

RELIGION

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Church and State in the Schools

In the aftermath of Vatican II, I had an interesting and memorable conversation with my farmer father. I asked him why he and mother seemed much more ready to live in the world of John XXIII than many of my contemporaries. His response was quick and clear. "Your mother and I went to a one-room ecumenical school."

Years later, my parents helped build and sustain the parochial schools in our small town, paid the small tuition and provided the transportation for us to attend during Depression and post-Depression times. Each time there was a public school bond issue coming up, my father made the rounds of his neighbors to lobby for the issue, trying to convince his fellow farmers that kids needed to be well educated even though the real estate tax was unfair—especially for farmers. When some of them asked why he worked for public education while he supported and sent his children to parochial schools, his response was quick and clear. "An American who chooses to send his children to nonpublic schools should work even harder to support public education. If we don't, our schools will divide society, and I don't want my kids to live in a divided world."

As I studied a wide range of church statements on education in the American context, in preparation for this presentation, my father's words of wisdom kept coming back like a recurring refrain.

The National Council of Churches (NCC) in a policy statement on Public Funds for Public Schools in 1961 maintained:

In principle, Protestant and Orthodox churches claim the right for them-

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selves to establish and maintain schools in any community where the ethos of the public school system is basically inimical to the Christian education of our children. But we believe that to encourage such a *general* development would be tragic in its results to the American people.

In 1971, some 40 years after my dad's lobbying for school bond issues in spite of the iniquity of the real estate tax base, the NCC lobbied for "support of alternatives to the property tax base for financing schools so that neither the poor nor the affluent are penalized because of the neighborhood in which they live."

In an attempt to get a clear, comprehensive and current view of the consensus and dissension among American religious groups on religion in the American context, the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) asked them to send their current statement on churches and public education. We received replies from 15 denominations as well as from ecumenical and Jewish agencies. In reviewing, analyzing and comparing the statements that were made available, we found three

important focal areas being addressed.

The first, and most consistent, common focus was support for public education as a broad-based, high-quality service for the whole people. That commitment in principle remains strong in all the policy statements we were able to gather. It is clearly a religion-ethical commitment for all religious groups.

The consensual position was probably best expressed in a statement of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., reminding its constituent groups, "All citizens share responsibility for the general education of all children in the society." In a series of statements over the last three decades the Council has remained a strong advocate of public education, supporting nonpublic schools as an alternative for individuals and groups but opposing nonpublic schools as the major purveyor of education in the country.

Within the Christian community, of course, there is a wide range of commitment to the principle of affording choice between public and private education for the individual American family. The Catholic Bishops of Pennsylvania in 1976, responding to the lack of agreement on how to educate our children, spoke out in behalf of alternative approaches to education that "respect reasonable and legitimate differences." In 1979 the Church of the Brethren in a public statement called for exploration of the "growing trend toward parochial education systems and the participation of Brethren in such schools."

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able statements by Christian church groups.

The second area of focus addressed in most of the statements we gathered was the role of religion in the public schools.

Recognizing religion as a pervasive aspect of American life for individual citizens and for denominational groups of citizens, there is a general agreement among religious groups that public schools must help students understand and appreciate the role of religion in American life.

Many of the statements strongly advocate teaching about religion in public school classrooms. Some of them explicitly ask that the teaching extend to education about the varied denominational religions as well as cultural traditions.

The American Jewish Committee (AJC) has publicly stated that "pertinent references to religion, even to doctrinal differences, whenever intrinsic to the lesson at hand, should be included in the teaching of history, the social studies, literature, art and other subjects so long as the teachers' identification does not color their instruction." The Committee insists, however, that teaching about religion in a doctrinal sense is primarily the function of the home, church and synagogue. The problem, of course, is that doctrinal positions do affect history, social studies, literature and art, as well as current political events.

Official Presbyterian statements resonate well with the position of AJC, supporting "programs and measures which provide for cultural education in public schools about the history, literature and symbols of varied religious traditions," but insisting that it is the churches and other religious communities that must provide for quality instruction in the experience of religious faith and practice. Statements made by the American Baptists and the Church of the Brethren are remarkably similar on this point.

But might we not ask whether religious faith and practice are not far more central to religious commitment and history than symbols?

The third area of common concern reflected in the statements is the authority and responsibility of public education in teaching moral and ethical values. Both secular and religious educators are agreed that we cannot escape the broadly "religious" or value-laden nature of the educational process. For millions of American families, these values are directly linked to a faith commitment. For

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millions more, the values were shaped by a religious heritage to which they remain loyal and reverent if not vigorously adherent. But millions of other nonreligious American families believe that morality and ethical values and commitment are not—and should not—be grounded in religious belief.

