

A SURVEY OF 2017-2018
SAUDI MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL
TEXTBOOKS



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NOVEMBER 2018

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WHO WE ARE

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) that monitors the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad. USCIRF uses international standards to monitor violations of religious freedom or belief abroad and makes policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and Congressional leaders of both political parties. The Commission's work is supported by a professional, nonpartisan staff of regional subject matter experts. USCIRF is separate from the State Department, although the Department's Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom is a non-voting, *ex officio* Commissioner.

WHAT IS RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Inherent in religious freedom is the right to believe or not believe as one's conscience leads, and live out one's beliefs openly, peacefully, and without fear. Freedom of religion or belief is an expansive right that includes the freedoms of thought, conscience, expression, association, and assembly. While religious freedom is America's first freedom, it also is a core human right international law and treaty recognize; a necessary component of U.S. foreign policy and America's commitment to defending democracy and freedom globally; and a vital element of national security, critical to ensuring a more peaceful, prosperous, and stable world.

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INTRODUCTION

For more than 15 years, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has reviewed and analyzed content in Saudi government textbooks that were found to promote hatred and violence toward religious minorities and others. The results of this analysis have appeared in USCIRF's annual reports and separate stand-alone reports on the topic. Moreover, inflammatory language is not confined to textbooks distributed within Saudi Arabia. Saudi textbooks containing such language continue to surface in numerous countries around the world. For example, in 2008, USCIRF [reported](#) on passages inciting intolerance and violence in high school textbooks used at the Islamic Saudi Academy (ISA) in Alexandria, Virginia. At the time, the ISA operated under the auspices of the Saudi Embassy in Washington, DC and used some textbooks published by the Saudi Ministry of Education.

For years, the Saudi government has stated publicly and privately that it was making progress by reviewing and revising its textbooks. In July 2006, the Saudi government [confirmed](#) to the United States that, by 2008, it would revise and update its textbooks to remove all language disparaging non-Muslims or promoting hatred

toward other religions and religious groups. Nevertheless, this and other subsequent deadlines were not met. Since then, USCIRF has acknowledged the Saudi government's incremental progress in revising its textbooks that reflect an overall trend toward greater tolerance, but efforts remain incomplete.

In addition, USCIRF has consistently raised its concern in meetings with Saudi government officials during visits to the Kingdom in 2007, 2011, 2013, 2017, and 2018 and during numerous meetings with Saudi officials in Washington, DC. In March 2018, USCIRF delivered a letter conveying concern over intolerant content in the 2017-2018 textbooks to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman during his visit to Washington, DC.

In May 2018, USCIRF released a [Special Report](#) on select high school textbooks identifying several areas of concern. This report by an independent contractor examined textbooks from the 2017-2018 academic year. Unlike past revisions to textbooks where progress had been made, these most recent texts contained several intolerant and inflammatory passages that are cited by the report. Overall, these textbooks represented backsliding from earlier versions that were trending toward more tolerance and understanding.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This follow-on contracted study reviews 22 middle and high school textbooks published by the Saudi government for the 2017-2018 academic year, including the 12 high school books previously reviewed by USCIRF in its May 2018 [Special Report](#). The books number more than 3,000 pages and primarily focus on religious subjects. For comparison, the study also includes two middle school texts on social and national studies.

Intolerant content is scattered throughout many of the books. This intolerance is reflected in the commentary and interpretations offered by the textbooks. Whereas the middle school curriculum and books generally dwell on developing “right” belief, the high school books focus on inculcating appropriate responses by society and the individual to those with “wrong” beliefs. They teach that those who worship differently from the Saudi state-sanctioned interpretation of Islam are polytheists who will go to hell regardless

of their good deeds. Shi’a and Sufi veneration of the gravesites of prophets is dismissed as “heresy” while criticism of Islam is deemed “apostasy,” for which the textbook endorses the death penalty. The textbooks caution students to avoid friendship with members of other religions. They also encourage both violent and non-violent *jihad* against non-believers. Finally, the passages espouse the death penalty for women who have an affair, and for gay men.

The textbooks examined in this study are more intolerant than the six religious books from 2012–2014 reviewed in a previous internal analysis by USCIRF. They are even more intolerant than the 2011–2012 textbooks [studied](#) by the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD), which identified many troubling passages. The 2017–2018 books are more akin to Saudi textbooks from the early years of the previous decade before the Saudi government promised to reform its curricula.

