and national home schooling organizations; and engage in a variety of community activities and programs that serve the education of their children. Home schooling families meet together at playgrounds; frequent local libraries, museums, and zoos; organize drama productions, science projects, and art workshops; enroll their kids in YMCA soccer and swimming classes; organize home school association picnics and cook-outs; and much more. Home schooling families also frequent home education conferences and seminars; pay close attention to education-related legislative issues; share political information with each other; and educate themselves about relevant legal concerns. Far from being privatized and isolated, home schooling families are typically very well networked and quite civically active. Of course, some people do not like the purpose of home schoolers' networking and activism. But that objection is an altogether different matter than the one at hand.  

Smith and Sikkink list many ways that homeschoolers actively participate in their communities—ways that could be assigned to the five modes mentioned above. Yet, while homeschoolers are often quite active in their community, it is still in very controlled ways and completely subjected to the parents’ authority. Romanowski argues that there are

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“important limitations” on the interactions and socialization that homeschooled children experience:

For example, home schooled children seldom are exposed to the diversity of beliefs and backgrounds that they would encounter in most public school classrooms. Even though they are involved in various activities outside of their homes, such as field trips and other activities with fellow home schoolers, the participants usually are a very select group of students who for the most part share similar values, background, and social class. This type of interaction simply provides the children with a controlled social group unlike those they will face when they enter college or the work force.117

Romanowski’s point about preparing children for future experiences in college or the work force is a very important one and should be given much weight when evaluating the socialization experiences of children in different educational environments. As I will discuss in more detail during chapter four, one of the purposes of education is to prepare children for adult life, and it is necessary to expose children to a diversity of lifestyles and worldviews so they will not only be able to interact with people who are different from them, but also so they will have the autonomy to choose which way they want to live their own adult lives. Ultimately, homeschool parents have near complete control over their children’s interactions with others – and that is the main concern. It is possible, through all the channels described above, to, in one sense, successfully socialize homeschooled children, but the responsibility lies entirely on the parents to create situations that ensure a healthy type of socialization for their children.

Labeling the Movement

Throughout this chapter, I have so far used the term “conservative Christian” homeschoolers without much explanation, and it is now time to reflect more carefully on

this label. It is not an easy task to find an appropriate term for discussing the particular group of homeschoolers with which my thesis is concerned. As was noted above, it is also not easy to discuss homeschoolers in general. Yet, many scholars who study homeschoolers have noticed a division within the homeschooling movement. Although the lack of data available about homeschoolers makes it difficult to characterize this division, scholars have found it necessary to develop a typology for talking about different types of homeschoolers. Each of the labels proposed by the scholars below has something to do with the religious beliefs of homeschoolers, and justifies my claim that religion is a factor that distinguishes a certain group of homeschoolers. My thesis is concerned with “conservative Christian” homeschoolers, by which I mean parents who choose to homeschool their children for reasons stemming from their conservative Christian beliefs and values. In chapter two I will explore in more detail what it means to be a “conservative Christian,” but for now it will suffice to say that my subjects are Christians outside of the “mainline” denominations.

Many scholars have identified the importance of religion in the division of the homeschooling movement. Rob Reich characterizes this division by saying, “The larger of the groups is the Christian right. Although homeschooling has become a much more diverse enterprise in the past 10 years, its strength as a social movement and the majority of its practitioners are conservative Christians.” In 1991, Jane Van Galen was the first scholar to argue for labels to distinguish the two groups of homeschoolers, and divided homeschoolers into “Ideologues” and “Pedagogues.” Van Galen based the division around parents’ reasons for homeschooling. Ideologues, the first group of parents, choose to homeschool “because of strong ideological differences with the content taught in public

118 Reich, “Civic Perils of Homeschooling,” 2.
schools. These parents are primarily fundamentalist Christians, and their disagreements with the schools center around moral and spiritual values and about the authority of parents relative to other actors in their children’s lives.”¹¹⁹ Pedagogues, the second group of parents, choose to homeschool “because of their preferences for informal learning structured around their children’s interests and paced to their children’s development.”¹²⁰ Using this typology, John Holt’s “unschoolers” would fall into Van Galen’s category of Pedagogues, whereas conservative Christian homeschoolers would be labeled Ideologues.

In 2001, Mitchell Stevens took a sociological look at homeschoolers by studying the organizations they joined. Stevens found that parents “opt to join rather different kinds of homeschool organizations.” The first set of parents join groups that often include the word Christian in their names and provide newcomers with a statement of faith that stipulates core religious tenets of conservative Protestant Christianity. … Others participate in explicitly nonsectarian homeschool support groups. These purvey nondiscrimination or inclusion statements that formally welcome members regardless of religious preference or homeschooling philosophy.¹²¹ Stevens decided to use this split in homeschooling parent organizations to label the two movements within homeschooling. The first group he calls “believers” because they “participate in avowedly Christian groups” and because the term “alludes to the spiritual convictions that many of these men and women bring to home schooling.”¹²² The second group is admittedly “harder to encompass with a single term,” but nevertheless he calls

¹¹⁹ Van Galen and Pitman, 3.
¹²⁰ Van Galen and Pitman, 3.
¹²¹ Stevens, 18.
¹²² Stevens, 19.
them “inclusives” whenever it seems too cumbersome to repeatedly refer to them as “some homeschoolers” or “other home schoolers,” always relative to “believers.”\textsuperscript{123}

In 2008, Gaither critiqued both Van Galen and Stevens’s characterization of the division and proposed his own labels, again based on different types of homeschool groups. Gaither begins by analyzing the need for distinct homeschool groups to form, which he argues is based on the sociological need to maintain their identity in a world that challenges their philosophy of education, among other things. Gaither claims,

\begin{quote}
Homeschooling is so difficult, and the conveniences of modern life so hard to resist…. Exclusion and shunning of those who do not share such commitments is a necessary if ugly concomitant to building strong community bonds. Homeschooling groups that have tried to embrace all views have usually been chronically understaffed, underfunded, and disorganized.\textsuperscript{124}
\end{quote}

Clearly there is a benefit to creating exclusive groups. Gaither critiques Van Galen’s model by saying, “But there is an obvious problem with calling conservative Protestants ideologues and more liberal homeschoolers pedagogues. Both groups were clearly driven by ideological commitments, and both certainly employed a wide range of pedagogies.”\textsuperscript{125} Gaither also critiques Stevens’s nomenclature, saying that his terminology also “runs the risk of implying that only conservative Protestant homeschoolers are religious believers or that all believers are separatistic.”\textsuperscript{126} Gaither’s proposed labels instead focus on a group’s response to pluralism and “use a distinction found in Christian debates over who may receive communion in a local church as a metaphor to capture the division.”\textsuperscript{127} Gaither labels “closed communion” those groups that “exclude others from their groups,

\textsuperscript{123} Stevens, 19-20. 
\textsuperscript{124} Gaither, 142-143. 
\textsuperscript{125} Gaither, 143. 
\textsuperscript{126} Gaither, 143. 
\textsuperscript{127} Gaither, 143.
conferences, and publications.” The other group, which he calls “open communion,” accepts differences within their membership.

Both Stevens and Gaither’s approaches to characterizing the division within the homeschooling movement stem from sociological research conducted by scholars who focus on organized groups of homeschoolers. My research, on the other hand, is more similar to Van Galen’s because it is concerned exclusively with the question of the role of religion in the lives of individual conservative Christian homeschooling families. These scholars are correct in their identification of a bifurcation within the larger homeschooling movement, and are also correct in identifying religious homeschoolers as the larger group; however, it is not my project here to further characterize the division. In this thesis, I will address the question of whether conservative Christian homeschooling, in particular, creates good citizens for contemporary America. Thus, the label “conservative Christian” homeschooling will adequately suit my purposes.

**Conservative Christian Homeschool Organizations**

Regardless of how one characterizes the division within the homeschooling movement, conservative Christian homeschoolers stand apart from other homeschoolers, and this has a lot to do with the conservative Christian organizations they form for themselves. Although conservative Christian homeschoolers can be found scattered almost anywhere in the country, they are remarkably connected through local, regional, and national homeschool groups. Stevens argues that the hierarchical structures of conservative Christian homeschool organizations and the shared worldview that binds conservative Christian homeschoolers together have created a strong foundation for a cohesive movement.\(^{129}\)

\(^{128}\) Gaither, 144.

\(^{129}\) Stevens, *Kingdom of Children*, chapter four.
Stevens makes the claim that different “schemata” (ways of making sense of the world) cause believers and inclusives to have different organizational structures in their support groups and institutions. Inclusives’ organizational structures are built on ideals of individual freedom of accommodating difference, whereas believers’ organizational structures are built on ideals of “godliness,” appointing leaders, and discouraging dissent. Believers’ organizations have been more successful because they have clearly-defined boundaries, due to their shared religious convictions. The successful organization of the conservative Christian homeschool movement is the reason for its success and dominance over the broader homeschooling movement. Because of its cohesiveness, it is much more correct to speak of a single “movement” of conservative Christian homeschoolers, compared to other types of homeschoolers who have failed to come together because of their diversity.

The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) is the largest national conservative Christian homeschooling organization. Because of its size and active membership, the HSLDA influences the broader homeschool movement and debates about related political issues. As Kunzman noted, “few will deny the disproportionate influence of HSLDA in setting the tone and agenda for homeschooling in the United States.”\(^{130}\) The founding of the HSLDA was a reaction to perceived threats of secularism and modernism in the public schools. During the 1980s, HSLDA founder Michael Farris represented the New Christian Right (NCR) on the public stage and helped maintain the movement’s energy. During the 1986 case Mozert v. Hawkins County, Tennessee,\(^{131}\) seven fundamentalist NCR families came together to fight the public school system. Farris

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\(^{130}\) Kunzman, 7.  
argued that the school system was “teaching the ‘religion of secular humanism,’ thus violating the plaintiffs’ constitutional right to free exercise of their religion.”

Eventually, the Sixth Circuit Court ruled against Farris, claiming that “mere exposure” to different values does not violate the free exercise clause. After this defeat, Farris founded the HSLDA to protect homeschooling families.

According to the HSLDA website, the organization “is a nonprofit advocacy organization established to defend and advance the constitutional right of parents to direct the education of their children and to protect family freedoms.” The HSLDA provides free legal counsel for its members and advocates on behalf of homeschooling and parental rights on Capitol Hill, in state legislatures, and in the media. The HSLDA also collaborates with the National Home Education Research Institute, which conducts research about homeschoolers. Additionally, the HSLDA founded the Home School Foundation in 1994, which is a support group for conservative Christian homeschoolers that also financially helps needy families who want to homeschool their children.

The HSLDA operates based on conservative Christian values, yet claims that its mission “is to protect the freedom of all homeschoolers regardless of their faith background.” Any homeschooler can become a member of the HSLDA, but because of the outspokenly Christian rhetoric, most families who are not conservative Christian will likely be turned off by the organization. The emphasis on so-called traditional family values is evidence of the conservative Christian worldview that informs and justifies the

HSLDA’s political actions. For example, Farris defends the HSLDA’s position that marriage should be constitutionally defined as being between a man and a woman by appealing to religious claims:

The truth is that God created the family. … If we tear down this God-based view of the family, then all of the God-based principles in our society are ultimately at risk. The reason we have parental rights is because our law assumes that God gave children to parents, not the state. If we eliminate the assumption of God from our law, parental rights and human rights themselves are impossible.136

This “slippery slope” argument matches much of the New Christian Right’s rhetoric, as we will see in chapter two, and also serves Farris’ goal of mobilizing conservative Christian homeschoolers to defend all parents’ rights to homeschool.

Since its founding in 1983, the HSLDA has become more politically active and has expanded its influence greatly beyond just defending homeschooling. In 2000, the HSLDA’s board of directors founded (and continues to fund) Patrick Henry College (PHC), which is a school exclusively for conservative Christians who were homeschooled. PHC’s mission “is to prepare Christian men and women who will lead our nation and shape our culture with timeless biblical values and fidelity to the spirit of the American founding. Educating students according to a classical liberal arts curriculum, and training them with apprenticeship methodology, the College provides academically excellent baccalaureate level higher education with a biblical world view.”137 By creating and funding a college specifically to mentor young conservative Christian politicians who will help bring the country closer to Christ, one could argue that the HSLDA has overstepped its original charter. However, the leaders of the HSLDA and its sister organizations

believe that homeschooling efforts require public activism, because participating in the political system will be “the most effective way of realizing the NCR’s goals and principles insofar as it would enable parents and activists to transform the political system from within.” 138

The HSLDA has also created a political youth group called Generation Joshua, or “GenJ” for short, which teaches homeschooled teens about Christian civic involvement. GenJ offers a combination of online civics learning as well as real-world interactions and opportunities to get involved with the political Christian Right, including voter registration drives specifically targeted at potential Republicans. Generation Joshua gets its name from the Biblical figure Joshua, Moses’s successor who led the Israelites to the Promised Land. Conservative Christians think of the “pioneers” and parents of homeschooling as the generation of Moses, who led the exodus from public schools but did not get to see the “promised land.” They have passed on the responsibility of reforming American education to the next generation. Their goal is to elect Christian politicians who will rule according to God’s law and therefore bless the nation. Ned Ryun, founding director of GenJ, said, “we must recognize that our children will either be shapers of culture or shaped by the culture.” 139

As we will discover in chapter two, the message of the NCR is that conservative Christians should engage the world, else they will be swept away by values antithetical to Christianity. Kunzman seems divided over whether to support or condemn GenJ: on the one hand, it seems like a “compelling example of genuine civic engagement” often not matched by liberals; on the other hand, it frames citizenship as “adversarial political engagement informed by narrow ideological boundaries” instead of a “shared

138 Bivins, 104.
139 Kunzman, 40.
endeavor among a diverse citizenry, where compromise and accommodation” are necessary.¹⁴⁰

One example of the legal and financial power of the HSLDA was when the organization gained the spotlight in January of 2010 as it advocated on behalf of a German family’s request for asylum in the United States. The Romeikes came to the US from Germany so they could homeschool their children, and their journey was made possible by legal and financial help from the HSLDA: “the HSLDA helped the Romeikes become the first people granted asylum in the U.S. because they were persecuted for homeschooling.” The Romeikes objected to the material taught in German schools, claiming that the curriculum and textbooks force “inappropriate subject matter onto young children and tell stories with characters that promote profanity and disrespect.” Since the first decision, the “U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has submitted an appeal requesting to overturn the judge’s decision to grant the Romeikes asylum.”¹⁴¹

Critics accuse the HSLDA of framing issues in apocalyptic terms and of advocating for issues that are not directly related to homeschooling, such as same-sex marriage bans. The fact that nearly a third of the PHC faculty resigned in 2006 because of the overbearing administration shows the lack of freedom of thought at the HSLDA and its subsidiaries. Though, perhaps its authoritarian structure befits the aims of such an organization. The HSLDA claims that 97% of its members identify as born-again Christians, so perhaps they feel no need to accommodate those who disagree with the majority.¹⁴² Kunzman’s biggest critique of the HSLDA is its “ongoing distortion of research” about homeschooling, which

¹⁴⁰ Kunzman, 107.
¹⁴² Kunzman, 123.
is especially important since public opinion and policy decisions are often based on this research. Reich notes the presence of the HSLDA as a leader of the influential homeschool lobbyists in Washington, DC. The HSLDA truly is a leader in the conservative Christian homeschool movement, which itself dominates the general homeschooling movement.

A Personal Look into Conservative Christian Homeschooling Families

Kunzman’s book, “Write These Laws on Your Children,” is the first in-depth study of a diverse group of American conservative Christian homeschoolers. The book’s chapters alternate between telling in-depth stories about his visits with conservative Christian homeschool families and brief discussions about homeschool topics relating to these visits. For a more complete description of the families that Kunzman interviewed, I highly recommend reading his book. I will draw a brief portrait of four of these families in the hope that Kunzman’s personal interactions with these families will concretize my discussion of conservative Christian homeschooling.

The Palmer family is a large family from Los Angeles, and registered members of the HSLDA. Their nine children are enrolled in a Christian independent study program (ISP), an organization that controls the curricula and tracking of their children’s education. ISPs are technically registered with the state as “private schools,” but are actually groups of homeschoolers. Bridgeway Academy, the ISP used by the Palmer family, acknowledges that “there is always a way around the system” and because they do not require testing, “there’s no evidence that the students have actually learned anything.”

Bridgeway Academy views assessments of reading, writing, and arithmetic as

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143 Reich, “Civic Perils of Homeschooling,” 2.
144 Kunzman, 67.
overstepping the proper role of the government because testing or “any attempt by the state
to stipulate a basic educational minimum will inevitably reflect a value system.”\textsuperscript{145} The
entire system rests on the trust Bridgeway Academy has in its members to honestly report
the progress of their children. Bridgeway Academy argues that cost of freedom is a risk
that “some people will not behave in ways that we want them to.”\textsuperscript{146} Yet, they believe that
the state should not punish \textit{all} parents with more regulation just because there are a few
bad parents; instead, the country should continue to assume that parents have the best
interests of their children in mind.

ISPs are also popular in other states. The Branson family lives in Tennessee with
their ten children, who enroll in a church-related ISP, “which allows them virtually total
control over curricula and pedagogy – no standardized tests or other state assessments are
required.”\textsuperscript{147} The Branson parents are very outspoken about their dislike of the public
schools because of the social environment and control by the government. Mr. and Mrs.
Branson have a very strict view of the way that children should be “trained” according to
conservative Christian values (and reinforced with a whip). All the children go
volunteering at least once a week, which Mrs. Branson identifies as important for their
socialization. Mr. Branson works the late shift at work so that he can take part in the
homeschooling during the morning.

On the other side of the country from the Bransons, the Carroll family lives a very
isolated life on an elk ranch in Eastern Oregon with minimal exposure to the rest of the
world. Their four children switched curricula after a few years, but at the time of
Kunzman’s first interview they were using the Sonlight curriculum, which “provides a core

\textsuperscript{145} Kunzman, 69.
\textsuperscript{146} Kunzman, 70.
\textsuperscript{147} Kunzman, 75.
The children are very well disciplined, and spend most of the school hours in their bedrooms doing independent work, only occasionally coming out to ask their mother questions. Mrs. Carroll admits that her children’s academics “may eventually exceed her current knowledge base, particularly with physics and calculus. She doesn’t see this as a huge problem, however” and explains, “I’m going to learn it alongside of them, support them, and encourage them while they’re learning.” The family does not watch TV or read the newspaper, so the children usually only hear their father’s political views. Mr. Carroll supports an extremely limited role of government and believes that one way to improve our economy would be to get rid of the public schools, since they spend too much money per student. In Oregon, there is moderate regulation for homeschooling, including state testing every few years, but Mrs. Carroll knows other homeschool families who have fallen through the cracks and never report to the state.

In central Vermont, the Wallis family leads a very different lifestyle. Both of the Wallis parents work in a nearby Pentecostal church, and they feel like the minority in Vermont, a state that is socially progressive overall. They only have one child, a daughter, who mostly uses the A Beka curriculum, which is a popular choice among homeschoolers. She is a year ahead in her curriculum, which her parents attribute to the individualized pace homeschooling allows. Mrs. Wallis helps her daughter study for Bible Quiz, an elective subject and competitive activity with competitions all over New England. She also participates in some public school electives and extracurricular activities, such as foreign

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148 Kunzman, 132.
149 Kunzman, 134.
languages, band, and art. Mrs. Wallis says that she would find a way to give her daughter these experiences even without help from the public schools, but she says, “it’s convenient and I’m paying the taxes anyway, so I might as well benefit from it.” They do choose to avoid some public school activities, such as the prom, because of their disapproval of the inappropriate music and dancing that takes place during the event. Instead, Mrs. Wallis will probably organize a dance for their Christian and homeschooling friends so that her daughter can experience dressing up to be “the princess” that every girl wants to be.

