

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM A CONTINUING DEBATE:  
CHRISTMAS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CURRICULUM

by

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B.S., Newark State College, 1971

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A REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Elementary Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

1988

Approved by:

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## INTRODUCTION

There has always been controversy concerning the role of religion in the process of education. All early education was religious and all early religion was also educational (Byrnes, 1975). The United States Constitution included the concept of religious freedom. The earliest political disagreements involved the role of religion in education. "Establishment", Common Schools, social goals, and constitutional guarantees were some of the problems faced by our government as it developed from its Independence up to the Twentieth Century.

Since the 1940's, the Supreme Court has made many decisions relating to our First and Fourteenth Amendment rights. One of the more controversial areas, not yet ruled on by the Court, is the question of religious holiday observance in the public schools.

Many Americans object to the celebration of religious holidays in the schools. In contrast, a significant portion of the American population assumes that it is entirely appropriate. This paper is an investigation of this controversy. It is the purpose of this author to sensitize the reader to the pertinent issues and to examine some possible solutions.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### Introduction

In order to face the concrete religious issues that face us in the public schools today it is helpful to understand the history of both education and religious freedom in our country. It is essential to understand that these subjects have been "forever" in contention. In medieval Europe, studying, writing, and "the educated" were associated with the priests, the monasteries, and the church. Common people were not educated. Only the very wealthy or the very pious were involved in learned activities.

Public education did not become a subject for discussion in England until the Victorian era and it was immediately fraught with disagreement in relation to religion. It is not surprising that our earliest leadership should concern themselves with these questions. In light of their times, it is surprising that certain decisions were made. Therefore we must understand the motivation of their decisions to better understand current conditions.

### Colonial America: "Establishment"

Establishment is defined as state support of religion through levied taxes and the use of public property and public funds to aid the established church. It includes enforcement by law to aid the exclusive rights of the established church and the compelling of all residents of the colony to participate in church services regardless of their religious convictions (Weinstein, 1979). The earliest settlers to America retained their national and religious characteristics. A common factor in their various backgrounds was the close cooperation of the church and state in their countries of origin. Since the first waves of immigration resulted in settlements that

were religiously homogeneous, this attitude of establishment prevailed in colonial America. The state provided financial aid to the church through tax allocations. It also enforced public worship and doctrines of the established church by punishments to offenders. It was assumed that the state would continue to dictate to its people on religious matters (Dierenfield, 1962). Nine of the thirteen colonies had established churches, imposed on the people at public expense (Blanshard, 1963).

The Massachusetts colonial legislature, circa 1700, ensured adherence to Protestant doctrine. They provided for a penalty of death for idolatry and blasphemy. Quakers and Jesuits were forbidden to enter the colony. The right to vote was denied to anyone who denied the deity of Jesus Christ (Blanshard, 1963). Roger Williams was banished from the Massachusetts colony for his religious views. Not only did he believe that each person should be allowed to worship according to his own conscience, but he also believed that non-believers should be able to practice their non-belief. In his Rhode Island, no tax money was used to support churches (Dierenfield, 1962).

The earliest established education was founded upon the precepts of religious conformity. The earliest texts and materials were mainly of religious content (Dierenfield, 1962). The New England Primer is the most famous and popular example of these texts (Blanshard, 1963). The development of moral and religious character, and preservation from Satan were the main purposes of education (Dierenfield, 1962). The aim of education was to produce conformists to the established religious doctrine and institutional structure. A literate citizenry was considered a prerequisite to this orthodoxy (Byrnes, 1975). The main requirements for teachers were

religious orthodoxy, loyalty to civil government, and morals of acceptable standard (Dierenfield, 1962).

The most influential men, who built the new nation were believers in the separation of church and state. Washington belonged to a "regular church". Jefferson, Franklin, Madison and John Adams can be classified as extreme religious liberals. Jefferson was both anti-Calvanist and anti-Catholic. He and Madison were far in advance of their contemporaries in their concerns for religious freedom and public education (Blanshard, 1953).

During the period just prior to Independence, additional immigration and population movement among the settlements also affected a movement toward multiple establishment (Freund & Ulrich, 1965). Multiple establishment meant that more than one church enjoyed the privilege of supporting their church functions with state funds. Under this arrangement, each person was entitled to select his brand of Protestant worship and required to support financially the religious church of his choice (Weinstein, 1979). As groups dissented the single establishment, this gradual change occurred. By the mid 1700's, Christian Protestant groups of all kinds had, in this way, established credibility and acceptance (Freund & Ulrich, 1965).

There was a fear of national power. The assurance for the many sects that were being established, both secular and religious, was a safeguard against that fear (Freund & Ulrich, 1965). The Constitution required an oath of allegiance but prescribed that no religious test ever be required as a qualification for public office in Article VI. Later, the Bill of Rights, particularly the First Amendment, further protected religious freedom (Freund & Ulrich, 1965). At the time of the ratification of the constitution, nine of the thirteen colonies already had virtual separation of church and state in

their own constitutions. Connecticut abolished establishment in 1818, New Hampshire in 1819, and Massachusetts in 1833. Maryland abolished establishment in 1810 (Dierenfield, 1962) but retained a religious test for office until the middle of the 20th century (Curry, 1986). In the Southern states, religion was defined as an inherent right but only in terms of the variety of Christian denominations. There was toleration of a kind for Catholics. Jews and other non-Christians achieved political and civil rights only after a bitter struggle in the early 19th century (Curry, 1986). Religion is equated with Protestant Christianity in all early United States historical discussion of religion (Curry, 1986). "A country wherein eleven of thirteen states restricted office holding to Christians or Protestants hardly envisaged Catholicism or Judaism, not to mention Mohammedanism or any non-Christian group, as part of the "religion" to be promoted and encouraged either in the states or the Northwest Territory." (Curry, 1986, p. 221).

Madison proposed the guarantees of religious freedom be imposed on both the state and federal governments. After much argument on the wording, the First Amendment was finally drafted, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...". This provision committed the federal government to separation of church and state even though several of the states did not concur with the idea at that time (Dierenfield, 1962). Only two clauses in the Constitution refer to religion, Madison's non-establishment of the First Amendment and the free-exercise clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (Freund & Ulrich, 1965).

Several main forces contributed to the growth of support for religious freedom: 1) the gradual change toward the belief that religion was a matter

between an individual and God, 2) the differences in the many denominations and sects, 3) the "Age of Enlightenment", and 4) its concern with the "natural rights of man". Thomas Jefferson was one of the most well known proponents of these ideas (Dierenfield, 1962). From the time of the framing of the constitution to the early twentieth century, the public school system evolved. During the first years after the inclusion of the concept of religious freedom into federal law, Thomas Jefferson wrote a great deal about education and religious freedom individually and as they were related. Jefferson's bill for religious liberty was enacted in 1784 in Virginia. It stated, "All men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain their opinion in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge or affect their civil liberties." (Freund & Ulrich, 1965, p. 7).

