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Series C: Interreligious Activities. 1952-1992

Box 38, Folder 14, Moral instruction in California schools, 1969.

July 7, 1969

Rita Hoffman

Samuel Rabinove

"Guidelines for Moral Instruction in California Schools"

You asked for my evaluation of these new guidelines, particularly pages 65 to 73 on teaching about religion, as well as my opinion of "Religion Goes to School: A Practical Handbook for Teachers" by James V. Panoch and David L. Barr.

First, a few general observations: These guidelines, prepared under the aegis of Superintendent of Public Instruction Max Rafferty, really are something. They are simply permeated with right-wing and/or Fundamentalist claptrap. If they weren't so depressing, they would be ludicrous. Of course, as a Navy veteran, recalling the long lines outside the Honolulu brothels in 1943, I was deeply touched by their utilization of the Navy's own "moral leadership" materials (P. 21). Equally impressive is their glittering attack on present day methods of teaching of evolution (P. 62-64)

As to pages 65 to 73 on teaching about religion, the best thing I can offer you as a counterweight is our revised Statement of Views on Religion and Public Education, a copy of which is enclosed. See pages 5 through 11. Rafferty's guidelines epitomize my own apprehension regarding teaching about religion, i.e., that such teaching can easily become a screen for the advancement of religion (and it's pretty safe bet it won't be our religion), in clear violation of the heart and spirit of the Schempp decision, to which the guidelines very selectively and somewhat misleadingly choose to allude.

On page 68, they have the nerve also to cite, in support of their biased outlook, the case of U.S. v. Seeger, in which the Supreme Court actually ruled that belief in God is not a prerequisite to qualifying for exemption as a conscientious objector. But, of course, the guideline authors carefully neglect to mention the very essence of the decision -- it wouldn't quite serve their purposes to do so.

Rita Hoffman

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July 7, 1969

Concerning the book by Panoch and Barr, I am enclosing also a copy of a capsule review of that book which I did for I. Terman. It speaks for itself.

In sum, it is my opinion that these guidelines are good neither for Jews nor for Judaism, and should be reacted to in whatever ways may be most appropriate, preferably in concert with other groups.

SR:h

cc:

I. Terman
M. Tanenbaum