Homeschool regulation in Vermont requires that families submit a “year-end assessment, either through standardized achievement tests, a portfolio of student work, or a written evaluation from a Vermont-licensed teacher.” Mrs. Wallis knows a certified teacher who attends their church and who signs and submits the letter on their behalf, but Mrs. Wallis is the one who writes the letter, which is about one page long and lists the curricula and academic subjects her daughter participated in during the year.

According to Kunzman’s descriptions, there are some common characteristics that tie together these very different families. All of the families begin the day with prayer and Bible reading, and the parents choose Christian curricula as the basis for their homeschool experience. These parents consider homeschooling to be God’s chosen path for them, and one of their goals is to instill good values in their children in the hope that they will remain on the “right” path once they grow up and make their own choices. For all of these families, family relationships are extremely important and church is the primary opportunity for their children’s socialization with non-family members.

All four sets of parents believe strongly in creationism and that America was founded as a Christian nation. They act out their conservative Christian beliefs through

150 Kunzman, 174.
attending small or unaffiliated churches, which chapter two of my thesis will identify as “Christian fundamentalist” congregations. Multiple siblings in each family are also involved in Christian missionary work or summer camps. Kunzman notes, “For conservative Christian homeschoolers, the metric for a successful education is almost always described in terms of ‘being the person God wants them to be’ rather than an Ivy League diploma, a high-powered job, or a six-figure income.”

The Branson family has the minimum goal of teaching their children character and reading skills so they can read the Bible. “Whether they are academically intelligent or not, they’re contributors to a responsible community and not a hindrance.” Mrs. Branson said, “The main thing is that they know God… that they are grounded and settled in the Word and that they can tell others. That they have the character they need to continue in life and they’re happy and productive. You know, good citizens – they vote and make their voice known in the world.” These educational and character goals appear in the homeschooling curriculum and style chosen by each family.

All these families experience a tension between wanting to instill solid Christian values and a Christian worldview in their children while at the same time giving their children enough freedom and independence to make their own decisions about what is right. They treat children as being in need of protection before releasing them into the world. And in the end, all the parents have such a strong faith in God and God’s plan that they are willing to extend freedom to their adolescents as they go off into the world because they trust that God will take care of them. They believe strongly in Proverbs 22:6

151 Kunzman, 29.
152 Kunzman, 72.
153 Kunzman, 76.
154 Kunzman, 93.
(“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it”), however some of their experiences with their older children who have strayed from the path that their parents set them on have tested their faith in this proverb. Kunzman notes how all families must learn that “the art of release” requires striking a “balance between freedom and safety.”

These four families vary in their views about homeschool regulation, their involvement with government programs (such as extra-curricular activities or part-time attendance at public schools), and their attitude towards the HSLDA. They also disagree about the extent to which their children should interact with people of diverse viewpoints and be exposed to popular culture (such as television, movies, and video games). The relationship between husband and wife is different for each family as well, although the mothers are generally more involved with day-to-day instruction and choice of curriculum than their husbands. These disagreements, however, do not negate Kunzman’s observation of many similarities and, ultimately, the unity of conservative Christian homeschoolers as a powerful movement in America.

What is it about the conservative Christian worldview that unites seemingly different homeschooling families from all over the country? Chapter two will serve to provide some needed background about the conservative Christian movement in America that has so strongly shaped homeschooling. I will propose definitions of conservative Christianity and give a brief overview of its history in America in order to show its strong relations with the homeschooling movement. It will also be helpful to understand the values and beliefs of conservative Christians so that the religious worldview will be identifiable in chapter three’s analysis of homeschooling textbooks. So far we have

155 Kunzman, 179.
explored who homeschoolers are, how they came to be, what motivates them to homeschool, how they go about their education, and the special place of conservative Christian homeschoolers within the broader homeschooling movement. Ultimately, combining this background about the homeschooling movement with background about conservative Christianity in America will enable us to understand what motivates conservative Christian homeschooling curricula and, finally, pose important evaluative questions about the movement’s significance for a liberal democracy.
II. CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANITY IN THE UNITED STATES

Chapter one gave important background information about homeschooling in the United States, and often referred to “conservative Christian homeschoolers.” This chapter seeks to answer the questions of whom these conservative Christians are today, and who they have been historically. The first section of this chapter will define key terms and briefly outline the history and beliefs of conservative Christians in America, relying on the work of three well-respected scholars in this field: George Marsden, Mark Noll, and Robert Wuthnow. The second section will use recent statistics to discuss the contemporary situation of Christians in America. Next, it will be important to learn about the political involvement of conservative Christians over the past forty years, in order to learn about their views of Christian citizenship. The final section of this chapter will rely on recent sociological-ethnographic studies of conservative Christians to present readers with a better understanding of how these religious people live their daily lives. By learning about the historical, political, and practical elements of conservative Christianity, it will be possible to identify elements of the religion in the homeschooling textbooks that are the subject of research discussed in chapter three.

Terminology, History, and Beliefs

The word “evangelical” has Greek etymological roots meaning “good news,” or “gospel,” and often refers to the Christian message of “God’s redemption of sinners by the
work of Christ.” Today, the term “evangelical” refers to a movement within Protestant Christianity that has a history dating back to the eighteenth century English and American revivals. The term “Christian fundamentalism” refers to a sub-group of evangelicalism that arose as a cohesive movement at the beginning of the twentieth century that has been historically known for its “anti-modern” stance. The identification of evangelicals and fundamentalists as “movements” instead of “denominations” means that they are both decentralized popular groups lacking clear institutionalized boundaries. In this thesis, the term “conservative Christian” is meant to refer to Protestant Christians of both the evangelical and fundamentalist varieties who share many key conservative beliefs and tend to inhabit similar worldviews. As this thesis shows, many conservative Christians have chosen to homeschool their children because of these shared beliefs.

George Marsden’s 1980 book, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, made popular the concept of fundamentalism as militant and anti-modern. According to Marsden, the story of fundamentalism really begins in the 1870s, when philosophical, theological, and social trends in America contributed to the formation of what would become a distinct group of fundamentalist Christians by the beginning of the twentieth century. A split within American Protestants during the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American revivals formed two distinct, yet inter-mingled, groups: “mainline” Protestants and “evangelicals.” Examples of mainline Protestant denominations are Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians. Evangelicals were part of a broad movement, not a denomination, and were very diverse because of their transdenominational identity. Their most distinguishing beliefs were the importance of

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missionary work, the ultimate authority of the Christian Bible, and the need for personal faith in Jesus Christ in order to receive salvation.\textsuperscript{157}

People who came of age between the Civil War and World War I had to choose between maintaining their evangelical belief in the complete authority of the Bible or accommodating their religiosity to modern understandings of nature and history. “Liberal Christians” believed that religious thought could change, that leading an ethical life is generally more important than following doctrine strictly, and that historical-critical Biblical interpretation is the best way to understand Christian scriptures. “Conservative Christians” disagreed with liberal accommodations to scientific discoveries. They opposed historical criticism of religious texts, favoring instead what they felt were traditional approaches to Christianity. Most evangelicals fell into the conservative camp and considered liberals to be sell-outs to modern thought and culture. Increasingly, the tests of faith for evangelicals revolved around issues of Biblical inerrancy and historical accuracy of the Bible. Although the tensions surrounding new philosophies and theologies leading up to the twentieth century sparked disagreement among diverse Protestants, who began to split along liberal-conservative lines, the conservatives had not yet abandoned the mainline denominations.\textsuperscript{158}

Around the year 1900, arguments as to what actions would be appropriate for conservative Christians to take in defense of true Christianity ultimately created a split within the conservative Christian movement. On the one hand, there were many conservative evangelicals who wanted to remain in the mainline denominations and perhaps work from inside those organizations to effect change. On the other hand, radical


\textsuperscript{158} Marsden, \textit{Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism}, 32-60.
conservative Christians – soon to be called “fundamentalists” – refused to remain in mainline denominations. These “fundamentalists” believed in a strictly literal interpretation of the Bible and its inerrancy, and came together to battle against liberals and the “religion of secular humanism,” which they believed were threatening American culture.

Conservative Christians within and without Protestant denominations succeeded in forming a more cohesive group identity after The Fundamentals were published during the years 1910 to 1915. The Fundamentals were written and edited by Bible teachers and evangelists, pastors, scholars, and popular writers and were meant to be a “broad defense of the faith” with articles about various topics, including apologies dealing with traditional theological questions about the trinity, sin, and salvation, as well as contemporary polemics about modernism, liberalism, and evangelism.159 Overall, the volumes presented somewhat moderate views and avoided politically divisive subjects, in order to bring together the conservative Christian movement. According to Marsden, the financial backers of The Fundamentals, Lyman Stewart and his brother Milton, “financed free distribution to every pastor, missionary, theological professor, theological student, YMCA and YWCA secretary, college professor, Sunday school superintendent, and religious editor in the English-speaking world, and sent out some three million individual volumes in all.”160 This initial push gave fundamentalists across the country a united message and language with which to defend their strict Biblical interpretations. The polarizing effects of World War I and the debate over evolution gave fundamentalists an opportunity to rally around particular causes. William Jennings Bryan, a key figure during this time period,

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159 Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism, 119-120.
160 Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism, 118-119.
fought both political and legal battles against Darwinism. According to Marsden, he and a few other fundamentalist evangelists “laced their messages with political pronouncements, featuring patriotism and Prohibition and attacking Marxism, socialism, evolutionism, and Catholicism.”

The conservative Christian reaction to Darwinism was not initially as simplistic as the storybooks describe. In fact, Marsden argues that it may have been opponents of Christianity who developed and promoted “the ‘warfare’ framework for understanding the relationship of Christianity to Darwinism.” After the Enlightenment, many Christians had found ways that science and reason could support Christian faith, and some fundamentalists were not against science of all kinds: “They favored what they regarded as true objective science, as they opposed only the biased, false, naturalistic-historicist science that dominated the age.” However, professionalization and secularization in research universities around the turn of the twentieth century essentially removed the influence of religion from science and adopted a naturalistic and historical approach. According to Marsden,

The disappearance by the 1920s of Biblicist views in virtually all the sciences makes it less surprising that at this point “evolution” emerged among conservative evangelicals (now called fundamentalists) as the almost universal unifying symbol of everything that was wrong. … The fundamentalist leaders who opposed evolution recognized that evolutionism had to do with more than just a theory about biology. Evolutionism reflected, and for many champions of secularism long had symbolized, an entire naturalistic worldview.

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161 Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 100.
162 Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 139.
164 Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 143-147.
165 Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 147.
When this denial of evolution took the form of law in Tennessee and the American Civil Liberties Union rose to the challenge of striking down that law, suddenly the eyes and ears of Americans across the country were focused on the debate. John Scopes, a high school biology teacher charged by the State of Tennessee with illegally teaching the theory of evolution, went to trial. His defense lawyer, the famous Clarence Darrow, faced off against religious and political giant William Jennings Bryan. Although Scopes lost and the case was ultimately decided based on a technicality, the examination of witnesses during the trial provided ample opportunity for a public debate about evolution and religion. After the trial, “antievolutionism became associated in the popular imagination with conservative religious views – and with the most negative stereotypes of such views. Antievolutionists and fundamentalists in general were portrayed as foolish, unthinking, religious zealots.”

Noll and Wuthnow describe the first quarter of the twentieth century as characterized by “fundamentalist-modernist battles,” culminating with fundamentalists rallying around the Scopes Trial. The second quarter of the century saw fundamentalists humiliated in a public defeat after the Scopes Trial, which contributed to their loss of control and ultimate exodus from mainline denominations. Conservative Christians retreated into their own subculture, in part aided by the theology of dispensational premillennialism. In the dispensational premillennialist worldview,

...the current dispensation, or “church age,” was marked by the regressive corruption of so-called Christian civilization and the apostasy

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of its large churches. Only a remnant of true believers would remain pure. The Kingdom of Christ would not be brought in by united Christian effort, as the Social Gospel had promised, but only by the dramatic return of Jesus to set up his millennial kingdom in Jerusalem. Dispensationalism thus suggested that Christian political efforts were largely futile. Believers should … separate into pure churches and preach the gospel for the higher cause that eternal souls would be saved for eternity. As evangelists often said of the Social Gospel, why try to clean up the state rooms of the *Titanic* when you know it is doomed?\(^{168}\)

Although some conservative evangelicals remained in the major Protestant denominations, most strict fundamentalists had left by the mid-1930s. Yet, this fundamentalist subculture was not idle: strict Bible believers formed their own press, newspapers, summer camps, and schools. By World War II, the conservative Christian subculture had seen major growth, although it was not yet politically organized or active. The prevailing political attitude in the conservative churches was that a person’s values determine his or her behavior. Preachers and churches were motivated to shape their congregants into moral people, hoping that those individuals would ultimately shape the country according to their values.\(^{169}\) However, political and social changes in the 1960s and 1970s would convince conservative Christians to change their *modus operandi*.

After World War II, the role of the federal government expanded enormously, and the so-called “liberal” Supreme Court of the 1960s and 1970s was a big factor in that expansion.\(^{170}\) Court decisions about prayer in public school and the legality of abortion were religious and moral issues that rallied conservatives together much like the Scopes trial had done a few decades before. Those particular Supreme Court decisions were genuinely threatening to conservative Christians because they felt that the “widening wall of separation between religion and politics… threatens the freedom of people with

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168 Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 101
169 Wuthnow, 30.
170 Wuthnow, 57.
religious convictions to express those convictions in public arenas."¹⁷¹ By 1980, the Supreme Court was viewed by religious conservatives as an enemy whose actions were “antagonistic to the values that religious groups held dear.”¹⁷² This perceived attack on conservative religious values did, however, energize the fundamentalist subculture, attract new membership, and convince some conservative Christians that political action would be required to effect change of the country’s laws and values.

The sexual revolution and cultural crisis of the 1960s encouraged many Americans to seek out religious systems that would give more meaning to their lives, and conservative Christianity, along with other religious groups, seemed attractive to a new generation ready to experiment. Since conservative Christians already had a well-established network of organizations, they were ready to accommodate new members. For example, Marsden describes how the “people-community impulses of the era were readily translated by evangelicals into personal contacts and small-group meetings, such as groups for Bible study and prayer, that contributed substantially to evangelical growth during the 1970s.”¹⁷³ Another element that made conservative Christianity attractive was the set of definitive answers offered by its Biblical worldview: “Confronted with the crisis in authority in a changing and pluralistic society, evangelicals could point to the sure certainty of the word of God. The ‘inerrancy’ of the Bible became an increasingly important symbolic test of faith for much of the movement. Evangelicals generally could draw on the immense residual prestige of the Bible in America as a firm rock in a time of change.”¹⁷⁴ All these

¹⁷¹ Wuthnow, 57.
¹⁷² Wuthnow, 55.
¹⁷³ Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism, 104.
¹⁷⁴ Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism, 105.
elements from the 1960s and 1970s contributed to what seemed like an “evangelical resurgence” leading up to 1980.\textsuperscript{175}

In a time rocked by political and social instability, key leaders realized that they could mobilize this religious coalition around moral and religious issues such as abortion, pornography, and school prayer.\textsuperscript{176} Perhaps one of the best-known religious and political leaders of the time was Jerry Falwell, who founded the Moral Majority in the 1980s to mobilize conservative Christians as a political force in America. Although Falwell was a fundamentalist, his cooperation with other religious groups such as the Mormons, Catholics, and New Evangelicals caused strict fundamentalists to distrust his movement.\textsuperscript{177} Fundamentalist language of warfare between good and evil pitted conservative Christians against “secular humanists,” who threatened to remove Christianity from American culture completely.\textsuperscript{178} According to Wuthnow, “[t]he religious right also borrowed the more activist style of political confrontation that the left had used during the 1960s” and “urged believers to take political action, to organize themselves, to infuse their morality into the basic institutions of government.”\textsuperscript{179} Falwell’s style and beliefs sometimes seemed more akin to New Evangelicalism than to strict fundamentalism.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, influential public figures such as Billy Graham contributed to the rise of “neo-evangelicalism.” These “post-fundamentalists” reacted against the militant nature of fundamentalists and instead were more willing to compromise on many issues. Sometimes called “New Evangelicals,” these Christians are still technically fundamentalist, according to Marsden’s definition of their conservative

\begin{footnotes}
\item[175] Marsden, \textit{Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism}, 105.
\item[176] Marsden, \textit{Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism}, 95.
\item[177] Marsden, \textit{Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism}, 107.
\item[178] Marsden, \textit{Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism}, 108.
\item[179] Wuthnow, 35-36.
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social stance and theology – however much they separated from other fundamentalists in order to be more politically involved, socially accepted, gain intellectual respect, and be more engaged with the modern world. This new wave of “scholarly fundamentalists… emphasized the need to meet the intellectual challenge of the age if the movement was to have a lasting impact.”¹⁸⁰ These New Evangelicals “were somewhat more affluent and, like many Americans after World War II, more interested in college education. Many of their young people were now attending colleges, and by the 1960s substantial numbers were emerging from graduate schools.”¹⁸¹ Strict fundamentalists viewed the New Evangelicals as victims who had succumbed to the trends of secular intellectual elitism in America, and the conservative Christian movement split once again.

Changes in American culture during the end of the twentieth century, such as an increased global awareness, more obvious diversity in America, the authority of university intellectual elite and secular thought, and new feminist thought all contributed to a shared sense of crisis among conservative Christians. When Jerry Falwell and James Dobson led conservative Christians into politics in the 1970s and 1980s, their successful use of mass media gave rise to the New Religious Right and Christian Coalition in America. These religious groups aimed to mobilize conservative Christians into political action at local, state, and national levels. They rallied around causes such as abortion, homosexuality, and evolution in order to help America regain its moral footing and keep government out of its citizens’ private lives.

¹⁸⁰ Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism, 150.
¹⁸¹ Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism, 150.
Contemporary Christianity in the United States

Today the split between conservative and liberal Christians remains wide. Although the two groups cannot be neatly divided, there are still important distinctions worth noting. Wuthnow observes that religious conservatives at the end of the twentieth century “were much more likely than liberals to identify themselves as evangelicals, to believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible, to say they had had a ‘born-again’ conversion experience, to indicate that they had tried to convert others to their faith, and to hold conservative views on issues such as abortion and prayer in public schools.”182 Currently, the association between conservative Christians and the Republican political agenda is strong. A 2006 Pew Research Center survey about religion and politics found that “white evangelical Christians comprise 24% of the population and form a distinct group whose members share core religious beliefs as well as crystallized and consistently conservative political attitudes.”183 Compared to those who identified themselves as liberal Christians (32%), who “come from different religious traditions and disagree almost as often as they agree on a number of key political and social issues,” evangelicals are more cohesive and therefore “remain a more politically potent force.”

