educators are free to foster discussion through critical comments and questions.

Worse yet, students would be encouraged to report the names of teachers who do not comment and fail to remain neutral. It is ironic that the editor is urging the Religious Left to emulate the Religious Right by encouraging students to ostracize teachers who offend their religious sensibilities by naming names. If I were a teacher, it would be very hard for me to remain neutral about a process that could get me fired if I didn’t keep my mouth shut.

In urging this anti-intellectual approach to inclusivity, the editor has in fact proven precisely the opposite of what he intended. If public school teachers cannot be allowed to truly teach religion, what better proof can there be that religion should not, and cannot, be taught in the public schools?

How in the world would such a course be graded? If a teacher marks a student down, inevitably some religious parent will claim that the teacher did so out of religious animus. The existence of school boards tends to disprove Darwin—most school board members have never developed spines. A teacher faced with such an accusation will find him/herself in precisely the same position as a teacher faced with a false charge of sexual impropriety: out of a job. And what of the false accusation that the teacher intersected his/her religious opinions in a conversation witnessed only by the accuser and the accused? Same result. If we give students an opportunity to get teachers fired, sooner or later they will do exactly that. I have a number of friends who teach high school in good schools, and the environment is truly frightening.

A major problem I have with “teaching” religion in the public schools is the question of who judges whether the course material honestly and fairly presents each religion, warts and all. Case in point: the Mormon Church.

I just finished reading Under the Banner of Heaven, by Jon Krakauer. A critical history of the Mormon Church, the book documents that there are serious reasons to believe that Brigham Young personally ordered the massacre of some 200 members of the Fancher wagon train in 1857. Twelve years later, there are equally serious reasons to believe that some perpetrators of that massacre also murdered three members of the expedition that first navigated the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon within days of their climbing the north slope of the canyon from the river below. There is also serious reason to believe that the highest levels of the Church were aware of the murders and covered them up.

In putting together materials for the course you propose, don’t you think the students have a right to know of these very grave allegations? If so, who will tell them? Not the Mormon Church; it is official church doctrine that it is permissible, indeed required, to lie for the Church if telling the truth.