

"TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION" IN THE AMERICAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS?.....Elliott #434

Notes for Chappaqua Interfaith Council, additional to #428 ("Propositions Against Transcendental Meditation--presented to CIC 15 Feb 74")

1. The great studies of our national principal of "separation of church and state," such as that of Jn. Courtney Murray for Vatican Council II, distinguish between religions and religion, i.e. between governmental promotion of a particular religion, on the one hand, and on the other hand the people's freedom of access to information about religion and religions. Separation of religion from education is a gross overreading of the rule, and has resulted in gross deprivation in the citizenry educated in government (i.e., "public") schools. Last summer the government paid me money to teach religion and the religions, and I did so without violating the rule of no propaganda for a particular religion against other religions (the "promotion" of any religion being, patently or latently, an attack on all other religions). That was a state government (Hawaii), but a local school system would not differ in principle. Why, then, the abysmal neglect of religion in American public schools? To say it would be too difficult both to handle and to manage is to say that it's not important enough to bother hurdling the difficulties, and our children get the message that religion's not all that important to human life. To say that the schools are tooled up for, and the teachers are untrained for, the teaching of religion is to say that teaching religion is not worth a crash program of preparation, with the necessary prior exploration--which might, e.g., reveal that training public-school teachers for this would be less desirable than training resident clergy and traveling religious. What gets the child's attention gets the child, and what is put out of the child's attentional range will be nonexistent or at best peripheral to his world-picture--not being materials he/she has available for seeing the world. (It's historically ignorant, or worse, to say that the design was that church should teach religion and school the rest beyond what parents teach; and it's impractical: the few children who put specific time into religious education put in almost no time in comparison with the time they must put into public-school education--and furthermore, even such little religious education is almost without exception education in only one religion, indeed only one sect within one religion.)

2. My first note means that far from trying to keep something out of the public schools (viz., TM/SCI), I'm trying to get something in (viz., education in religion and the religions). I'm using the TM/PS issue to consciousness-raise on a serious neglect in our society, a neglect visualized here as stage #2:

	Judaism	Stage #1	Stage #2	Stage #3?
History of the American public school	Catholicism			
	Roman			
	Other			
	Protestantism			
	Other religions			

Implicit Protestantism was the religion of our public schools almost till World War II. As a child at home I was exposed to the 10-vol. DRAPER'S SELF CULTURE (20th-c. Self-Culture Association, 1907), which from the opening prayer on is saturated with Protestantism--the editor-in-chief being none other than the Commissioner of Education of the State of NY. Explicit Exclusion of Religion, creeping secular^{ism} and practical atheism, hit us in Stage #2, from which I hope we are beginning to emerge into some form of direct attending to religion and religions (beyond the present side-glances and "extracurricular activities"), and that not only to data but also to praxis. Incidentally, the present piggish attitude to public schools vis-a-vis children's time is natural at Stage #2: "church," in the eyes of children and administrators, is not important enough to consider in scheduling "state" use of children's time: in more than one way, religion has been reduced to a beggar vis-a-vis

the American public schools. Community calendaring is only a pastepot "solution." An adequate answer will have to be more radical, more painful, to optimize community concerns and the welfare of children.

3. But while I thus have bigger fish to fry, I am concerned about the watchdog function I share with you all as American citizen and have in particular as a theologian, viz. keeping particular religious fish of any size from swimming unnoticed --or unnoticed as religious fish!--into the public schools. I confine the remainder of these notes to this concern in general and to TM/SCI in particular. While, accordingly, I must ask you to set aside the wider issue delineated in notes #1 and #2, I plead that you remain aware both of the larger context and of my governing broader concern.

PROPOSITION: Though it uses chicanery and evasion to deny it, TM/SCI is a sect of a particular religion, viz. Hinduism, and as such is subject to the relevant exclusionary clauses in national legislative and judicial decisions.

4. Let's have a documentary look: We all know The First Amendment (1791): "Congress shall make no laws respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Less familiar is the fact that Amendment Fourteen (1868) implicitly extends these caveats to the states, and that the judicial extrapolations thereof are still happening. Governmental favoritism by public taxation --that is what's ruled out. There are gray areas in *Everson vs. Board of Education* (1947 Supreme Court decision); I hold that it does not exclude the teaching and demonstration of religion and religions, but it does definitely exclude praxis, i.e. using tax money to invite the public to participate in a religious exercise--and, in the case of public schools, using religious ritual (the specific religion being excluded, in this instance, being biblical religion [prayer and Bible-reading]), but the principle clearly inclusive of "meditation" [which in many forms of Eastern religion is the equivalent of "prayer" in Western religion [i.e., Judaism, Christianity, Islam]: "No tax...to support any religious activities, or institutions, whatever they may be called [e.g., "Transcendental Meditation" or "Science of Creative Intelligence"], or whatever form they may adopt to teach or practice religion [e.g., asana postures, which is the particular religious exercise I saw used to begin, this past Saturday in Mt. Kisco, the "Northern Westchester World Plan," complete with "a beautiful color film of Maharishi," founder of TM/SCI]. Of course TM/SCI isn't--is it, yet?--expecting to be paid out of tax money for teaching its doctrine and practice in the public schools. But it certainly is intending more than giving lectures; it intends to provide opportunity and encouragement for experiencing, through meditational praxis ("the practice of religion," which does indeed promise peace and has a "world plan"), its immediate personal benefits, which are [as in the case of all other religions also] psychophysical ["peace of mind," stress-reduction, etc., through, as in the case of all mind cults, mind-control]....(SIDE-NOTE: All this legislation intends freedom, which requires information. What therefore hinders public access to information--e.g., politically, Watergate; religiously, the exclusion of religion/religions education from the public schools--is deleterious to the citizenry and therefore subversive of the Republic...Further, our political freedom grew out of our religious freedom, and cannot continue without profound [i.e., religious] commitment.)