#### Jefferson: Democracy, Religion, and Education

Jefferson wrote about education only as it related to society or personal betterment (Heslap, 1969). He never defined the term or the nature of education but he did formulate philosophical ideas upon which he based his educational proposals (Heslap, 1969). Methodology, as Jefferson defined it, included the principles of the source of knowledge or what exists that is appropriate for inquiry. Accordingly, education should yield conclusions supported by evidence, include no inconsistencies, provide explanations of natural phenomena, and take into account the purposes of human life (Heslap, 1969). As regards sensory experience or the source of knowledge, matter and motion, the universe of existential subject matters, are the best starting points. These are selected characteristics. Jefferson uses "Nominalism" as his philosophical base. Nominalism states that any existing thing is a

particular, nothing in general exists, i.e., this or that dog exists but "dogness" does not. General terms reference human experience which may change, therefore they cannot be permanent (Heslap, 1969, p. 68).

Jefferson was concerned with educational problems only as they related to political democracy (Heslap, 1969). His philosophy and writings about education were guided by his ideas of sensation, matter, and motion, as well as God, natural creatures, and the natural order. Therefore, he was concerned with several special issues: 1) individual differences, 2) differences in customs and circumstances of societies, 3) natural laws relevant to all societies, 4) man as self-governing according to the dictates of his moral sense, appetites, and to the extent of his ability to make choices, 5) man as subject to the moral laws of nature, self-preservation, liberty of thought, and pursuit of happiness, and 6) God's intention that human beings attain their well-being, therefore His giving them the faculties and rights for attaining it within individual limitations. Jefferson did believe that a person did not have the right to conditions beyond personal limitations either natural or imposed by society (Heslap, 1969).

Jefferson stated that the purpose of government is to maintain a society where people have the opportunity to make decisions toward attaining their own happiness and to protect its members natural rights (Heslap, 1969). Jefferson's educational proposals were based on four main concerns. First, he defined the purpose of education as it was relative to this particular republic and to the natural differences among the students of the society. According to his theory, not all students were entitled to the same educational opportunities, only those commensurate with the strength of his faculties, and "proportioned to the condition and pursuits of his life" (Heslap,

1969, p. 90). Therefore, his stated purpose of education was threefold: 1) to prepare citizens to be public leaders ("natural aristocrats"), to identify those with lesser abilities, and to prepare them to assume the ordinary tasks of society (Heslap, 1969); 2) to enable citizens to exercise the common rights of self-government; 3) to ready citizens for the pursuit of happiness in the private sphere.

Jefferson's next concern was subject matter. According to his philosophy, since all subject matter was equally real and therefore important, only the differences in the needs of the society affected its value (Heslap, 1969).

Then Jefferson addressed the matters of educational method. He recommended attention to imitation and drill, exercises in memory and imagination, the study of relationships, comparison of perceptions and conceptualizations, generalizations and the application of generalizations, providing models, and emphasizing moral and aesthetic instruction. He suggested that methods be relevant to the development of the judgmental powers of the young student and include sensory experiences (Heslap, 1969).

He outlined a general system of administration that was local and regional, a system of wards within counties, counties within districts, and all under state control. First, wards, with an elementary school in each, to be supported locally, by tax or other means, and maintained by a local official. Next, within each county, all ward schools would be supervised by resident officers appointed by county court. The quality of instruction, and selection of promising students for secondary schools, was to be done at public expense. Then the district, made up of a cluster of counties and served by a secondary school, supported by state monies, and supervised by the state's

Board of Public Instruction with general control and authority to select poor students for university at public expense.

Finally the system included a university, a state institution supervised by the Board of Visitors and appointed by the legislature. The university should be subject to the control of the Legislature, including questions pertaining to the limits of academic freedom. On the question of how much control of public education should be maintained by the citizenry, he suggested that officials should be appointed by other officials, rather than elected; in other words, "ordinary people" should not be in control.

Specifically, in Virginia, Jefferson proposed education bills in 1779 and 1817 that included elementary, secondary, and university, with provisions for impoverished students. These bills promoted the preparation of gifted students for leadership, and others for ordinary affairs of self-government. In 1818, he proposed a bill reorganizing the college of William and Mary and establishing a public library in order to prepare students to undertake their private pursuits of happiness, foster research of scholars and scientists, to increase knowledge, and thereby promote the well-being of the states members. He was involved in the establishment of agricultural societies for the purpose of furthering each person's private economic well-being and the prosperity of individual farmers. In addition to his specific recommendations for Virginia, he proposed a national university, a national philosophical academy with the same goals as the library (Heslap, 1969).

Elementary education, according to Jefferson's plan, included the teaching of academic studies and skills for the majority of students, that is, arithmetic, history, and geography, reading and writing of English, and the fundamentals of morality. Following this, vocational training dealt with

household arts to be learned at home, for girls and farming, crafts, seamanship, in an apprenticeship system for boys. Secondary training designed for male wealthy and gifted male poor students included Latin and Greek, modern European languages, English grammar, geography, advanced arithmetic, plain geometry, surveying, and navigation. Female students of all categories were presumed not to desire other than the appropriate domestic training for their station. At the University, Jefferson recommended a complete variety of material be made available, including applied aspects, an elective system of study, physical exercise, research and continuing education were encouraged (Heslap, 1969).

The statement of these particular subjects and goals raised the question of religious freedom and how to preserve it. In response to these questions Jefferson stated the following: 1) public institutions should not provide any religious doctrine or teaching contrary to any of the respective creeds, 2) no ecclesiastical official should be appointed as public education supervisor, 3) no religious reading, instruction or exercise should be prescribed or practiced that would be inconsistent with the tenets of any religious sect or denomination, 4) no professor of divinity at University of Virginia, 5) holidays commonly shared by Virginia's various religious groups could be observed, and 6) Greek, Hebrew, biblical texts could be examined in the philosophical problems involved in the concept of God (Heslap, 1969).

Jefferson's interest in education was a crusade against ignorance. He believed strongly in man's possession of God given natural rights, that is the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. He was devoted to the rational scientific, pragmatic approach to knowledge and truth and to a free society's commitment to support those principles and institutions which

respect and enhance that rational process (Lee, 1961). He believed in equal rights and opportunity BUT potential and ability in varying degrees (Lee, 1961). He believed in a "natural aristocracy of virtue and talents" and that this small group were the protectors of universal prerogatives and leadership in advancing human welfare (Lee, 1961).

#### Horace Mann: Humanism and Education

Horace Mann is considered the hero and champion of the religiously neutral conception of the American public school. He was an educator as well as a politician and a humanitarian. He represented a compromise on religion because he was willing to admit some religious instruction into the classroom (Blanshard, 1953).

