

During its August 1993 meeting, the National Board of the American Choral Directors Association adopted the following position statement pertaining to music from a sacred tradition in the public schools.

The Study of Music from a Sacred Tradition in the Public Schools

I. GOAL

To improve music education by assisting educators and the community in identifying ways of studying, creating, and performing music from a wide variety of religious/cultural traditions.

II. RATIONALE

A. The first amendment to the United States Constitution provides for the separation of church and state. "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Within limits defined by the United States Supreme Court, government (i.e., public schools) is neither to advance nor inhibit religion(s). This commitment provides one of the important foundation stones for the establishment and maintenance of an open, just, and peaceful multireligious society.

The American Choral Directors Association supports this concept. Academic study about religions can contribute to the protection of this freedom by providing information and experiences which help to dispel stereotypes. Such study can also help develop a sense of human community and an appreciation of our common humanity in the midst of our diversities. There are, of course, other important reasons for studying about religion(s). For example, religions have had a continuing influence on human history. Developing an adequate understanding of history thus requires study about religions.

Academic study about religions in the public schools, contrary to widespread opinions, has not been prohibited by the United States Supreme Court. Justice Tom Clark made this point without qualification when, in 1963, he wrote the majority opinion (8-1) of the Court in *Abington v. Schempp and Murray v. Curlett*.

In addition, it might be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religions 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 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 consistently with the First Amendment.

B. Any work of art studied or performed should be selected for its inherent beauty of structure and form. Its purpose in study should be learning for the sake of developing artistic understanding and responsiveness. Often artworks are related to a specific religious/cultural tradition. The study of such works of art can enhance one's understanding and appreciation of a cultural product which a particular tradition has fostered.

In no way should music be selected for study and performance in the public schools for the purpose of advancing or perpetuating a particular religious belief system. Rather, music should be selected first, on its own merits as an art form and second, as a cultural object for study which enhances the understanding of the cultural development of a particular movement in human civilization.

Problems of misunderstanding and intent seem to arise most frequently with solo songs and choral compositions which have a sacred text. While public school teaching objectives and criteria for repertoire selection should not include religious indoctrination, the selection of quality repertoire will invariably include, within its broad scope, music with a sacred text. To exclude from a public school curriculum all choral music which has a religious meaning associated with the text is to limit severely the possibilities of teaching for artistic understanding and responsiveness. Such exclusion has as its parallel the study of art excluding paintings related to the various religions of the world, the study of literature without mention of the Bible, or the study of architecture without reference to the great temples and cathedrals of the world.

Care should be taken in the performance of music associated with any religious/cultural tradition that it not be construed as a religious service or religious celebration. Whenever possible, a multiplicity of cultural traditions should be included in musical programming.

C. Typical educational standards should include a range and a balanced offering of music from various religions/cultural traditions. Music from a sacred tradition shall be created, studied, and performed as an educational experience that relates to achieving goals and objectives, and shall not be designed to foster a religious belief.

III. GUIDELINES

A. The school's approach to religion is academic, not devotional.

B. The school may strive for student awareness of religions but should not press for student acceptance of any one religion.

C. The school may sponsor study about religion but may not sponsor the practice of religion.

D. The school may expose students to a diversity of religious views but may not impose any particular view.

E. The school may educate about all religions but may not promote or denigrate any religion.

F. The school may inform the student about various beliefs but should not seek to conform him or her to any particular belief.

IV. CONSIDERATIONS FOR SELECTION OF REPERTOIRE

A. Select repertoire for its musical and educational values.

B. Show sensitivity to the traditions of different people and their cultures.

C. Neither promote nor inhibit religious views.

D. Observe all local and school policies.

E. Develop a community awareness of various religious beliefs.

F. Show a diversity of programming over a period of one school year, if not longer.

G. Document all performances by printing and saving copies of concert programs.

V. WHAT SCHOOLS MAY DO

A. Schools may use the Bible and other religious books as source books in teaching about religions.

B. Schools should recognize the multiplicity of explanations related to human origins in their appropriate curricular place.

C. A student has the right to pray at any appropriate time.

D. Schools may offer objective instruction about religion as literature and history, and about religion's role in the story of civilization.

E. Students are free to recite such documents as the Declaration of Independence which contain references to God.

F. Students may sing the national anthem and other patriotic songs which contain assertions of faith in God.

G. Rhetorical or personal references to religious faith in connection with patriotic or ceremonial occasions are permissible.

H. Students may be excused from classes for sectarian instruction off school premises.

I. Schools may excuse a student from engaging in an activity which offends that student's religious belief or conscience.

J. Classroom instruction, where its content is in the area of religious holy days or celebration, should be carefully tied to educational objectives. These educational objectives should be specified in writing and should be consistent with the overall curriculum of the school.

K. The school calendar, vacations, and holidays may be scheduled to permit observances of religious holy days when school is on a hold day, upon the request of students' parents.

VI. WHAT THE SCHOOLS MAY NOT DO

A. Schools may not incorporate religious worship or indoctrination into their sponsored programs.

B. School programs may not provide for compulsory reading from the Bible as part of a non-instructional activity.

C. Schools may not promote or indoctrinate any religion, including theism, atheism, agnosticism, humanism, secularism, sectarianism, yoga, or transcendental meditation.

D. School officials may not compose, authorize, or sanction prayers.

E. Sectarian instruction may not be offered to students in public schools during schools hours.

F. Sectarian instruction may not be offered in any school-sponsored activity.

G. Official public school musical groups may not participate in religious services under the auspices of the public school

H. Non-student members of religious groups are not permitted to participate in performances