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# The Undergraduate Courses in Religion at the Tax-Supported Colleges & Universities of America

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BULLETIN  
OF  
THE NATIONAL COUNCIL  
ON  
RELIGION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

(Formerly the National Council of Schools of Religion)

IV

The Undergraduate Courses in  
Religion at the Tax-supported  
Colleges and Universities of  
America

By CHARLES FOSTER KENT

on the basis of a survey made by  
MILLAR BURROWS  
National Fellow in Religion



## THE UNDERGRADUATE COURSES IN RELIGION AT THE TAX-SUPPORTED COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES OF AMERICA

### Aim of the Survey

The aim of this survey is to show to what extent religion is taught in regularly accredited undergraduate courses in the tax-supported colleges and universities of the United States and how far these institutions during the academic year 1922-23 were able in practice to meet the students' need for systematic instruction in religion. The survey is based on the courses offered and elected during that year.

Theoretically these institutions are not supposed to teach religion, and in the main they do not, but gradually courses, religious and semi-religious, are beginning to permeate their curricula.

The forces behind this broad movement are many and varied. Primary, perhaps, is the desire to remove the stigma of godlessness with which the state colleges and universities have been branded. More potent still is the desire of their administrative officers to fill the serious gap in every curriculum where religion is not taught. Sometimes the students or their parents demand that certain religious courses be given. Many individual courses are offered because of the personal interest of presidents, deans or instructors. Public opinion, often more effective than law, supports those courses, and they are increasing rather than waning. In several institutions the offerings in 1923-24 are much richer than in 1922-23.

It is planned to issue a similar bulletin every five or ten years to indicate the progress attained during the intervening period.

### Scope of Survey

The survey includes all of the one hundred and eighty-one tax-supported institutions in the United States that offer four years of work of college grade and have the authority to grant degrees. Complete information is given regarding one hundred and fifty-seven, partial regarding twenty, and none regarding four, whose catalogues could not be secured.

The difficulty in making a clear-cut distinction between religious and non-religious courses is fully recognized. In their practical religious values, courses, for example, in mathematics or geology, are now and then so taught that they are more effective than courses in the Philosophy of Religion or Biblical Literature.

Regarding a course in the Literary Study of the Bible, one college official writes, "It is a course in literature and includes nothing that could be interpreted as instruction in religion." This statement is undoubtedly true of others here listed as courses in religion. Their effect upon the students depends not so much upon the subject matter as upon the personality and attitude of the individual teacher. Upon these the present survey throws no light. It indicates rather how far the field is opening in these institutions for the broad inductive study of the history, literature, philosophy and psychology of religion, as well as of the theory and methods of religious education and the practical application of religious principles to modern life.

Even with this understanding, the definition of what constitutes a course in religion must of necessity be somewhat arbitrary. For the present purpose the following criteria have been adopted:

- (1) Only courses which deal directly and primarily with religion, religious literature or history of religion or which approach such subjects as ethics, education, philosophy, psychology or sociology definitely and avowedly from the point of view of religion are included.
- (2) Courses referring only incidentally to religion or including religion among several other subjects, as, for example, courses in ancient civilization, are omitted.
- (3) Courses in Hebrew, Aramaic and New Testament Greek are included, because they contribute directly to the interpretation of the thought and teaching of the Bible. All other language courses are omitted.

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#### Sources of Inform

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The number class sessions per weeks. For exam which requires th through the year week for a term o

The number refers only to th Bible Colleges or which may be cou toward a college o given by the colle of them may be o

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- (4) All courses offered by independent religious schools or foundations for which credit is given by tax-supported institutions are included. All voluntary courses are omitted.
- (5) Courses announced, but not given in 1922-23, or else offered in graduate, extension or correspondence departments or summer schools, are omitted, for the survey is limited to regular college courses, intended primarily for undergraduates.

### Sources of Information and Terminology

The data has been gathered from the college and university catalogues and has been supplemented by detailed facts secured through correspondence with the presidents, deans and registrars of these institutions. The source of information is, therefore, in each case official.

The number of semester hours represents the number of class sessions per week in a course of one semester of eighteen weeks. For example, a course of two semester hours is one which requires thirty-six sessions of the class, one per week through the year, two per week for a semester, or three per week for a term or quarter of twelve weeks.

The number of semester hours allowed toward graduation refers only to the courses given by outside agencies such as Bible Colleges or Chairs, supported by religious organizations, which may be counted as a part of the individual students' credit toward a college or university degree. Where the courses are given by the college or university itself, it is assumed that all of them may be counted toward a degree.

