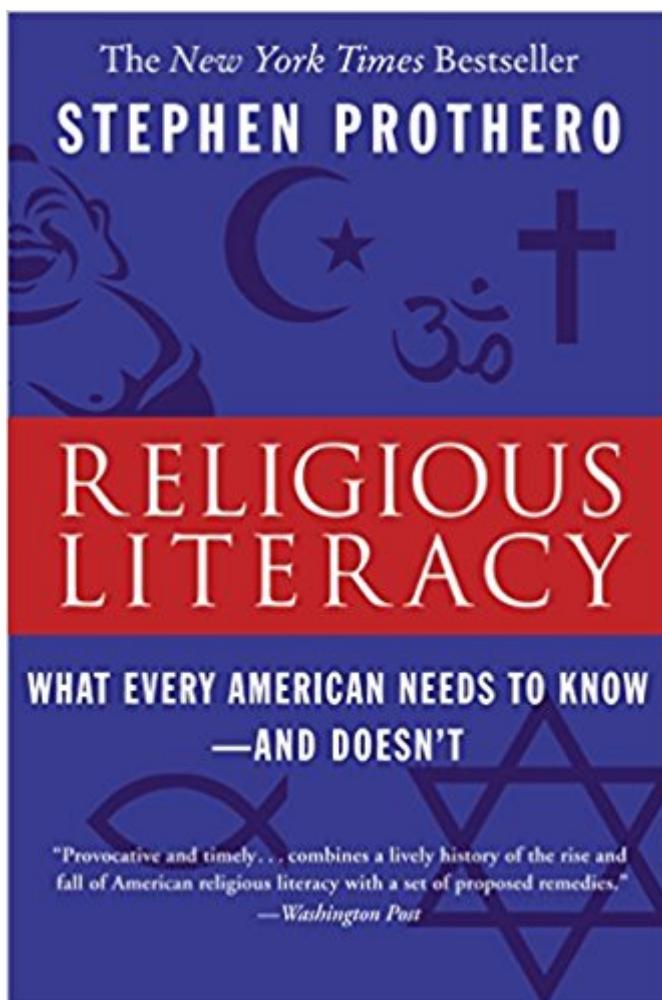


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# Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs To Know--And Doesn't



## Synopsis

The United States is one of the most religious places on earth, but it is also a nation of shocking religious illiteracy. Only 10 percent of American teenagers can name all five major world religions and 15 percent cannot name any. Nearly two-thirds of Americans believe that the Bible holds the answers to all or most of life's basic questions, yet only half of American adults can name even one of the four gospels and most Americans cannot name the first book of the Bible. Despite this lack of basic knowledge, politicians and pundits continue to root public policy arguments in religious rhetoric whose meanings are missed or misinterpreted by the vast majority of Americans. "We have a major civic problem on our hands," says religion scholar Stephen Prothero. He makes the provocative case that to remedy this problem, we should return to teaching religion in the public schools. Alongside "reading, writing, and arithmetic," religion ought to become the "Fourth R" of American education. Many believe that America's descent into religious illiteracy was the doing of activist judges and secularists hell-bent on banishing religion from the public square. Prothero reveals that this is a profound misunderstanding. "In one of the great ironies of American religious history," Prothero writes, "it was the nation's most fervent people of faith who steered us down the road to religious illiteracy. Just how that happened is one of the stories this book has to tell." Prothero avoids the trap of religious relativism by addressing both the core tenets of the world's major religions and the real differences among them. Complete with a dictionary of the key beliefs, characters, and stories of Christianity, Islam, and other religions, *Religious Literacy* reveals what every American needs to know in order to confront the domestic and foreign challenges facing this country today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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

\*Starred Review\* The author of *American Jesus* (2003) opens this important book with a paradox. To wit, Americans are deeply religious *and*

