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Lewis, Bengt-Oves, and Thobros' "Textbook violence" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Lewis, J. R., Bengt-Ove, A., & Thobro, A. S. (Eds.). (2017). *Textbook violence*. Sheffield, UK: Equinox Publishing. 223 pp. \$29.95. ISBN 9781781792599

Textbook Violence analyzes the way school textbooks handle or avoid handling the topic of religion and violence. The book is edited by professors and academics affiliated with the University of Tromsø in Norway, and much of the content is contributed by Norwegian scholars. The book brings a variety of approaches to the subject through a series of eleven essays, and while not all religious traditions are represented, each chapter focuses on specific examples as a starting point for further discussion.

The dominant theme throughout is the tendency for textbooks to avoid or barely mention issues of conflict or extremism of a religious nature. Most of the essays focus on religious education textbooks used in public schools, with particular reference to Norwegian textbooks. The collection opens with a theoretical discussion of textbooks and how they shape national culture and students' perception of events like 9/11, the American war on terror, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Another chapter addresses how Islamic textbooks have treated ongoing conflicts following the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. One contributor analyzes how anti-Semitism and the Holocaust have been represented in Norwegian textbooks. Other contributors discuss historical ambivalence in textbook representations of indigenous peoples in Scandinavia, depiction of Buddhism in religious education textbooks, treatment of religious conflict in ethics and religious culture textbooks in Quebec, and the portrayal of religious violence in textbooks on Judaism and Islam. In addition, there are essays on governmental influence on Japanese high school textbooks, misrepresentations of Sikhs by world religion textbook authors, and visual representations of Islam and Judaism in primary school books.

As one contributor notes in his essay on religious textbooks designed for teacher education in Norway, the inclusion of violence or extremism may be considered a disruptive force that could undermine the goals of religious education, particularly if teaching about religion is intended to foster peace, tolerance, and understanding. This contributor argues that teachers need to be equipped to discuss issues relevant to their students with reference to the world outside the classroom. Similarly, other contributors argue that teachers should provide for more balanced perspectives on

historical events and conflicts and provide opportunities for students to learn about opposing viewpoints that will help them understand that a textbook's interpretation is one of many possible perspectives.

Understandings of religion and violence may be very different within different cultures and faiths, and these essays reflect that diversity. This book does a good job of presenting the complex relationship between conflict and religion as represented in textbooks from around the world. Each essay is well-documented with references and endnotes for readers interested in further study.

Libraries may also want to consider comprehensive handbooks, such as *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence*, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, and *The Cambridge Companion to Religion and Terrorism*.

Reviewer

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