

Shut Up and Teach!

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The separation of church and state has been discussed in American society since the eighteenth century. Today people cannot turn on their televisions or open their newspapers without reading or hearing about this debate. The separation of church and state is a historical, but still relevant, issue found in every facet of our lives: in the government and in our currency, but the most heated argument is in our public school systems. Our government was founded on the basis of religious freedom, so it should be permissible to teach Judeo-Christian doctrine to willing public school students.

Susan Jacoby, stated in her lecture, “The separation of church and state by our founding fathers is seen as a *gift*.” Jacoby mentioned that the Founding Fathers of our nation “deliberately omitted the word *God* from documents.” The Founding Fathers, like Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and even our first president George Washington, supported the idea of omitting all references to religion from the Declaration of Independence and the original Constitution (“The United States Constitution”).

Since the signing of the Constitution in Independence Hall and the writing of the Bill of Rights, the idea of the separation of church and state has been blown out of proportion. Students who are merely asking to learn about the Judeo-Christian religion are not getting the opportunity because of the heated debates that the idea of religion causes at local, state, and federal levels. The prohibition of Judeo-Christian doctrine from any federal document, building, or even words coming from our lips is an infringement on an individual’s religious freedoms. Is not one of rights as Americans the freedom of religion?

In the days of the Puritans, teaching Judeo-Christian doctrine to children was seen as the right thing to do, but in the last 232 years, this activity has been frowned upon. A student in a public school system should be allowed a sense of individualism and “free thinking.” We, as a society, do not condemn continuing education in subjects such as math, science, or even our native tongue, English. However, any time Judeo-Christian religion is brought up in a classroom, the notion is either glossed over or looked down upon. People in our society are individuals and have many different morals, values, and religions. Haleem, the author of *The Crescent and the Cross: Muslim and Christian Approaches to War and Peace*, quotes the Qur’an: “It states that people will remain different (11:118), they will always have different religions and ways and this is an unalterable fact (5:48)” (qtd. in Haleem et al. 102). Regardless of what religion one practices, he or she should be able to practice it without persecution or ridicule. Children of school age are robbed of the opportunity to learn about the Judeo-Christian religion in schools without persecution or ridicule by the strict curriculum laid down by the state, such as the Standards of Learning (SOL’s) in Virginia’s public schools.

In 1948, the U. S. Supreme Court decided in *McCollum v. Board of Education Dist. 71* that the teaching of religious instruction in a public school setting is unconstitutional. This decision was a victory for some and a defeat for others; it was a loss for those fighting to keep the teaching of religion in schools. In my opinion, this court decision was a setback, and it is a reason to press forward defiantly for the teaching of religion in public schools.

Followers of any religion are always searching; at school age, one’s mind is most open to accepting new ideas. However as we get older, we allow people we have come to respect to lead us or to tell us what to believe. Therefore, if an educator is not willing to, or is told not to, teach

religion in a public school, his or her students will not become as learned as they could otherwise have been.

Works Cited

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