My friends, "Is this what you are looking for?" I guess that if you are looking for something in specific and you do not get it you might feel disappointed. Perhaps sometimes we are looking for shortcuts to gaining huge amounts of knowledge, and actually I think there aren't many. Knowledge and wisdom are acquired through a lifetime process in which each one of us need to embark in a quest for it, not necessarily depending upon one book only. What I mean is that religion, which is the theme that concerns us now and that is dealt with in this book, is a topic much too deep to be discussed in one book speaking of each of them individually. My opinion is that each religion therefore should be analyzed independently in texts written by people well versed in each of them and that actually they profess, so the information is not biased. That said, the question is, "does this book delivers what it was intended to?" I guess so, since I think that the purpose of this book basically to lead us to the understanding of the fact that we are a nation with a shameful religious ignorance that should be addressed efficiently and in a timely manner, not only by the state, but

by ourselves, and establishes the responsibility we as citizens of a multicultural society have towards it. It actually establishes the importance of such knowledge in terms of understanding the international conflicts our nation is involved in and the basics of our neighbors religions that don't necessarily have the same set of beliefs we do, in order to live together in peace with each other. It does not indicate, by any means that it is the only problem that we have, as someone suggested. There are other issues to address but there are also people with expertise in those other areas that should rather write and convince the nation upon the need to understand them and to fight for those other causes. We are voters and have a voice and thus a power that can influence our government in one way or the other. Therefore, with this information at hand we should get better educated so that we can confront the ignorance that has been taught to us. I think that the book actually tells us that there are many facts, mainly and mostly historical, that we actually ignore about our nation, the way it was founded and the laws that rules it. All of these facts should be pondered since there are actions been taken upon the misinterpretation of such laws taking advantage of our own ignorance to fulfill such purposes. We have to open our eyes towards these issues and take action. The title of the book is ironic since it is titled "Religious Literacy..." and basically it points out the contrary, "that we are very illiterate regarding religion." So what we need to know is answered; We need to know more about every religion professed in our country. What we doesn't know... well the previous premise tells us. We do not know the basics of world religion, therefore we are subject to believe what anyone wants to tell us whether it is true or not. We actually do not have the basic knowledge to discern the truth from the lie. Buy it and don't expect to get every answer about every religion. To the contrary, expect to understand the reasons why we should be more Religious literate.

Both readers that are religiously literate and illiterate will benefit from this book. For those that are illiterate, Dr. Prothero outlines and defines what he considers to be essential religious knowledge following a lengthy discourse on \*why\* religious knowledge is essential. For the religiously literate, however, his discussion of how religious education has evolved (devolved?) in America as well as its current slide toward being more emotional and less intellectual will motivate you to re-review his religious glossary. I grew up in a non-religious home so I count myself among those with a sub-par religious literacy and, as such, found the breadth and depth of this book spot on. Regardless of your religious literacy, however, you'll likely agree that "Americans' knowledge of religion runs as shallow as Americans' commitment to religion runs deep" (pp. 26) -- this book is a first step in the direction back toward generalized religious literacy.

I used this as a primary resource for a paper I was writing, but I am so glad I didn't just borrow this title from the library. It has earned a place on the permanent bookshelves in my home. Good message, clearly presented. It gets me thinking and it makes me inspired to be a little less cynical about the world and a little more hopeful about actions we can take to promote peace, understanding, and information.

Another good buy from .com! This site always has what I'm looking for and I'm a very happy customer. You will be too.

For me, the first part was preaching to the choir. Yes, indeed we so need to understand the beliefs of others. The definitions were so good that instead of passing the book to someone else, I bought the book for others and intend to keep my copy as a reference.

RELIGIOUS LITERACY has been nominated for the 2009 Rodda Award sponsored by the Church and Synagogue Library Association (CSLA), an international organization serving congregational libraries of all faiths. CSLA's Rodda Award is named for Dorothy Rodda Sargent, a lifetime member and one of the founders of the organization. This award recognizes a book which exhibits excellence in writing and has contributed significantly to congregational libraries through promotion of spiritual growth. The award is given to books for adults, young adults, and children on a three-year-rotational basis. The 2009 Rodda Award focuses on books for adult readers and this year's winner will be announced at the CSLA annual conference to be held at the McKinley Grand Hotel in Canton, Ohio, July 26-28. To learn more about CSLA and the Rodda Award go to[..].

I thought this would be a good topic but boring to read. It is actually both very interesting and easy to understand. It is one of those subjects about which all citizens should have a good understanding. In a world where so many people make decisions based on their beliefs, we should all know something about each other.

I have not completely read this presentation by Dr. Prothero ,however, it has very strong christian bias. I am a member of a Christian church--but I take rather seriously the text that says---Seek ye the truth and the truth shall set you free----since God has not written any of the religious texts, one can always wonder which is the best religion or the best representation of the here after.

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