METHOD

Twenty-two books are included in this review. All but two have to do with religious studies, which is where most of the worrisome content was found in previous years:

Middle School Curriculum (2017–2018)

Grade 1

- Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) – 1st Semester
- Hadith – 1st Semester
- Hadith – 2nd Semester
- Interpretation (*Tafsir*) – 1st Semester
- Interpretation (*Tafsir*) – 2nd Semester
- Monotheism (*Tawhid*) – 1st Semester
- Monotheism (*Tawhid*) – 2nd Semester
- Social and National Studies – 1st Semester

Grade 2

- Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) – 1st Semester
- Social and National Studies – 2nd Semester

Standard High School Curriculum (2017–2018)

Shared Program

- Hadith 1
- Interpretation (*Tafsir*) 1
- Monotheism (*Tawhid*) 1
- Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) 1

Specialized Program

- Hadith 2
- Interpretation (*Tafsir*) 2
- Monotheism (*Tawhid*) 2
- Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) 2

Optional Program

- Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) 3

Quarterly High School Curriculum (2017–2018)

- Monotheism (*Tawhid*) 1 - Quarterly
- Qur'an Sciences (*Ulum al-Qur'an*) 1 - Quarterly
- Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) 1 - Quarterly

The following discussion contains representative material arranged by theme and concludes by comparing the 2017–2018 textbooks with previous textbooks from the early 2010s.

Polytheism

One of the principle tenets of Wahhabism is the worship of God alone. Failure to do so is condemned as “polytheism” (*shirk*), worshipping something alongside God. Polytheists, according to Wahhabis, are not merely people who worship multiple gods; they are also people who worship God improperly (i.e., equate a non-Islamic deity with the God of Islam), including Jews, Christians, and even fellow believers like the Shi’a and Sufis.¹

In Wahhabi theology, polytheists of all stripes are destined for hell regardless of their good deeds. These doctrines are reflected in passages found in the middle school textbooks on monotheism:

فتوحيد الله تعالى هو أساس قبول كل عمل، فإن الله تعالى لا يقبل عمل المشركين وإن كان في ظاهره عملا صالحا، كالصدقة والبر ونحو ذلك	“Belief in one God is the basis for any act to be accepted, for God does not accept the actions of polytheists even if the act is outwardly righteous, such as charity, and kind acts, etc.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 1st Semester): 18)
الجنة لا يدخلها إلا أهل التوحيد، وقد حرمها الله تعالى على المشركين، والدليل على هذا قول الله تعالى انه من يشرك بالله فقد حرم الله عليه الجنة ومأواه النار وما للظالمين من انصار	“Paradise is only entered by those who believe in one God, and it is forbidden by God for the polytheists. The evidence of this is in the verse, ‘God has forbidden paradise for whomever equates any other deity with God. His abode will be hellfire and those oppressors will have no supporters.’” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 1st Semester): 32)
أن الله تعالى لا يقبل أي عمل وإن كان في ظاهره صالحا إلا بالتوحيد	“God does not accept any action, even if it looks good on its face, unless it is accompanied by monotheism.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 1st Semester): 49)
الشرك الاكبر (1) يخرج من الاسلام (2) لا يغفر لصاحبه ابدا. ولكن من تاب منه قبل موته توبة صحيحة تاب الله عليه (3) يحبط جميع الاعمال (4) صاحبه خالد مخلد في النار	“The greatest polytheism [shirk]: 1) It places one outside of Islam 2) One who professes it is not forgiven for it at all; but, if someone repents properly before he dies, God will forgive him. 3) It supplants all his other actions 4) He is banished forever to hellfire.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 1st Semester): 75)
لا يقبل الله تعالى مع الشرك عملا وان كان في ظاهره صالحا كالصدقة والبر	“God does not accept any action by someone who equates other deities called God with Him, even if the act is good on its face, such as charity or kind acts.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 1st Semester): 78)
حديث عبد الله بن مسعود (ر) قال سألت النبي (ص) اي الذنب اعظم عند الله؟ قال ان تجعل لله ندا وهو خلقك قلت ان ذلك لعظيم قلت ثم اي؟ قال وان تقتل ولدك تخاف ان يطعم معك قلت ثم اي؟ قال ان تزاني حليلة جارك	“A hadith by Abd Allah bin Masud says, ‘I asked the Prophet what is the greatest sin in the sight of God? He said to equate any other being with God because He created you. Then I said, that is truly great. And what is next? He said to kill your son because you cannot feed him [i.e., abortion]. Then I said what is next? He said to sleep with your neighbor’s wife.’” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 1st Semester): 81)
من مات وهو يشرك بالله تعالى شركا اكبر فهو في النار خالد مخلدا فيها	“Whoever dies while still committing the greatest (kind of) polytheism is in hellfire forever.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 1st Semester): 82)
لا ينفع مع الشرك عمل صالح فمن مات وهو يشرك بالله الشرك الاكبر فهو من اهل النار ولو كان من اعبد الناس	“A righteous act does not benefit [i.e., cancel out] polytheism, and so whoever dies while adhering to the greatest [kind of] polytheism is among the people of hell even if he is the most worshipful of people.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 1st Semester): 83)
وصف الله تعالى الشرك بانه ضلال بعيد....انه بالشرك قد ابتعد عن الحق والهدى بعدا شديدا وبهذا يكون قد ابتعد عن رحمة الله ومغفرته فلا يرجى لصاحبه رحمة ولا مغفرة	“God described polytheism as an error.... Through polytheism, one is extremely remote from the truth and the light, and in this way he will be far from the mercy of God and His forgiveness, and he will not be shown any mercy and forgiveness.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 1st Semester): 84)