The fight of Horace Mann in Massachusetts exemplifies the early struggle against sectarian teaching in the schools. Mann's first speech in the Massachusetts legislature dealt with the Blandford petition. His plea against the petition dealt with the overall issue of freedom of religion and the consequences of assisting one group at the expense of another. The petition was postponed indefinitely. This represented a turning point in religious legislation in Massachusetts. Massachusetts school law of 1827, ordered all instructors to impress the minds of children and youth with the principles of piety, justice, and sacred regard to truth (Messerli, 1972). It forbade the use of any book calculated to favor any particular religious sect or tenet.

Mann believed "men's actions were based upon certain general ethical principles shared by all reasonable men." Although he believed that education was a vehicle for religious indoctrination, his view was far more broad than his antagonists. He believed that children needed to be educated,

and "if sectarian strife stood in the way, doctrinal specificity could be delegated to the home and meetinghouse." Further he stated, "the fundamental principles of Christianity may and should be inculcated. This should be done thro' the medium of a proper text-book to prevent abuses. After this each denomination must be left to its own resources for inculcating its own faith or creed" (Messerli, 1972, p. 315).

Horace Mann had high hopes for the public schools. He believed that a common set of republican political principles and values, taught to all children in a "common" school, would provide political and social order or political consensus. Political liberty would be assured because it would be restrained and controlled by the school. Controversial topics were to be excluded. Social problems would be solved by the proper training in the school. He argued that there were certain moral values that all religious groups could agree on and that these should be the backbone of the moral teachings of the school. Many have disagreed with him, the largest group being the Catholic Church (Spring, 1985). Its religious objections to the Protestant attitude towards the schools resulted in the beginnings of the Catholic Parochial school system. Bible reading and textbooks that reflected Protestant doctrine created dissent. These controversies were the source of political action on the local scene from the mid 1800's to early 1900's. While temperance, religion, and culture continued to be the group of issues that concerned the native born Protestants in the late 1800's (Tyack, 1974).

Mann based his hopes on the following definitions and concerns. The terms Public School and Common School, by definition were schools which children from the entire community could attend. These schools, supported by taxes could not support any particular religion by the largest definition of

Religious Establishment. Taxation in support of these schools was for the purpose of prevention of dishonesty, fraud, and violence because ignorance, superstition, and vice breed these qualities. Because schools are the most effective means of developing and training the powers and faculties of the child so he becomes a man who understands his highest interests and duties and may become a truly free agent. As the political education of a child in school was not for the purpose of making him join a particular party, so the religious education received at school was not for the purpose of making him join a particular denomination. It was for the purpose of enabling him to judge, according to the dictates of reason and conscience, what his religious obligations were and where they led. But if a man was taxed to support a school where religious doctrines contrary to his own were inculcated, "he is excluded from the school by Divine law, at the same time that he is compelled to support it by the human law. This is doubly wrong." (Mann, 1865).

Mann refuted the complaint of the anti-Christian nature of the Massachusetts school by citing the presence of the Bible used in sectarian ways and the requirements of teachers to impress upon their students the principles of piety, justice, sacred truth, love of their country, humanity, and universal benevolence, sobriety, industry, frugality, chastity, moderation, and temperance. He suggest four alternatives for the establishment of schools and their respective problems: 1) Establishment of totally sectarian schools, 2) Establishment of religious system for the schools and officers to carry it out, which was against the constitution, 3) Establishment of schools where the religious majority could control the religious content, which brought to the fore the question of the one true faith and promoted continued animosity

and ultimately the breakdown of the system of schools, and 4) Abandon the establishment of schools to private and parental will (Mann, 1865).

#### Post Civil War: Social Change Through Education

In 1876, President Grant made a statement concerning free schools that said "...Resolve that neither the state nor the nation, nor both combined, shall support institutions of learning other than those sufficient to afford every child growing up in the land the opportunity of a good common school education, unmixed with sectarian, pagan, or atheistical dogmas. Leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the church, and the private school, supported entirely by private contributions. Keep the church and state forever separated." Both Grant and Garfield supported a constitutional amendment assuring that no public money would be spent for sectarian schools. This amendment was considered unnecessary by most congressmen and never added (Blanshard, 1953, p. 19).

From 1860 to 1920, from the Civil War to World War I, was a period of transition in terms of religious pluralism in the United States (Wilson, 1965). Blanshard (1953) stretches this transitional period up to 1940, into World War II. Up through this time the Supreme Court vacillated and was inconsistent in handling First Amendment issues.

During this whole time, ethnic immigration to the United States was such that the population was no longer overwhelmingly Protestant. Common schools although secularized were resented by "foreigners" (Wilson, 1965).

Much writing was done on the much debated subject of religion and the school. Samuel T. Spear, an Episcopalian minister, in 1876, wrote a book called Religion and the State. It was originally a series of articles on the

"much debated schools question". In it he stated, "The Public School, like the State, under whose authority it exists, and by whose taxing power it is supported, should be a simply civil institution, absolutely secular and not at all religious in its purposes, and all practical questions involving this principle should be settled in accordance therewith...The position is impregnable, and taking it the Protestant is sure of victory, not as a Protestant, but as a citizen. He conceded to the Catholic all his rights and simply claims his own. He demands for himself no more than he is willing to grant others. This position is a strong one, because it is just and because it exactly accords with the letter and spirit of our civil constitutions" (Wilson, 1965, p. 129).

Philip Schaff wrote an essay on church and state in the United States, in 1843. In it he discussed the concept of toleration. He conceded that toleration was an important step, but that the difference between tolerance and liberty is great. According to Schaff toleration is a concession which may be withdrawn. It is coupled with restrictions and disabilities. It is "wrung from a government by the force of circumstances and the power of a minority too influential to be disregarded...In our country we ask no toleration for religion and its free exercise, but we claim it as an inalienable right" (Wilson, 1965, p. 150). It isn't toleration established in our system, it is religious equality.

During this same period administrative progressives in education began to modernize the system. They believed that the school system should meet the needs of the students. There was a shift in conception of the functions of education. The progressives had some good intentions, but ended up achieving the wrong results. The expectations for education became

confused. While privileged classes expected education to secure property and prevent revolution, lower classes hoped education would break down class barriers and bring them equality (Tyack, 1974).

"Scientific" assessment of student needs, including IQ tests, tracking, and other methods were put into use. Their main concern was the homogenizing American beliefs and behavior. They "saw pluralism as peril" (Tyack, 1974, p. 180). The problems of students were not attributed to their sociological and economic roots. This period saw the beginnings of ethnic, religious, and class groups suffering from classification based on results to testing that was invalid for their background (Tyack, 1974).

