

SCHOOL YEAR ENDS IN CONTROVERSY

The 2004-2005 academic year is over, but some controversies linger. For example, the Catholic League is involved in a case in Washington state protesting the treatment of Catholic students by an irate teacher.

At the end of the school year, we learned of a public high-school teacher who has a long history of exhibiting anti-Catholic behavior in the classroom; so much so that many Catholic parents do not allow their children to take his classes. When asked to get involved, we did.

We contacted the superintendent of schools in the area registering a complaint. Things got worse when the offending teacher read to his class the letter that we sent. The result was predictable: the student whose father contacted the Catholic League was ostracized from other students. So we complained again, this time more forcefully.

The superintendent has not been insensitive to our complaint, and has met with the teacher and the parents of the student. In so many words, he is saying that he is doing what he can, given his authority. Indeed, he acknowledges that harassment and intimidation has occurred. We are hopeful that he will succeed in getting this teacher to stop venting his bigotry in the classroom. If not, we will up the ante.

We found a most reasonable public school principal in New Hampshire. When we learned that a novel by Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees*, was being taught to eighth graders, we were concerned. The book, while fine for college students and even those in high school, may be inappropriate for middle-school students. The problem with the book is that it mixes Catholicism with a folk religion practiced by the characters

in the novel, thus sending a message to young readers that Catholicism sanctions ideas and practices that are really heretic.

Our suggestion was to have the teachers alert the students to the fact that the book should not be taken as an example of what Catholics believe. The principal agreed with this suggestion and even said he would share our letter with all the teachers; the principal is himself a Catholic and does not want the students to be misinformed about his religion.

In a case that garnered public attention, a six-year old Christian student at Culbertson Elementary School in Newtown Square, Pennsylvania, was asked to pick a favorite book for his mom to read to the class. He picked the Bible. The kindergartner's mother, Donna Busch, was denied (on the usual church and state grounds). So she sued.

This same Philadelphia-area school allows Jewish parents to read books about Judaism and to teach the students about the dreidel game. Moreover, they can put a Star of David and a menorah on a calendar and songbook. But Christians are not given the same rights. Indeed, Christmas decorations are banned and the Christmas tree has been dubbed a "giving tree." The suit charges religious discrimination.

They make them tough in Texas. As the school year ended, the school board in the West Texas town of Odessa voted unanimously to add a Bible class to its high school curriculum. It will be taught as a history or literature class, something that is constitutionally legal: while it is not legal to teach religion, it is legal to teach about it. Not surprisingly, the ACLU and People for the American Way complained, but got nowhere.

Why would anyone mind what a student was reading during recess? Most teachers don't, but a principal at Karns Elementary School in Knox County, Tennessee did. What he

objected to was a ten-year old reading the Bible. The kid's parents are suing.

Planned Parenthood, which receives a hoard of money from the taxpayers, doesn't like competition and that is why it was delighted when the ACLU filed suit against an abstinence-only program in northwestern Pennsylvania that also receives federal funds. The suit claims that such programs amount to religious indoctrination. In short, Planned Parenthood and the ACLU are worried that if young people pick up on the abstinence message, its pro-abortion message will suffer.

When a student in Napa, California painted a castle-in-the-sky mural on a school wall, anti-religious students complained that the castle in the clouds looked too much like heaven. The student acquired a lawyer to defend him.

The right of little kids to sing a religious song in a public school is being challenged in New Jersey and Louisiana. A second grader at Frenchtown Elementary School in western New Jersey has been denied the right to sing "Awesome God" at a talent show. And a kindergartner at Terrytown Elementary School in Terrytown, Louisiana was banned from singing "I Can't Give Up Now."

The problem with "Awesome God" is that its lyrics mention "Our God is an awesome God." But God is not even mentioned in the other song. However, because one of the lines says, "I don't believe he brought me this far to leave me," the principal banned the song because she believed the "he" refers to God.

Finally, the same ACLU that cites legal precedent for the right of a student homosexual group to meet on campus says that Christians in Kent, Washington should not have an equal right to do so.

So this is what we've come to: an anti-Christian culture pervades public education. The real shame is that it is happening in a society where better than 8 in 10 are

Christian.