Wuthnow’s account of religious liberals describes them as “less likely than conservatives to attend church or synagogue regularly, but a majority affirmed the importance of religion in their lives, tended to regard the Bible as divinely inspired (but not to be taken literally), and held liberal views on a variety of political and moral issues.” It is interesting to note that this division between religious liberals and conservatives is, for

the most part, not split along denominational lines. Except for conservative Pentecostal churches such as the Assemblies of God and the Southern Baptist Convention, which has been predominantly conservative since fundamentalists took over the church leadership in 1979, conservative Christianity is a broad movement.184 Because of its broad “transdenominational” nature, it is difficult to generalize about its diverse members, but Wuthnow discusses a few trends in the “distinctive subculture of American evangelical Christianity:”

In comparison with the rest of the population, and certainly in comparison with the population of academic faculty in the social sciences, the evangelical subculture tends to be more conservative on moral issues, disproportionately pro-life rather than pro-choice (although both views are represented), somewhat more conservative on gender issues such as ordination of women and views of the Equal Rights Amendment, more fearful of communism, more devoted to the principles of free enterprise in business, more suspicious of big government, and more supportive of strong national defenses.185

Many of these political issues happen to align with the current values of the Republican Party in America, but are usually motivated by the conservative Christian worldview rather than because of mere party loyalty. Conservative Christian views of citizenship place an importance on governing according to their interpretation of the Bible’s moral principles. Recent polling data confirm that conservative Christians are more likely than other religious groups in America to say, “the Bible is the actual word of God, to be taken literally.”186 The same survey found that “six-in-ten white evangelical Protestants say that the Bible should be the guiding principle in making laws… a view rejected by an equally

185 Wuthnow, 166-167.
186 “On matters of faith, fully 62% of white evangelicals say the Bible is the actual word of God, to be taken literally. In contrast, only 35% of the public – including just 24% of Catholics and 17% of white mainline Protestants – share this literal view of the scriptures, with most believing that although the Bible is God’s word, not everything in it is literally true,” (“69% Say Liberals Too Secular…,” Pew Research Center, 2006).
large majority of Americans, including most Catholics and white mainline Protestants.” Conservative Christians are also more likely to believe that churches should be vocal about political issues. Also, evangelical Protestants are the least likely Christian population in America to say that homosexuality should be accepted by society.187

Religious groups in America remain divided over the issue of evolution and the origins of life. The same research from the Pew Research Center found that “the views of white evangelical Protestants are very different from those of other groups, with a majority (65%) rejecting the notion that humans and other living things have evolved over time, and espousing the view that life has existed in its present form since the beginning of time. Just 28% of evangelicals believe in evolution, and only 6% think evolution occurred through natural selection.” A majority of people in all other religious groups does believe in evolution. As chapter three will reveal, these conservative Christian beliefs about politics, science, and morality are the foundation of what is taught today in many conservative Christian homeschool textbooks.

Many scholars of religion predicted that modernity would bring about a process of secularization, whereby modern societies and the individuals within them would orient themselves less around religion. However, recent evidence suggests that the United States, unlike other Western industrial countries, has not become secularized in the way scholars predicted: “There is little indication in recent decades that American religion has undergone what might be termed ‘secularization’ in any absolute sense. According to most of the standard measures, such as participation in organized religion, belief in God, and belief in an afterlife, religious commitment is as strong now as it was thirty-five or forty

years ago.” Marsden agrees, saying, “theories of secularization that predicted
correlations of scientific-technological advance and spiritual decline are in deep
trouble.” Some scholars even go so far as to say that a “religious revival” has taken
place since WWII. Wuthnow replies that since polling statistics show no significant
change in religiosity, perhaps it would be more correct to talk about a “religious
mobilization” whereby “religious people have become organized to participate in public
affairs more effectively.” The mobilization of religious people, with the help of “special
purpose groups” that arose in the 1980s, enabled conservative Christians “to devote their
energies to a more limited array of activities.”

**Political Involvement**

Conservative Christian homeschooling organizations mentioned in chapter one,
such as the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) and Generation Joshua
(GenJ), are examples of special purpose groups that mobilize religious people to more
effectively influence the rest of the country. Although conservative Christian
organizations are relatively small compared to some other special interest groups, they
allow for independent-minded people to come together around similar values. Another
example of an association that was created with a particular political or social purpose is
the American Family Association (AFA), whose mission is to “motivate and equip
individuals to restore American culture to its moral foundations.” According to its
website, the AFA “is one of the largest and most effective pro-family organizations in the
country with over two million online supporters and approximately 180,000 paid

188 Wuthnow, 15.
189 Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 98.
190 Wuthnow, 51.
191 Wuthnow, 51.
subscribers to the AFA Journal, the ministry's monthly magazine. In addition, AFA owns and operates nearly 200 radio stations across the country under the American Family Radio (AFR) banner.193 The AFA has its own statement of faith and is committed to Christian activism, especially around issues relating to the family. The Christian Coalition of America is a similarly “pro-family” organization that was founded by Pat Robertson to represent conservative Christian interests in politics.194 Another political organization called Liberty Alliance Action was founded in 1992 and “is the successor to the Moral Majority.”195 The group currently tackles issues such as “Obamacare,” the “Sanctity of Life,” and “Religious Liberty.”196 These are just a few examples of the many conservative Christian interest groups that exist currently. The existence of so many groups shows the importance that conservative Christians today place on activism around “Christian values.”

Social and political scientists have noted the increase in number and influence of these voluntary associations, and have for some time now identified them as a “third sector,” separate from the traditional two sectors: “private” and “public.” Although there exists a healthy scholarly debate around how to define this third sector and what its origins are, scholars agree that suddenly “religion is playing an aggressive role in the public arena.”197 Wuthnow argues that the third sector arose because of a perceived need for more democratic input.198 The advent of religious television programming and the conservative Christian use of modern technology in general has helped propel religious messages across the country. Marsden notes that the conservative Christian message is

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197 Wuthnow, xii.
198 Wuthnow, 4.
…peculiarly suited for large segments of society in the technological age. Fundamentalists have been particularly adept at handling mass communication. If there is a rule of mass communications that the larger the audience the simpler the message must be, fundamentalists and similar evangelicals came to the technological age well prepared. Television ministries flourish best when they provide answers in simple polarities. … For better or worse, fundamentalism is a version of Christianity matched to its age.  

Through radio, television, and the Internet, conservative Christian groups have been able to spread a message that was already well suited for mass communication.

Some of the most important political issues around which conservative Christian interest groups rally their forces include debates concerning “big government” and the proper relation of religion or faith to the public sphere. Before World War II, religious groups provided most of the higher education, social support, and hospitals in America. Now, government has taken over those roles. All over the world, government is providing services that were not under its purview decades ago. Political conservatives look at the fact that “the state is organized into larger bureaucratic agencies, employs a larger percentage of the population, supplies more services, and regulates more aspects of personal and social life than ever before” and fear that “as government bureaucracy expands, the potential for more and more of the society’s policies being determined behind closed doors rather than through open public discussion becomes a frightening reality.”

Polling data suggest that religious conservatives are more likely to align with these political conservative values as well as typical conservative interpretations of the relation of the church to the state, placing “greater emphasis on the right to free expression of

199 Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 120.
200 Wuthnow, xiii.
201 Wuthnow, 13.
The growing influence of religious groups on public affairs in America through their special purpose organizations suggests that the overall influence of religion on politics in America has increased, but does not support claims of changing individual religiosity.\textsuperscript{203}

**Ethnographic Studies**

One way to learn about individual religiosity of conservative Christians is to conduct interviews and observe church events. In this area of research, Christian scholars play an important role because they can conduct sociological studies about their own communities. Wuthnow values these scholars as “interpreters of their own tradition for the broader intellectual community” because they have a window into the subculture that is not available to other scholars.\textsuperscript{204} Nancy Ammerman is one example of a scholar with an evangelical background who is also a well-respected academic. Ammerman is a professor of the sociology of religion and has written many books about congregational religious experiences in America. Ammerman’s recent work focuses on the congregational aspects of religion in contemporary America and one of her earlier books is particularly relevant to this discussion because it is based on her in-depth exploration of a single fundamentalist congregation from a sociological viewpoint. Ammerman’s motivating questions in her book, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World*, seem to stem from a curiosity about how fundamentalists can maintain such a different worldview and lifestyle from the rest of American culture, and how their belief system, or worldview, influences their lifestyle. In order to answer these questions, Ammerman conducts a participant-observer ethnography in an independent fundamentalist church (dubbed “Southside Gospel

\textsuperscript{202} Wuthnow, 43.
\textsuperscript{203} Wuthnow, 54.
\textsuperscript{204} Wuthnow, 172.
Church” to preserve her subjects’ anonymity), located in suburban New England. Her goal is to attempt a different kind of study than one usually finds in the literature on fundamentalism – one that allows her to get involved personally with her subjects and to witness their daily life.

Ammerman refers to her subjects as fundamentalists, which she clearly distinguishes from other evangelicals. She defines “fundamentalists” as those Protestant Christians who maintain separation from rather than accommodation to the modern world. Both fundamentalists and evangelicals affirm “the divinity of Jesus, the reality of his resurrection and miracles, and the sure destiny of human beings in either heaven or hell. They believe that salvation is the result of a personal faith in Jesus that starts with an experience of being born again.”205 These shared beliefs among both fundamentalists and evangelicals are the reason why fundamentalism is considered a sub-group of evangelicalism. However, distinguishing the two groups by using different labels is extremely important for members of the religions. As Ammerman notes, “identifiable organizations adopt each label and do not want to be confused with one another. … The leaders in each camp (who are, of course, most aware of the differences) usually choose for themselves one designation and not the other. Self-identification, however is not entirely reliable.”206 Ammerman agrees with most scholars that the difference between fundamentalists and evangelicals has more to do with style and behavior than doctrine, and most importantly with “the degree to which believers are willing to get along with the rest of the world.”207 Ammerman is familiar with fundamentalism through her own past

206 Ammerman, 4.
207 Ammerman, 5.
religious experience, and at Southside Gospel Church she “was more often treated as a participant than as an observer.” This self-identification as “saved” allows her to enter into circles that would be closed to complete outsiders. As a result, she can present a uniquely personal study about fundamentalists.

Ammerman discovers that fundamentalists constantly need to maintain their faith because the outside world challenges them daily. Most members of the congregation are converts from one or another Christian denomination, and the fundamentalist church always feels the need to recruit more members. In order to maintain their unique lifestyle and belief system, fundamentalists minimize interactions with the outside world and surround themselves with fellow Bible believers who become like their new family. Ammerman notes that relationships “are difficult to maintain when one party insists that there is something wrong with the other. It is not surprising that few Southside members reported any close friendships with unsaved people,” even “old friends and unsaved relatives. …For these people, ‘separation from the world’ has meant leaving loved ones behind.” Ammerman writes, “For the members of Southside, the orderly world of Fundamentalism is indeed a sheltering canopy, a defense against the terrible chaos they perceive in the modern world and sometimes feel within their own souls.” Through frequent church and community activities, believers maintain their faith by staying involved and adhering to strict rules and beliefs.

In addition to the church community, the family construct is a central element of fundamentalist world-maintenance because it is in the home where many conservative

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208 Ammerman, 12.
209 Ammerman, 95.
210 Ammerman, 51.
Christian beliefs are acted out and supported. Ammerman notices a traditional gender division of roles in fundamentalist households:

In the day-to-day lives of families, then, women shoulder the responsibility of maintaining the home. If they are employed, they may persuade their husbands to help with a few chores; but cooking, cleaning, and child rearing are the God-given tasks of women. Major purchases and repairs are delegated to husbands, while the general physical and emotional condition of the home and family is the job of the mother. The father’s primary job is to provide the resources, make the right decisions, and preside over the spiritual well-being of the family.²¹¹

Part of the father’s job is to carve out a time every day for family prayer and teach his children about the Bible. Although Ammerman discovers that the reality of busy, modern lives does not always live up to the ideal, the valuing of daily Bible study demonstrates the important role given to the Bible in the fundamentalist worldview.²¹²

Most conservative Christians view the Bible as the “inerrant word of God,” which means that, “because God is the timeless author of every word and story, the Bible need not be interpreted in a historical or literary context… each sentence is equally timeless and useful.”²¹³ An example of how fundamentalists use the Bible in their everyday lives is a story Ammerman tells about a man who turned to God for advice when he was making a decision about whether to switch careers. This man opened the Bible to a random page and expected to find a verse that was relevant to his current dilemma. Another subject Ammerman interviewed was a woman who similarly turned to verses from the Bible for help deciding whether it was time to move to a new house. When conservative Christians rely on the “Word of God” to make big decisions, it demonstrates the authority and trust they place in God and the Bible.

²¹¹ Ammerman, 137.
²¹² Ammerman, 139.
²¹³ Ammerman, 51.
This worldview based on Biblical authority is starkly contrasted with the worldview of the rest of American society. One reason that Ammerman’s subjects do not send their children “outside” to public school is because they view public schools as

…undisciplined environments and potentially bad influences for Christian children. Equally important, the public schools are seen as repositories of knowledge that is contrary to Fundamentalist ways of thinking. … They see public school children being taught false ideas not only about biology but also about government, economics, history, geology, astronomy, physics, and other sciences. About the only safe things to be learned are reading, writing, and arithmetic; and most schools do not seem to be doing a good job of that.214

Ammerman sees fundamentalism as more than just a religion: it is a subculture, a separate group of people and institutions reacting against the outside culture. Although they mostly blend in with other people in their neighborhood, believers will eagerly insist that they are different from “outsiders” and claim that being “saved” is the most important aspect of their identity.215

Another sociologist, Brenda Brasher, conducted a similar participant-observer ethnography of conservative Christians. Her book, *Godly Women: Fundamentalism and Female Power*, presents her study of two comparable fundamentalist congregations in Southern California. Because of Brasher’s own extensive feminist background, this book relies heavily on feminist thought when it studies power and gender in fundamentalism. Brasher acknowledges that her book “privileges gender as a category of analysis,”216 but she thinks it is an important task because gender tensions within fundamentalism have been overlooked by previous scholarship. Her study “seeks to rectify”217 the imbalance of

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214 Ammerman, 177-178.
215 Ammerman, 30-31, 72-73.
217 Brasher, 28.
the public eye’s focus on male leaders of Christian fundamentalism and instead provide an outlet for Christian fundamentalist women’s voices.

By encountering her subjects on a personal level through interviews, Brasher tries to discover how fundamentalist women see themselves. The compelling question for her is why do young, well-educated, modern women agree to go along with the ideas of fundamentalism, which seem to marginalize and disempower them. This “apparent paradox” motivates Brasher to conduct a study that uncovers the reality of women’s experiences in fundamentalist congregations. Brasher’s subjects are exclusively “Christian fundamentalist women,” and Brasher defines fundamentalism as “[a]nother word for conservative evangelical Protestantism.” Because Brasher’s book was written almost twenty years after Ammerman’s book, the difference in their labeling of fundamentalists and evangelicals reflects the emergence of “post-fundamentalist” churches. These women and their congregations are members of “second wave fundamentalism,” or “new evangelicalism,” which is more actively engaged in popular American culture than the first “wave” of fundamentalists and is, therefore, more closely related to the broader term “evangelical.” The congregations Brasher studied are both very new congregations, which did not exist even thirty years ago. This means that all of their members are recent converts and have chosen to be a part of this religious community over other options.

In relatively young and new congregations, how do these fundamentalist women become involved in the first place? The conversion stories that Brasher’s subjects shared shed light on this question. The majority of women were not “new” converts in the sense

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218 Brasher, 3.
219 Brasher, 22.
that they already identified as Christian before they joined these particular churches. However, when the women were “born again” and accepted a new “relationship-based faith,” they considered themselves having undergone a significant conversion, which resulted in “a substantial change in the spiritual, emotional, and mental pattern of their lives. Each associated current faith commitments with a qualitatively different world view and a transformed lifestyle.”

One of the women Brasher interviewed, Cheryl, described her pre-conversion self as knowing that something was missing, and then she “felt the drawing to go to church… the Spirit was drawing me there. It was an emotional feeling from within, a desire of my heart.” Once that emotional draw to the church begins, the second step of the conversion process is to undergo a public commitment to relationship-based faith in Jesus. One woman, Jane, made a public commitment at a church musical concert. She describes the experience as transformational, saying “I was totally overcome with the deepest peace I have ever had in my entire life – knowing that if I were to leave that auditorium that evening and be shot in the head by some maniac, I’d immediately be with Jesus. That was the peace he had given me. My life has been totally different since.”

Since women are often the first to convert, many of the women Brasher interviewed were in the process of encouraging their spouses to get involved in the church as well, and the women who had already done so noted that their marriages improved.

The new life for Jane and other recent converts usually involves joining a bible study group and other church groups that keep the new believers busy with church activities throughout the week. Female believers often join women’s-only church groups where they find emotional support and build close friendships with the other women in the

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221 Brasher, 35.
222 Brasher, 39.
223 Brasher, 41.
congregation. What Brasher discovers, in addition to the “sacred canopy” separating the congregation from the outside world that Ammerman and other scholars have identified, is a “sacred gender wall” that separates the congregation internally along strict gender lines. Brasher notes that men hold all the senior leadership positions in the church, such as pastors and elders, and so women generally “channel their abilities into women’s ministry programs” where they do all the planning and leading of the female groups and develop their leadership skills in those realms.

In “regular” mixed-gender services, men lead the sermons, which presents them as the “sole source of intellectual authority at congregational gatherings.”224 Women are usually the song leaders during worship services. Brasher describes one such service, saying: “With hands raised and eyes closed, two to three women each week stand on the stage singing, awash in religious ecstasy during worship as if unaware of the crowd’s presence.”225 These women accept their limited leadership roles in regular services, but in all-female Bible study groups they embrace stronger roles.

These women take a “fundamentalist-literalist” approach to Bible study, which means that they take the Bible to mean what it says. This allows the women to interpret the Bible themselves through “common sense” without relying on any authority besides the text itself, a process that Brasher considers empowering for female believers. Yet, it is also disempowering because the women have no reference to recent historical or feminist studies that would “disclose the patriarchal social context of these writings.”226 Without any outside authorities to oversee their Biblical interpretation, there is much opportunity

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224 Brasher, 115.
225 Brasher, 114-115.
226 Brasher, 67.
for individual believers of these congregations to decipher the Bible in their own way and make it relevant to their personal lives.

Independent churches, such as the ones Ammerman and Brasher studied, form the backbone of the conservative Christian movement in America. Yet, it seems as though it would be a difficult task to maintain a cohesive message among such a disconnected network of independent churches. One thing that ties these independent congregations together is the “statement of faith” that most require their members to sign. These statements of faith are usually very similar, and highlight the key beliefs that conservative Christians have in common. This builds a sense of group identity that strongly connects believers in different communities to one another. Here is an example of a “statement of faith” used by a congregation in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania:

We believe the Bible to be the inspired, infallible and authoritative Word of God.
We believe that there is only one God, eternally existing in three persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.
We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His substitutionary and atoning death, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the father, in His imminent return to rapture the Church, and in His personal future return to this earth in power and great glory to rule and reign for a thousand years.
We believe that the Holy Spirit carries out the ministries of restraining evil in the world, convicting people of sin, righteousness, and judgment; regenerating and indwelling all believers; baptizing them into the body of Christ; sealing them unto the day of redemption; and empowering them to live for and serve the Lord. …
We believe that man was created by God in His own image and that Adam sinned and thereby incurred the judgment of God in both physical death and spiritual death which is eternal separation from God.
We believe that the only way to be forgiven of our sin and restored to fellowship with God is through repentance and faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
We believe in the resurrection of the saved to everlasting life in a new heaven and new earth, and the resurrection of the lost to everlasting condemnation in the Lake of Fire.227

This statement of faith addresses issues that typically concern conservative Christians, including the authority of the Bible, the role of God and Jesus in salvation, original sin, prophecy about the end times, and the afterlife. When members claim publicly that they believe the same thing as the other members of the church, they feel spiritually connected and are able to form strong relationships as a community of believers. Some independent churches have come together to form voluntary associations so they can share resources and coordinate events such as missionary trips or summer camps. Groups in these associations often adhere to the same statement of faith, which gives their members an even greater sense of unity.

Although conservative Christians are unified around some issues, they are not completely homogeneous. The trends discussed above represent the best scholarly perspectives available with which to categorize conservative Christians as an identifiable movement. The portrait drawn in this chapter of both historical and contemporary conservative Christians will serve as a useful background to discussions of conservative Christian homeschooling. After learning about the history, political views, daily lives, and religious worldview of conservative Christians, the elements of conservative Christianity that are present in the A Beka Books homeschool textbooks are easily identifiable, as the next chapter seeks to show. Christian universities, such as Bob Jones University in South Carolina and Pensacola Christian College in Florida, as well as elementary and secondary schools integrate the conservative Christian worldview into their education. Both these

universities have their own publishing houses that publish Christian materials and scholarship, including homeschool textbooks. The next chapter will examine how conservative Christian values are taught in the homeschool textbooks published by A Beka Books, the publisher affiliated with Pensacola Christian College. Ultimately, it will be important to determine whether an education based on these conservative Christian principles is appropriate for children in America today.
III. CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIAN CURRICULA: AN EXAMINATION OF A BEKA TEXTBOOKS

This chapter aims to show that many elements of the conservative Christian worldview outlined in chapter two are visible in conservative Christian homeschool textbooks. As this chapter’s analysis will show, the publisher’s beliefs and value system can be ascertained through close readings of a few key textbooks. From the publisher’s goals for student learning – both explicit and implicit – we may extrapolate their view of an ideal education. The conservative Christian views from chapter two about the authority of God, the inerrancy of the Bible, their focus on traditional Christian family values, and their support of conservative political values can all be found in these textbooks. When reading this chapter, it may be helpful to imagine what an “A Beka Books statement of faith” would look like based on the religious claims made in these textbooks.

