

The coming together of two events prompts this thinksheet: (1) Our town's been in an uproar over the 5th-grade requirement of Robt. Cormier's *THE CHOCOLATE WAR* (a seamy-steamy view of the American private school), and (2) The publication of the National Inst. of Education's study of religion and traditional family values in public-school textbooks. As you can see by this letter to the editor, I get my oar in on the former item (CCT 3Mar86).

1. The rhetorical advantage of taking a stand for "free-dom" is dual: (1) It puts your adversary in the position of being an enemy of freedom, and (2) It forces the other side to deal with your definition of freedom by way of redefinition. In this case, parents and the local Legion of Decency wanted schools free of "filth and corruption," and the school wanted to be free of coercion, censorship, book-burning. And I wanted everybody to be free: (1) The community to be free to participate in curricular choice; (2) The language of discourse to be free of the illusion that the present system of curricular choice is free of censorship (on which see, below, the heart of the NIE report); (3) Children to be free to voice complaints through a responsible and public-monitored channel; (4) Teachers to be free (as in my letter); and (5) Society to be free of compulsive education in a uniformitarian public-school system that alone, among educational possibilities, is free to dip into the public till (ie, be supported by tax money)....Now let's have a look at the NIE report (as written up in the 7Mar86 CT, p.15, by Paul C. Vitz, NYU prof. of psychology, whom I often thank in my heart for his virtuoso exposé of *PSYCHOLOGY AS RELIGION*):

2. Bias censorship in our present public-school textbooks is so tight that "religion and traditional family values have been excluded." (I must add: In the USSR public-school textbooks, religion is excluded but traditional family values are not. "We have more textbook freedom than you do," said a Soviet educator.) Texts introducing the pre-5th-grade child to U.S. society contain "not one word referring to any religious activity in American life. For example, not one word referred to any child or adult who prayed, or who went to church or temple." Further, "the idea that marriage is the foundation of the family was never presented. The words 'marriage,' 'wedding,' 'husband,' 'wife,' did not occur once. Nowhere was it suggested that being a mother or homemaker was a worthy and important role for a woman." Fifth-grade U.S. history texts had "modest" coverage of religion in colonial America and at early Southwest missions (else how could the history be written at all?), but "the treatment of the past 100 years was so devoid of reference to religion as to give the impression that it has ceased to exist in America." The 6th-grade texts dealing with world history or world culture "neglected, to the point of serious distortion, Jewish and Christian contri-

Teacher freedom vs. school freedom

In your editorial on the Barnstable school war over "The Chocolate War," you mislocate the freedom issue.

You say "At issue is a fundamental conflict over teacher freedoms." The issue was not over teacher freedoms but rather over school freedoms, the freedom of public schools and their committees from what the education establishment considers, at the particular time and place, undue public pressure.

Would that there were public debate over "teacher freedoms." As it is, the public-school teacher has very little freedom. The teachers are told what to do and what not to do:

What to do: Use the curricular ma-

terials you're handed.

What not to do: Don't open the school day or classroom period with any form of religious devotion even if your religion desires you to do so.

What I'm objecting to is the subtle, inauthentic defense by and of the education establishment to create the false impression that it is the defender of "teacher freedom." Our public schools are in deep trouble because they are not teacher-friendly.

Rather, they are institution-friendly, obscuring the fact by parading educationistic dogmas and power-plays illicitly under the banner of "freedom."

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butions." Highschool history texts covering U.S. history: "None came close to presenting the major religion events of the past 100 years adequately. For example, there was not one reference to a prominent preacher....Most disturbing was the constant omission of references to the large role that religion has always played in America."...."Taken together, these results make it clear that public school textbooks commonly exclude the history, heritage, beliefs, and values of millions of Americans. This is a serious injustice. More serious, the minds of many children are being coerced against the will of their parents.... Our textbooks must be changed to present a more truthful picture of America's past and present." We need parent-pressure, + textbook publishers with a little courage and more common sense; maybe Christian publishers might produce balanced books for use in both public and Christian schools....However, even if successful, a movement to improve textbooks would not be enough: "In the public schools as they are now constituted, a fair presentation of all traditions important in American life is possible only at a shallow level. So parents should have greater freedom to choose their child's school. This would not only help create new and more competitive schools--it would also support new publishers and more varied textbooks. We must finally recognize that the very pluralism of American life requires pluralism in American schools."

3. Why are increasing numbers of thinking Americans, including Paul Vitz and me, turning against the educationistic monolithic present public-school system? It's impoverishing and distorting our children's minds. It's promoting, along with the media, the secularistic paradigm of sense-making--the paradigm whose vision and internal logic radically rejects the Biblical paradigm, the fundamental paradigm of our civilization and nation--the paradigm that considers nonsense the atheist (God-less) paradigm, as the atheist paradigm considers Bible-church-synagogue nonsense. But why did the public school, founded as it was to engender Protestant perspectives and values, go atheist? (1) The teacher-training institutions, including almost all colleges and universities, became captive to late-Enlightenment humanism, which views God as irrelevant or worse--so children went to college, "lost their religion," then got jobs in the public schools, where they helped the children lose their religion: atheism for three generations has been leaking from higher to lower education; and (2) Bit by bit, "sensitive" special interests, "offended" by the old McGuffey Protestant public school, have successfully pressured the public schools into censoring "religion and traditional family values" out of the curriculum. (Some of these special interests, in the reverse of historical-pressure order, are gays, feminists, humanists, Jews, and Catholics--the last in the list succeeding, in 1931, in knocking Bunyan's PILGRIM'S PROGRESS out of my highschool, so I missed it though my older sister had it the year before. That same sister grew up to teach in the public schools and, after 30 years of it, had the Bible knocked out of her hands: no Bible-reading!)....Even if we could overcome #1 by a process of teacher-freedom such as I've been promoting (eg, #2011), I'm afraid #2 is hopeless: most religious forces would ally themselves with secular forces to prevent any incursion of "religion and traditional family values" into the public schools. Let the children in public school starve (it's as though each sect would say) if I can't feed them my food. So the public school has become more the enemy than the friend of freedom, and--more by default than by design--has become uniformitarian, promoting one sense-making paradigm which the teachers are free to teach and preach (aggressive secularists not having any of their books or ideas censored as they practice their religion in the classroom).

4. It's unfortunate that the fundamentalists are the leaders in the movement for alternative schools: it turns off so many who should join them.