Within this new philosophy the school also assumed the responsibility of assimilation. These efforts to socialize or equalize new members of the society, opened the curriculum to teaching cleanliness habits (baths), as well as providing food for needy, medical services, playgrounds, vacation schools. In response to delinquency, the school also became a community center for family recreation, and language classes. It was also believed that schools should integrate the immigrant into American Society. Progressives saw this as the primary way to achieve equality for the newcomers. They saw school as the main instrument of socialization and civilization. Some thought that these various cultures should be brought into a cooperative confederation rather than amalgamated but they were entirely outnumbered. Hardly any reference was given to segregation at this time (Tyack, 1974).

Organized religion was not a vital force in the 1920's. The Scopes "monkey" trial and Prohibition trivialized it. Traditional Protestant morality was losing strength and becoming a conventionalized and institutionalized church. After 1929 Protestant theology was revitalized by the neo-orthodoxy

of writers like Neibur and Tillich. They supported separation from secular society (Byrnes, 1975).

In the 1930's school leadership was predominantly native born. Almost half of the teachers were offspring of immigrants, but all were equally interested in the Americanization process. This included learning skills, shedding old culture and language and anything foreign, and acquiring middle class standards (Tyack, 1974).

There were many problems created by this assimilation. A generation gap developed. Children were drawn away from their parents and their cultures. Roles reversed as parents began to depend on children for information and guidance. Disrespect for parents and cultural heritage because of their foreignness was a by-product of the new system. Parents resented the schools for taking away family controls. There was an alienation of these families from the school (Tyack, 1974).

The Supreme Court, in 1940, made a decision favoring "equal protection of the laws" to the Jehovah's Witnesses. This litigation was the beginning of a new era. In 1947, tax support for bussing to parochial school was passed by a vote of five to four. In 1948, religious instruction was outlawed in the schools by a vote of eight to one. In 1952, release-time for religious instruction was granted at state option by a vote of six to three. In 1961, compulsory faith restrictions for holding of office were outlawed in Maryland. The most drastic was the Regent's prayer decision of 1962. Finally in 1963, the Court outlawed the practices of Bible reading and reciting the Lord's Prayer.

A characteristic of the 1940's and 1950's was the revival of church affiliation. There was an emphasis on soul saving, attacks on Communism

and ethical relativism. Also during this period, politicians avoided theological questions. Congress avoided almost all record votes by voice votes or by sending controversies back to committee. Through this time, the issue of religious instruction in the classroom never became a great issue in national politics. This last Court decision brought the issue out into the national political arena (Blanshard, 1963).

The "religious pluralism" of the 1960's is far more complex than any previous period in our history. Eastern religions became viable alternatives. The drug phenomenon was associated with religious interests. The Jesus movement had its impact on the public schools (Byrnes, 1975, p. 49).

### Summary

This nation was founded upon religious interests. Though seeking religious freedom, the earliest colonists organized their communities on the concepts of "Establishment." There was a strong belief in the power of education to secure both the political and moral future of citizens. The political leaders of the Constitutional and post Constitutional period espoused the belief in the concept of the separation of church and state. They worked hard to organize the new government in this respect. They did not believe in cultural equality as we now define it. They were for the most part Protestant Christians and many were based in strong classed society traditions. Jefferson's educational design excluded the masses and women in particular, from higher levels of education. He was a slave holder.

Mann believed that religion should be included in curriculum, though not doctrinally. The developments in education in the post Civil war period and into the early twentieth century were detrimental in terms of

acceptance and respect for ethnic heritage. The use of the school as a socializing institution, geared to making everyone American, created problems for the many ethnic groups who were caught in the shuffle. The economic, political, and religious trends in the early 1900's set the scene for a revolution in the political response to the issue of religion in the public schools in the 40's, 50', and 60's.

Regardless of the intentions of the founding fathers, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Fourteenth Amendment set our nation up for the continuing need for evaluation and reevaluation on the question of the relationship between religion and education. As the profession of education evolves and changes its goals and objectives these problems come to the forefront. We seem to be in an era of multi-cultural recognition. As we become more attuned to the needs of the many minorities in our culture, we must again reassess the place of religion in our schools.

## CONTINUING DEBATE

### Introduction

The continuing debate between religion, government, and education leads us to a central question. How to best secure a happy future for our children? In order to answer this question we must resolve a series of practical questions. Can a core of values be taught? What rituals shall be observed? What shall be taught about religious institutions, beliefs, the role of religion in history, culture, literature, music. How to relate patriotism, moral, ethical, and character values to their ultimate religious sanctions (Brickman, 1961)? Religion is unquestionably a part of our history and our culture. All areas are considered essential for a complete education. The question is whether religion can be conveyed within the educational process without the objectionable features. Can we teach about religion without teaching religion? The second half of the question is related to moral education. Can we teach values without pinning the instruction to one version or another of religion. These questions are the heart of "the great debate of the United States", the controversy between public education and religion (Freund & Ulrich, 1965). Interest, controversy, and experimentation have characterized the relationship between religion and public education. This controversy is rooted in heterogeneity. Therefore, efforts to reach solutions that satisfy the majority tend to incite individual groups (Dierenfield, 1962). There are are set of concerns paramount in the making of these decisions. First, each child has the right to learn, to participate, to create and to develop in and through the life of the public school. Second, it is the responsibility of the teacher to develop subject matter

according to personal insights and the highest standard of excellence. The religious integrity of both teachers and students must not be disregarded (Loder, 1965).

### Legal Issues

All legal questions raised concerning religion in the schools have rested on the interpretation of two constitutional amendments. The First Amendment which contains the anti-establishment clause and the clause dealing the prohibition of the free exercise of religion. Cases relating to school prayer and religious exercises have been related to the former and cases concerning interference with religious practice and offensive practices to the latter. The First Amendment does not forbid all mention of religion in the public schools. It is the advancement or inhibition of religion that is prohibited (American Association of School Administrators, 1986). An interpretation of First Amendment by Everson (1947) and McCollum (1948) stated, "Neither the Federal government nor the states can set up a church; aid one religion over another; force one to go to or remain away from church or to profess a belief or disbelief in any religion; levy a tax to support any religious activity; or openly or secretly participate in the affairs of any religious organization" (Brickman, 1961, p. 77). This separationist interpretation has enabled us to avoid problems that other nations have had in this regard. This system of separation establishes the political authority as an exclusively secular authority (Brickman, 1961).

The Fourteenth Amendment, Section 1 has also been the basis for court actions. "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of

the State wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws" (Spring, 1985, p. 236). The section including privileges and immunities protects free speech and religion issues. The section including life, liberty and pursuit of property is referred to in suspension and firing issues. The protections of this amendment depend on the states making provision for education. Once education is provided, the state must provide equally to all people.