For example, teaching of evolution with or without reference to the creation story is an old dispute. Education dealing with marriage, the family and sexuality is a newer, broader and even more volatile battleground. Sex education is probably the most controversial, explosive and decisive issue in public education today.

Can public education address values formation without being or seeming to be allied with one religious view of morality over another? Can public education communicate the importance of religion in the development of value systems and moral behavior without conveying or seeming to convey that value formation and moral behavior are the exclusive heritage and domain of religious faith?

The developing American response in word and in deed to those two questions will, in my opinion, have an extraordinary impact on the course and the quality as well as the content of public education for the rest of the century.

Background of our present dilemma

The framers of our Constitution and the Bill of Rights stood steadfast against the establishment of religion and steadfastly in support of the free exercise of religion, of free speech and of free assembly. When the First Amendment was passed in 1789 and ratified by the states in 1791, educa-

tion in America was still largely a private, religious enterprise, reflective of and responsive to community values and expectations. The members of Congress and the state legislators who approved the First Amendment could hardly have foreseen the impact of those two seemingly contradictory commitments on public policy for public education two centuries later, when elementary and secondary education would be overwhelmingly publicly supported and when communities responsible for their policy and administration would be multicultural and often bureaucratically complex.

The framers and establishers of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights were dominantly European Protestant Christians greatly influenced in their political philosophy and to varying degrees in their familial lives by the Enlightenment. The great majority of those who followed them as East Coast settlers and early Westward pioneers shared their basic heritage. For many of them, I would suggest, freedom from state-imposed sanctions against heretical word or deed was seen as a sanctuary to celebrate the good news of their faith commitment and its moral imperatives within their own communities—an integral part of what were their schools—however supported.

Those communities were infiltrated—or enriched—by newer settlers and pioneers. Growing numbers of Roman Catholics and Jews in those community schools, now publicly supported, saw the celebration in curriculum and festival as cultural exclusion at best and religious proselytizing at worst. If public education had a *de facto* Protestant bias, it reflected a *de facto* establishment of sectarian bias by the State. The bias was all the more suspect because it was affecting the very young when they were most vulnerable to prejudices and proselytizing. It is not difficult to imagine the anguish and anger that this engendered in Jewish parents with their raw memories of pogrom and persecution in Christian Europe and in Irish Catholics with their raw memories of patronization and persecution under Anglican rule.

Religious indoctrination—flagrant or subtle—is often espoused by dominant religious groups only until or unless they feel compelled to set up defense departments against real and/or perceived indoctrination from a competing group.

The battle to free our schools from sectarian religious bias long preceded the battle by secularists to eradicate religion in curriculum content and cultural cele-

bration from those schools. I would suggest that it is the clear and present danger of recreating that bias that continues to make somewhat strange bedfellows of religious groups and ideological secularists today.

Like all Defense Departments—once called War Departments—of state governments, an impregnable defense has for centuries been seen as the only ultimate protection. Only in very recent decades have we begun to suggest that peace offensives might offer more long-range protection and prosperity for individuals and groups in an open, competitive world than Berlin-like walls or “Star Wars” shields in a protectionist, competitive world.

The Enlightenment opened the vistas and paved the way for open, competitive religious thought and for secular political governments. Spawned by Judaic and Christian traditions in the largely Christian West, the Enlightenment provided the rich and ambiguous context that nurtured our founding parents and launched our constitutional democracy. Twentieth-century society, in which the world community has been opened to all peoples by the technology of transportation and communication, creates, I believe, a provocative dissonance for competitive religious thought and secular as well as sacred political governments—perhaps most challenging of all dilemmas for the United States of America.

When religion is stripped, or freed, of regulatory authority, can it continue to be a strong, sometimes compelling teaching authority for its continuing faithful? How are those continuing faithful free to declare and celebrate their religious and religio-ethical convictions without compelling the behavior and not the belief of those who hold different beliefs?

Resolving dilemma through education

The ideologically sacred or neo-sacred states of the Middle East, as well as the ideologically atheistic states of Eastern Europe, are polar examples of totalitarian governments that resolve the dilemma of pluralism by denying freedom of speech and freedom of assembly to all but the voices of ruling orthodoxy. All totalitarian governments have recognized that controlling the minds of the young is essential to sustaining the status quo.

But the United States of America placed its founding faith and its continu-

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ing constitutional covenant in an espousal of We the People—finite and fallible, perhaps divinely graced but never inspired by a direct line of omniscience, which would give one person or one group the right to practice omnipotence to save the people from themselves.

