

CONTROLLING LEGAL PRINCIPLES

Free Exercise Clause Decision – The “Contemplation of Justice”

Stone v. Graham, 449 U.S. 39 (1980)



JUSTICE REHNQUIST, *dissenting*.

The Establishment Clause does not require that the public sector be insulated from all things which may have a religious

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significance or origin. This Court has recognized that "religion has been closely identified with our history and government," *Abington School District, supra* at 374 U. S. 212, and that "[t]he history of man is inseparable from the history of religion," *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U. S. 421, 370 U. S. 434 (1962). Kentucky has decided to make students aware of this fact by demonstrating the secular impact of the Ten Commandments. The words of Justice Jackson, concurring in *McCollum v. Board of Education*, 333 U. S. 203, 333 U. S. 235-236 (1948), merit quotation at length:

"I think it remains to be demonstrated whether it is possible, even if desirable, to comply with such demands as plaintiff's completely to isolate and cast out of secular education all that some people may reasonably regard as religious instruction. Perhaps subjects such as mathematics, physics or chemistry are, or can be, completely secularized. But it would not seem practical to teach either practice or appreciation of the arts if we are to forbid exposure of youth to any religious influences. Music without sacred music, architecture minus the cathedral, or painting without the scriptural themes would be eccentric and incomplete, even from a secular point of view. . . . I should suppose it is a proper, if not an indispensable, part of preparation for a worldly life to know the roles that religion and religions have played in the tragic story of mankind. The fact is that, for good or for ill, nearly everything in our culture worth transmitting, everything which gives meaning to life, is saturated with religious influences, derived from paganism, Judaism, Christianity -- both Catholic and Protestant -- and other faiths accepted by a large part of the world's peoples. One can hardly respect the system of education that would leave the student wholly ignorant of the currents of religious thought that move the world society for a part in which he is being prepared."

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I therefore dissent from what I cannot refrain from describing as a cavalier summary reversal, without benefit of oral argument or briefs on the merits, of the highest court of Kentucky.