

## The Bible as Literature....Is it legal? Is it necessary?

**The facts speak for themselves...Review the arguments below from national and state legal and education sources, and you will see that there is only one answer to the questions above.**

---

Justice Clark, speaking for the majority of the United States Supreme Court in *Abington School District v. Schempp*, 1963:

"...it might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing that we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistent with the First Amendment."

---

Justice Brennan, concurring in *Abington v. Schempp*:

"The holding of the Court today plainly does not foreclose teaching *about* the Holy Scriptures or about the differences between religious sects in classes of literature or history. Indeed, whether or not the Bible is involved, it would be impossible to teach meaningfully many subjects in the social sciences or humanities without some mention of religion. To what extent, and at what point in the curriculum, religious materials should be cited are matters which the courts ought to entrust very largely to the experienced officials who superintend our nation's public schools. They are experts in such matters, and we are not."

---

Justice Goldberg, concurring in *Abington v. Schempp*:

"Neither the state nor this court can or should ignore the significance of the fact that a vast portion of our people believe in and worship God and that many of our legal, political and personal values derive historically from religious teachings. Government must inevitably take cognizance of the existence of religion and, indeed, under certain circumstances the First Amendment may require that it do so. And it seems clear to me from the opinions in the present and past cases that the Court would recognize the propriety of providing military chaplains and of the teaching *about* religion, as distinguished from the teaching *of* religion, in the public schools."

---

California *Education Code* 51511:

"Nothing in this code shall be construed to prevent or exclude from the public schools, references to religion or references to or the use of religious literature, art, or music or other things having a religious significance when such references or uses do not constitute instruction in religious principles or aid to any religious sect, church, creed, or sectarian purpose and when such references or uses are incidental to or illustrative of matters properly included in the course of study."

---

Opinion 53-266 from the office of the California Attorney General (June 10, 1955):

"Although direct instruction in religious principles may not be given in the public schools, it does not follow that every reference to anything religious is prohibited. A course in the history of California which did not describe the early Catholic missions is unthinkable; Father Junipero Serra is justly regarded as one of the great figures in our history and in fact his statue is one of two representing California in the Hall of Fame at the nation's capitol. A high school course in European history could not properly omit reference to the great religious controversies of the middle ages, such as the struggle over lay investiture; and such a course would also devote substantial time to a study of the Protestant Reformation. Instruction concerning the Constitution would similarly involve study of the history of the struggle for religious freedom in colonial times. Religious subjects have many times been used in art and music; Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, Michelangelo's *Moses*, the Winged Victory of Samothrace, an Indian Totem Pole—all have religious significance, and yet all are appropriate for study in a

public school class on art. The playing of passages from Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* in a music class would not violate constitutional restrictions any more than would the playing of Wagner's *The Valkyrie*.

"Even the Bible need not be excluded. It has exerted, and still exerts, a great influence on English and American literature. Not only may it be discussed in a general way in an appropriate literature class, but specific passages, because of their eloquence or poetic beauty, may be used for special study, such as the Song of Ruth or Paul's great tribute to Charity."

---

*Moral and Civic Education and Teaching about Religion* from the California State Department of Education, 1991:

"To teach about religion is not to instruct in religion. Teaching about religion embraces the study of various religions; appreciation of the nature and variety of religious experience historically and currently; information on past and present sources, views, and behavior of religious persons or groups; and the influence of religion on cultures and civilizations."

"School authorities should see that students are taught about religion and that teachers are adequately prepared to teach it....School personnel are obliged to help students develop an informal understanding and appreciation of the role of religion in the lives of Americans and the people of other nations. Teachers should seek to encourage students to become aware of their richly diverse and complex religious traditions and to examine new forms of religious expression and insight."

"Study about religion in America is fundamental to understanding and appreciating the American heritage...."

"An educational imperative is to seek to understand ourselves, others and the world. Religion has been a decisive factor in the development of civilizations. Students should comprehend the religious ideas that have helped to shape Western and Eastern cultures and civilizations....To become educated in Western religious thought and practice, students should be exposed to the major religious heritages of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Similarly, students should study the major Asian religions."

"The study of representative portions of the classical sources of major religious traditions is appropriate in public education. These religious documents have contributed to the major cultures, to the personal lives of countless persons, and to self-understanding. A knowledge of biblical literature, for example, is necessary to understand Western literature, history, and the values underlying the United States and many of its laws...."

---

**In short, use of biblical literature is both legal and necessary. Biblical allusions are addressed as they arise in every English class. More significantly, study of biblical literature is an important part of the Honors English program, dealt with at length in Freshman Honors English and then reviewed in the AP Literature class. In addition, study of biblical literature is an integral part of the more demanding regular senior classes (Advanced Composition and Literature, World Literature and Composition.) Why? Because students with high academic goals simply can't afford the kind of cultural illiteracy that being ignorant of biblical literature would produce.**