¹ For an overview of the Wahhabi interpretation of shirk and its political manifestations in Saudi history, see Elizabeth Sirriyeh, “Wahhabis, Unbelievers and the Problems of Exclusivism,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 16.2 (1989): 123-132.

Heretics

The middle school textbooks on monotheism are especially critical of Shi`a and Sufi Muslims for venerating the graves of their imams and saints and for seeking their intercession with God. Wahhabis consider these practices the greatest form of polytheism, placing one outside of the faith. The textbooks reflect this perspective but do not explicitly say whether someone who engages in these practices is an apostate.

<p>نهى النبي (ص) عن اتخاذ قبره عيداً لئلا يكون ذلك ذريعةً ووسيلةً لعبادته من دون الله تعالى...تحريم اتخاذ قبر النبي (ص) عيداً بان يعتاد المجيء إليه على وجه مخصوص ومن ذلك: ان يتخذ قبره عيداً للصلاة والدعاء وغير ذلك من وسائل الشرك</p>	<p>“The Prophet forbade his grave from being the site of any festival lest it become a pretext and a means to worship him aside from God... It is forbidden to use the Prophet’s grave for a festival by doing things associated (with festivals) like using his grave for a festival for prayer and other means of polytheism [shirk].” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 1st Semester): 99)</p>
<p>فإذا كان الذين اوتوا نصيباً من الكتاب يؤمنون بالجبت والطاغوت كما في الآية الاولى واذا كان اليهود ممن عبد الطاغوت كما في الآية الثانية واذا كان في الامم السابقة من اتخذ المساجد على القبور كما في الآية الثالثة فان ذلك سيكون في هذه الامة</p>	<p>“If there were people who received a portion of the scriptures and believed in idols, as stated in the first verse, and if the Jews were among those who worshipped idols, as in the second verse, and if there were those in previous religious communities who used graves as places of worship, as in the third verse, then that will happen in this religious community as well.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 1st Semester): 105)</p>
<p>الامثلة التي وقع فيها الغلاة في الانبياء والصالحين كثيرة منها: (1) الغلو في النبي (ص) بدعائه او الاستغاثة به من دون الله تعالى (2) الغلو في النبي (ص) بالحلف به من دون الله تعالى (3) الغلو في عيسى بن مريم (ع) بجعله الها او ابن الاله (4) الغلو في الاولياء والصالحين بالبناء على قبورهم وطواف بها والسجود عليها ودعائهم من دون الله عز وتقدس</p>	<p>“There are many examples of what those who excessively venerate and exaggerate [al-ghulat] did with regard to the prophets and the righteous: 1) Exaggeration regarding the Prophet by praying to him or seeking his help aside from God. 2) Exaggeration regarding the Prophet by swearing by him and not by God. 3) Exaggeration regarding Jesus by making him a god or a son of God. 4) Exaggeration regarding the saints and the righteous by building structures on their graves, circumambulating them, prostrating on them, and praying to them without God, powerful and holy.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 – 2nd Semester): 12)</p>
<p>الغلو في آل بيت النبي (ص) برفعهم فوق مكانته التي أعطاهم الله تعالى من أسباب الشرك بالله تعالى، وقد غلا فيهم أناس فوقعوا في الشرك بالله تعالى، ومن صور ذلك: (أ) دعاؤهم من دون الله تعالى، والاستغاثة بهم في الشدائد، وهذا شرك في الألوهية. (ب) زعم أن لهم القدرة على التصرف في الكون، وتدبير الخلائق، وهذا شرك في الربوبية. (ت) زعم أن لهم القدرة على معرفة الغيب، أو أنهم يعرفون ما سيكون إلى يوم القيامة، وهذا شرك في الأسماء والصفات</p>	<p>“Exaggeration regarding the Family of the Prophet by exalting them above the station God gave them is one of the causes of polytheism [shirk]. People excessively venerated them and fell into polytheism. Among the examples are: A) Praying to those other than God and asking them for help during times of hardship. This is polytheism regarding God’s divinity. B) Claiming that they have the power to manipulate reality and command created things. This is polytheism regarding God’s lordship. C) Claiming that they have the ability to know the unseen realm, or that they know what will happen until the Day of Judgment. This is polytheism regarding the names and attributes (of God).” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 – 2nd Semester): 18)</p>
<p>حرمت الشريعة الاسلامية جميع الوسائل الودية الى الشرك ولو كان ذلك الفعل عبادة لله تعالى ومن ذلك: اتخاذ القبور مكاناً يتقرب فيه الى الله تعالى بالصلاة فقد نهت الشريعة عن ذلك اشد النهي وحذر...منه الرسول الكريم</p>	<p>“The Islamic Shari’ah has banned all the means that lead to polytheism [shirk], even if they include a way of worshipping God. Among them are using graves as places where people get closer to God through prayer. The Shari’ah has strictly forbidden this, and the Noble Messenger warned against this.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 – 2nd Semester): 20)</p>
<p>الذين يتخذون قبور الأنبياء والصالحين مساجد هم شرار الخلق عند الله تعالى</p>	<p>“Those who use the graves of the prophets and the righteous as mosques are evil people in the eyes of God.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 – 2nd Semester): 20)</p>

