

## Theologian sees Transcendental Meditation invading schools under false label of 'science'

To the Editor:

Religion in the public schools is a complex, perpetual issue, irreducible to "values" education — "value" being a category of philosophy and of ethics rather than of religion. We humans being "incurably religious," as a disgusted skeptic once said, a public school education that sidesteps religion to that extent side-steps the humanization of the citizen.

Recurrent efforts to ground ethics in biology (e.g., Maslow) and philosophy in "nature" (natural law, philosophia perennis) are noble failures with high humane payoffs, and I'm for sweating these out as best we can and making the results available to the general public through the society's media, including public education. But the ultimate grounding of any ethics and any philosophy is commitment to a way of seeing the world, and that's precisely what a religion is: a way of seeing, and living in, the world in the comprehensive sense of "world."

Can the public schools promote a particular way of seeing the world? Operationally, yes. I would argue, indeed, that our public schools have been doing just that for some time: promoting the American pragmatic analytic technopsychic "democratic" way of seeing and living in the world, a way that is raping and polluting the earth and impoverishing consciousness ("the mind," "the spirit," "the soul"). The religion of the public schools should be undergoing an even more agonizing reappraisal than it is. But of course theoretically, no: the public schools have no business promoting sectarianism.

Now, a "sect" is literally the consciousness and community of those who "follow" a particular way of seeing and living in the world, over against other particular ways of seeing and living in the world. The Greek-philosophical notion of the autonomy of the individual, which dominates Western "humanisms" and of late has become virtually the religion of the American public school system, is sectarian in that it is only one way of seeing the world — and one at odds, e.g., with the Jewish-Christian Bible. Our schools have not just left the Bible out;

they have provided a pagan substitute of a Western sort. Now some of them are providing a pagan substitute of an Eastern sort, transcendental meditation.

Illinois, the state of whose council of churches I was president, has officially approved TM for use in the public schools. Now your November 10 issue says (p. 18), under a Pleasantville by-line, that "the potential use of the science of creative intelligence in public schools, for school administrators," is to be considered in a seminar soon in our area.

Hold it! I'm far from being a Christian fundamentalist complaining about the absence of biblical prayer in the public schools! Last summer I taught the world's religions in America's outstanding university in that field, the University of Hawaii; and as dean of exploratory programs in New York Theological Seminary, I am involved in research and teaching on what I call "emergent global man," i.e. the rising worldwide awareness, beyond but inclusive of Wendell Willkie's "one world," that our human surviving and thriving on this globe depends on evolving a way of affirming our common humanity beyond our particular commitments.

Furthermore, I'm not against folks "getting something out of" TM or any other religious praxis. But I have a duty, as a professional theologian, to tell the public when it's being conned. And it is, right now, being conned by TM's fraudulent claim of being a "science" rather than a "religion." Its presuppositions are, crystal-clear, Brahmanic Hindu. But Hinduism is so little known by those in power in the West that it can insinuate itself as "science" into our public life and bypass the American stricture against sectarianism in the public schools.

Mind you, I'm not complaining that — as your article reports — "3,000 in Westchester and Putnam Counties" are into TM. What I'm crying out against is TM or any other sect getting into the public schools, as has happened in Illinois. The notion that TM does not subtend a metaphysic is ignorant nonsense, and the

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further notion that it is compatible with the Bible — with the biblical struggle for justice and peace in the joy of praise to God — is dangerous misinformation. The fact that TM comes with the exotic trappings of a publicly unknown Eastern religious consciousness makes it highly seductive, easily passing the censors even of our public-school guardians. When a public-school administrator gets "high" on TM, the danger increases.

What's all this come down to? Two matters: (1) Let's guard our public schools against sectarianism, but provide our children with access to the world's commitment-options — e.g., by the use of some great anthology such as WAYS OF BEING RELIGIOUS (Frederick J. Streng, et al (Prentice-Hall, 1973); and (2) Let's have more public dialog, for adults, on the options in today's world, with genuine confrontation among the options. For the days of placid provincialism, and mere stand-off propaganda, ought to be — for the sake of the children's children, must be — gone.

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