5. On an ascending scale, a school might forbid all instruction in religion, ² permit instruction in religion as experience but not in the particular religions, ³ permit both, ⁴ permit both with demonstrations but forbid student participation in the demonstrations, ⁵ permit student participation in the demonstrations but forbid praxis (i.e., the repetition of a demonstration), ⁶ permit praxis but forbid proselytism (the overt effort to make converts), ⁷ or permit proselytism (i.e., be wide open on religion, letting in any and all religions to do their full thing). I present this continuum (1) to show the spread of options, against the notion that religion-in-the-public-schools is a simple yes/no issue, and (2) to provide CIC with a decisional base vis-a-vis our local public-school system: which limit

will you suggest to the School Board, and in practice what will this limit mean (i.e., who/what, in consequence, will be able to get at the children on school time, whether or not with school money)? If your limit does not exclude TM as actually practiced, and/or if TM gets into our public schools, I will present you and/or the School Board with a recommendation vis-a-vis equal time for biblical religion. [On this, legal models, court-bound cases, are beginning to come in from across the country.]

6. Let's get specific: Why, in a bill of particular exclusions if TM is to get into the public schools, exclude an innocent little nonverbal nonsacramental thing like āsanas [yoga postures]? Two days ago I was with an Eastern monk who's beginning a meditation center in the Catskills, and he was saying that he learned by rote, without knowing what it meant, a certain scripture which subsequently, when he heard two pilgrims singing it, led to his conversion. Proselytism often works best if you can get folks to do the religion before they understand it! Religious postures, religious gestures, religious words and associations, religious relationships (with rabbi, priest, minister, guru) direct or indirect, create a conversion-Gestalt, a proclivity toward the particular religion, a "receptacle" (in the Platonic sense) for "the truth" that will come and get you if you come and get it. Asanas are an instance. I'll not take your time for an exposition, but look at the etymology: "a-sa[n]-a" (Eng., "not-move-ness;" root "san" from root "sa" in Sanskrit, "sei" in Greek [as in "seismic," of an earthquake]). In other words, the essence of a yoga posture (a-sana), is a denial of something, viz. of motion, so that the body, mind[attention]-controlled, can simulate the state of Reality over against the state of restless maya: the body becomes its own sacramental of transcendent Reality, which in Hinduism is believed (in contrast to Judaism and Christianity, in which God restlessly, sleeplessly suffers toward his creation's justice and joy) to be "bliss," subject-object stillness (advaita--another negative: "non-duality" [cp., in Lat., "du," Eng. "two," for Skr. "dv"], in Judaism and Christianity a blasphemous canceling of the Creator/creation distinction). If Moses had practiced asanas, he'd not have confronted Pharaoh, and the world wouldn't have had any Jews to put up with; the same goes for Jesus and Pilate, and Christians. Yoga postures in themselves, when not used with the corrective of biblical teaching, are elements not just of another religion (neutral) but of a religion as adversary to ours as is conceivable. If an advocate of TM/CSI slyly advertises that asanas are no real part of TM/CSI, he/she would be hard put to it to explain why, as the first act in beginning the TM/CSI Northern Westchester center, TM/CSI chose---at such a critical moment!---asanas. Anybody who would call an asana "an innocent little nonverbal nonsacramental [i.e., nonreligious] thing" is either ignorant or deceptive. For the heart of Vedanta [the usual form in which Hinduism invades the West] is the self/Self-centering which asanas use the human body, cosmikos in cosmo, to practice, ritualize, experience-confirm in a reinforcing, self-validating loop. Do you accuse me of being too technical? What we're dealing with is technical, and anybody who claims otherwise is putting me at an unfair disadvantage and is conning you. (And to ease your mind, so I'll not be presuming your trust in me as scholar, without support from other scholars, let me refer to just one objective study [mentioned also in one of my PT letters] that states, without fear of accredited scholarly contradiction, that TM/CSI is a Hindu cult: Robt. S. Ellwood, Jr., RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL GROUPS IN AMERICA (Prentice-Hall, 1973), pp.3f, 231ff, "Chapter 7: The Ganges Flows West: Hindu Movements in America." TM is, he says, an "export version" of Hinduism, a missionary form that will sell the West. Ellwood defines a religion as a "means of ultimate transformation," and TM is thus solidly religious: it's a global "ultimate transformation" trip, promising world peace through its praxis....I have over 400 3x5 cards on TM as religious and as a religion. Those who deny it are dupes--or dupers.)

7. Jesus forbids guru-devotion [e.g., Mt.19.17, L.18.19], which TM preaches and practices; and Jesus also forbids mantras [Mt.6.7], which are the heart of TM....I have only begun, but must not exceed three pages!