<p>لماذا كانوا شرار الخلق عند الله تعالى؟ كان هؤلاء شرار الخلق عند الله لأسباب، منها الأول: أن اتخاذ القبور مساجد من أعظم أسباب وقوعهم وإيقاع غيرهم في الشرك بالله تعالى، فيكونون قد ضلوا بأنفسهم وأضلوا غيرهم من حيث كان الواجب عليهم هداية أنفسهم وهداية الآخرين الثاني: أنهم قد أدخلوا الشرك على أنفسهم من حيث يظنون أنهم يحصنون صنعا، فهم يظنون عملهم عبادة وقربة إلى الله تعالى، فيجتهدون فيه، ويدعون إليه، وهذا غاية الجهل والضلال الثالث: أنهم يفعلهم هذا يلبسون على الناس، ويوقعونهم في الشرك بالله تعالى. في حين أنهم في الصورة الخارجية يعبدون الله، ويدعون إليه، فضلوا في أنفسهم، وتسببوا في إضلال غيرهم فاشتبه فعلهم على الجاهل، ولو دعواهم إلى الشرك ابتداء وجهارا لم يقبلوه منهم، فتوصلوا إلى الشرك والدعوة إليه بطريق ظاهره الإصلاح، وباطنه الإفساد والإضلال الرابع: أنهم تسببوا في اتخاذ أطهر الأماكن وأفضلها وهي بيوت الله تعالى لمعادته والإشراك به، فبدل أن يذكر فيها اسم الله، وتتخذ لعبادته والتذلل له والخضوع له وتوحيده، تسببوا أن يذكر فيها اسم غير الله تعالى من الطواغيت</p>	<p>“Why were these people evil in the eyes of God? They were the worst in the sight of God for the following reasons: 1) Treat the graves as mosques, which was one of the greatest reasons they fell into polytheism and made others do so. So they led themselves and others astray when they instead had an obligation to guide themselves and others. 2) They introduced polytheism among themselves while they thought they were doing good. They thought their work was actually worship and drawing closer to God, so they strove for and prayed for it. This is a goal of ignorance and darkness. 3) They are misguiding people, and they are making them fall into polytheism although on the outside they are worshipping God and praying to Him. They have led themselves and others astray to polytheism. They disguise what they’re doing to the ignorant, and even if they publicly call for polytheism in the beginning and are rejected, they continue their polytheism in a way that is outwardly a reform but is really corruption and error. 4) They took some of the holiest and best places, which are the houses of God, to transgress against Him and practice polytheism. Instead of mentioning His name in these places—worshipping him, humbling themselves and submitting to Him and His oneness, they caused these sites to be places where idols rather than the name of God are mentioned.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 – 2nd Semester): 21)</p>
<p>حديث عبد الله بن عباس (ر) قال: «لعن رسول الله (ص) زائرات القبور والمتخذين عليها المساجد والسرج» ولعن الذين يوقدن السرج عند القبور لان ذلك من الغلو الذي يؤدي لاي تعظيمها وعبادتها</p>	<p>“A hadith by Abd Allah Ibn Abbas said, ‘The Messenger of God has cursed women who visit the graves and whoever uses them as mosques and puts lamps on them.’ He cursed those who lit lamps on them because that excess leads one to glorifying them and worshipping such places.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 – 2nd Semester): 22)</p>
<p>عقوبة المصورين دلت الأدلة الشرعية على عدة عقوبات للمصورين يوم القيامة، وهي (1) أنهم أشد الناس عذابا يوم القيامة، فعن عائشة (ر) أن النبي «(ص) قال: «أشد الناس عذابا يوم القيامة الذين يضاھون بخلق الله (2) أن الله تعالى يخلق يوم القيامة بعدد كل صورة صورها نفسا) يعذب بها المصور في جهنم، فعن عبد الله بن عباس (ر) قال: سمعت رسول الله (ص) يقول: «كل مصور النار، يجعل له، بكل «صورة صورها، نفسا فتعذبه في جهنم (3) ان المصور يكلف يوم القيامة ان ينضح فيما صوره الروح وليس ...بقادر على ذلك ولكنه تعذيب له وتعجيز</p>	<p>“Punishment of the person who makes images The Shari’ah prooftexts indicate several punishments on the Day of Judgment for those who make images: 1) They are the people tortured most on the Day of Judgment ... 2) On the Day of Judgment, God creates a torture in hell for every image a soul has made ... 3) The one who makes images will have to breathe life into those pictures on the Day of Judgment, and he will not be able to, but it will be a torture and punishment for him.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 – 2nd Semester): 37-8)</p>
<p>الرجاء الشركي وهو: رجاء غير الله تعالى فيما هو من خصائص الله تعالى وهذا شرك اكبر مخرج عن ملة الاسلام امثله (1) رجاء المشركين الهتهم الباطلة في جلب نفع او دفع ضر (2) رجاء القبوريين من الاولياء ان يغفروا لهم الزلات وينجوهم من الملمات في الدنيا او في الآخرة</p>	<p>“Polytheistic supplication Supplicating anyone other than God for something that is in God’s hands. This is the most deviant polytheism [shirk] putting one outside of the religion of Islam. Examples include: 1) The polytheists supplicating their fake gods to attract benefits and push away evil. 2) The supplication of those who go to graves of saints to ask for forgiveness and to save them from the pitfalls of life of the afterlife.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 – 2nd Semester): 63)</p>