In light of the legal constraints, there has been discussion involving excusing students from school for holidays of their faiths (Dierenfield, 1962). From an educational standpoint, this allows students to observe holidays, and encourages students to participate in their chosen religion. In the early 60's this included: Catholic students two days in the spring, Bahai ten holy days, and Jewish children fifteen holy days during the year. Conditions governing these kinds of policy decisions involve State law, community opinion, teachers, and the Superintendent. In the 1952 case, *Zorach vs. Clauson* students were allowed release time to leave school grounds to attend religious instruction as requested in writing by individual parents. According to the Court the government cannot "coerce anyone to attend church, to observe a religious holiday, or to take religious instruction. But it can close its doors or suspend its operations as to those who want to repair to their religious sanctuary for worship or instruction" (Tyack, 1974, p. 242).

In 1955, the New York Board of Regents made a statement of fundamental beliefs. It stated that liberty under God, respect for the liberty

and rights of the individual, and devotion to freedom were primary to education in that state. The policy was written up and rewritten with less references to God but still received a great deal of opposition from teacher and parent groups and the New York Board of Rabbis (Dierenfield, 1962). The methods prescribed for teaching these beliefs included the use of the constitution and other great American documents, the discussion of inalienable rights, religious freedom, respect for human dignity, devotion to freedom, reverence for God; daily activities such as sports and games for fair play; through science studies, the development of respect for truth and humility; studies of biography, character, and friendship to guard against prejudice and intolerance (Dierenfield, 1962).

In the early 1960's the supreme court made two decisions in relation to religion and public education. They ruled that prayer recitation and Bible reading in public schools violated the Constitutional principle of Separation of Church and State (Hollander, Saypol, 1976). The issue of prayer in schools has been the basis for many court battles. According to Freund (1965), it would be inappropriate for the Supreme Court to decide which prayers are more appropriate than others, by definitions of civil liberties they could only decide for or against the concept of prayer in schools.

The Supreme Court has not ruled on the acceptability of Christmas celebrations in the schools. Rulings have been made for separation of church and state, against religious instruction in the schools, for release time from school for religious observance, against prayer of any kind in school, against Bible reading in school, and against pastoral play presentation in schools (Martin, 1976; American Association of School Administrators, 1986). The language and logic of those decisions would seem to apply to religious

holiday observances as well. If a "denominationally neutral" prayer "establishes an official religion", then plays depicting the Christmas story and other activities related to the celebration of any religious holiday do this as well. The Court also condemned the blending of secular and sectarian education (Hollander, Saypol, 1976, p. 63). The Supreme Court stated that "When the power, prestige and financial support of government is placed behind a particular religious belief, the indirect coercive pressure upon religious minorities to conform to the prevailing officially approved religion is plain" (Martin, 1976, p.29). The courts have also expressed their concerns relative to timing, context of classroom programs, and the grade level of the children. Many teachers are unaware of and do not understand the court decisions (Hollander & Saypol, 1976). The teacher intent and the net effect of teaching upon students have been regarded as significant factors in court rulings (Drotman, 1973).

If the school education during Christmas takes on a religious character, it is in opposition to the constitutional law. It imposes on the rights of those who worship in other ways. Bible should not be used for devotional purposes and curriculum should not be used as a vehicle for conditioning children in the belief in God (Brickman, 1961).

#### Supporting Views

In 1963, the United Presbyterian Church USA, made the following statement: "Public schools should not ignore the personal beliefs in God which are part of the life of its pupils, but should recognize and respect such beliefs. Public schools should neither be hostile to religious beliefs nor act in any manner which tends to favor one religion or church over another."

(Wilson, 1965, p. 174). Furthermore, they recommended that since association of seasonal activities with religious holidays in the public schools tends to pervert religious significance, this association should be discouraged as foreign to the purpose of the public school. Religious holidays should be acknowledged but never celebrated religiously in the schools (Loder, 1965).

In 1964 Richard Rubenstein stated a Jewish perspective, "...historical Jewish experience has taught us that the ideal of a government neutral in religious matters offers the only hope for equality of condition for all men in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious community" (Wilson, 1965, p. 182). There is a strong Jewish defense of the public school as the chief instrument for developing informed citizenry and achieving the goals of American democracy. However maintenance and furtherance of religion are the responsibilities of the synagogue, church, home, and not the public school (Brickman, 1961).

### Curriculum

Course offerings: Curriculum is defined as the subject matter and organized pattern of courses which combine to make the formal academic offerings of a school (Dierenfield, 1962). Religion as a moral and philosophical concept as well as a social institution has had great influence in the history and culture of all societies (Dierenfield, 1962), and therefore on the curriculum of the public school. A democratic society grants its citizens the right to believe as their consciences dictate. The schools can and should stress the meaning of this right (American Council Education, 1953).

There are many things related to religion that should be in the curriculum: the contribution of religion to developing civilization, the unique tradition of religious liberty to America, the role of religion in social institutions - universities, hospitals, welfare agencies, the contribution of religion to art and literature, including the Bible (Brickman, 1961; Loder 1965). Many courses lend themselves to the inclusion of religiously related material: art, architecture, music, literature, history, science, etc. Religion in this sense has been regarded as one of the "great humanities" and one of the important factors in the life of all mankind. Learning about religion has also been considered appropriate to help students understand the importance of religion in the lives of individuals, to understand the meaning of religious freedom, to better understand the viewpoints of others, to become more loyal to the church of one's own choice (Dierenfield, 1962; Weinstein, 1979). The inclusion of any or all of these religious references to the curriculum raises serious questions. Specifically how can the Bible be referenced? Can it be taught as literature, in the context of geography, or as a background for the humanities? How should courses be related to religion? Are they to discuss religious lore, literary reference, or teach facts? What is the relationship between the theoretical and practical decisions about religion and public education? Who is responsible for decisions about course content? These questions reflect the need for an organized, conscious effort in response to this dilemma (Cox, 1969).

To omit all references to religion would be to neglect an important part of American life (American Council on Education, 1953). The incidental teaching of religion in the curriculum can be done by objectively examining its dynamic force on society (Dierenfield, 1962, p. 39). Unit teaching about

religion for the purpose of teaching the many ways which humanity has devised to cope with material and spiritual problems, is perfectly sound practice (Brickman, 1961). However, there are many problems. Unit outlines and materials are inferior. Few teachers are capable of handling religious topics in an historical or sociological way. Teaching about religion may become an opening wedge for the teaching of religion. This raises the question of the objectivity and the education of the teacher (Dierenfield, 1962). Objectivity on the part of the teacher may be interpreted by the student as an expression of indifference to deep personal religious experience (Brickman, 1961). Silence may create the impression that religion is unimportant. This negative consequence is all the more striking in a society where more and more responsibility for dealing with social problems is being given to the schools (American Council on Education, 1953). Most teachers have not been adequately prepared or are not "religiously literate" (Dierenfield, 1962, p. 39). Teaching about religion would include religions around the world as well as in America. However, teaching about religion in a higher level course that taught about all religions from a truly unbiased view would probably include material that would be objected to by every denomination, because it would have to include factual concepts that might be counter to the more magical religious interpretations and comparisons of points of view (Freund & Ulrich, 1965). Teaching about religion may arouse opposition of those to whom any religious presentation without efforts to win faith is false and purposeless (Brickman, 1961). For this group the question of objective religious literacy without its other side, faith, presents a most serious dilemma (Brickman, 1961).