A Beka Books is one of the most popular publishers of textbooks used by conservative Christian homeschoolers. The 2011 homeschool catalog boasts: “Used by millions of home schoolers since 1978.” The company began as a textbook publisher exclusively for Christian private schools, and then expanded to include a curriculum and other services for Christian homeschoolers. A Beka Books is an affiliate of Pensacola Christian Academy, an elementary through high school, and Pensacola Christian College, a post-secondary education institution in Florida with a “distinctively Christian-traditional,

liberal arts education that develops students spiritually, intellectually, morally, culturally, and socially.”

The textbooks developed by A Beka Books are interesting items of investigation for this research because they represent a physical synthesis of homeschooling and conservative Christianity in America.

Research of the A Beka texts was based on the revised “UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision” published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2010 in collaboration with the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research. The guide outlines suggestions for conducting research about textbooks, the first step of which is to select a sample from which it is possible to make generalizations. This chapter is based on five A Beka high school textbooks that are widely used among conservative Christian homeschoolers. Covering a wide range of topics, the books to be discussed in more detail below are: “Biology: God’s Living Creation,” “American Government, in Christian Perspective,” “United States History: Heritage of Freedom, in Christian Perspective,” “Health, in Christian Perspective,” and “World Geography, in Christian Perspective.” History and science were chosen instead of math and language because these academic subjects are of particular concern to many conservative Christians. High school textbooks were chosen because their content was likely to be more detailed and nuanced than those aimed at younger students.

The UNESCO guidebook goes on to say that textbook content can be analyzed from either a quantitative or a qualitative perspective. Because these textbooks are not

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available in electronic format, nor did I have the resources to digitize them, it was not feasible for me to conduct the kind of quantitative studies based on frequency and space that are sometimes performed on other textbooks. Additionally, qualitative approaches are more relevant to this study because they reveal more about the religious beliefs of the authors and publisher, and thereby the religious beliefs of families who choose to purchase these textbooks.

Other specific methods outlined in the UNESCO guidebook, such as hermeneutic, linguistic, discourse, and question analysis were useful during my analysis of these textbooks. When reading these books, I paid particular attention to passages where God, the Bible, or religion was mentioned or alluded to. I noted what topics were included or omitted from the textbook, and which authorities were presented as worthy of mention. I considered whether the in-text questions facilitated student learning, and whether the language used by the textbooks’ authors represented a particular value system. My main purpose in this chapter is not to make evaluative conclusions about these textbooks, but simply to present their material and discover which aspects of the conservative Christian worldview are apparent in these textbooks.

When reading A Beka textbooks, claims or statements made by the authors fit into three general types. What I refer to as religious or “Biblical” claims appeal to revelation or are derived from an interpretation of Christian scriptures. The second type, rhetorical, aims to persuade or assert a conservative Christian perspective about social and political issues. Lastly, scientific or historical claims are statements of fact that are generally accepted by the broader academic and scholarly community. I will focus on the first two types because identifying the religious content and rhetoric in these textbooks reveals how
much conservative Christian ideology influences what is taught in their homeschools and how that material is presented. The detailed analysis of this chapter will allow these textbooks to be evaluated against the standards for citizenship education in chapter four.

**Biology: God’s Living Creation**

*Biology: God’s Living Creation* is a biology textbook suggested by A Beka Books for use in a 10th grade science curriculum. A careful reading of the preface reveals crucial principles that informed the authors’ decisions to write a textbook of this nature and their decisions about what to include and how to present the information. The preface makes outright religious and political claims and also identifies the text’s unique characteristics, including its claim to present simple and familiar concepts first, mimicking a “naturalistic” approach to scientific study. In this naturalistic approach, students learn about familiar subjects of the living world and then gradually learn about more difficult subjects. The authors’ stated purpose for this organizational strategy is to avoid the “subtle evolutionary philosophy” of teaching according to the evolutionary sequence found in other biology textbooks, which begin by studying chemicals, then cells, then single-celled organisms, then invertebrates and more complicated animals, culminating with human beings.

This textbook’s unabashed “Biblical perspective” begins in the first paragraph of the preface, which states:

> Life is God’s most marvelous and complex creation. *Biology: God’s Living Creation* presents life as God created it and now controls it. Historically, biology was the first major area of assault in the American classroom as evolution permeated the schools in the 1920s. Even today, evolutionism poisons biology textbooks and distracts from God’s glory in creation. High school students need to understand God’s living creation from a biblical perspective, as God created it, and as man has learned of it.  

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231 Keith Graham and Gregory Parker, *Biology: God’s Living Creation* (Pensacola, Florida: A Beka Books, 2009), iii; subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.
From the very beginning, “God’s Living Creation” treats evolution as “a retreat from science” that has “invaded the classrooms,” which is presumably a main reason why parents who choose the A Beka curriculum have removed their children from formal schooling and chosen to homeschool instead. The publisher’s conservative Christian Biblical worldview encompasses everything – even biology, as evidenced by this textbook. In order to give my readers a sense of this material, I will highlight some patterns and sections of the textbook that represent this religious perspective.

As the preface states, this organization of the text represents a reaction against an evolutionary organization of biological concepts, which separates conservative Christians and identifies them as antagonistic toward most of the scientific and academic community in a very concrete way. The writers clearly espouse the view that the Bible is a factual book of divine origin and therefore of great relevance to scientific inquiry. The Bible is useful for science in three main ways: first, its scientific facts were revealed long before modern science discovered the same facts; second, it trumps modern science as the authority about truth when the two contradict; and third, it provides answers to questions that science cannot answer clearly or at all. A few examples will be discussed below to illustrate these three uses of the Bible.

First, in this biology textbook the Bible is treated as a holy book that revealed scientific truths long before modern science came about. According to the textbook’s list of “Scientific Truths Revealed in the Bible,” the Christian scriptures claim, among other things, that the “Earth is a sphere suspended in space,” that “Blood sustains life,” that “The winds form a circulating system,” and that “Man’s body is composed of the same materials as the earth” (248-249). Sometimes, the authors declare explicitly that Biblical claims
were right before people confirmed the same things later with science. For example, the section about “Preventing the Spread of Disease” declares:

One of the simplest and most effective ways to stop the spread of many diseases is frequent hand washing. Cleanliness is an important good health factor that is specifically addressed in the Bible. It was not discovered by medical science until the late 1800s that God’s instructions to the Israelites on washing prevent the spread of diseases. For example, in Leviticus 15:13, the Israelites were instructed to wash their hands under running water after they had touched anything which a person with an infection had touched (233).

Following the authors’ logic, since the Bible instructed the Israelites to wash their hands, then it must have been because God knew about the importance of hand washing in the prevention of the spread of diseases. Furthermore, the fact that people did not understand the reason for the commandment is evidence that God is the main authority on the way our world functions, and sometimes God’s reasons are unknown to mere humans. Scientists can be right in many cases, yet even then conservative Christians often give God the credit for scientific discoveries made by people. God’s divine intervention explains how people make scientific discoveries in the first place, and this textbook highlights many scientists who were Christians.

Frequent references to Scripture, such as the one above, show how the Bible is made relevant for science. An example in the section about “Nutritional Relationships in an Ecosystem” says:

As you learned in the previous section, the welfare of an ecosystem depends on the flow of energy and recycling of nutrients. God has built these important natural processes into His creation. The Bible tells us that, “He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field... He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man... The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God.” -Psa. 104:10-12, 21 (297).
In this section, the textbook’s authors invoke the Bible’s claims as evidence of the way ecosystems work in our world today.

Second, this textbook claims that scientists will always be wrong when they contradict the “clear” words of scripture. An example from the evolution section teaches:

Darwin pointed out similarities between man and ‘other animals’ and came to the false conclusion that man is simply the most evolved form of animal… This directly contradicts the biblical teaching that God created man: And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. (Gen. 2:7) (273).

Conservative Christians interpret the Bible to say that humans are different from animals and also that humans are better than animals. They believe Darwin was wrong because his conclusions contradicted a literal interpretation of Genesis.

Third, the Bible is very important for conservative Christians because it answers questions that “cannot be discovered through science alone… [T]he Bible is very important to the scientist because it records important facts about the history and future of the physical universe that he would not otherwise know” (261). Both conservative Christians and modern scientists believe that scientific inquiry is limited to the physical realm and does not apply to the spiritual realm or questions about the origin and destiny of the universe. The difference between them is that when there is a hole that science cannot fill, conservative Christians turn to the Bible for answers. For example, the chapter about evolution claims:

[M]any vital facts about the origin of the universe, the origin of life, and the ultimate destiny of the cosmos cannot be discovered through science alone… Only God was present in the beginning, when the universe was created. The facts about the manner and order of Creation that God has chosen to reveal to us in the Bible are all that we (including the scientist) can know with certainty about the beginning (261).
This passage justifies the conservative Christian rejection of evolution as partially due to their belief that only God knows the answers to questions about the beginning of the universe. Since conservative Christians believe that only the Bible can answer these questions, scientists who look to other sources for answers will inevitably be wrong.

Sometimes Biblical claims supersede scientific claims because the authors of this textbook believe that God gives clear answers, whereas scientists’ answers are uncertain or controversial. For example, the section about “Hominid Fossils” teaches:

The confusion among evolutionists over man’s ancestry has existed for well over a century. Yet there is seemingly as much controversy among evolutionists over the course and procedure followed by the evolution of man as there is controversy between creationists and evolutionists. In contrast, God’s account of how man was created is clear, concise, and complete… (Gen. 2:7) (278).

Whenever science is confusing or controversial and the Bible is “clear, concise, and complete,” then the Bible is a better and truer authority.

This “Biblical perspective” is crucial to understanding the conservative Christian approach to science in general. As this textbook claims, conservative Christians believe that all science is based on faith. The authors claim that “evolutionists” mistakenly base their scientific claims on their faith in materialism, whereas conservative Christians rightly base their scientific claims on faith in a literal interpretation of the Bible. Of course, most “evolutionists” would disagree with the textbook’s claim that science is based on faith assumptions; instead, they would claim that all true scientific inquiry is based on observations that can be verified through repeated experimentation, and that the Bible has no role in science. From these uses of the Bible, it is evident that the entire textbook serves to establish God and the Bible’s authority over people, including scientists.
The rhetoric used throughout the text also reinforces the conservative Christian worldview. Chapter and section titles are often worded as to reflect the religious opinions of the authors. Chapter six, about the human body, is titled “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made,” and the first section title identifies the human body as “The Crown of God’s Creation” (84). At the end of the same chapter, a section about abortion is titled “The Tragedy of Abortion” (94). Chapter fourteen, about evolution, is titled “Evolution: A Retreat from Science” and has section titles such as “The Scientist Needs the Bible,” “Paleontology: Evidence against Evolution,” “Homology: Evidence of Common Design,” and “Evolution is a Threat to Modern Science” (261-290). The first thing a student sees when he or she begins a new chapter or section is an opinionated statement, not neutral scientific titles about the subject to follow. This kind of rhetoric remains consistent throughout the textbook, and is found not just in titles and subtitles. For example, the term “man” is used instead of “human being” or “person,” which reflects language consistent with conservative or traditional Bible translations and rejects modern feminist gender critiques. In the sections about abortion, the “fetus” is instead referred to as the “unborn child,” which supports a view of life with full moral status as beginning at conception and is coupled with partisan Republican political and social values. Frequent use of terms such as “designed,” “created,” and “engineered,” reinforce the central claim of the book that God created the entire natural world. Thus, by its most basic word choice, this publisher supports a particular conservative Christian ideology.

This textbook employs a consistent pattern to frame all scientific knowledge in a conservative Christian worldview. One example of this pattern can be found in chapter
two, which is about leaves. The chapter begins with a religious claim that frames the scientific facts that follow:

Plants, like all living things, were created for a purpose and were designed according to the plan that would best fulfill that purpose. In order to perform their God-given purpose, plants are equipped with specially designed systems which are composed of specialized organs made up of specialized tissues formed by specialized cells (19).

The next few pages identify the different types of systems and organs of a leaf. Then, the next section wraps up the scientific claims with another religious claim, attributing the facts about leaves to God’s creation: “Leaves come in a tremendous variety of shapes, sizes, and textures that testify to the imaginative powers of the creator” (20). Thus, even the most basic scientific facts are seen through a Biblical perspective when framed in this manner. This biology textbook claims, “The goal of science is to determine God’s laws of nature and to use them for man’s benefit and God’s glory” (257). By continuously attributing the complexity of creation to God, the authors accomplish their goal of relating all science to God’s glory.

Emotional appeals and the frequent use of positive adjectives also reinforce a reverence for God. For example, the section about blood vessels teaches, “It is a marvelous wonder of God’s design that all of the ingredients for blood clot formation are always present but do not operate until they are needed” (182). A handful of other frequently used adjectives and emotional or religious phrases are “special design,” “the loving provision of God for His creation,” “magnificent,” “marvelous assembly,” and “bears witness to the infinite wisdom of its Creator and Designer” (31, 30, 84, 193). These religious phrases fit nicely within the Biblical framework of the entire text but when they
are found in-between paragraphs of scientific facts and theories, they will strike outsiders as seemingly out of place.

Another element of the textbook that does not fit in its surroundings is the religiously motivated questions in the chapter and section reviews. Like many textbooks, “Biology: God’s Living Creation” asks questions and presents exercises at the end of each section and chapter to provide students the opportunity to test their comprehension and retention of knowledge. For example, the section review after section 6.2, which is about tissues, cells, and organs, asks students to identify terms such as “interstitial fluid,” “cutaneous membrane,” and “vestigial.” It also prompts students to answer questions such as “What are the four basic types of tissue?” and “What are the four types of membranes found in the body?” Yet mixed in with the questions about scientific facts is a religious “Critical Thinking” question that asks, “What do the supposedly vestigial organs tell you about the wisdom of God and the wisdom of man?” (91). This question is clearly asking students to recall information on the previous page about vestigial organs, which the textbook claims do not really exist because, although there are organs “that we do not yet fully understand,” all organs in the human body do have a God-designed purpose. Not only does this “Critical Thinking” question not require any critical thinking, since the only right answer is clearly stated on the previous page, but it serves to underscore the authority of revelation over scientists’ claims about the human body. Questions such as this occur with great frequency throughout the text, often prompting students to find support in the Bible for certain religious claims about the natural world or the way people should behave.

An overarching theme that is reinforced throughout the text is the conservative Christian historical timeline based on Biblical events. During the evolution chapter, for
example, the authors claim that fossils were created by the Flood described in Genesis chapters six through nine. The textbook claims: “Countless billions of fossils are found in the earth’s crust, most of which were probably buried during the worldwide Flood of Noah. …[S]ome fossils represent plants and animals that have become extinct. It is possible that some of these organisms had difficulty surviving the post-Flood environment and gradually died out” (267). In this instance, a Biblical story about Noah and the Flood is presented as historical fact because conservative Christians regard the Bible to be an accurate and factual account of their ancestors’ history. Again, the Biblical stories are used as relevant explanations for scientific findings, such as fossils.

Another theme that stands out in this textbook through its rhetoric and Biblical motifs is an establishment of human beings’ authority over the rest of the natural world (i.e. plants and animals). The dominance of people over the earth is justified by the authors in a section titled “Man’s Dominion,” the content of which reads: “Scripture also declares that man has dominion over nature. From the very beginning, God placed the earth and all living things under man’s authority and commanded him to subdue and have dominion over them” (314). The Bible reference is to Genesis 1:28. The following section about “Good Stewardship” qualifies this “right of dominion” by saying that it comes with

…the responsibility to exercise good stewardship. Mankind has a responsibility to manage creation in a way that brings a balance between the wise use of our natural resources and their conservation….. Unfortunately, some people take conservation to such an extreme that they stress the welfare of nature above that of man (314).

Using words such as “unfortunately” is clearly taking a position on environmental politics, and underscores the Biblical theme that nature should be subordinate to people because human beings are more important in God’s eyes. Overall, the combination of overtly
religious wording and rhetoric and the reliance on the Bible as an authority relevant to the study of biology reveals much about the conservative Christian Biblical worldview and how that worldview enters into children’s education in conservative Christian homeschooling.

**American Government: in Christian Perspective**

*American Government: in Christian Perspective* is a 12th grade textbook that lays the foundation for a semester-long course about the formation and structure of American government. Like all the textbooks in this collection of A Beka curricula, it is brimming with Biblical statements and religious rhetoric that affirm a conservative Christian Biblical worldview while teaching students some history and civics. To begin with, this textbook claims that God serves an important role in American government because God is the source of all human authority, including governments. America’s successes are seen as gifts from God, and therefore the authors claim, “We, the people of the United States, should be a thankful people because God has given us many privileges that millions of people throughout history have hoped for, prayed for, and died for.”

Conservative Christians believe that ultimately God deserves credit for human actions because God controls the world. The opening chapters claim that America is “the greatest nation on earth,” which has succeeded because of blessings from God and the piety of its people (4). According to this view, America quickly became successful because the Puritans who first came to America had good character traits and values (such as honesty and trustworthiness) and because of their “Protestant work ethic” (6). Some historical accounts of the philosophical, intellectual, social, and political currents that led to the formation of

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the United States are briefly discussed, but they are portrayed as “the result of centuries of
God’s providential workings in English and American history,” including “the influence of
the Bible and the Christian religion” (155). Just as God was given credit in the Biology
textbook for technological advances, here God is given credit for America’s success.

This American government text describes America as a Christian nation. America
is often described as “great,” “blessed,” and “unique” – virtues that are attributed to its
Christian heritage. The Founding Fathers of America are always portrayed as Christian in
this textbook. For example, in a discussion of the Bill of Rights, this textbook’s authors
write: “The Framers of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights… shared the common vision
that ‘freedoms,’ ‘liberties,’ and ‘rights’ must be set within the framework of a Christian
moral order and of common cultural values derived from Christianity” (155). Quotes from
the Founding Fathers are included in the textbook when they mention God or help to
establish the Biblical worldview. One quote from Benjamin Franklin during a “climactic”
moment of the creation of the Constitution attributes to him the phrase “God governs in the
affairs of men” (58). A student reading this textbook would not learn the nuances of the
Founding Father’s religious beliefs, nor discover that many were deists, but would come to
view the Founding Fathers as exemplary Christians who shared the same Biblical
worldview as conservative Christians today.

The conservative Christian Biblical worldview of the Founding Fathers, including
their view of original sin, is claimed to be the reason for the particular system of
government established in the United States. Specifically, as claimed by this textbook, the
Founding Fathers “had a biblical view of human nature. They knew that because of man’s
sinful nature, governmental power was essential for civilized society” (96). Conservative
Christians believe that the Founding Fathers designed America’s federal constitutional democracy with its balance of powers because they understood that the sinful nature of human beings would lead to corruption if left unchecked. This textbook teaches that “sinful human nature makes the concentration of power in any one place a dangerous thing” and that to “counteract the ambition of sinful man to force his selfish will on other, the Founders… divided power up among different levels of government (national, state, local) and separated power within each level (legislative, executive, judicial)” (177). Conservative Christians interpret Biblical teachings about sin to mean that all human beings are sinful, and this “fallen” nature justifies the need for a balanced human government.