Apostasy

In classical Islamic law, apostasy from Islam is punishable by death if the apostate does not repent.² The 2017—2018 high school texts endorse this penalty, including for those who make fun of God and His Prophet.

حد الردة هو القتل لا فرق ذلك بين الرجل والمرأة	"The punishment for apostasy is death. There is no distinction in that between a man and a woman." (Jurisprudence (1): 277)
قتل المرتد حيث إن درء مفسدة وجوده كإفساد غيره من اهله وولده وفتنة الناس به وتجريتهم على الدين أولى من مصلحة بقائه التي فيها من المصالح	"Killing the apostate, since fending off the corruption of his existence—like corrupting others among his people and children, causing dissension among the people, and making them risk religion—is better than the benefit of him remaining..." (Jurisprudence (3), 46)
القتل إن لم يتب	"Death [for the apostate] if he does not repent." (Jurisprudence (1) - Quarterly: 137)
المستهزئ بالله وآياته ورسوله مرتد لا يقبل له أي عذر فإما أن يتوب و أما أن يقتل كفرا	"Anyone who makes fun of God, His verses, or His Prophet is an apostate. No excuse is acceptable from him regardless of whether he repents or is killed for infidelity." (Interpretation (1): 109)

² For an overview, see David Cook, "Apostasy from Islam: A Historical Perspective," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 31 (2006): 248-288.

Shunning

A pillar of Wahhabi religious practice is the doctrine of *al-wala' wa'l-bara'*, fraternizing only with true Muslims and shunning nonbelievers and misguided Muslims. The concept was elaborated in the teachings of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the eponymous founder of Wahhabism, who justified violence against his fellow Muslims by arguing that they behaved like idolaters and so should be fought until they accepted his beliefs. For decades, the kingdom has promoted the doctrine within its borders and overseas. Even today, the government committee that issues fatwas proclaims on its website that “hating infidels is obligatory because they are the enemies of God and His messenger and the enemies of Muslims.”³ Another fatwa states that any Muslim who calls for the “unity of religions” is an apostate.⁴

The 2017—2018 middle and high school textbooks endorse the doctrine *al-wala' wa'l-bara'*:

الله تعالى لا يحب الكافرين والمسلم لا يحبهم لاجل ذلك ولتكذيبهم لكتاب الله تعالى ورسوله (ص)...نهى الله تعالى عن مودة...الكافرين	“God does not love unbelievers, and the Muslim does not love them because of that and because they denied the book of God and His Messenger....God forbade loving unbelievers.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 2nd Semester): 53)
موالاة المؤمنين ومعاداة الكافرين اوثق عرى الايمان	“Being loyal to Muslims and being the enemy of the infidels is the firmest handle of faith.” (Monotheism (1): 163)

The textbooks urge Muslims to avoid befriending Jews and Christians because they are presumed to be hostile to Islam:

ان اليهود والنصارى لا يرضيهم الا الكفر بالاسلام واتباع ملتهم	“There is no satisfying the Jews and Christians except by disbelieving in Islam and following their faiths.” (Interpretation (2): 78)
بيان كيد اليهود وحرصهم على تفتيت الصف الاسلامي وزعزعة عقيدة المسلمين ونشر الشبهات والشهوات بينهم	“Explanation of the plotting of the Jews, and their effort to divide the ranks of Islam, unsettle the dogma of Muslims, and sow doubts and base desires among them.” (Interpretation (2): 116)

³ تجب معاداة الكفار: لأنهم أعداء الله ورسوله وأعداء المسلمين

<http://www.alifta.net/Search/ResultDetails.aspx?languagename=ar&lang=ar&view=result&fatwaNum=&FatwaNumID=&ID=11337&searchScope=3&SearchScopeLevels1=&SearchScopeLevels2=&highLight=1&SearchType=exact&SearchMoesar=false&bookID=&LeftVal=0&RightVal=0&simple=&SearchCriteria=allwords&PagePath=&siteSection=1&searchkeyword=216165217138216182216167216173032217133216185217134217137032216167217132217130216179216183032217136216167217132216168216177032216167217132217133216176217131217136216177217138217134#firstKeywordFound>

⁴ إن الدعوة إلى (وحدة الأديان) إن صدرت من مسلم فهي تعتبر ردة صريحة عن دين الإسلام

<http://www.alifta.net/Search/ResultDetails.aspx?languagename=ar&lang=ar&view=result&fatwaNum=&FatwaNumID=&ID=6967&searchScope=2&SearchScopeLevels1=&SearchScopeLevels2=&highLight=1&SearchType=exact&SearchMoesar=false&bookID=&LeftVal=0&RightVal=0&simple=&SearchCriteria=allwords&PagePath=&siteSection=1&searchkeyword=216170216185216170216168216177032216177216175216169032216181216177217138216173216169#firstKeywordFound>

Nevertheless, one passage in a middle school textbook on monotheism encourages treating unbelievers kindly and with justice:

لا يمنع بغضهم من الاحسان اليهم والعدل معهم وحسن التعامل معهم ودعوتهم الى الله تعالى وترك ظلمهم والتعدي

“Hating them does not prevent you from being good and just toward them, treating them well, calling them to God, and not oppressing them or transgressing against them.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 2nd Semester): 54)

The passage is drawn from Qur’an 60:8: “God does not forbid you from dealing with kindness and justice with those who did not make war against you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes. Indeed God loves the just.”

Another passage counsels students to judge sinners on a sliding scale, not in absolute terms:

ليس هذا بغضا مطلقا بل يحب المسلم العاصي بقدر ما فيه من الايمان والعمل الصالح ويبغض بقدر ما فيه من الفجور والعصيان

This is not absolute hatred; rather, the Muslim loves the sinner to the extent of what faith and righteous action is in him, and he hates to the extent of immorality and disobedience in him. (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 2nd Semester): 54)

Still, passages that encourage religious tolerance are rare—two were found in the 3,000 pages of text studied. Their infrequency means they likely do little to ameliorate the intolerant passages.

Jihad

Several passages in the high school textbooks urge violent jihad against nonbelievers for rejecting Islam:

مجاهدة الكفار بدعوتهم وقتالهم	"Among the types of jihad are striving with the infidels by proselytizing them and fighting them." (Hadith (2): 197)
3 - الغلظة على الكفار المعاندين	"3 - Being severe against enemy non-believers.
4 - الحث على الجهاد في سبيل الله والتحذير من التفريط في ذلك	4 - Encouraging jihad in the path of God and warning against neglecting that
5 - بيان ان الغاية من الجهاد في سبيل الله اعلاء كلمة الله ونشر دينه	5 - Explaining that the aim of jihad in the path of God is to make the word of God supreme and spread His religion.
6 - فضح اهل الكتاب و بيان زيف عقائدهم والحث على قتالهم حتى يعطوا الجزية	6 - Exposing the people of the Book, explaining the falsity of their doctrines, and encouraging fighting them until they give the jizya [tax]." (Interpretation (1): 94, explaining Sura Tawba, the Qur'an's ninth sura)
فضل جهاد الكفار و جهاد النفس، وانه سبب للهداية والتوفيق لاصابة الحق	"The virtue of waging jihad on unbelievers and waging jihad of the self, and this is a way to attain guidance and to be supported in finding the truth." (Interpretation (Middle School - Grade 1 - 2nd Semester): 44)
مصطلحات - الجهاد: بذل الجهد في طاعة الله و المراد به هنا: قتال المعتدين لاعلاء كلمة الله تعالى...من العمال الفاضلة ما بينه النبي (ص) في هذا الحديث وهي...3) الجهاد في سبيل الله: فهو ذروة سنام الاسلام وسبب عز المسلمين ونصرهم	Terminology – jihad: exerting effort in obedience to God, and its meaning [in this hadith] is: fighting the enemies to make the Word of God supreme... Among the good actions that the Prophet elucidated in this hadith are...3) Jihad in the path of God: it is the pinnacle of Islam, and the means of dignity and victory for Muslims." (Hadith (Middle School - Grade 1 - 1st Semester): 30)