According to Dierenfield (1962), the other curriculum issues that have been raised include Bible classes (elective), homeroom devotional exercises , units on religion in regular course work, textbook references to religion, and extracurricular activities (illegal).

Values: Curriculum has also included the teaching of inherent American values based on our religious faith, humanitarianism and social justice: appreciation, cooperation, courage, faith, generosity, good will, honesty, kindness, loyalty, respect for Law, responsibility, and reverence. The teaching of moral and spiritual values is part of the curriculum controversy. Most of what is taught in schools is related to moral issues such as clean speech, cooperation, good will, honesty, loyalty, respect for elders, truthfulness, responsibility (Dierenfield, 1962), thoroughness and objectivity (Brickman, 1961). The spirit of the school and its teachers are a basic factor in developing moral values (National Education Association).

#### Holiday Celebrations

After World War II, the observance of religious holidays such as Christmas, Easter, and Hanukah became an increasingly more significant part of the curriculum. This received little support from Jewish groups, who believe that these holidays should not be celebrated in school. In fact this issue has become the basis of the continuing conflict between religion and education. This sectarian conflict has negated the atmosphere of the occasion, to say the least (Dierenfield, 1962).

Since then, the celebration of Christmas has become a significant activity in schools. Texts, supplemental curriculum materials, and

instructional magazines all provide volumes of a broad spectrum of activities related specifically to Christmas themes. This emphasis is supported by the popular notion that Christmas is a central celebration of childhood. While the importance of Christmas in contemporary American culture is significant and an emotionally charged issue, it is essential for educators to assess curriculum programming in light of our history, our goals for education and the needs of children (Gelb, 1987).

The Christmas tree, it is argued, is not intrinsically Christian. However, by topping it with a star or cross, and by linking it to Christmas activities such as songs, gift giving and other classroom activities it takes on the religious significance. Children do not differentiate between the symbols and the activities when they are linked in the classroom. It is not the tree or the gift giving that are the problem. The problem is the insensitivity to difference (Goldstein & Menelly, 1974).

There are many kinds of arguments presented against the celebration of religious holidays in public schools. There are many unintended, negative consequences involved in the extensive inclusion of the celebration of any particular religious holiday in a public school (Gelb, 1987).

Majority Power: Freedom of conscience of every child is sacrosanct. The majority rule is not applicable to matters of religion (Weinstein, 1979). The majority cannot rule the decision making on religious celebration (Brickman, 1961). The free exercise clause has never meant that the majority may coerce a minority to conform to its religious practices. Resentment of the minority reveals a lack of understanding of this principle. It must not be invoked when this would mean a violation of the

constitutional rights and sensitivities of the minority (Hollander & Saypol, 1976).

Minority Integrity: When the teacher sends the minority child home with an ornament for a non-existent tree it can be compared to calling the Hispanic child Charles when his given name is Carlos" (Gelb, 1987). "Asking Jewish children to make dreidels and other ornaments to hang on the class Christmas tree is disrespectful" (Moskowitz, 1987, p. 12).

The assumption that everyone celebrates the secular aspects of Christmas is not founded in fact. Even when lip service is given to the minority holidays, minority children are getting the message that they are "guests in their own country" (Gelb, 1987; Rosenthal, 1986).

The observance of a religious occasion that does not involve any formal lesson or class activity is a more subtle invasion of minority integrity (Brickman, 1961). Such celebrations have the affect of setting minority religions apart and pointing out that difference. Christmas observances put pressure on minority children to conform to majority patterns of behavior. In this way, the school subjects the minority child to unnecessary pressure (Brickman, 1961).

By its nature, in no institution anywhere on the American scene, is the sanctity of the individual held more sacred than in the public school. The duty of the public school is to encourage a child's pride in individuality and create an atmosphere of respect for difference. A vital ingredient of religious freedom is to recognize traditional religion, humanism, agnosticism, and atheism positively and equally. All children of every shade of religious opinion, as well as those religiously unaffiliated families, should enjoy

complete equality in the classroom, school, and community. The rights of minorities must be a matter of concern (Brickman, 1961). Non-Christian children are not guests in the public school. They are fellow citizens whose religious freedom must be preserved. Teachers have a mandate to teach all children about different rites, customs, and creeds of our nation that make up the multi-ethnic, multi-religious culture (Weinstein, 1979). Young children must be protected from growing to feel that they are second-class citizens in a country that, professing no establishment of religion, seems in fact annually to endorse and support one (Beggs, McQuigg, 1975). Unfortunately, most teachers are not prepared for teaching in an era of cultural pluralism. School guidelines often tell what is not allowed but do not offer help with interculturally acceptable programming (Hollander & Saypol, 1976).

Psychological factors: Many teachers are unaware of the psychological effect religious celebrations have on non-Christian children (Rosenberg, 1986). They view all of the activities as American culture and they cannot understand how anything "so good" can be bad (Hollander & Saypol, 1976; Lipman & Vorspan).

Christmas celebrations in the schools create confusion for non-Christian children. These situations can impair wholesome classroom relationships and create a poor climate for education (Hollander & Saypol, 1976). Mistrust can develop. Teachers are preaching understanding and good will but they are being insensitive to the feelings and beliefs of the minority child. Teaching respect for law, through the Bill of rights, but committing unconstitutional acts in the classroom establishes an untrustworthy pattern (Drotman, 1973).

If the development of self-control and self-discipline are goals of education then the emphasis on rewards for good and bad behavior are contrary to these goals. Telling children to be good so that Santa will be pleased and give them presents encourages them to look outside of themselves for standards. It also re-emphasizes the problems of less financially able families. Poor children who are "good" are not rewarded as well as others. These children can suffer in the development of their self esteem, having feelings that they are somehow not as "good" because they do not get so many things (Gelb, 1987).

Teachers who spend much time with Christmas curriculum become supporters of that majority view. When minority children are asked to take the role of teacher in explaining their holiday, they are asked to assume equal status with the authority figure. This is an inappropriate role and puts undo pressure on the child to support and explain complex material (Hollander, et al, 1978; Elkind, 1981). The dependence on the child "expert" can also result in the exchange of inaccurate even foolish interpretations of the holidays (Goldstein & Meneilly, 1974). It also puts the child in the limelight, accentuating differentness. At the same time majority children are guided toward ethnocentrism and insensitivity by observing the imposition of their traditions on their minority peers (Gelb, 1987).

