

RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS

When the Catholic League learned that an anti-Catholic book was being used in a public school in Cooperstown, North Dakota, we immediately asked the superintendent of schools for an explanation. We are happy to report that the book will no longer be referenced by the teacher. Here's what happened.

Handouts from a book by Ralph Woodrow, *Babylon's Mystery Religion*, were being used by a teacher in his seventh grade social studies and tenth grade history classes at Griggs County Central Public School District. The book is loaded with evangelical anti-Catholic propaganda. Indeed, the author himself admits that his work is not historically accurate.

To make matters worse, Cutting Edge Book Reviews praised the work as "a basic handbook exposing the truth regarding the Roman Catholic system in a day when many 'evangelicals' are touting 'Christian Unity' with the Church of Rome." After the Catholic League registered its complaint, the teacher agreed to consult the World Book Encyclopedia instead.

On another front, Catholic parents in Westchester sued a school district when they learned that an altar was used at an Earth Day observance; third graders were also instructed to make cut-outs of an elephant-headed god. Such attention to the religious sensibilities of Catholics would never be countenanced, and this is especially true of Westchester schools; there have been many New Age-type practices observed there in recent years.

We get a lot of complaints from Catholic League members about school calendars which list Jewish holy days but not Christian ones. There is nothing illegal about these abuses, so it is up to local residents to complain. Mary Buse, a Catholic League member from Cincinnati, did just that and got what she was looking for—an even playing field. Members take note!

A kindergartner from a suburban community in Syracuse expressed his concern for the environment by including a reference to God in his artwork. The religious-cleansing police, known as teacher and principal, naturally muzzled the child's freedom of speech by censoring his First Amendment rights. It's now in the courts.

After decades of the failed experiment in non-judgmental "value free" education, character education is now all the rage. But some are worried that by teaching character, religion might slip in the door. Tom Brokaw, on NBC Nightly News, expressed the worst fears of many when he introduced the topic on November 2: "Character education—a good idea or a blatant violation of your child's civil rights"? That would seem to suggest that Johnny's rights are being duly respected by teaching him that there is no such thing as right and wrong.

Of course, many of these problems could be solved if parents had a right to send their children to the school of their choice. But the same folks who think it is a "blatant violation" of liberty to teach right from wrong are the same ones who oppose school choice. On this score, a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision is most welcome.

Everyone who follows school-choice initiatives has been watching Cleveland. A successful voucher program there was put on hold at the beginning of the new academic year when a Federal Judge barred new entrants into the program. But now the high court, agreeing with an appeal from Ohio's Attorney General, has ruled that new students can join the program while a U.S. District court considers all the evidence.

The voucher issue is one that continues to get knocked around in the courts. That's because there's more than legalities involved in this one.