In a middle school textbook on social and national studies, conquest of infidel lands is praised as a pious act of jihad:

ولما تميز به المسلمون من قوة العقيدة وحب الجهاد في سبيل الله ولاختلاف كلمة القوط. فقد انتهت هذه المعركة بانتصار المسلمين وقتل ملك القوط، ثم تابع المسلمون فتوحاتهم حتى تمكنوا من ضم معظم المدن الاندلسية	"When Muslims were able to distinguish themselves by their strength of belief, their love of jihad in the path of God, and opposing the word of the Visigoths, the battle ended with the Muslims winning and the death of the king of the Visigoths. Then the conquests of the Muslims followed until they controlled most of the Andalusian cities." (Social and National Studies (Middle School - Grade 2 - 2nd Semester): 23)
سار العثمانيون في فتوحاتهم على المنهج الاسلامي جهادا ودعوة في سبيل الله ووقفوا امام البيزنطيين الذين كانوا يههون ديار المسلمين منذ عهد النبوة	"The Ottomans proceeded with their military conquests in accordance with the Islamic method of jihad and missionizing in the path of God. They stood against the Byzantines that had threatened the Muslims since the time of the Prophet..." (Social and National Studies (Middle School - Grade 2 - 2nd Semester): 93)

Some passages in religious studies textbooks glorify jihad without explicitly saying that it excludes fighting:

الجهاد في سبيل الله تعالى هو ذروة سنام الاسلام والغاية منه: الدعوة الى الله تعالى ونشر دين الاسلام ولذلك كانت الدعوة الى الاسلام مقدمة على القتال خلافا لما يشيعه اعداء الاسلام من ان هدفا الجهاد هو القتل والتدمير او الاستيلاء على الاموال والبلاد	"Jihad in the path of God is the pinnacle of Islam, and its purpose is calling to God and spreading the religion of Islam, which is why calling to God is preferred over fighting, in contradiction to what the enemies of Islam say is the purpose of jihad, that it is to kill, to destroy, and to take forcefully money and land." (Hadith (2): 48)
الخوف المذموم وهو الخوف الذي يحمل صاحبه على ترك ما اوجبه الله تعالى عليه او فعل ما حرم الله عليه، مثاله ان يترك ما يجب عليه من جهاد او امر بمعروف ونهي عن منكر لغير عذر خوفا من بعض الناس	"Blameworthy fear is fear borne by someone for abandoning what God requires of him or for doing what God forbade. For example, someone abandons without excuse what is required of him for jihad or for commanding right and forbidding wrong out of fear of some of the people." (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 2nd Semester): 59)

And finally, some passages are quotations from Islamic scripture that are reproduced without context or comment:

لا تقوم الساعة حتى يقاتل المسلمون اليهود فيقتلهم المسلمون حتى يختبئ اليهود من وراء الحجر والشجر فيقول الحجر او الشجر: يا مسلم يا عبد الله هذا يهودي خلفي فاقته الا الغرقد فانه من شجر اليهود

“The Hour will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews, and the Muslims will kill them until the Jews will hide behind the rocks and the trees. The rocks and the trees will say: O Muslim, O servant of God, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him – except for the gharqad tree which is a tree of the Jews.” (Monotheism (2): 102, quoting a hadith from Bukhari, Muslim, and others)

الجهاد في سبيل الله ذروة سنام الاسلام

“Jihad in the path of God is the pinnacle of Islam.” (Hadith (2): 197; Interpretation (1): 97, paraphrasing a hadith from Nawawi and others: “The head of the matter is Islam, its pillar is prayer, and its pinnacle is jihad.”)

Women, Gay Men, and Illicit Sex

In keeping with Wahhabi religious strictures, the books recommend isolating women from strangers:

يحرم على الرجل مصافحة المرأة الاجنبية	"It is forbidden to shake hands with a woman who is not close relative." (Jurisprudence (1) – Quarterly: 148)
يحرم اختلاط الرجال بالنساء في الوظائف و على مقاعد الدراسة وفي الحفلات وما اشبه ذلك	"It is forbidden to be close to women at work, in schools, in parties, and in similar places." (Jurisprudence (1) - Quarterly: 149)
يحرم سفر المرأة بغير محرم	"It is forbidden for women to travel alone without a mahram [guardian]." (Jurisprudence (1) - Quarterly: 149)
اذا لم تجد المرأة المريضة إلا طبيباً رجلاً واحتاج العلاج الى كشف شيء من بدنها كاذنها مثلاً فلا يجوز كشف ما زاد على الاذن	"If a sick woman can only find a male doctor and treatment requires revealing part of her body, like her ear for example, she can only reveal the ear." (Jurisprudence (3): 42)
المرأة بطبيعتها أشد حياء من الرجل؛ ولذا أمرتها الشريعة بما يتوافق مع فطرتها من الستر والبعد عن الرجال، ومن الأحكام المتعلقة بذلك: الأمر بستر الوجه عن الرجال الأجانب، منع الاختلاط في أماكن العمل	"A woman is inherently shyer than a man; this is why the Shari'ah commands her to do what is in accordance with her nature with regard to covering and separating herself from men. Among the laws connected with this are the command to conceal the face from men who are not relatives and the prohibition against mixing with men in the workplace." (Hadith (Middle School - Grade 1 - 2nd Semester): 33)

The high school textbooks also advocate beating women when they disobey and stoning them to death if they have an affair:

وانما يجوز الضرب عند الضرورة	"Hitting [your wife] is only permitted when necessary." (Interpretation (2): 174)
واغد يا أنيس الى امرأة هذا فإن اعترفت فارجمها	"...go and check on [that man's] wife, if she admits adultery, then stone her." (Jurisprudence (3): 83)
وحده اذا زنى بالجماعة حتى يموت	"The judgment of adultery is stoning to death." (Jurisprudence (1) – Quarterly: 154)

Similarly, gay men are to be stoned to death regardless of whether they are married:

وقال بعض العلماء: عقوبة اللواط القتل فيقتل الفاعل والمفعول به سواء أكانا محصنين أم غير محصنين	"Some of the ulama say the punishment for sodomy for is death, so the giver and the receiver should be killed regardless of whether they are married." (Jurisprudence (1): 256)
ذهب جمهور الفقهاء الى أن حد اللواط كحد الزنى	"The majority of jurists say the punishment for sodomy is the same as the punishment for adultery [i.e., stoning to death]." (Jurisprudence (1) - Quarterly: 161)

CONCLUSION

The USCIRF review of the textbooks for the 2012–2013 and 2013–2014 academic years revealed intolerant passages. None, however, were as intolerant as the passages in textbooks from previous years, like those discovered by the ICRD in textbooks for the 2011–2012 school year. Several passages endorsed interreligious friendship, a sentiment also lacking in previous years. Still, it could not be determined whether the improvements in the 2012–2014 school textbooks were part of a new trend or if these findings were biased by the few books available for study.

This review revealed an apparent reversal in the previous trend toward tolerance in Saudi textbooks. In terms of their content, the 2017–2018 textbooks are more like the 2011–2012 textbooks studied by ICRD than the 2012–2014 textbooks. As in the 2011–2012 Jurisprudence textbooks (ICRD report, 69), the 2017–2018 books say Muslims who convert to another religion should be killed. The two Jurisprudence textbooks for 2013, by contrast, do not call for the execution of apostates or sorcerers. Instead, the textbooks stress that the apostate should be treated like any other nonbeliever. Like the 2011–2012 books (ICRD report, 79–80), the 2017–18 books extol jihad and violence against infidels.

The 2017–2018 textbooks also include topics not found in ICRD’s study. For example, they condemn gay men and support the views of jurists who assess that sexual relations between them is punishable by death. ICRD’s study did not focus on gay men, and the 2012–2014 textbook study only turned up one passage that addressed gay men, condemning it. The passage, however, did not call for the death penalty for gay men. The 2017–2018 textbooks are more akin to Saudi textbooks from the early years of the previous decade before the Saudi government promised to reform its curricula.⁵ They reflect core Wahhabi doctrines and not other trends of Islamic scholarship that are more accepting.

In line with Saudi Vision 2030, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman [stated](#) that he is “determined to build a thriving country in which all citizens can fulfill their dreams, hopes and ambitions.” Critical to the success of this vision will be the advancement of religious freedom in Saudi Arabia, including school textbooks that reflect religious tolerance and eschew hatred and violence. Full implementation of such revisions – which the Saudi government has publicly committed to for more than 15 years – would send a clear signal that the government is fully embracing a more accepting and tolerant religious curriculum in its public education system consistent with international human rights standards.

⁵ Compare with Amon Groiss, *The West, Christians and Jews in Saudi Arabian Schoolbooks*, Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace, American Jewish Committee (2003), <http://www.ajcarchives.org/main.php?GroupingId=4070>; and Nina Shea and Ali Al-Ahmed, “Saudi Arabia’s Curriculum of Intolerance with Excerpts from Saudi Ministry of Education Textbooks for Islamic Studies,” Center for Religious Freedom (2006), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED500608.pdf>.



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