The total enrollment in religion is the sum of the enrollment figures for all courses in religion, but does not indicate the number of different students taking each course, because the same student may be enrolled in more than one course.

The total college enrollment is the number of undergraduates in that branch of the university in which the courses in religion are given or accredited. In some cases this includes more than what is known as the College. In the University of Pennsylvania, for example, it includes both the College and the School of Education, because courses in religion are offered in both.

**Group I. The Fifty-four State Universities and the State Colleges for Women**

(Complete data given for forty-six, partial for eight)

Only five universities offered no courses in religion in 1922-23; the University of Georgia, the University of Idaho, Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, New Mexico University and the University of Wyoming. In the southern branch of the University of California, no courses in religion are offered.

Three universities offer courses in religion which were not given in 1922-23: University of Arizona, University of Arkansas and the University of North Carolina.

**UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA**

Enrollment: College 903	undergraduate departments 1,586
Courses	Semester Hours
English Bible .....	6
	Enrollment
	54

**ALABAMA COLLEGE**

Enrollment: College 427		
Courses	Semester Hours	Enrollment
The Gospels .....	4	43
Acts .....	4	28
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Totals .....	8	71

**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**

Enrollment: College 5,225	undergraduate departments 13,568
Courses	Semester Hours
Primitive Religions .....	3
Bible in English Literature.....	6
History of Buddhism.....	1
Biblical Archaeology .....	1
First Hebrew Commonwealth.....	1
Elementary Hebrew .....	6
Second Year Hebrew .....	4
Religion and Mythology of Egypt, Babylonia and Assyria.....	4
	<hr/>
Totals .....	26
	Enrollment
	401

**UNIVERSITY OF**

Enrollment: College 1  
Courses  
The Medieval Church  
Reformation ...

**UNIVERSITY OF**

Enrollment: College ( )  
Courses  
Greek Testament . . . .  
Literary Study of the B

Totals .

**UNIVERSITY OF**

Enrollment: College 40  
Courses  
Old Testament History  
New Testament History

Totals .

**FLORIDA STATE**

Enrollment: College 78  
Courses  
Biblical History, Old Te  
Biblical History, New Te  
The Bible as Literature.  
Psychology of Religion.

Totals ..

**GEORGIA STATE**

Enrollment: College (U)  
Courses  
Bible, I (required) . . . .  
Bible, II

**UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY**

(Rutgers College and New Jersey College for Women)

Enrollment: College 1,147

Courses	Semester Hours	Enrollment
English Bible and Ethics.....	2	67
Biblical Literature .....	6	6
Totals .....	8	73

**NORTH CAROLINA COLLEGE FOR WOMEN**

Enrollment: College 1,285

Courses	Semester Hours	Enrollment
Literary Study of the Bible.....	2	35

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA**

Enrollment: College 1,158      undergraduate departments 1,448

Courses	Semester Hours	Enrollment
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**Wesley College**

Social Teachings of Jesus.....	4	38
Old Testament History.....	8	9
Psychology of Religion.....	6	5
History of Christian Progress....	4	15
Christian Thought .....	4	11
Work and Teaching of the Apostles	2	30
Social Message of the Old Testa-		
ment Prophets .....	2	3
The Psychology of Prayer.....	3	15
History of Christian Missions....	2	19
Totals .....	35	145

**OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**

Enrollment: College (Unknown)      undergraduate dept's (Unknown)

Courses	Semester Hours	Enrollment
The English Bible.....	3.3	
Ancient Christianity .....	3.3	
Roman Religion .....	2	
Development of Hebrew Ideas in		
the Old Testament.....	3.3	
Origin and Development of Re-		
ligious Ideas .....	3.3	
Origins of Christian Thought....	2	
Philosophy of Religion.....	3.3	
Total .....	20.5	

**OHIO**

Enrollment: College 1,63

Courses

**Ohio U**

Life of Christ.....  
 Early Church History...  
 Religious Education ...  
 Psychology of Religion..  
 Philosophy of Religion..  
 Messages of the Prophets  
 The Teaching of Jesus..  
 How the Bible Grew...  
 The Bible as Literature.

Totals ...

Enrollment: College 707

Courses

Comparative Study of L  
 igions .....

Philosophy of Religion..

Totals ...

**UNIVE**

Enrollment: College 2,2

Courses

Literary Study of the Ne  
 ment .....

Religious Development o  
 Testament, Pre-Exil

Religious Development o  
 Testament, Post-Exil

Life and Teachings of Je  
 Story-Telling in Religio  
 tion .....

Christian Evidences ...  
 The Church and Social Se

Totals ...

where the population is more homogeneous than in other sections.