Although nuances of the conservative Christian theology are not discussed here in depth, parts of this textbook read like a religious tract or an excerpt from a catechism class meant to instruct believers about proper doctrine. The textbook teaches its students:

No human government will ever bring perfect peace and harmony to society, because human governments are plagued by fallen human nature… Man is, by nature, a sinner, and he does not want to be governed by God or by anyone else. Thus every human government will ultimately come to an end. Not until Christ returns to set up His millennial kingdom will mankind know a form of government that is established in peace and always established in righteousness (24).

This section outlines very clearly some of the basic tenets of conservative Christian belief found in the “statement of faith” that was addressed in chapter two: original sin and premillennialism. The authors organize their lessons about American government to fit within the conservative Christian religious worldview so that education is not separated into religious and secular teachings. There are no secular lessons in this textbook because everything is encompassed in the Biblical worldview.
Some explicit religious lessons rely on references to the Christian scriptures. For example, in the section about “Symbols of America,” readers are reminded that memorials are a type of symbol used in the Bible to help remember past events: “Certain ceremonies God established for His people also served as memorials, such as the Passover feast (Exod. 12:14)” (7). Examples given of American memorials are symbols such as the flag and monuments such as Mount Rushmore. Scripture quotes carved on many famous American monuments in Washington, D.C. are seen as reminders to conservative Christians of America’s Christian heritage. With Biblical excerpts such as the one from John 5:39 written inside the Washington Monument, America’s Christian founders cannot be forgotten (11). Another example of this textbook’s use of Bible quotes is a reference to Exodus 18:21, which lists character traits that create good leaders: “Elected officials should be competent, fear God, love truth, and hate covetousness. Why? Because these character traits will be reflected in the decisions that they make. Men who fear God will make laws that are in accord with God’s moral law” (91). In this textbook’s perspective, God-fearing Christians make the best leaders for America.

Christians play a special role in leading the United States, and even ordinary citizens are important contributors to the country’s success: “Why has God blessed our nation? America has been blessed because many of her Founding Fathers and millions of American men and women through the years patterned their lives after the standard of righteousness found in God’s Word” (5). This textbook teaches students that if they live as righteous Christians, they will earn God’s blessing for themselves and for America. Since God is in control of everything, students are taught, “Every Christian citizen ought to consider it his responsibility to pray for his congressmen and senators, as well as for other
government officials. Christians need to pray that government officials will make wise decisions in regard to public policy; they also need to pray for God to direct in the affairs of their nation and to use the nation to bring honor and glory to Himself” (222). One important aspect of Christian citizenship is praying for the country, but there is a lot more that good conservative Christian citizens should do in America.

Other, more generally accepted aspects of citizenship are also emphasized in this text. Students learn the importance of voting and jury duty, as well as staying informed about political issues and frequently writing to one’s representatives. Most importantly, “Christians ought to set an example of good citizenship” and be the “salt of the earth” as the Gospel of Matthew teaches (221, 37). This textbook also makes clear the particular positions that a good Christian citizen must take on important political issues. Many key political issues from the agenda of the “religious right” play a central role in this text, and their opinions are spelled out for students to absorb. Today’s typically conservative Republican values such as small government, the protection of private property, low taxes, and the evils of pornography are discussed in this textbook. The issue of communism has its own section, entitled “Communism: The Ultimate Tyranny,” which portrays communism as an “anti-God, anti-Christian ideology (way of thinking) dedicated to the conquest of the entire world and the destruction of the freedom we cherish in the United States” (32). In accordance with their Biblical worldview, the authors teach, “The battle against Communism is basically spiritual and will be won only by spiritual resources – the belief in the reality of God and the Christian perspective of life. The antidote for world Communism is world evangelism. … Only a vigorous, vital, vibrant Christianity in the life
of a nation can overcome Communism from within and without” (33). Indeed, this textbook finds political justifications for international missionary efforts and evangelism.

An appropriate Christian response to evil governments abroad is made clear by the passage quoted above. But what about Christians’ responses to their own government? This textbook focuses on Romans chapter 13 as the source for its interpretation about how a Christian citizen should act under civil governments. It teaches that citizens in America are lucky to be able to influence the laws of their own country through participating in the democratic process. When Christian citizens disagree with a current law, “we should still obey our civic leaders” because ultimately civil government “whether it be good, or bad, represents God’s authority in our lives” (34). However, when “the laws of civil government demand that the believer oppose God’s commands… then we must respectfully stand for God and take the persecution that will result” (34). Conservative Christians are given the responsibility of remaining righteous even in the midst of what they perceive to be a sinful nation.

In addition to learning how conservative Christians are to act under civil authority, it is also important for our discussion of citizenship to understand how conservative Christians view the issue of the separation of church and state. In this textbook, the separation of church and state is defined as “the idea that the church and the government are to remain institutionally separate,” an idea based on the First Amendment (35). This amendment was meant to avoid a national church, but did allow states with already-established state churches to continue their practice. Students learn:

Today some have taken the separation of church and state to extremes, calling for the separation of religion and government. But this was never the intention of the men who wrote the Bill of Rights…. [O]ur Founding Fathers believed that the Christian religion was essential to good
The prevalent view of the separation of church and state is not only unconstitutional, it is unbiblical. Rightly practiced, the doctrine of the separation of church and states permits both institutions to perform their God-given duties without interference (35).

Within this conservative Christian worldview, the American government should act morally, which is to say, in accordance with Biblical commandments. Institutional churches should remain free from interference from the government, but that both government and churches should act according to God’s will. An example of how this textbook teaches that civil and religious law should agree with one another is the issue of abortion. The authors teach students about the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme court decision, which made legal “elective abortions (deliberately killing unborn children)” (150-151). According to this conservative Christian portrayal of the case, the Supreme Court was wrong in its ruling, and “the error of such thinking was obvious. The right of any mother to have the power of life and death over a child once conceived is much more than a ‘right to privacy’; it is the usurpation of God’s role in the lives of others, a right that does not reside within the four corners of the Constitution” (151). According to this description, both God’s law and America’s law agree that the *Roe v. Wade* decision is wrong. Conservative Christians want the country to adhere to “traditional family values” they believe are revealed by God in the Bible. Intermixed with lessons about the United States government’s history and how it functions today is a well-packaged presentation of the conservative Christian worldview for students to absorb.
United States History: in Christian Perspective is an 11th grade textbook that serves as the foundation for a year-long American history course. Its teachings about history match the general conservative Christian worldview found in the other A Beka textbooks. This textbook, in particular, stresses that what makes America great is its moral foundation in Christianity and its dedication to freedom. These purported Christian and patriotic values are embedded in most of the historical discussion presented in this text. Its content shows an explicit bias in favor of Conservative Christian religious beliefs and social values as well as contemporary partisan Republican political positions. The authors even employ the term “conservative Christianity” to describe the views they favor.\textsuperscript{233} Although the text includes fewer references to Bible passages than the Biology text, the story of United States history remains focused on the teachings of the Bible as interpreted by conservative Christians.

The entire historical outlook of the textbook establishes God as ultimately in control of history. For example, it claims that God’s intervention caused the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and the subsequent creation of English settlements in America (12-13). God also had a hand in the 18th century spiritual revivals in America, which ultimately gave “the colonists a strong moral foundation on which to build a new nation” (57). Similarly, it was God’s providence that spared President Reagan’s life in spite of an assassination attempt in 1981. Clearly, the textbook implies, God wanted Reagan to continue putting the country “on a more conservative course” (522). In addition to recognizing God’s providential hand in human history, the authors recognize the Biblical historical timeline. As in the other textbooks, references to world geography during the

\textsuperscript{233} Michael Lowman, United States History in Christian Perspective: Heritage of Freedom (Pensacola, Florida: A Beka Books, 2009), 424; subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.
Flood of Genesis explain how ancient peoples migrated between continents that have since separated (4).

The doctrine of original sin is another key tenet of conservative Christian belief that plays an important role in this retelling of American history. The textbook claims that one of the main reasons why communal societies of the 1800s, such as the Brook Farm and New Harmony utopian communities, ultimately failed was because their members denied “man’s sinful nature… expecting to live together in perfect harmony” (185). The implication of this discussion is that human beings will never live together harmoniously because they cannot escape their sinful nature. Later attempts at world peace, such as the establishment of the League of Nations in 1919 after World War I, similarly failed because they were “futile attempts to impose peace on people whose hearts are at war with each other” (403). Although world peace seems an impossible task in this lifetime, conservative Christians believe that at least one country, the United States, has been a blessed nation and can be so again if it returns to its original Christian heritage.

After all, the authors claim, Christianity is what made America great, blessed, unique, and a world leader. The textbook claims that America is a nation built on “biblical foundations” (558). This contributes to America’s status as “the most prosperous nation in the world” (360). If the United States can continue to rely on “people with character and a will to work, an economic system that encouraged individual initiative and enterprise, and abundant resources,” then the country will remain great (284). Christianity is portrayed in as a positive influence on America, since Christian values strengthen the “moral fiber of the nation” and Christian institutions are valuable to society (251, 301). However, as the
textbook’s perspective reveals, America has recently experienced a decline in its moral fiber and dedication to free enterprise.

Descriptions of conservative Christianity in positive tones fill the text with pro-Christian rhetoric. Some chapter section titles make the conservative Christian views of the authors known upfront. In a section about the newly established American government, the textbook uses the title “The Bible: Foundation for Liberty and Justice for All” to invoke the idea that American government was founded on Biblical principles (111). In one of the final chapters about the beginning of the 21st century, the textbook begins with the title “Cultural Decay” to preface its discussions about homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia, and the courts, thereby making its conservative Christian bias extremely clear (57-558). By using loaded rhetoric, the textbook declares that it is a good thing for the country’s leaders to be Christian (330). Conversely, it is a bad thing when American leaders – and even ordinary American citizens – are not Christian.

Continuing to establish itself as a pro-conservative Christian tract, this textbook describes non-conservative Christian religions and philosophies in overtly negative tones. Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Christian Science are all described as “cults,” demonstrating the conservative Christian perspective that other religions are wrong (185). Other forms of Christianity, such as Catholicism and mainline Protestant churches, are described as “cold, formalistic Christianity” whose people have failed to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior (57). After a discussion of the destruction of the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001 by Muslim terrorists, the textbook blames radical Islam without noting the existence of moderate Muslims in the world or the complex political and social factors that breed terrorism (546).
But this textbook does not just condemn other religions; it also has negative things to say about many philosophies. According to this textbook, “false philosophies” such as Unitarianism and Transcendentalism arose in the 1800s as a challenge to Biblical Christianity (183). Ideas that “led, at least indirectly, to the world wars” came out of the Enlightenment in Europe. Ideas such as rationalism, empiricism, skepticism, deism, higher criticism, theological liberalism, modernism, and evolution were encouraged by many renowned philosophers. Voltaire, Rousseau, Hegel, Kant, Schleiermacher, Marx, and Darwin are each treated as influential thinkers who promoted false ideas to the detriment of human history. The “spiritual decay” caused by these thinkers and the spread of their ideas is ultimately to blame for the rise of dictators and world violence (384-388). For example, widespread religious unbelief, spiritual blindness, and false philosophies left people to become easy prey for dictators, such as Lenin, Stalin, Mussolini, Hitler, Mao, and Franco, who promised better times to their people (447-452). Even America experienced the influence of anti-Christian philosophies, which led to the 1960s and 1970s – decades identified by conservative Christians as a key low point for American society. The cultural revolution with its hippie lifestyle, rock music, and permissiveness resulted from humanistic philosophies and the evolutionary understanding of people as merely animals (510). Conservative Christians attribute these and many other “crises” of American and world history to an insufficient influence of Christianity in the world.

Rhetoric throughout the text sets the stage for opinions about key moral and political issues such as the correct form and role of government, education, evolution, abortion, family, and individual character. Chapter 19, entitled “The Triumph of Free Enterprise,” claims that free enterprise capitalism caused the United States to become a
leading nation of the world (284). The chapter claims that later trends in American politics, which turned responsibility over to the government through regulations and social services, resulted in a loss of freedom (292). According to the textbook, a political system that “spurred individual initiative” was successful in America because the country had people of high moral character and a will to work (292-293). Christian Americans were willing to work because of the Protestant work ethic, which saw work as a blessing and fulfillment of their responsibility to glorify God. The textbook also teaches that the ability to accumulate private property contributed to the strong work ethic of Americans, and therefore conservative Christians believe that capitalism is the best form of human government. Conservative Christians believe that other types of government, such as communism and socialism, are bad not just because they are ineffective at motivating people to work, but also because they are incompatible with Christianity. While Christianity is rejected in other forms of government, the freedom guaranteed to Americans in the United States ensures religious freedom for its citizens. The textbook acknowledges that some people referred to the FBI anti-Communist raids as the “Red Scare” to signify the sometimes-unjust actions taken by the government in the name of national security, yet the authors conclude that “the Communist menace was a real threat to the nation” (409). Socialism was perceived as such a dangerous threat that conservative Christians would not even support Nelson Mandela after his release from prison in 1989 because they considered him to be a socialist. President Clinton’s proposals for social welfare and health coverage were opposed by conservative Christians because they considered his plan to incorporate “tenets of socialism” that would inevitably result in “substandard health care – the hallmark of socialized medicine” (533). Only capitalism
free from regulation allows individual citizens the freedom to take care of themselves and adhere to the tenets of conservative Christianity.

Trends in the 20th century to increase federal regulation of private corporations enraged conservative Christians who valued their freedom more than government help: “...the government was becoming socialistic, wielding excessive power over business, industry, and agriculture. The American tradition of free enterprise and individual initiative, which had made the country great, was being replaced by an ever-expanding, paternalistic federal bureaucracy” (441). Small government, as well as other issues discussed in this textbook, has become a political value associated with current Republican Party platforms. The fact that this textbook favors lowering taxes because it views taxation as a form of socialism is more proof of its Republican political perspective. A section entitled “Benefits of financial freedom” in the chapter about the Reagan Era defends the position that minimal taxation and minimal regulation allow American citizens more freedom, and therefore endow them with a sense of responsibility (524). Descriptions of social criticism by the “liberal media” and “Hollywood contingency” that caused “impressionable youth” to be “easily won over to a more liberal perspective” also contribute to the overall conservative political and moral perspective of this textbook (549).

Whereas Republican political values may only loosely be tied to conservative Christian theology, conservative moral and social values have stronger ties to their Biblical worldview. Given what we know of the conservative Christian interpretation of Biblical values, it comes as no surprise that this textbook is overtly opposed to “liberal” court decisions from the 1960s to the present that legalized abortion and civil unions or
marriages for gays and lesbians (541, 557). Wrapped in the guise of conservative “family values,” the textbook has no qualms about saying explicitly:

*Homosexuality.* The family is the basic building block of civilization. When it comes under attack, all of society suffers. Traditional American family values have dramatically declined in recent decades. … In 2008, the American culture stressed tolerance for people who choose to live an alternative lifestyle, a “lifestyle” the Bible calls a sin (“Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is an abomination.” Leviticus 18:22) (557).

Events in United States history that go against this Biblical interpretation, such as the invention of “abortion pills,” scientific advances in embryonic stem cell research, the availability of pornography, and prevalent alcohol use are all “sign[s] of America’s moral decline” in the eyes of conservative Christians (558).

Conversely, this textbook declares that positive morality in America comes from the influence of Christianity on the country. For example, “increasing prosperity among all classes of people” came hand in hand with Americans who “gave generously to support schools, churches, missions, and charities” (362). This textbook claims that the spirit of philanthropy stems from Christian values. The spread of Christian values through evangelism in both domestic and international missions is portrayed as one of the best gifts America gave to the world. For example, when Americans annexed the Philippines after the Spanish-American War, Christians saw it “as an opportunity to open new fields to the gospel” whereby American missionaries could educate and “uplift” and “civilize” the foreigners by introducing them to Christianity (351). Similarly, Christians in the 1800s “reached out to American Indians and African slaves” by distributing Bibles, starting churches, and founding schools (177).
Education is also an important topic in this textbook. Early American education is praised because of its foundations in Christian lessons about character and morality. Since most educators were Christian and most schools were affiliated with a church or allowed Bible reading, the tradition of American education was strong until the Progressive Era. In the Progressive Era, “American education suffered greatly from the anti-Christian philosophies of the 1920s,” including John Dewey’s progressive “humanistic” philosophy of education (419). In contrast to “traditional education, which had prevailed since the Protestant Reformation,” progressive education aimed to change society through instituting social reforms in the classroom. The fact that John Dewey “believed that God is a figment of the imagination” prevented conservative Christians from supporting his philosophy of education (419). After the court cases of the 1960s about prayer and Bible reading in public schools, the authors claim:

The quality of American public education continued to decline in the 1980s. To protect their children from public school violence, many parents enrolled their children in private schools, which were often run by local churches. Others began to educate their children at home; homeschooling grew in popularity throughout the 1980s and 1990s (524).

As the first chapter of this thesis explained, the rise in popularity of homeschooling in the 1980s and 1990s was, as this textbook claims, a response to a combination of religious and non-religious factors. Certainly the worry about school violence around the turn of the 21st century caused many parents to worry about the public school environment, but the majority of conservative Christians who moved their children to private Christian schools or homeschooling did so because evolution, secular humanism, and multiculturalism became strong influences on public school educational philosophy. The authors define multiculturalism as “[t]he desire to return minority peoples to their tribal roots and
religions, a pre-Christian status,” which they view negatively because they fear it “will keep minority groups from becoming part of American culture” (542). Secular humanism is a similarly dangerous philosophy because it “is directly opposed to biblical principles and seeks to make man his own savior” by claiming that “man is naturally good and thus has no sin” (540). As we saw in chapters one and two of this thesis, Conservative Christian parents viewed these educational influences as so dangerous that many of them decided to remove their children from the American public school system.

When determining what makes this A Beka textbook unique among other United States history textbooks, it is important to consider which topics are included in the text’s discussion that are likely not given as much attention in other kinds of textbooks. This textbook includes information about church history and the Christian backgrounds of historical figures. In addition to scattered references to the Christian scriptures, it spends multiple sections retelling the history of Protestant and Catholic Christianity around the world. The textbook identifies prominent Christian missionaries, both abroad and at home, as well as influential Bible teachers and Christian scholars (318, 423-427). The status and influence of Christianity on American society is evaluated during each era of the country’s history, with an emphasis on an increased influence during the Reagan Era and a decreased influence before Reagan during the 1960s and 1970s and after Reagan at the turn of the 21st century (522, 553). The textbook’s authors are also careful to note the Christian upbringing of many prominent American historical figures. Among others, Abraham Lincoln, Stonewall Jackson, Grover Cleveland, Teddy Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Calvin Coolidge, and Ronald Reagan are all praised for their reverence of the Bible and strong moral character. Woodrow Wilson, for example, is remembered “as the son of a
devout Presbyterian minister” who prayed with his father from their family Bible during his childhood and “never lost his deep reverence and respect for the Bible” (376). The good, brave, and solid acts of these men and their administrations are attributed, in hindsight, to their Christian moral character. Changes in the nation that conservative Christians perceive as moving away from the country’s Christian tradition are blamed on the “lax moral standards” of Americans today (417). The textbook ends by claiming that the United States is declining, but hopes that a spiritual revival will bring about positive change.

World Geography: in Christian Perspective

*World Geography: in Christian Perspective* is a semester-length textbook from A Beka that is meant to be an introduction for 9th grade students to world geography that also addresses the political and cultural aspects of countries around the world. This textbook teaches students how to read different kinds of maps and identify national flags, but what gives this textbook its “Christian perspective” is its discussion of each country’s culture and political system. Without going into much depth in world history, it provides an overview of human history on Earth that is told from the conservative Christian Biblical worldview. Its introduction explains why it is important to study geography and why a Christian perspective is necessary: “Geography – the study of the earth – is an adventure, an opportunity to learn about God’s magnificent creation. …the fascinating variety found on planet Earth reflects the power and creativity of the One who made it all.”