Subtle coercion is always involved in group policy requiring a child to separate himself from his fellows (Blanshard, 1963). Children in public schools are vulnerable to this indirect coercive pressure. Non-christian children are forced to choose between isolating themselves by abstaining from participation or, equally hurtful and unjust, to participate in religious observance contrary to their beliefs (Hollander, et al, 1978). Children are a

trapped, captive audience due to compulsory education laws. They sit under the authority of teachers whom they are taught to revere as guides for social living. Calling participation voluntary is questionable when their attendance is required (Blanshard, 1963). They are compelled to violate their consciences and the cost may be heavy in guilt and pain (Drotman, 1973). Children want to "belong." This desire outweighs parents wishes, their cultural and religious background (Rosenthal, 1986). Excusal from participation is not an adequate protection because the psychological pressure to conform is so strong in the classroom atmosphere. Non-conformity produces a stigma which is real and painful to a child. This practice tends to destroy the equality of pupils which the constitution seeks to protect (Freund & Ulrich, 1965; Jacobson). The issue is one of sensitivity and responsibility by parents, teachers, and the institutions themselves. If a child doesn't feel lovable or good enough the situation can exacerbate already existing fears (Granberry, 1983).

Even if none of the children in a class are offended by Christmas celebrations in a classroom, potentially there is harm done. A group of attitudes is developed: the constitution is not supported by the most obvious authority figures children relate to, teachers; children grow up subconsciously accepting Christmas as a religious event sanctioned by the state; today's students become teachers who perpetuate these celebrations as classroom traditions (Martin, 1976).

Secularization: If Christmas activities are non-sectarian and non-religious, harmlessly emphasizing symbols without touching on the religious significance, there is no educational significance. In addition it is a mockery

of legitimate religious observance. This compromise cannot satisfy those who understand, cherish and practice their own religion (Brickman, 1961).

Religious Christians do not want Christmas to be a cultural occasion. It is intended to be a personal, meaningful experience. If it is reduced to secular culture, a disservice is done religiously and culturally (Goldstein & Meneilly, 1974; Jacobson). If formal lessons and assembly programs are objectionable, then informal observances, such as Christmas and Easter decorations are also objectionable (Brickman, 1961).

Christians believe that God became man in Jesus Christ and that this festival is a celebration of that belief (Di Veroli, 1983). If Christmas is treated as a national holiday in the school, the school is helping to convert one of the most beautiful Christian occasions into a secular festival suitable for commercial exploitation. This emphasizes the material concerns contrary to Christian spirituality (Brickman, 1961). Media commercialization, with its emphasis on material gain, also puts an additional stress on children whose expectations cannot be met due to economic factors. One in five American children live in poverty. The media and schools set many children up for a sense of loss and disappointment (Gelb, 1987).

Hanukah: In an effort to teach "tolerance" teachers have introduced the subject of Hanukah into the public school classroom (Brickman, 1961). Some teachers, in their awareness of the diversity believe they have solved the problem of "balance" by the addition of activities related to Hanukah. There are many reasons why this is does not achieve either objective (Gelb, 1987). No attempt should be made to "balance" Christmas observances. The answer to one violation of the required separation of church and state is not

another violation, according to the American Civil Liberties Union (Martin, 1976).

There is a distorted equation of the two holidays simply because they fall at the same time of year. If one understands the religious significance of both holidays, it is clear that there is not the "slightest rational connection between Hanukah and Christmas" (Brickman, 1961, p. 100). In the Jewish tradition, Hanukah is a very minor observance, while in the Christian tradition Christmas is a very major observance (Jacobson; Granberry, 1983). Teachers do not display multicultural sensitivity by treating Hanukah as the most important Jewish holiday or by equating it with Christmas. This support of the false notion of Hanukah as the "Jewish Christmas" does a disservice to all of the children (Gelb, 1987).

Teachers often do not have enough information about the holiday to make observances meaningful. Recognizing this they may ask the minority children for help. This puts the child under pressure to be an expert and singles that child out. Both expectations on the the part of the teacher can create uncomfortable and inappropriate roles for the child (Gelb, 1987). Jewish children are often asked to write or give oral reports to their class about their holiday. Children reporting on their own holiday or about what they already know, is "educational foolishness", according to Brickman (1961, p. 99).

Curriculum Goals: Attempts to change objectionable practices must take into account several factors: constitutional principles, the attitudes and values of teachers, concern for all students and the goals of education in a pluralistic society (Hollander & Saypol, 1976). What is best for a particular

school or community will not come as a compromise of religious views. It must be the result of concern and careful planning (Beggs & McQuigg, 1975).

Teachers come to the classroom with personal attitudes and emotions based on their own life experiences (Hollander & Saypol, 1976). Though difficult, teachers must examine their own attitudes and values. They must evaluate their perceptions of children of religious and ethnic backgrounds other than their own. It is essential that purposes and effects of holiday curriculum be examined (Hollander, et al, 1978).

An ultimate goal may be the formulation of guidelines, or the creation of a truly multicultural curriculum. Educational goals, constitutional principles, the welfare of children, and sound educational practices must be part of the plan. Changes are best initiated at any time of the year other than Christmas time. When Christmas is viewed and treated as just one element in the curriculum, just one holiday among the many that children learn about, it will have been put in its proper place (Drotman, 1973; American Association of School Administrators, 1986).

Another appropriate goal may be the better understanding of the cultures of different people. This would include respecting the dignity of individuals, emphasizing the importance of diversity, and appreciating the strengths in difference. In this light teachers must recognize difference and help children to learn that different is not "better" or "worse". (Hollander, et al, 1978).

In the "true spirit" of Christmas, that is peace on earth and good will toward all people, we should consider amending certain practices. Limit Christmas activities to a few days, as close to the holiday as possible. Emphasize the giving, rather than the receiving aspect of the holiday. Leave

communication of personal beliefs to parents by neither encouraging nor discouraging religious concepts. Become aware of important celebrations in other religions and recognize them at appropriate times during the year. Educational professionals must maintain professional judgment in the face of the pressures of the holiday season (Gelb, 1987).

The spirit of the holiday of Hanukah is remembering that all people have the right to religious freedom (Moskowitz, 1986). It is important to ensure that children are accepted by their peers while they remain true to their own culture and religion. Teachers can do this by helping them to accept their uniqueness as well as their similarity to their peers (Rosenthal, 1986). Development of self awareness and sensitivity ought to be included in our educational goals and curricular considerations (Hollander & Saypol, 1976). The various religious celebrations are all part of "our" culture. Learning about our neighbors celebrations and how to live harmoniously in our pluralistic society is an appropriate educational objective (Jacobson; American Association of School Administrators, 1986).