While the number of courses in religion offered in tax-supported colleges and universities is in many ways astonishing, it is equally evident that they do not adequately meet the needs of the quarter of a million students enrolled in them. They simply represent a hopeful and significant beginning. The possibility, however, of providing satisfactory courses for this vast and exceedingly important body of students is by no means discouraging. The success of any endeavor to supply this need depends primarily upon the interest of the administrative officers, faculties and friends of these institutions. In most institutions this interest is already present and is rapidly developing.

The situation calls in the first place for a careful study of the problem, of the possibilities and of the limitations presented by each individual institution. The next step is to prepare a carefully worked out program for the development of a department or school of religion within or at the gates of that institution. Above all, it requires the careful selection and training of certain of the ablest graduates of our American colleges and universities, that they may be fully qualified as teachers to interpret the history, literature, philosophy, psychology and the practical application of the principles of religion to the problems confronting twentieth century college students. At present the resources of the National Council are being largely devoted to meeting this need.

In certain colleges and universities, where the state laws and public opinion are favorable, the department of religion can be developed from within. In others a head of the department or the dean of the school of religion, whose task will be to correlate the available resources of the college or university and to offer the courses required to satisfy the deeper spiritual needs of the students, will have to be secured on the basis of a private endowment.

In the light of existing precedents, such a department head or dean can in many institutions, be made a member of the state college or university faculty, so that his courses can be announced in their catalogs and given in their buildings. Already the Disciples have endowed chairs of religion at the

University of Virginia and are regularly incorporated

In states like Michigan that no person shall be of a teacher of religion stands, the department be privately endowed. Such a school provides students in institutions what the week-day schooling of elementary and our American cities.

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The second plan definite educational undergraduate problem College at the University of Missouri, in conditions, although the have felt so strongly have asked other den and to share in the di

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University of Virginia and the University of Oklahoma which are regularly incorporated in these institutions.

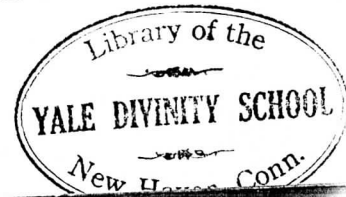
In states like Michigan, where the state constitution rules that no person shall be compelled "to pay taxes for the support of a teacher of religion," it is clear that as long as the law stands, the department or school of religion to be legal, must be privately endowed and established outside the university. Such a school provides in form adapted to the needs of the students in institutions of higher learning in the state, precisely what the week-day schools of religion are offering for the training of elementary and public school pupils in one hundred of our American cities.

This aspect of the problem is being worked out in three different ways. The first plan is to extend the functions of the different denominational foundations, so that they may offer courses that are credited by the state institutions. At the state universities of Kansas, Texas and Illinois and Ohio University this plan appears to be working well, but at Ohio State University it has been abandoned.

The second plan seeks to provide permanent endowment, definite educational standards and a united approach to the undergraduate problem. It is illustrated by the Wesley Bible College at the University of North Dakota and the Bible College of Missouri, in connection with the University of Missouri. These were built and are supported by individual denominations, although the authorities of the Bible College of Missouri have felt so strongly the handicap of sectarianism that they have asked other denominations to join them on their faculty and to share in the direction of the College.

The student reaction to the offering of the Bible College of Missouri and of the Eugene Bible University is exceedingly significant. The first follows the historical, literary and scientific methods adopted in most modern educational institutions. Even though students in the University of Missouri are limited to fourteen semester hours' credit for work done in the College, between four and five hundred were enrolled in 1922-23.

The University of Oregon allows its students to elect forty semester hours in Eugene Bible University, where the older dogmatic methods prevail, but not one has availed himself of the privilege. It is also significant that the Bible College of



Missouri attracts the largest proportion of University graduates found in any state university center.

The third plan is that which is being worked out in connection with the University of Michigan. It is a thoroughly cooperative approach to the problem of education in religion at the tax-supported institutions of higher learning in the state. On its Board of Trustees are Protestants, Roman Catholics and Jews. Three leading deans, three professors, sixteen alumni of the University and eight other representative business and professional men of the state constitute that Board. Although it is a distinct institution, the aim is from the first to put its work on the same educational basis as that of the University and to give the undergraduates an opportunity to come into personal, as well as classroom contact with instructors who have already demonstrated their ability to teach religion.

Experience will probably prove that the problem of religious instruction in these tax-supported colleges and universities will be worked out in diverse ways in different institutions. In making surveys of their religious problems and resources, in developing a constructive educational policy adapted to local conditions and in securing and training teachers of religion, the National Council is ready, when requested by their administrative officers, to cooperate to the limit of its time and resources.