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Where the Spirit of the Lord Is, There Is Liberty

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Critical Thinking And Religion In the Schools

By DENNIS L. CUDDY

IN THE EARLY PART of this century, a Rumanian psychiatrist, Jacob Moreno, developed psychodrama and sociometry using role-playing or "God-playing," as he called it, to develop "social shock methods which may well become scientific methods of social action." In his book, "Who Shall Survive?," he indicated that religions such as Christianity and Judaism were limited, and he proposed a new "religion" modified by science.

Today, we would understand this new religion as "humanism," and John Dewey who signed the 1933 Humanist Manifesto called sociometry "the next stage" after reading Moreno's book. Also during the period of the New Deal, President Franklin Roosevelt told Moreno one day in Hyde Park after reading his book, "When I am back in Washington, I will see where your ideas can be put to use."

MORENO'S SOCIOMETRIC GROUPINGS were taken up by native Estonian Hilda Taba in the 1950s and early 1960s when she developed a social studies curriculum that became widely used in the United States. Receiving considerable federal funds while at San Francisco State College, she developed the "Thinking Project," which de-emphasized subject matter and facts in favor of carefully selected information that would lend itself to analysis and discussion. This we have come to know as "critical thinking."

At first, this dialectical process dialogue appears non-judgmental, as one Pittsburgh teacher recently asked his students whether socialism is better than capitalism, and there was no penalty for choosing socialism.

But because the students' decisions are based upon "carefully selected information" by the teacher, the students can be subtly led in a particular direction. Concerning values, this type of behavior modification or sensitivity training has been called "brainwashing," and according to Dr. Melvin Anshel, M.D. of Los Angeles, is clinically "desensitization." On Jan. 3, 1985, the television program "20/20" devoted a good deal of time to an alleged example of how "brainwashing" of preschoolers could have been used to destroy the children's sense of family values and patriotism among other things.

IN OTHER WORDS, "CRITICAL THINKING" becomes criticizing, which becomes challenging one's parents and all authority figures as well as the law, one's country, moral absolutes and God.

Sidney Hook signed the 1973 Humanist Manifesto II, and in The Humanist magazine, he stated: "human beings can be influenced to examine critically their religious beliefs only by indirection. By indirection, I mean the development of a critical attitude in all our educational institutions that will aim to make students less credulous to claims that transcend their reflective experience..." In order to accomplish this, however, a "crisis" in education would have to occur (to see how education "crises" have been and can be "manufactured" to attain particular goals, look at "The Uses of Crises: Guidelines for School Leaders," The Education Digest, October 1984).

The "crisis" arose when a recent study showed that many of the facts regarding the role of religion in our history had been excised from textbooks. While most Americans support teaching the role of Judeo-Christian values in our nation's heritage, there are those who would resolve this

"crisis" by teaching about the beliefs and practices of all major religions in our schools in a "non-discriminatory manner."

SOME YEARS AGO, THE World Religions Curriculum Development Center in the United States developed a course titled, "Religion in Human Culture," to develop attitudes of respect for the legitimacy of others' beliefs and practices, "safeguarding against dogmatic 'right answerism.'"

This attitude of "equivalency" toward all religions fits the syncretistic desire of John Dewey to establish a "common faith" in which all could agree. Yet, it is this "democracy" of values that was rejected by the founders of this country in favor of a constitutional republic whose inhabitants are endowed with certain Judeo-Christian "inalienable rights" (God-given). In his farewell address, President Washington warned: "Let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."

THE UNDERMINING OF Biblical moral absolutes is a primary objective of secular humanists in their attempt to produce a secularized new generation of Americans believing in Moreno's philosophy of the "here and now." In The Old Testament, Judges 2:10 warned, "... there arose another generation after them which knew not the Lord..." And this is why we should reject "critical thinking" and teaching about all major religions' beliefs and practices in our public schools.

—The author is a former associate in the U.S. Department of Education.