That is both the glory and the scandal of the American odyssey. If the young are to be formed and fortified to protect and nurture a workable pluralism under the constitutional democracy, may it not be foolhardy to deprive them of wrestling with the trade-offs that must forever be made by citizens living in and committee to sustaining this workable, pluralistic democracy?

Educators have long realized that all real learning is bite-size, calculated to take learners where they are, to nurture them and to help them grow. Such learning can and often does lead students to insights that confound and confuse their mentors—teachers and parents and pastors. The physical sciences, philosophy, political science and theology all give evidence to that proposition.

The role of religious faith in a secular democracy has a very short learning curve for the human race. The United States of America is the only nation founded on *de facto* pluralism and constitutionally committed to a tension of powers that would protect freedom of thought, expression, assembly and religion.

Our learning curve as a constitutional democracy is a mere 199 years old, a tiny fraction of human history.

Do we have enough faith in our faith—sacred and secular—to open ourselves as adults to the dialogue that might unlock the dilemmas posed in a secular society by sectarian belief and

unbelief? Do we have enough faith in our faith—sacred and secular—to expose and enrich our children with bite-size learning experiences that could nurture them and help them grow? In my judgment, only children so nurtured can create a pluralistic democracy more workable than our generation has yet produced.

If the role of religion as both a cohesive force and a sectarian stumbling block is not reflected in the content of public education, I believe our children will be deprived of much of the cultural heritage. They also will be deprived of the process of learning that will prepare them as citizens, legislators, governors and judges in ensuing decades.

Faith in a pluralistic setting is clearly the greatest challenge denominational religion has ever faced. Protecting the faithful as individuals and as groups and protecting them from the tyranny of one another may well be the greatest dual challenge a nation has ever faced. Our founders were, and we their faithful followers are, committed to our fallible, finite selves as people and to a constitutional government that protects us by the tension of powers and the trade-offs of competing groups.

It is time, I believe, for citizens informed by religious faith to rev down defense departments and engage in a true peace offensive that does not overtly or covertly seek the conversion of the patronized, proselytized or persecuted. If we begin to share our faith in a pluralistic setting, we may be able to create curricula for teachers and students intended to introduce our children to belief and unbelief as they learn to live in and perpetuate a workable pluralistic democracy.

What better legacy than teaching pluralistic democracy can religious faith leave to its people of God as part of the human race! What better legacy can the American nation leave “We the People . . .” of the world community!

Early in the century, the French prose-poet Charles Pequy wrote a beautiful piece, *On Freedom*. Taking on the voice of God, he said, “I am just like a father teaching his boy how to swim in the current of the river and holding him up with my big hand. If I hold him up too much and hold him up too often, he will never learn to swim in the current of the river, but if I don’t hold him up at just the right moment, he will swallow more water than is good for him.”

If American children are to learn to swim in the current of the river individ-

ually and together, they will often swallow more water than is good for them. If we hold them up too much and too often with our protective hands, they may drown each other in protecting their individual and group rights.

Some Fundamentalist sectarian groups today seem determined to fill a perceived religio-ethical vacuum in public education with their own denominational faith or to secure public financing for sectarian schools. Some secularist groups supported by believers and nonbelievers today seem determined to turn the public schools into what John Neuhaus describes as a naked square to protect our children from the conflicting claims of religious and non-religious groups in our pluralistic democracy.

In my opinion, neither position is courageous or pragmatic in meeting the challenge of the faith in a pluralistic setting or of a workable democracy in the most pluralistic nation the world community has ever seen.

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sity with reverence and skepticism lies in the hands of fallible and finite teachers who are themselves representative of divergent and competing philosophical, political, economic and theological views. These views are supported and restrained by a First Amendment that protects us against an established religion and guarantees us the free exercise of religion with equal force.

What greater *de facto* learning chal-

lenge has any nation ever been given and espoused? Resolving that seeming contradiction is a lifelong challenge for the American citizenry and for every citizen.

The founders of the National Conference of Christians and Jews—Charles Evans Hughes, Henry Sloan Coffin, David de Sola Poole, Jane Addams and their contemporaries—wrote in 1927, “The intergroup problems of the nation rise like a spectre in the path of democracy and dare her to come on.” Our founding fathers dared in 1787 and 1791. Generations that followed have to greater or lesser degrees continued to dare as the problems and possibilities of an even more workable democracy have increased.

