

It's crystal clear something is broken in religious education



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Last week I was invited to give an introduction to humanism for a religious studies class at UNC Asheville. It's always a delight to present a positive secular point of view, especially among the next generation.

Before I spoke, I sat and smiled as the professor collected papers, remembering the relief I felt after long nights

of study. Students were asked to name the spiritual communities they visited for their assignment and it was great to hear the diversity: Catholic, Protestant, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Sufi, Wiccan, Buddhist and Baha'i.

It was encouraging to hear they had made the effort to have face-to-face interviews with people representing these various beliefs, then stayed to observe their rituals and services.

I sensed enthusiasm in the students' eyes as they shared what they had chosen as the subject of their papers. I was impressed, thinking, "There's hope for

the world, and it starts here before my eyes."

Having worked in multifaith circles for more years than these students have been alive, I had to commend the instructor for her insightful assignment. For her this is simply a natural, rational way to teach this hot-potato subject of religion. She told me the department doesn't teach religion but rather about religion, which makes sense in a public university.

Teachers have a challenging job presenting such an emotionally charged subject in an academic con-

text, never quite sure how much a student's worldview has been shaped by Sunday school. We could hope that by the time they reach college most women and men have been exposed to so much knowledge that they know there is much more to know.

Yet the question is: Are they ready for the practice of wisdom, a primary value in secular education?

Speak with just about anyone about faith and it becomes crystal clear that something is broken in religious educa-

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