This language matches the rhetoric of the Biology textbook, which also claims that the variety in God’s creation was a reason for studying the natural world.

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234 Brian Ashbaugh and Julie Lostroh, *World Geography in Christian Perspective* (Pensacola, Florida: A Beka Books, 2010), 3; subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.
The A Beka authors present their curriculum in “Christian perspective” as an alternative to the secular perspective:

…secular geographers embrace the idea that the earth and mankind developed by “accident” and evolved toward a better state over billions of years. … Evolution, however, is a false philosophy that attempts to explain the origin of life apart from God, the creator; it is a futile attempt by man to escape his responsibility to a holy and righteous God. In contrast, the Christian geographer views creation from the perspective of the Bible, the infallible Word of God. He knows that God created the entire earth and everything in it in six days (Gen. 1). … The Christian geographer also believes the Scriptural account of the Genesis Flood (Gen. 7-8) and takes into consideration the effects it might have had on the earth” (4).

An example of how these different perspectives affect geographers’ explanations of natural phenomena is their different explanations of the Grand Canyon in Arizona. While “secular geographers” explain the deep chasm as a result of erosion over thousands of years from a river that flowed from the Rocky Mountains, the “Christian geographer, with knowledge of the Genesis Flood, can see the shaping of this magnificent gorge as a possible result of the powerful rushing floodwaters as they receded from the North American continent to the Pacific Ocean” (5). From the conservative Christian perspective, secular geographers will remain ignorant of the truth, even though they have the advantages of modern technology, because they reject the revelation of truth from God. In contrast, “Christian geographers have the advantage of technology plus the understanding that God gives through his Word. God alone sees the earth and its inhabitants in the past, present, and future, and it is His perspective that the Christian geographer seeks to discover” (5). Thus, the entire textbook is written from this perspective, with an aim to interpret the world’s geography, history, and cultures based on God’s revelation in the Bible.
In keeping with the other A Beka textbooks, this geography textbook acknowledges God’s control over the earth. For example, the first chapter about the planet rejects other scientific explanations for the earth’s position in the universe and asserts: “Because God ‘tilted’ the earth in relation to the sun, sunlight strikes some parts of the planet more directly than others” (11). Just as God controls the planet as a whole, God also has a hand in the unfolding of human history: “God, in His providence, kept the Americas hidden from the world until the Protestant Reformation had transformed the hearts of Englishmen and other Europeans with the truths of Biblical Christianity” (185). In this way, the authors maintain the authority of God while teaching some world geography.

Another unique task of writing the “Christian perspective” on world geography is to explain the events of the world in relation to the Biblical timeline. As the authors note above, understanding the role of the Genesis Flood is crucial to understanding world geography and world history in the conservative Christian perspective. Another key Biblical event that the authors use to explain world geography is the tower of Babel. This story, also from Genesis, “records the division of languages and the resulting dispersion of mankind from the tower of Babel (Gen. 11). This dispersion marked the beginning of cultural diversity among men” (22). According to the textbook, after people started to speak different languages, they migrated all over the world, giving rise to unique cultures in each geographical area.

These cultures are comprised of various elements, but this textbook claims that religion is the most important element of each culture: “Religion determines how a people live (especially with one another); what their views on morality, truth, and justice are; and ultimately whether they succeed or fail as a nation. Christian cultures are distinct from all
others because Biblical principles form the basis of society” (23). An example of how a culture’s religion determined its outcome can be seen in India, which used to be a colony of Great Britain, as was the United States. According to this textbook, both countries adopted much of Britain’s culture, except that India did not accept the teachings of the Bible, and the United States did. Today, “the United States has become one of the world’s leading nations, while India struggles with poverty and internal strife” (23). In the conservative Christian perspective, the “failures” of India happened because “the people of India continued to follow false religions and thus remained in bondage to superstition. The resulting spirit of escape from reality and resignation to evil and injustice has hindered economic, political, and social progress in India for centuries” (23). This discussion of India and its “false religions” is just one example of the conservative Christian perspective on other religions. The textbook’s authors say explicitly that Buddhism is a “false religion” (66) and that animism is a “religion of fear,” which “has hindered many African tribes for centuries, preventing the people from using the land and its resources for their own benefit” (140). The conservative Christianity taught in this textbook is an exclusivist religion that considers itself to be the only true religion in the world.

Whereas other countries have failed or stalled because of their “false religions,” this textbook presents Christianity as a positive force in the world that contributed to other cultures and helped the United States to become the greatest nation in the world. This textbook advises its students, “As you study the many cultures of the world, you will learn to recognize the blessings of Christianity in societies that accept the Bible and the consequences suffered by those that reject it” (27). An example of the “beneficial changes” that Christianity has brought to other cultures is the “impact of Christian
missionaries on the Hawaiian islands in the 19th century. As the islanders accepted Christianity, they stopped practicing human sacrifice, cannibalism, and gross immorality, and established new, Biblical standards of morality and justice” (26). According to this textbook, the influence of Christianity is responsible for many positive changes that took place in Hawaii.

Conversely, students learn that if a “Christian nation” like the United States “moves away from Christianity and abandons Biblical principles, the changes in its culture will be detrimental. Morality will decline, justice will fail, and personal freedoms will be lost” (26-27). This is where the idea of Christian citizenship is instilled in the students who read this textbook. The textbook’s readers are encouraged to “prevent this kind of change” by preserving Christian culture and “holding back corruption and holding forth the Biblical standard of righteousness” (26-27). Another way Christian students are taught to interact with the world is through missionary work. One of the “special features” of this textbook is its spotlight on “Heroes of the Mission Field,” which teach students about famous Christian missionaries who traveled to India, the Far East, the Pacific Islands, and Canada to spread the gospel.

In addition to learning about the world’s countries and their cultures, students also learn about the different forms of government in each country. In the authors’ descriptions of the major forms of government, theocracy and capitalism are highlighted as the preferred systems from the conservative Christian perspective: “In a true theocracy, God Himself rules personally or through chosen representatives. True theocracy will not be seen again until Christ returns to set up His millennial kingdom. In modern practice, theocracy has come to mean rule by religious leaders” (25). The textbook includes a chart
with two examples of theocracy: “Ancient Israel under Moses and Joshua,” which is a “true theocracy” and the “Islamic Republic of Iran,” which is a “false theocracy” (25). This simple statement about a political system reveals much about the conservative Christian worldview, in which people are meant to look forward to the time when Christ returns and God rules the millennial kingdom. Another reference to the end times can be found in this textbook’s discussion of the State of Israel, which conservative Christians consider especially important because, “[a]ccording to the book of the Revelation, Israel will be the site of the world’s last great battle, Armageddon, where Christ will destroy His enemies in the Valley of Megiddo (Jezreel)” (45). The authors clearly demonstrate the importance in the conservative Christian worldview of learning world geography as it relates to past and future Biblical events.

Until the end times when Christ will return to establish a “true theocracy,” conservative Christians in the United States are meant to feel lucky that they live under a capitalist government: “It is also called free enterprise because it leaves the individual free to make something of himself if he has the enterprise (energy and initiative) to do it. Free enterprise capitalism is the only economic system consistent with the Biblical principles of good stewardship and individual responsibility to God” (26). As this textbook argues, the conservative Christian political, economic, and social values that are described in other A Beka textbooks, such as the United States History textbook, are consistent with a democratic republic and a capitalist system because they are compatible with “Biblical” principles. Living within this Biblical worldview means that conservative Christians judge their government against their interpretation of Biblical standards. This geography
textbook is just one example of the way that conservative Christians view seemingly unrelated subjects through the lens of their unique religious worldview.

**Health: in Christian Perspective**

*Health: in Christian Perspective* is a semester-long textbook aimed for students in grade nine. This textbook is different from the four textbooks discussed above because it offers practical advice to its readers about how to live a healthy Christian life. One of its practical “special features” is a set of articles that address “various health issues such as suicide, euthanasia, organ donation, and substance abuse,” which are designed to give students “practical experience in applying Scriptural principles to current issues.” These articles serve as examples for students of issues that are considered especially important by the conservative Christian authors of this textbook, and most likely of other adults in the students’ lives. Another practical aspect to the textbook is a set of medical careers that are highlighted in order to show students some professional ways to get involved in Christian healthcare. Among these medical careers, “Missionary Nurse” and “Missionary Doctor” are occupations that are suggested to the textbook’s readers (273, 279). In addition to the practical aspects of this textbook, many elements of the conservative Christian perspective come through in the teaching of Health, as they do in other textbooks such as the Biology textbook mentioned above.

This textbook begins by explicitly identifying its Christian perspective as its most important “feature”: the authors “desire that as you gain a deeper knowledge of the anatomy (structure) and physiology (function) of the body God has given you, you will be drawn closer to Him. … And you will be challenged to keep yourself pure as you maintain

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235 Delores Shimmin and Gregory Parker, *Health: in Christian Perspective* (Pensacola, Florida: A Beka Books, 2009), How to use this text; subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.
a consistent walk with the Lord” (How to use this text). Just as in the other academic subjects, learning about health is crucial for living a good Christian life. According to this textbook, the reasons for learning about health and practicing good safety habits are based on the belief that a person should be a good steward of the body that God gave him or her (104). In order to be good stewards of their bodies, students must learn how to keep their bodies healthy. However, “health” in this textbook’s conservative Christian perspective is not limited merely to physical health, but also includes spiritual health because conservative Christians believe that human bodies are not merely physical entities. This textbook’s authors support their position by asserting the difference between the brain and the mind: “The Bible reveals that man has both a material part (the body, which includes the brain) and an immaterial part (the soul and spirit, including the Mind). The mind continues to exist even after a person’s body has died. For this reason, a person’s mind must consist of more than simply neurons and electrochemical reactions” (88-89).

Because people have both physical and non-physical parts, this textbook teaches students how to look after both, according to conservative Christian standards for health.

This Health textbook’s premise that human bodies are not naturally healthy comes from the conservative Christian view of original sin. According to the textbook’s teachings, “God created for man a perfect body. Until Adam and Eve sinned, their bodies were without flaw. Ever since sin entered the world, however, the human body has been subject to disease, decay, and death” (235). In the conservative Christian worldview, sin causes many of humankind’s problems, including mental illnesses and mental disorders. This textbook teaches that feeling guilty about one’s sins causes a person to become mentally unhealthy, and therefore people’s “mental health is largely determined by [their]
spiritual condition” (78). This view is contrasted with modern psychiatrists’ “humanistic” view, which tries “to explain mental health with purely human reasoning; denying the truth of man’s fallen nature, they blame society, heredity, and other circumstances for many mental disorders that are really caused by sin” (92). Since conservative Christians consider sin to be the root cause of many unhealthy conditions, spiritual health is a large component of this textbook’s advice for remaining healthy:

The foundation of spiritual health is a healthy, vibrant relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ. But spiritual health does not stop with salvation; it really begins with salvation. As Christians, we should be growing spiritually as we go through life, so that our character becomes more like that of Christ. … Character traits such as these are even more important to your overall lifelong health than how many calories you eat, or how much you exercise, or whether or not you avoid getting the flu (preface).

Since the secret of maintaining health is having Christ-like character and a healthy relationship with God, this textbook gives examples of practical ways that young conservative Christians can be healthy through spiritual means. One example of a mental health issue that can be avoided by maintaining good spiritual health is depression. According to this text, “If you harbor discouragement in your heart, depression will generally be the result and your mental health with decline. … [D]epression often has spiritual causes that require spiritual solutions. … By focusing on the attributes of God—His holiness, love, mercy, and forgiveness—you can escape discouragement and depression” (94). This focus on God’s forgiveness is meant to help conservative Christians move past their feelings of discouragement and guilt and will help maintain their mental and emotional well-being.

Another way that students are taught to maintain their health is by making correct decisions. The process of “Biblical Discernment” is meant to help young conservative
Christian students decide which choices are aligned with their Biblical worldview and will therefore make them healthy people. The textbook describes this process in great detail, first by outlining the seven steps of the process by using the acronym D.I.S.C.E.R.N. as a tool to help students remember how to make decisions from a Biblical perspective. The steps are: 1) Determine your choices, 2) Inquire of God through prayer, 3) Search the Scriptures, 4) Consider godly council, 5) Eliminate worldly thinking, 6) Recognize God’s leading, and 7) Never compromise the truth (99-100). Looking for answers in the Bible is encouraged for conservative Christians because they believe that “God’s leading will never be contrary to Scripture” (100). Students who have trouble understanding or interpreting the Bible on their own are encouraged to get advice from their “pastor or another mature Christian” (101). Yet the process is meant to be simple enough that students can learn to D.I.S.C.E.R.N. on their own, and key examples cases of applying the Biblical Discernment process help show students how to make decisions in their own lives.

The first example case has to do with suicide. The question asks students to consider, “Is suicide an acceptable choice from a Biblical perspective?” (100). Certain related Scriptural passages are listed in order for students to learn what the Bible says about suicide. Exodus 20:13 (“Thou shalt not kill/murder”), 1 Cor 6:19 (“your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own”), and Luke 12:7: (“ye are of more value than many sparrows”) teach students that the Bible forbids murder and that people should cherish their own bodies. The example case goes on to show how “worldly” attempts to justify suicide are merely excuses, and that the Bible has a response to each. The conclusion states: “No matter what circumstances you might ever find yourself in, suicide will never be the answer” (101). A similar process is outlined for
the issues of euthanasia and abortion, each time concluding that God values human life and that murder is wrong. In keeping with conservative social values revealed in the textbooks discussed above, this Health textbook takes the opportunity during its discussion of abortion to remind its readers that since 1973 “more than 30 million unborn infants have been killed” (197). During the textbook’s application of the seven steps of Biblical Discernment, the authors cite Scripture passages that “refer to the unborn as children or as human beings” to support their case. This process of Biblical Discernment makes clear to readers how conservative social values are based on a Biblical worldview.

This textbook also discusses many other examples of “good” choices that conservative Christians should make in their daily lives. For example, conservative Christians should not listen to “worldly” music because a “person under the influence of the sound and beat of worldly music opens himself to manipulation by the musicians with their messages of drugs, immorality, and violence. Prolonged exposure to worldly music greatly affects a person’s conscious and subconscious mind and is, therefore, morally and spiritually harmful as well as physically and mentally damaging” (90). This section also makes reference to the positive effects of good music, such as David’s playing of the harp for Saul in the Bible (1 Samuel 16). By making a choice that aligns with conservative Christian values, the authors believe that students will live healthier lives.

Decisions about sexual relations should also align with conservative Christian values, otherwise students risk unhealthy results such as contracting a sexually transmitted disease (STD). According to this Health textbook, “statistics show that most new cases of HIV infection in the U.S. result from immorality. Following God’s standards of morality greatly reduces your risk of acquiring HIV: Wait until marriage to have sexual relations;
remain faithful to your spouse after marriage; and avoid drug abuse” (222). Following Biblical principles is a method of preventing many kinds of disease, including STDs, which are “almost always spread by direct bodily contact during illicit sexual relations (sexual relations outside God’s institution of marriage). … The reason for this terrible scourge is not a lack of scientific information or of ‘sex education,’ but a lack of morality and righteousness” (234-235). Once again aligning this textbook with the conservative social agenda in the United States, its authors have claimed that sex education is not the best way to keep teenagers from catching STDs, but that teaching Biblical standards for morality is the preferred method. This textbook does not acknowledge that romantic or sexual relationships are appropriate for its target audience. Instead, in the chapter entitled, “Pursuing Right Relationships,” the authors encourage students to choose good friends who will “encourage you in your walk with the Lord” (270). Having close friendships and “wholesome associations” is considered an important step for young conservative Christian teenagers who, according to their Biblical interpretation, are not ready for more intimate encounters (277).

All of the examples listed above from the textbook demonstrate the unique perspective that conservative Christians have on health. According to the textbook’s authors, physical health habits, such as washing hands, avoiding contagious people, eating well-balanced meals, getting sufficient exercise, and getting enough sleep, are important for conservative Christians to develop. In addition, conservative Christian teenagers must develop spiritual health habits, such as avoiding alcohol and drugs and obeying “Biblical principles regarding morality, self-control, attitude, and anxiety” (235). Even though they believe that God ultimately controls their health and personal safety, conservative
Christians believe that they have the responsibility to use common sense and take their own precautions by following God’s will as revealed in the Bible.

Summary

The conservative Christian textbooks analyzed in this chapter share several key traits. Each book, regardless of its academic subject, encapsulates its lessons within a conservative Christian worldview that matches the findings from chapter two of this thesis. By retelling history and science based on a Biblical historical timeline and looking to the Bible for evidence and answers, these authors clearly hope to reinforce in their readers a reverence for God as the ultimate authority. Readers learn about the basic theological doctrines of conservative Christianity: Biblical inerrancy, original sin, evangelism, and most importantly, that conservative Christianity is the only true religion. Traditional phrasing and conservative political rhetoric in both the textbooks’ titles and content are aimed to further the values of the Religious Right in a new generation of students.

But do these textbooks merely instill reverence in the reader for Christianity, or does the theology interfere in the teaching of widely acknowledged scientific and historical facts and citizenship skills? Through powerful rhetoric and leading questions, the Bible is held up as an authority because it provides inerrant facts. Scientific, empirical evidence cannot challenge Biblical claims because God cannot be wrong. Does this mean that students who use these textbooks are truly learning, or are they being indoctrinated in conservative Christian ideology? The next chapter will aim to answer these questions and determine whether a homeschool education based on textbooks such as these from A Beka Books is compatible with a contemporary view of citizenship in the United States of America.
IV. CITIZENSHIP THEORIES AND REGULATORY REFORMS

Chapter three analyzed several A Beka textbooks and discussed an approach to education entrenched in a conservative Christian Biblical worldview. Can students educated in this way be adequately prepared for adult citizenship in a pluralistic, liberal democracy such as the United States? This final chapter explores that question, drawing upon the work of two accomplished scholars of political science who have explored the civic goals of education. Ian MacMullen, a political theorist at Washington University in St. Louis, is known for his policy suggestions for regulating religious schools. MacMullen asks and answers the question of whether religious schools can create good citizens and outlines specific policy suggestions for regulating religious schools to ensure that they do, but he does not discuss the case of religious homeschooling in depth. Rob Reich, a political theorist at Stanford University, has written about the conflicting interests of parents, children, and government with respect to homeschooling. I will apply their work to the specific case of conservative Christian homeschooling, and propose additional criteria for citizenship. Finally, this chapter will recommend some specific education policies to ensure that homeschooled American children are prepared for their role as adult citizens.

The Nature of American Democracy

As a democracy, the United States is known for its free and fair elections and its system of political representation. It is “liberal” in the classic sense because it
acknowledges the need for civic education to unify a society, it emphasizes the importance of autonomy for developing a life plan, and it upholds a tradition of individual rights, such as the freedoms of conscience, expression, and association.\textsuperscript{236} Decisions are made through public debate, which requires participants to provide public reasons for their opinions. As Wuthnow reminds us, the difficulty of American democracy often lies in a tension between holding one’s own beliefs passionately and still behaving properly in public life.\textsuperscript{237} Either through deliberation (whereby participants attempt to convince others that their view is right, and ultimately form a consensus) or aggregation (whereby participants vote according to their own views and the majority wins), the goal of a democracy is to arrive “at some notion of the general will that reflects the common good.”\textsuperscript{238} However, the range of actions is limited in the United States because its people are bound to a constitution and a legal tradition with which policy must be consistent. This limitation has implications for homeschooling because education policy cannot simply be determined by the majority will; policy must respect the First Amendment freedom of religion clause as well as the power of states to guide their own educational policies.