In 1987, the nation and the nation’s schools reflect a cacophony of religious, ethnic, and cultural traditions that would have been mind-boggling in 1787 and beyond comprehension even in 1927. It will take dedication to our constitutional democracy and to our informed consciences to make the trade-offs necessary to produce education and legislation for an even more workable pluralism.

Hate groups employ fear tactics

Within the course of world history, religions have played a large share in the generation of violence. Monotheistic religions, especially, have propagated a great deal of violence against other religions, both montheistic and pagan, and have in turn been subject to much violence. This article will briefly examine the relationship of Judaism and violence throughout history.

The Old Testament advocates violence against two specific groups, the Amalekites and the Canaanites; the Amalekites because they were the first to attack the Israelites on their exodus from Egypt and the Canaanites as the indigenous inhabitants of the land that the Israelites were due to conquer. In actual fact, the Israelites were unable to displace the Canaanites from Canaan for a relatively long period after the conquest. For most other groups, the Old Testament is relatively noncommittal, disliking some while relatively more favorable to others.

On the other hand, individuals from these nations are to be granted equality before the law. Indeed, the Pentateuch is quite strict about this, stressing that you shall not discriminate against the stranger because you were strangers in the land of Egypt and advocating not only loving your neighbor as yourself but also the stranger as yourself.

Probably the single most interesting statement in the Pentateuch relating to the treatment of foreign captives are the verses in Deuteronomy 21:10-14.

When you go forth to battle against your enemies and the Lord your God delivers them into your hands and you carry them away captive. And see among the captives a woman of goodly form and you have a desire unto her and would take her to wife. Then you shall bring her home to your house; and she shall shave her hair and pare her nails. And she shall put the raiment of her captivity from off her and shall remain in your house and bewail her father and mother a full month; and after that you may go into her and be her husband and she shall be your wife. And it shall be if you have no delight in her, then you shall let her go where she will; but you shall not sell her at all for money, you shall not deal with her as a slave because you have humbled her.

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This is probably the most fascinating piece of antirape legislation ever encountered. By officially permitting rape (wife is largely a euphemism) but making the victim unattractive to the potential rapist, the Bible attempts to prevent the act.

The Talmud does not really deal much with international violence since at the time it was developed especially its post-Mishnaic part, Jews no longer possessed national independence and therefore questions relating to international politics were largely irrelevant. Without an internationally recognized government and with no military forces, Jews would not be capable of much religious violence for the next 2,000 years. Instead, they would often be the objects of violence.

The period from the first Crusade until the Holocaust marks a time of frequent violence against Jews, especially in Europe. Jews were accused of deicide, of disloyalty, of murdering Christian children, of desecrating the host and of poisoning wells. In most of these cases, one can distinguish between two types of anti-Semitism, the manipulative and the manipulated. Manipulative anti-Semitism, deriving from the elements in power often derived from numerous causes such as the need to divert attention from their own misdeeds. Manipulated anti-Semitism, on the other hand, almost always stressed fear. One of the consistent themes of the latter type of anti-Semitism is the consistent appeal to fear the Jews, hence destroy them before they become too major a threat. This theme is revealed throughout anti-Semitic literature, ranging from the earliest accusations against the Jews to Nazi propaganda and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. Yet the extreme irony of the matter was that Jews possessed very little power in this period. Jews were often the most powerless group within

society, surviving simply at the pleasure of the government. This relative powerlessness made the Jews the ideal victims of manipulative anti-Semitism, which paradoxically stressed the Jews power.

Jews did not always accept this powerlessness and at various times attempted to shatter the shackles of powerlessness by utilizing the only weapons they possessed, their limited economic influence. Thus, in the 16th century, Turkish Jews attempted to punish the port of Ancona for the murder of 24 marranoes by declaring a boycott on that port. It failed, as did the anti-Nazi boycott in the United States prior to World War II. But nevertheless, they revealed the attempt to escape from the curse of powerlessness. Of course, the establishment of the State of Israel is also an attempt to end Jewish powerlessness.

Finally, the Jewish Defence League, which arose in the late '60s, has also stressed its attempt to escape from Jewish powerlessness. It has stressed the fact that Jewish powerlessness has been the root of anti-Semitism, and if Jews gain the ability to defend themselves, anti-Semitism will disappear. On the other hand, it has, especially with the move of its founder, Rabbi Meir Kahane to Israel, been argued that Jews cannot really control their own destiny outside of the State of Israel and that all Jews should emigrate there.

