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HOW SOME HIGH SCHOOLERS ARE TAUGHT THE LAW

A currently-used high school textbook called "Street Law: A Course in Practical Law" is the wrong textbook at the wrong time and the wrong grade level. While it might have some value in law school or theological school (if the book's heavy bias could be overlooked), it is a wrong selection for high schoolers because it teaches them to challenge and doubt the law intead of to obey it. The book wastes the time of the students on rare or exotic problems when their time could be better spent in learning obedience to the laws until they have the maturity to question them responsibly.

The textbook boasts that it gives "practical" information. There is nothing "practical" about the way it induces discussion and even "role-playing" of bizarre situations which students would be unlikely to encounter if they lived to be a hundred.

Page 5 requires the students to develop arguments both for the defendants and for the state in a criminal prosecution for murder and cannibalism of one sailor by two other sailors who were all adrift on a raft without food or water for 25 days. The textbook poses questions which could be interpreted as leading the students to believe that, in this once-in-a-century circumstance, the murder/cannibalism might be moral (to save the lives of the survivors) even though it is illegal.

Page 40 tells the incredible case of a child drowning in the lake, while her father, her girlfriend who pushed her in, and a champion swimmer stood by and watched her die.

Page 44 poses the problem of "a religious group that passes poisonous snakes around during church services." A girl takes her boyfriend to the service after falsely assuring him that the snakes were harmless, while believing that the snakes bite only nonbelievers. The student could reasonably infer that her behavior is normal for "true believers" and that snakes are a characteristic feature of church services.

Page 54 is a sympathetic presentation of the euthanasia of a woman who was depressed because of poor health. The student is told that the husband really "loved his wife" so much that he helped her get into their automobile, close the garage door, and "commit

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suicide" by inhaling carbon monoxide fumes.

Page 181 asks high school students to discuss the reasons for changing or keeping the law that a husband may not be criminally prosecuted for raping his own wife. This is not an appropriate subject for high school discussion.

The section on Family Law tells the students that it is "now difficult, if not impossible, to define the typical American family" because of the "great diversity in family life" -- "unmarried couples, trial marriages, communal living arrangements, and other alternative lifestyles have become more common." (pp. 167-8) Most of the section is devoted to bigamy, divorce, annulments, common law marriage, elopements, illegitimacy, spouse abuse, family planning, abortion, child abuse, separation, and the "right to die."

The net effect of the section on Family Law is to encourage acceptance of the least normal and least happy human relationships, while failing to explain and defend the fabric of laws designed to protect traditional family relationships. It is no service either to the children from problem homes or from traditional homes to require classroom discussion of matters that should be within the realm of privacy.

The book is offensive to religious people. It impugns the Judeo-Christian respect for human life by casual descriptions of murder, abortion, suicide, and euthanasia. Page 53 tells the student that sex crimes which occur in private are "largely unenforceable."

"Street Law" has a depressing impact because it forces children to discuss and "role-play" adult immoralities. "Street Law" contributes to students' emotional insecurity by requiring them to make their own moral judgments about what is right and wrong in the context of situation ethics.

"Street Law" breeds disrespect for the law by driving wedges between morality and legality. Page 54 states that euthanasia is illegal but that some people advocate it as "humane" while other people feel it is "a highly controversial moral and religious issue." The book does not mention people who believe euthanasia is wrong.

The last section of the book provides names, addresses, and favorable descriptions of some 25 extreme liberal litigating and lobbying organizations (called "public interest groups") such as the ACLU and Common Cause. "Street Law" is basically a recruiting technique for such groups.

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