The United States can be categorized further as a “pluralistic” state because its citizens are heterogeneous in their culture, race, ethnicity, and religious and ethical values. The 2010 Census showed that of the 300 million people then in the United States, 72.4% self-identified their race as White only, 12.6% as Black or African American, 0.9% as American Indian or Alaskan Native, 4.8% as Asian, 0.2% as Native Hawaiian and Other

\textsuperscript{237} Wuthnow, xi.
Pacific Islander, 6.2% as Some Other Race, and 2.9% as Two or More Races. In the 2010 Census, Hispanic and Latino Origin was considered a separate category from race, and 16.3% self-identified as Hispanic or Latino. Beyond cultural and ethnic diversity, there is significant religious diversity. The 2007 Pew Forum’s U.S. Religious Landscape Survey found that 78.4% of all adults self-identified as Christian (51.3% Protestant, 23.9% Catholic), 16.1% as Unaffiliated (including atheists and agnostics), 1.7% as Jewish, 0.7% as Buddhist, 0.6% as Muslim, and 0.4% as Hindu. Although a large majority of Americans are some type of Christian, it is important to remember, as chapter two discussed, that there is much diversity even within these broad Christian categories. The conservative Christian homeschoolers who are the subject of this study would fall under the category of “Protestant” in this Pew survey, specifically in the subcategory of evangelical or fundamentalist Christians.

The non-Christian minorities affect the nation’s identity significantly enough that it would not be appropriate to discount them altogether and label the United States as a country of Christians only – or as a “Christian country,” as the A Beka textbooks do incorrectly. The Constitution ensures that even if a majority of people in America is Christian, the state itself is not. The United States has always been a country of immigrants and its strength comes from its diversity. Moreover, in a liberal democracy such as the United States, the guaranteed individual freedoms permitted to its citizens make it reasonable to predict that there will always exist a pluralism of values and beliefs.

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This pluralism “contributes significantly to the vitality of the public sphere.” The trend toward polarization and away from pluralism is dangerous because the public sphere requires open dialogue between citizens. When citizens disagree about basic premises and refuse to engage with others who disagree, communication breaks down and the democratic process fails. This is why a pluralistic, liberal democracy in the United States can only flourish when citizens are given the tools necessary to exercise their rights.

Being a citizen of a liberal, pluralistic democracy comes with special rights, such as participating in electoral politics through voting and public deliberation. In the United States, while it is not required that citizens vote or hold political office, only citizens are eligible for these activities. The strength of our citizenry should not be measured solely by collecting empirical data about how often people exercise their rights of citizenship. As MacMullen explains, “[m]easuring the quality of liberal democratic citizens would be very different from measuring, say, the volume of their political participation – in terms of voting, attending meetings, giving time and money.” Judging by this type of statistics, it could be concluded from their high rates of voting and participation in political youth groups that conservative Christians are better citizens than the average American.

Generation Joshua, the political youth group discussed in chapter two, aims to train conservative Christian homeschooled students to stand up for what they believe in and become active in the political arena. Through participation in this division of the HSLDA, students can attend summer camp and political rallies to practice citizenship. However, the content and reasoning behind their civic participation is of more concern than their rates of participation because being a good citizen requires more than filling out a ballot once a year or attending a rally. Being a good citizen requires distinctive character virtues and

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241 Wuthnow, 16-17.
intellectual capacities that enable citizens to exercise their rights of citizenship appropriately.

**Defining Citizenship**

What exactly are these character virtues and intellectual capacities that every citizen needs? MacMullen identifies the central virtues as toleration, mutual respect, and a commitment to reciprocity, which is an understanding that political decisions will be decided based on public reasons that citizens hold in common. MacMullen further argues that exposure to diversity is required in order to practice these virtues. Aristotle claimed that children can learn to be virtuous only by practicing those virtues, and therefore it is critical that education for citizenship give students opportunities to practice the virtues they will require in a liberal democracy. If students are to succeed as citizens in a liberal, pluralistic democracy, they must engage in discussions with people who hold diverse viewpoints and learn to cooperate with people who are different from them.

Citizens must also have enough of a civic spirit to be willing and enthusiastic about participating in “the core activities of citizenship” and a sense of patriotism whereby they “partially identify their individual good with the good of the state,” yet do not support their country in its injustices. The intellectual capacities must include basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, as well as knowledge about the country. It is in the best interests of the state and all its citizens that children learn the basic knowledge and skills that are necessary to become fully functioning, self-sufficient, and productive members of society. Reich provides an overview of a few specific requirements having to do with civic knowledge:

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[Schools] must also provide an education that conveys to students the organizational structure of their federal, state, and local governments, and a rudimentary outline of the history of the country, and an explanation of how to navigate the political domain (i.e., the process of voting, of lobbying for legislation, and so on), and some understanding of their rights and the laws of the country. Without these basic literacies and civic knowledge, no child could successfully find employment or make use, if desired, of his rights of citizenship.\textsuperscript{243}

Reich is correct that it would be impossible for citizens to intelligently participate in politics if they did not know anything about how the country functions. The A Beka textbooks do provide an informative curriculum about the inner workings of American government and encourage students to contact their representatives frequently. However, knowing about the mechanisms and history of the country is not enough. Citizens in a liberal democracy are expected to exercise their rights of citizenship as free-thinking beings who make their own decisions based on reason and experience. In order for this to happen, citizens must learn to exercise their rational autonomy.

MacMullen defines autonomy as “the capacity for critical-rational reflection about one’s ethical beliefs and values, including those that are foundational, and the commitment to practice this reflection on an ongoing basis.”\textsuperscript{244} More specifically, ethical autonomy is the ability to choose from among a set of permissible conceptions of the good life.\textsuperscript{245} However, as MacMullen points out, “ethical autonomy is not something that children can reliably be expected to pick up outside of formal educational institutions,” and therefore it is the duty of the state to provide education that develops the autonomy of its future citizens.\textsuperscript{246} Only autonomous citizens, who have reflected upon various options and chosen to support one version of the good life, can truly represent their own opinions when

\textsuperscript{243} Reich, \textit{Bridging Liberalism and Multiculturalism in American Education}, 196.
\textsuperscript{244} MacMullen, 23.
\textsuperscript{245} MacMullen, 69.
\textsuperscript{246} MacMullen, 161.
they make choices in the political process. After all, it would be contradictory for a citizen to participate in free elections if he himself is not free. Exposure to diversity is required here, as well, in order for students to see multiple options before they make a choice about how to live a good life. As Reich says, “[t]o become free, students must be exposed to the vibrant diversity of a democratic society so that they possess the liberty to live a life of their own design.”

If the state’s interests in creating self-determining citizens can be met by conservative Christian homeschooling, then the latter should be allowed as a legitimate educational practice in a liberal democracy. But, if conservative Christian homeschooling does not create citizens able to sustain a liberal democracy, then such schooling should be prohibited. In order to determine whether conservative Christian homeschooling should be allowed in a liberal democracy, it will have to be measured against the standards for citizenship discussed above: character virtues, intellectual capacities, ethical autonomy, and exposure to diversity. Later in this chapter, I will argue that the current form in which conservative Christian homeschooling is practiced does not fulfill citizenship goals, and even with changes and regulations it might still not be considered a viable educational option.

**Education for Citizenship and Conservative Christian Homeschooling**

Some might argue that it is oxymoronic to require a certain type of education in a society that is meant to be free. Yet, citizenship education has long been recognized as an appropriate goal for education that the state should offer to, and even require of, its citizens. After all, good citizens are not born; they must be educated. Dissenters would argue that identifying citizenship as the primary goal of education takes into account only the state’s interest in education and ignores the interests of both parents and children. For

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example, many parents consider themselves as having the right to fully control their child’s education, partly because their own interests of having a certain kind of family and raising children according to their long-held vision of parenthood require a specific type of education. As citizens themselves, parents do have a right to live according to their conception of a good life, which may extend to the education they desire for their children, yet they must not be allowed to completely ignore the interests of their children or the state. Education is a private and a public good, which is why adult citizens should care about the education of their own children as well as the education of others’ children. Reich discusses the difficult task of balancing the sometimes-conflicting interests of the state, parents, and children in education, and proposes standards for education that respect all parties’ interests and are also appropriate for a multicultural, liberal democracy. He identifies homeschooling as a case in which parents have complete control over their child’s education, which is potentially dangerous for both the state’s and the child’s interests.

In its currently unregulated form, homeschooling is worrisome because the state has no control over that education to ensure that the virtues of citizenship are being taught. Although he maintains that parents should have a significant say in the education of their children, Reich rebukes the prevailing mentality of parents and children as “consumers” of education in a “market” of choices because that metaphor ignores the state’s interests in ensuring education for citizenship for all children.\(^\text{248}\) One reason that a pluralistic, liberal democracy such as the United States needs education for citizenship is to unify its diverse citizenry: “Schooling is one of the few remaining social institutions – or civic intermediaries – in which people from all walks of life have a common interest and in

which children might come to learn such common values as decency, civility, and respect." Parents may wish to educate their children apart from the rest of society, but in order to fulfill the state’s legitimate interest in education, every type of education must ensure that children learn these common values and are prepared to be full citizens of their country.

In his book *Faith in Schools?* MacMullen evaluates religious schools against his standards for citizenship and draws some radical conclusions. He argues that the state should prohibit “narrowly religious schools” that do not meet his standards for citizenship and that the state should allow “moderate religious schools,” such as most Catholic schools. MacMullen also argues that state should fund moderate religious schools (as well as any other schools it allows) because all permitted schools are “instruments of civic education” and because it is unfair to privilege wealthy parents. While my thesis does not go so far as to make such radical claims about school funding, MacMullen’s criteria for religious schools can also be used here as a metric of whether conservative Christian homeschools fulfill the goals of education for citizenship outlined above. MacMullen’s four “hallmarks” of acceptable religious secondary schools are: (1) the school must offer fully rational justifications for academic claims, not exclusively religious reasons; (2) significant parts of the curriculum must be insulated from the religious ethos of the school; (3) the school must teach about other religious traditions without rejecting them as false doctrines; and (4) the school must be open to others outside of its own religious community. As I will argue below, conservative Christian homeschooling fails to fulfill all

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249 Reich, “Civic Perils of Homeschooling,” 3.
250 MacMullen, 181.
251 MacMullen, 181.
four of these criteria and therefore should not be allowed in its current form in the United States.

MacMullen’s first criterion of acceptable religious secondary schools is that the school must have “a sincere commitment to the practice of rational justification wherein the reasons given are not exclusively religious in form and content.” MacMullen argues that teachers must give secular reasons for academic claims, both in and out of the classroom, because the fostering of rational deliberation is necessary for the development of autonomy in children. A religious school can “offer religious teachings and justifications, but not to the exclusion of secular reasons that both support and question the conclusions of those religious arguments.” As chapter three exposed, A Beka textbooks rely on religious reasoning in all of their academic subject areas and reject any claims that contradict their conservative Christian Biblical worldview. For example, evolution is taught as a false theory because secular reasoning based on scientific facts contradicts conservative Christian reasoning based on the Biblical creation story. In order for a religious school or homeschool to be acceptable, it must teach fairly both religious and secular reasoning without clearly misrepresenting or privileging either one.

The second criterion is that significant parts of the curriculum must exist that are …insulated from and independent of the religious ethos of the school. Christian fundamentalist schools can legitimately present the Creationist account to children in a class on Bible study (provided that the scientific critique is also taken seriously), but there should additionally be separate lessons in biology where the theory of evolution is taught without giving equal time to the rival biblical account of human origins.

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252 MacMullen, 170
253 MacMullen, 171
254 MacMullen, 171.
In this passage, MacMullen seems to be speaking directly to the A Beka textbook “Biology: God’s Living Creation” because it serves as a prime example of how the teaching of conservative Christian biology is infused with religious claims. The entire purpose of A Beka Books, and other publishers like it, is to teach every subject, not just Bible study, from a conservative Christian Biblical perspective. MacMullen argues that this kind of “narrow” religious education should be prohibited because it fails to give children “a thorough grounding in the methods of secular reasoning that are essential for autonomous reflection.” It follows that conservative Christian homeschooling fails to meet both MacMullen’s first two criteria.

The third criterion has two parts: first, that religious secondary schools must teach about other religious and ethical doctrines; and second, that this exposure to diversity cannot be merely for the purpose of “target practice” whereby the school rejects all other belief systems as viable options and resists the possibility that its students will find an alternative religion more satisfactory than the one they inherited from their parents. The goal is to prevent religious schools from presenting diverse conceptions of the good “in their least favorable colors, or even downright inaccurately.” Even though it is more difficult to enforce pedagogy than curriculum content, it is an important and appropriate task for the state if it takes seriously the autonomy development of its citizens. Once again, the A Beka textbooks fail this criterion because they only present a biased perspective on diverse religious and ethical doctrines, often referring to them as “false doctrines” or “false religions” that run contrary to conservative Christian interpretations of the Bible.

But perhaps MacMullen’s requirement that schools do not see the potential apostasy of their students as unfavorable is too much to ask. It seems natural that any

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255 MacMullen, 171.
parents who believe they have found the right answers and have already discovered the
to lead a good life would want their child to follow in the same path and would view
any deviation as unfavorable. Especially when the parents consider the salvation of their
child to be at stake and the unity of their family, apostasy is not something to be taken
lightly. Herein lies one difference between religious schools and homeschooling: teachers
are meant to have a greater degree of separation from their students and would be more
likely to adhere to this criterion, whereas in homeschools parents are also the teachers and
therefore cannot maintain the distance required of an instructor to teach about diverse
viewpoints. Homeschooling parents would be unlikely to comply with any policy changes
surrounding this issue because the option to give their children a religiously based
education is one of the main reasons why they chose to homeschool in the first place. For
this reason, it is unlikely that conservative Christian homeschooling would ever adhere to
this criterion.

The final criterion is that a religious school should be open “to those beyond its
particular community of faith.” MacMullen’s suggestions for how to achieve this
openness include inviting others to give guest lectures in a class about world religions or
creating joint programs with other schools from different traditions. In the homeschooling
case, it is impossible just by reading their textbooks to determine whether conservative
Christian homeschoolers are open to outsiders. While it is certainly possible that a
conservative Christian family participates in neighborhood community service projects
with people from diverse backgrounds or invites the local Rabbi and imam to come teach,
it is highly unlikely. Some conservative Christians might argue that their evangelistic trips
to other countries would count as an example of being open to outsiders, but those trips are

256 MacMullen, 173.
typically exclusively composed of other members of the same or similar churches with the primary mission of converting others to Christianity and are therefore not viable options for “openness.” Given the fact that A Beka textbooks portray others as ungodly or representatives of false religions, and given the fact that conservative Christian homeschool parents often choose to homeschool in order to protect their children from outsiders, it would be highly surprising for families who use A Beka textbooks to fulfill MacMullen’s fourth criterion.

MacMullen’s four criteria present a bleak outlook for the potential of conservative Christian homeschooling to create good citizens in the United States. Further research of the A Beka textbooks reveals two additional aspects of conservative Christian homeschool education that are worrisome for citizenship: (1) textbooks that teach false facts or (2) conform to a dichotomous worldview are also detrimental to the task of forming good citizens. The specific content and pedagogy used in the A Beka textbooks is convincing evidence that conservative Christian homeschooling should not be permitted in the United States. For example, the biology textbook claims that the geologic column, or timeline, is “an imaginary arrangement” that “occurs nowhere in the world” and is based on the problematic technique of radiometric dating. In fact, there do exist real examples of the geometric timeline, such as one on exhibit at a light-rail station in Portland, Oregon.

The supposed scientific facts in the A Beka biology textbook could be more accurately described as religious statements, which rely on the authority of the Bible for answers. Science makes empirical claims about the observable world, whereas religion makes metaphysical claims about the supernatural world. According to Niles Eldredge, a

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258 For more information, see: <http://www.travelforkids.com/Funtodo/Oregon/Portland-city/portland-washington-park.htm>.
paleontologist at the American Museum of Natural History, when creationists make the mistake of conflating science with religion, they “threaten the integrity of science teaching in America.”

For example, conservative Christians appeal to religious claims about God’s creation to explain, “scientifically,” the origin of the universe. Any description of the origin of the universe that appeals to a deity is a religious claim, not a scientific one, because it assumes the presence of supernatural forces. The executive director of the National Center for Science Education, Eugenie Scott, asserts that evolution is internationally accepted as the best explanation for how the natural world came to be in its present state. She believes very strongly that it does children a disservice to mislead them into believing that there exists a controversy in the scientific community about whether evolution occurred, when in fact the controversy is only a public one that the mass media enjoys emphasizing.

Testimonies of scholars such as George Marsden and Langdon Gilkey during the “creationist” trial in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1981 and a 1987 Supreme Court decision all categorized creationism as a religious idea, not a scientific one. Thus, when A Beka textbooks teach the conservative Christian interpretation of creationism as if it were scientific, they are confusing their categories. This kind of education does not adequately prepare children with the scientific knowledge required for good citizenship in the United States.

The other problematic aspect of the A Beka curriculum is its portrayal of the world in strictly dichotomous terms. Everything is either “right” (because it is in accordance with a conservative Christian Biblical worldview) or “wrong” (because it contradicts the

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259 Scott, xii.
260 Scott, xix.
conservative Christian Biblical worldview), and there seems to be no nuance or “grey area.” As chapter two showed, the “black and white” nature of conservative Christianity, where there always seems to be an easy right answer, has been heralded as one of the main things that attract people to the religion. However, teaching from within this neatly divided worldview prevents homeschooled students from learning to think critically. Even the so-called “critical thinking questions” in the chapter reviews of the A Beka textbooks rarely require students to do any real critical thinking of their own. For example, a chapter review question in the world geography textbook asks students, “Why do you think God kept America hidden from the rest of the world until the Protestant Reformation?”

Students need not think for themselves in order to answer this question because the answer is written out clearly in the first sentence of the chapter: “God, in His providence, kept the Americas hidden from the world until the Protestant Reformation had transformed the hearts of Englishmen and other Europeans with the truths of Biblical Christianity.”

Historical facts aside, the right answer is provided in the textbook, which results in a lack of critical thinking required on the part of the student to answer the question.

In a landmark California court case, Association of Christian Schools International v. Roman Stearns, filed in spring 2006 by Association of Christian Schools International against the University of California (UC), the court upheld the UC’s choice to reject certain high school courses that relied on A Beka Book and Bob Jones University textbooks because they were not adequately college preparatory in nature. The Christian schools claimed that the UC standards were based on a religious discrimination, whereas the UC maintained that its decisions were based on academic, not religious, standards.

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263 Ashbaugh and Lostroh, 185.
One witness for the defense, UC Professor Barbara Sawrey, reviewed the A Beka biology textbook and “concluded that it was inappropriate for use as the primary text in college-preparatory science classes. Professor Sawrey found the text problematic because it characterized religious doctrine as scientific evidence, included scientific inaccuracies, failed to encourage critical thinking, and took an ‘overall un-scientific approach to the subject matter.’”\textsuperscript{264} The court’s judgment determined that the UC standards were appropriate and that A Beka and similar textbooks should not be considered adequate preparation for college. This decision supports my conclusion about factual inaccuracies in A Beka textbooks and the lack of critical thinking required by students who use them.

Another example from the biology textbook demonstrates the extent of the A Beka dichotomous worldview: in a section explaining (from the conservative Christian point of view) how variety in nature exists even though evolution is false, the “true” concept of variations “within each kind” is contrasted with the “error” of thinking that evolution occurs between species. Figure 14.18 entitled “God’s Plan for Variety in Nature” divides different statements into the “truth” column and the “error” column. For example, a caption under the image of different canines under the “truth” column reads, “Many varieties of canines have developed from a single pair of canines that left the Ark,” and is contrasted with the caption under the image of different species in the “error” column, which reads, “Dogs, seals, raccoons, bears, cats, and hyenas supposedly evolved from a single weasel-like animal.”\textsuperscript{265} While clearly establishing evolution as “error” and creationism as “truth,” this chart also emphasizes the textbook’s overall division of ideas


\textsuperscript{265} Graham and Parker, \textit{Biology: God’s Living Creation}, 283.
into two distinct categories. If children are taught to see dissenting views in these simple terms, then there will be no room for rational engagement with complexity. The simple division between “truth” and “error” that is maintained through all of the A Beka textbooks fails to give students the opportunities to learn about other points of view and see the potential merits of other arguments. Students who lack the ability to relate to others by understanding different worldviews will be much less likely to relate to others as equal citizens of this pluralistic, liberal democracy.