Kahane has formed a very right-wing party in Israel that preaches the eventual expulsion of all Arabs from Israel and has based its primary appeal on fear. For example, during the last parliamentary campaign, one KACH (Kahane's party) advertisement showed drops of Jewish blood spilling on the pavement accompanied by the names of Jewish victims of Arab attacks. It concluded by asking its viewers how long they would stand for this. It is noteworthy that Kahane has been rejected by every element in the Israeli political spectrum, even by the right-wing. Yet Kahane and the JDL operate on precisely the same principle that was utilized against the Jewish people for a thousand years, the appeal to fear. And it is this appeal to fear that is perhaps the most dangerous component of any hate group's arsenal.

Duties of citizenship

Clifford Hope Jr., a Garden City lawyer, is a member of the KSR Board of Trustees, having given many years of service.

After almost 30 years of part-time service in government at the community, state and federal level, I wish to share some observations concerning the duties, as contrasted with the rights and privileges, of American citizenship.

Our pursuit of individual goals to the detriment of our fellow citizens and the nation, however inadvertent and unintentional, has brought us to a crisis that can no longer be postponed except at our peril. An example of our flawed thinking is illustrated by a national magazine article last year, in which a prominent figure was asked to comment on the four principal components of the American Dream—a good education, a good job, a good marriage and a good home. Certainly these are worthy goals for each of us as individuals, but that is not the point. If the American Dream now excludes any concern for anyone other than ourselves and

our immediate families, we are in serious trouble as a nation.

We need to restore the original American Dream as envisioned by the founders of the republic. That dream included concern for individual rights and privileges. It includes, in the words of a former senator, remembering, "You have an obligation to the society which protected you when you were brought in the world, which taught you, which supported you and nurtured you. You have an obligation to repay it." True patriotism involves a sense of sacrifice, of duty and of shared obligation.

The USA has been and remains basically a good nation with good citizens, but as in every generation, we must strive to make our country better.

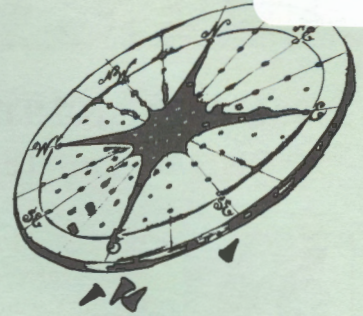
Our goal should be to make concern for the common good equal to concern for our individual pursuits and well-being. We need to renew our oldtime spirit of self-sacrifice for the common good and we need political leaders who will tell us we must do this, not only in the area I have discussed, but in every other area of national concern. A spirit of self-sacrifice will give us the toughness and strength we need to face all challenges and resolve all problems.

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Traverse Log



The (old) old time religion is still here. It suffers historic jet lag.

A dual pulsebeat shows through the function of religion—something inspirational and something practical. Relating intake and outgo has been a long, old balancing show.

Gavin MacLeod, of "Love Boat" fame, became a born-again Christian. After his divorce and remarriage, he and his wife Patti published *Back On Course*. He speaks for many of us trying to do the balancing drill. In an interview about Jim Bakker's current misfortune, MacLeod suggested that Bakker was too much of a "visionary" and not "practical" enough.

Whatever happened, here again is the old quest for the balancing, mixing or otherwise relating the conviction and the action aspects of religion. The meditators, the tinkers and the soul savers contrast the social gossipers, the project peddlers and assorted cause hustlers.

Bel Megalit of Manila noticed that after deposed leader Ferdinand Marcos fled, evangelicals were slow to fight for peace and justice. Apparently they were visionaries only. But we need not study this by long distance; it is right here. Perhaps it is the (almost) detachment of the action phase from the inspirational that has brought about a list of unattached causes and issues now being called religion.

Here is a story. Tell it not in Gath, for it is not really funny. Two survivors of a shipwreck found themselves in a raft far at sea. After determining the hopelessness of survival, they decided to turn to religion.

"Do you have a Bible to read?" one asked the other.

"No," was the reply.

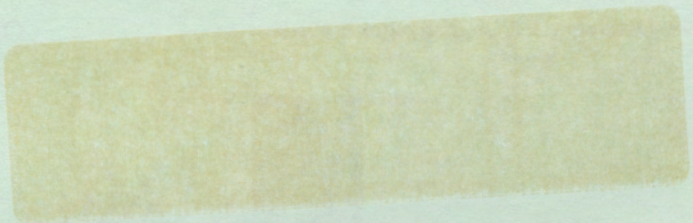
"Then will you say a prayer?"

"I don't know how to pray" answered the other.

The first one concluded, "Let's do something religious. Let's get up a campaign."

But let's remember, intake and outgo work together. Tell that in Gath.

Yea.



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