Other solutions to some of the stated problems have included the suggestion that better textbooks could be written, or that material be omitted from the curriculum altogether. The difficulties are so complex that there are no easy answers (Brickman, 1961).

Guidelines for validity of Christmas activities might include discussion of the following: public display of religious symbols is not permissible, according to the American Civil Liberties Union; the emphasis on religious rather than cultural aspects, i.e., a program of Christmas religious music is unconstitutional, also according to the ACLU; religious art activities including music, done at the suggestion or instruction of the teacher violate the

purpose and spirit of the constitution, while items produced by children on their own do not, according to the National Conference of Christians and Jews (Martin, 1976). The constitutional objections are not cured by observing the holidays of all faiths, although they are exacerbated by the observing of the holidays of only one faith (Stern, 1988,). Joint observances of religious holidays in the public schools are not less a breach of the American ideal than are the celebrations of a single faith (Beggs & McQuigg,1965; American Association of School Administrators, 1964).

Suggestions for a community approach to the issue: 1) educators, at all levels, must be familiar with the complexity of the issue of the separation of church and state, it should be included in their early training; 2) there should be discussion of the subject, including all affected parties, prior to the making of any policy; 3) it may be wise to avoid a written policy; 4) no one can have the luxury of representing "a side"; 5) If you must write a policy, plan carefully, have advance discussions, include clergy, religious leaders and civic groups, as well as community educators (Lipman & Vorspan).

#### Summary

The continuing debate between religion, government and education has raised many questions for professional educators. There is a great deal of legal support for the separation of church and state. Since 1940 the Supreme Court has made many rulings supporting the concept established by our founding fathers. Many individuals and groups have rallied to support the court.

In an era when the curriculum of the school is burdened with many social as well as educational responsibilities, it is essential to evaluate all school activities in terms of the goals and objectives of our schools. Do those activities really contribute to meeting those goals? How can we best meet the needs of the children?

If we agree that religion is a significant educational element, then we must make conscious decisions on how this element will be included in the curriculum. We must be sure that we are imparting accurate information and not wrong impressions.

We live in a multi-ethnic, multi religious community. We must be sensitive to all of the possible implications of our behavior. We must consider the needs of the minority children in our schools. We must consider the psychological effects of peer pressure, its affects on children and on families. The subtle coercion of holiday observances in the schools creates problems for the minority child and develops a sense of ethnocentricity in the majority child. Neither condition is an acceptable outcome of school activities.

Secularization of a religious holiday has questionable educational value. In addition, it creates problems for the religious community. What are our goals in terms of positive American values?

The inclusion of other religious holidays, Hanukah for example, to create religious balance is unconstitutional. It is also an inaccurate representation of the holidays and the religions. By doing this, educators impart wrong information. In addition, a poor example is set by the school concerning respect of the student's constitutional rights.

Teachers and their schools must come to terms with these objectionable practices. The tone was set in the beginning of the twentieth century. Schools are involved in the social concerns of our country. Training must be done. Individuals must assess their own feelings and behaviors. Changes must be made to reestablish the schools as constitutionally and psychologically safe places for children, places that meet the goals that we have set for them.

## CONCLUSIONS

The questions concerning the role of religion in education are still a major concern to the citizens of the United States. The public school is still the central American institution involved in the conflict. The public school has become one of the most important cultural institutions in our pluralistic society.

Horace Mann wrote, "If, then a government would recognize and protect the rights of religious freedom, it must abstain from subjugating the capacities of its children to any legal standard of religious faith, with as great fidelity as it abstains from controlling the opinions of men. It must meet the unquestionable fact, that the old spirit of religious domination is adopting new measures to accomplish its work,—measures, which, if successful, will be as fatal to the liberties of mankind, as those which were practiced in by-gone days of violence and terror. These new measures are aimed at children instead of men. They propose to supersede the necessity of subduing free thought, in the mind of the adult, by forestalling the development of any capacity of free thought, in the mind of the child. They expect to find it easier to subdue the free agency of children, by binding them in fetters of bigotry, than to subdue the free agency of men, by binding them in fetters of iron....Others, still are striving to break down all free Public School systems where they do exist, in the hope, that on the downfall of these, their system will succeed. The sovereign antidote against these machinations, is, Free Schools for all, and the right of every parent to determine the religious education of his children (Mann, 1865, p. 110).

Christmas activities do not bring us closer to the day when customs of smaller groups will be as respected as the ways of larger groups. The public school must be the chief instrument for developing informed citizenry and achieving the goals of American democracy. However, maintenance and furtherance of religion are responsibilities of the synagogue, church, home, and not the public school. If these restraints were recognized we might see that prayers, religious hymns, display of religious symbols, and other practices array the vast power and influence of the school on the side of the dominant majority in disregard of the most elementary rights of a defenseless minority of captive children (Brickman, 1961). To establish any religion in that system is to give religion a preferment far more substantial than monetary support (Blanshard, 1963).

It is clear to this author that these issues are complex, emotional, and rooted in our history. Educators will bear the burden of self-examination that should be required of every educated person. In the humanities the academic work demands a free exchange of ideas and convictions. If the teacher's integrity in teaching will not permit open-mindedness, it is possible that his/her suitability for teaching should be questioned (Loder, 1965).

We must decide what the purpose of learning is (Freund & Ulrich, 1965). We must face up to the challenges of Americanization, race, socialization, etc. We must expand curriculum to meet the needs of an increasingly complex age. In a democratic society, the education of the youth cannot be undertaken by a single institution.

The solutions to the problems of equality of treatment in our public schools are difficult. The inclusion of information about religion in the curriculum is not the same as the celebrating of particular religious holidays.

We do not support our communities or our children educationally or morally if we do not assess ourselves, our motives and our goals. Our profession must objectively evaluate its present attitude and make changes that will put our schools on a course that is morally fair and is in compliance with our constitutional guarantees.

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RELIGIOUS FREEDOM A CONTINUING DEBATE:  
CHRISTMAS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CURRICULUM

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Elementary Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

1988

## ABSTRACT

There has always been controversy concerning the role of religion in the process of education. This paper is an investigation of the historical background and the continuing debate concerning the inherent conflicts of this issue.

In Colonial America, Establishment was the basis of government. Thomas Jefferson, Horace Mann and other prominent figures in United States history fought for the separation of church and state. They applied these convictions to the separation of church and school.

The issue, here discussed, is the inclusion of the celebration of religious holidays in school, particularly Christmas. There are many reasons why it is appropriate to include religion in the curriculum. However, the actual celebration of holidays does not meet curricular goals or support constitutional guarantees.