**Objections to Education for Citizenship**

Of the many potential objections to this vision of education for citizenship, six will be discussed here. First, it may be argued that the goals of citizenship outlined above are actually indoctrination in disguise. As chapter two revealed, many conservative Christians fear that public schools teach the “religion of secular humanism” and indoctrinate students into a certain value system. By painting citizenship goals as a “religion,” objectors set themselves up to argue that even though public schools say that they do not favor a particular set of ethical doctrines in order to comply with the U.S. Constitution’s First Amendment prohibition of established religion, in fact they are inherently favoring the set of ethical doctrines that belong to the pluralistic, liberal democracy. Legally, this objection was rejected in 1994 when the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals refused to review the case of high school biology teacher John Peloza, who objected to being required to teach evolution. The Court concluded that neither evolution nor secular humanism have ever been considered “religions” relevant to the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. However, I do agree with the second part of this objection because a

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proper education for citizenship does teach an inherent value system. Political philosophers would not consider this problematic because a state that benefits its citizens is justified in perpetuating itself, a process that necessarily requires it citizens be taught to subscribe to the state’s philosophy. In this case, part of the American philosophy is learning to think for one’s self, so the teaching of autonomy is perhaps the least problematic form of indoctrination in existence.

Second, it may be argued that this vision of education for citizenship unfairly favors the interests of the state and hinders parents’ rights. Many conservative Christian parents deny the value of autonomy and desire to affirm their own parental right to raise their children as they see fit, regardless of what the state’s goals. I argue that pluralistic, liberal democracies should cultivate ethical autonomy as a goal of education, even in the face of parent objections. Parents do have legitimate interests in expressing their values and their own freedoms, including having and shaping a family that gives meaning to their lives. However, parents’ interests do not trump the interests of their children or the state, which both require autonomy. Parents may shape their children’s upbringing according to their own religious and ethical beliefs, as long as children’s education also involves the encouragement of rational self-reflection. Parents should not shield their children from other spheres of life, as is common in conservative Christian homeschooling, which is why the state plays an important role of balancing the parents’ interests by creating a sphere in which children’s interests are paramount and beyond the control of their parents.

Third, some conservative Christians may argue, and have done so in the past, that exposure to diversity infringes upon their religious freedom. A decision in the U.S. Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit, ruled that exposure to diversity and critical thinking does not
violate parents’ rights or the freedom of religion.\footnote{Mozert v. Hawkins City Board of Education, 827 F.2d 1058 (1987).} In the \textit{Mozert v. Hawkins City Board of Education} ruling, one of questions being considered was whether a state requirement that children be exposed to ideas that they or their parents find objectionable on religious grounds constitutes a violation of their free exercise of religion, as guaranteed in the First Amendment. The school superintendent argued that “exposure to something does not constitute teaching, indoctrination, opposition or promotion of the things exposed. While it is true that these textbooks expose the student to varying values and religious backgrounds, neither the textbooks nor the teachers teach, indoctrinate, oppose or promote any particular value or religion.”\footnote{Mozert v. Hawkins City Board of Education.} Chief Judge Lively’s written opinion cited the fact that Supreme Court cases have “affirmed that public schools serve the purpose of teaching fundamental values ‘essential to a democratic society.’ These values ‘include tolerance of divergent political and religious views’ while taking into account ‘consideration of the sensibilities of others.’”\footnote{Mozert v. Hawkins City Board of Education.} According to Chief Judge Lively, there is no need for the public school to change its curriculum to accommodate the handful of families who have objections. Furthermore, the 1972 \textit{Wisconsin v. Yoder} Supreme Court case where Amish children were given an exemption from compulsory education past eighth grade does not apply in this circumstance because viable education alternatives do exist for conservative Christian families that will not disrupt their lifestyle, namely the option to attend private school or homeschool without any curriculum requirements from the state of Tennessee. The legal precedent clearly supports the right of public schools to require specific curricula, even against religious or parental objections. Why should this not also be the case in homeschools?

\footnote{Mozert v. Hawkins City Board of Education, 827 F.2d 1058 (1987).}
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This leads us to the fourth objection, which rests on the age-old paradox of valuing both tolerance and diversity. Must a pluralistic, liberal democracy tolerate everyone, including those who are not tolerant themselves? MacMullen discusses the objection that requiring education for autonomy, including an exposure to diversity, would “extinguish certain traditional and religious ways of life” that are incompatible with autonomy.\(^{270}\) MacMullen agrees with Eamonn Callan, Professor of Education at the Stanford University School of Education, that autonomy is not incompatible with all religious beliefs, as empirical evidence shows, although it may be incompatible with certain conservative Christian tenets, such as Creationism.\(^{271}\) The Mozert case demonstrates that conservative Christians believe that autonomy is fundamentally at odds with their way of life and undermines their religious freedom. If they are correct, then requiring autonomy would eliminate their fundamentalist ideology and its accompanying way of life, which seems antithetical to the liberal democratic goals of freedom and pluralism.

MacMullen suggests that a line must be drawn somewhere in order to resolve the liberal tolerance paradox, and that the best way to determine policy is to differentiate between children and adults. In other words, the state’s paternalism is justified when it creates laws regarding children, but not justified when it limits the freedoms of adults, who are presumably old enough to make their own life choices. Liberals should not “value cultural diversity and cultures for their own sake, but rather for their significance in enabling individuals to find and live good lives, respectively. Adults who have committed their lives to a particular ethical path should not be coerced into reflecting on alternative

\(^{270}\) MacMullen, 124.

paths, but children deserve the opportunity to find their best path in life.” The state is justified in requiring that children be exposed to diversity and encouraging their development of autonomy, which also means that the state should prohibit forms of education, such as conservative Christian homeschooling, that prevent these goals of citizenship from being taught.

A fifth objection centers on the difficulty, and perhaps the undesirability, of distinguishing between parenting and education. Especially in homeschooling, where education and parenting both take place within the home, and when the “school” part of the day is mixed throughout the “family” part of the day, it becomes nearly impossible to separate the two. However, if education policy for homeschooling is to become more robust, the state will likely need to define more clearly in legal language the difference between parenting and educating. Although MacMullen proposes somewhat strict policies for religious schooling, he does allow parents broad freedoms outside of formal schooling. As he says, “the liberal state should grant parents broad discretion to direct the upbringing of their children outside of the institutions of formal education, even in some ways that do not serve the children’s best interests, but the sphere of formal education is the place where children’s interests in developing autonomy must be respected.” However, when this reasoning is applied to the homeschooling case, it may be impossible to separate a “sphere of formal education” in the home from the parental “upbringing” of children. In fact, the merging of the realms of parenting and education is one reason cited by Kunzman’s subjects that parents originally choose to homeschool. Most of Kunzman’s subjects, when asked what their favorite part about homeschooling was, responded that the best part was...

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272 MacMullen, 129.
273 MacMullen, 176.
the time they could spend with their children and the better family relationships they cultivated through spending more time together.\textsuperscript{274} When homeschool organizations and families claim that the state cannot raise children or that government cannot love a child, they are missing the main objection to homeschooling, which is about education, not parenting.

Even if the reasoning behind the prohibitions is accepted, actually prohibiting a certain type of homeschooling may present too many practical problems. The sixth objection has to do with these issues of entanglement, especially with regard to privacy and religion in the First Amendment. MacMullen suggests that the state’s entanglement with religious schools will be inevitable if improved education policies are put in place, and that the potential issues will be worth the trouble. It would be even worse to create a blanket prohibition of all religious schools or homeschools, since that would unfairly prohibit the educational environments that can and do meet the legitimate civic goals of education. In a pluralistic, liberal democracy, it might make sense to promote the ideal that parents should encourage their children to socialize with people from diverse backgrounds, but within the scope of the U.S. Constitution, it seems impossible to require and regulate such a thing. Socialization for diversity is important because it allows children to meet people who hold diverse religious and ethical views and because developing personal relationships is more likely to foster genuine respect and understanding of others than merely learning about an abstract “other” in school. But how is it possible to regulate social interaction in a homeschool where parents have complete control over their children’s associations with others? In a government dedicated to fostering the freedom of its adult citizens, most people would consider the state to be overstepping an important boundary if federal agents

\textsuperscript{274} Kunzman, 70, 123.
began regulating and enforcing the appropriate socialization of children. However, when parents take it upon themselves to be responsible for the education of their children, it may be appropriate for them to accept additional burdens from the state to ensure that they comply with the regulations associated with gaining an exception from the norm.

One suggestion that MacMullen and Reich both make that will be essential to creating education policy is to differentiate regulations based on what is age-appropriate for students. MacMullen’s distinction between primary and secondary education is important for distinguishing between groups of children, and his reliance on cognitive and developmental psychology, especially Piaget’s theory, to determine what children are capable of at different ages is commendable. In his book, MacMullen identifies secondary school as the time when students are eleven or twelve, until they are seventeen or eighteen. These are important and formative years for citizenship because by that age “most children have the cognitive capacity for the kind of formal thought and hypothetico-deductive reasoning involved in autonomous reflection.”

In contrast, preadolescent children may benefit from the “cultural coherence” of religious primary school because the environment can secure and stabilize children’s “provisional ethical identity,” which will help them “set out on the road to autonomy.”

Neither this aspect of MacMullen’s thesis, nor his even more radical financial recommendations, will be discussed in detail here, but his notion of age-appropriate education is one that will be crucial to take into consideration when policy-makers consider regulating conservative Christian homeschooling.

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275 MacMullen, 157.
276 MacMullen, 185.
Policy Recommendations

In the years since Stevens, Kunzman, Gaither, Van Galen, and Reich have studied homeschoolers and brought to light the lack of knowledge about homeschooling, not much progress has been made toward the goal of gaining more insight into the homeschooling phenomenon. As discussed in chapter one, ten states still require no notification for homeschooling, and the rest maintain a wide range of regulations. This variation among states is expected, given the limitation of the U.S. Department of Education to guide education policy, yet the situation can be improved. Although education is a matter delegated to the states, it would be beneficial to create consistent policies toward homeschoolers across different states, if only for the purpose of collecting adequate data about homeschoolers. Given the legal precedent of states’ unambiguous rights to regulate formal schooling, the states do have this power, and yet there are powerful lobbyists and homeschoolers from across the spectrum who defend the deregulation of homeschooling.

States would serve their constituents better if more were known about their children’s education. In general, it would best to collect data so that more can be learned before proceeding further. As a first step, I would recommend that states institute regulations requiring school districts to collect more information about homeschoolers. Data about the academic achievements of homeschoolers as well as the content of their education will be crucial for determining how critical the situation is in the United States. Uniform laws between states would provide a better understanding of the homeschool population whereby comparisons could be made between students in different states. The second step should be to conduct a proper analysis of the data collected during step one. In order to determine how best to proceed, representatives from all sides should participate in

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an open discussion about the data. Representatives could include professional educators and administrators, parents of homeschoolers, representatives from various advocacy agencies, political and social scholars, school board members, and potentially students themselves. Because education is one of the most important issues in the United States, willing citizens from across the country should volunteer to participate in this democratic process. The political ramifications of such a discussion are overwhelming, which is why civility and transparency will be important to maintain throughout. Learning more about how many and why people choose to homeschool and also what and how they are teaching would increase understanding of this significant minority and allow for better-informed regulations in the future. Ultimately, a case will need to be made in each state’s legislature about recommendations for changes to education policies so that new regulations can be put on the books. In this final step, it will be necessary to implement the key requirements for citizenship education with policies that could include notification, teacher competence, standardized testing, and curriculum oversight. Education statues cannot guarantee that the goals of citizenship will be met, but they will hopefully improve upon the current system in many states, including those that have minimal or no regulations for homeschooling. Below, I will discuss in more detail some specific policies currently in effect in various states and make recommendations for particular elements to include in expanded homeschool legislation.

In states that could be considered as having “moderate” or “high” regulation of homeschooling, there are three main aspects of their policies. First, there is the requirement that parents notify the state of their intention to homeschool each year. This relatively uncontentious policy serves the purpose of allowing the state to differentiate

278 Soczka, 58.
between truants and children who are homeschooled, which achieves the overall goal of enabling the state to enforce its existing policy of mandating school attendance for all children of a certain age. It also allows researchers to determine exactly how many children are being homeschooled in the United States. For both these reasons, it is crucial that states strictly enforce the policy of parental notification and ensure that children do not fall through the cracks of a decentralized education system, as Kunzman observed in his study.

Second, there is a requirement that parents demonstrate their capability of being teachers. This could include a minimal policy of requiring that parents submit fingerprints and pass a criminal background check, as is required in California.\(^{279}\) In a few states, parents must hold a valid teaching credential or have achieved a certain level of education themselves. This aspect is relatively more controversial because the requirement of obtaining a teaching credential is generally seen as too burdensome for parents. Since there are currently no other state methods for determining whether someone is prepared to be a teacher, perhaps a middle ground could be found on this issue.

Third, after parents have been allowed to begin homeschooling, they must show compliance with state education standards, usually at the end of every year. These standards are even more controversial and may include academic achievement on standardized tests, attendance records, and curriculum guidelines. Curriculum requirements usually mention that instruction may only be in English and that homeschools should cover the same basic subject areas that are mandated in public schools (reading, writing, mathematics, history/social science, and science).\(^{280}\) Standardized test

\(^{279}\) California Education Code, section 44237.
\(^{280}\) California Education Code, section 60605.
data is used to demonstrate children’s academic progress relative to their peers, and the curriculum guidelines similarly demonstrate that the content of children’s education is comparable to their peers’ education.

Although states have various ways of wording the legal language and framing these requirements, there are few common ways of regulating parents who choose to educate their children through a homeschool exemption. In some states, each family must maintain attendance records, academic progress reports, a portfolio of sample student work, and a list of curricula or teaching material used. Depending on the state, this information must either be sent to the state every month, every year, or it may be kept and maintained by the parents for a minimum of two years as long as it can be made available to the school superintendent within two week’s notice. Some states forgo these requirements in lieu of having a certified teacher evaluate the homeschooled student at the end of each year to confirm that the student has made adequate progress. What all these states agree on is the importance of maintaining records and a portfolio of materials by students who are educated outside of the public school system.

One question that arises from this accumulation of materials is, who maintains and reviews them? Many people would argue that the state should not be spending its resources dealing with the mountain of paperwork generated from homeschoolers. On the other hand, it has already been established that it is the responsibility of the state to verify that its children receive an adequate education, and also that there will not be one form of education that works for every child. Given the various needs of students, homeschooling should continue as an educational alternative, as long as it meets the necessary requirements. It will be important for the appropriate people to do significant leg-work
ahead of time and select which specific types of curricula will be allowed by the state. With the power of better technology, the processes of submitting, maintaining, and analyzing information about homeschoolers can become more efficient, thereby giving the state more time and resources to ensure that their education standards are being met.

Besides the state statutes that provide a specific exemption for homeschoolers, some state laws allow homeschoolers to register their homes as “private schools” or to enroll in private schools that offer distance learning programs or satellite programs. This poses a difficulty for collecting data about homeschoolers because it masks the fact that more families are actually homeschooling. Because the school environment, instructors, and curricula in relatively large private schools are often very different from homeschools, it is important for state education policies to create a way of distinguishing between the two. One strategy could be to create certain additional regulations that target private schools with fewer than seven registered students, which are most likely homeschools. However, this strategy would leave out the private school satellite programs. Instead, it may be possible create additional regulations that target private schools that have not been accredited by one of the regional accrediting bodies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, such as the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). These stipulations would allow most private schools to continue operating without additional burdens and would give the state permission to oversee homeschoolers’ education more carefully, even in states that do not have a specific statute for homeschoolers.

Given the state’s compelling interest in educating all of its children, both the content and method of education should be regulated by the state. In order to prevent false

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281 California Education Code, section 48222.
facts and biased opinions from being taught as the only “right” answers and to avoid the confusion between parenting and teaching that shelters homeschoolers from engaging with a diversity of viewpoints, it will be necessary to improve the education statutes of each state. A variety of educational options should be preserved; however, they should each be consistent with the goals of citizenship in a pluralistic, liberal democracy.\textsuperscript{282} For example, religious private schools and homeschools should be allowed, provided they teach about diversity, promote autonomy, and foster civic virtues.\textsuperscript{283} Homeschools or Christian academies that use A Beka Book curricula and others like it should be prohibited or required to change their curricula. Certain types of schooling do threaten children’s future autonomy, but it would be unwarranted to claim that all religious schools or all homeschools must be prohibited. Regulations are needed to ensure that all education meets the aims of a pluralistic, liberal democracy. The goal of education statutes should be to create a balanced set of regulations that give parents broad freedoms to raise their children according to their religious values, yet require the essential elements of citizenship education that have the best interests of the children in mind. In the case of conservative, especially fundamentalistic, Christian homeschooling, this balance is, unfortunately, impossible to achieve.

\textsuperscript{282} Reich, \textit{Bridging Liberalism and Multiculturalism in American Education}, 193.
\textsuperscript{283} Reich, \textit{Bridging Liberalism and Multiculturalism in American Education}, 200-201.
CONCLUSION

This thesis concludes that conservative Christian homeschooling, as represented by A Beka textbooks, does not adequately prepare its students to become adult citizens of a pluralistic, liberal democracy, such as the United States. This method of education discourages exposure to and rational engagement with diversity, it often teaches “facts” that run contrary to all reasonable evidence, it presents every subject through the lens of a “Biblical” worldview, and it isolates students in a strictly homogeneous environment where they lack the autonomy to reflect critically on their upbringing or the beliefs instilled in them by their parents. This type of conservative Christian homeschooling is detrimental to the civic goal of creating good citizens because it fails to prepare its students for engagement in a liberal, pluralistic democracy, which demands a free expression of ideas and rational, critical reflection on those ideas. After examining what it means for a state to be a liberal, pluralistic democracy and what good citizenship means in such a state, it is clear that conservative Christian homeschooling is not achieving appropriate citizenship goals.

When I began this research, my guiding questions stemmed from a curiosity about the unknown. During this process I have learned about the history of homeschooling and conservative Christianity in the United States. Drawing on that background has brought a deeper understanding of conservative Christian homeschooling textbooks and has revealed the truth about what is being taught at kitchen tables across the country. A rich tradition of political philosophy has informed my discussion of citizenship education and helped me
reach the conclusion that conservative Christian homeschooling is actually detrimental to many of the goals that contemporary citizenship education should seek to achieve. Ultimately, these historical, theoretical, and empirical claims must provide a framework for moving forward with state legislation. With the recognition that there may not be a single best education system that fulfills the needs of all children comes the acceptance of the state’s duty to develop appropriate standards, regardless of the political, legal, and practical obstacles. Within the bounds of the U.S. Constitution, education is a responsibility of the individual states. Still, it may be possible to develop national standards that allow for state and local variety in education, except where citizenship is at stake. The goal of ensuring that all children receive a good education in the United States requires improving all forms of education, including the homeschooling alternative. The nation is already aware that improvements should be made to public and private schools, but it cannot forget that homeschoolers are also a part of the country’s future.

If conservative Christian homeschooling continues to go unregulated, or if warranted minimum regulations are not enforced, the consequences for the United States are worrisome. In the twenty-first century, where globalization and technological advances have far-reaching effects on all societies, it is essential for citizens to be scientifically literate, to learn accurate history, and to understand and respect those who are different from them. Future generations of young adults will be responsible for navigating some of humanity’s toughest obstacles, including environmental, political, economic, and religious concerns. For all of the challenges that lie ahead, citizens will be needed who are ready to engage in their communities, the nation, and the world.
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