Religion Can Be Taught in Schools
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A single-sheet pamphlet of potentially widespread influence was recently released by James Dunn of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. Entitled "Religion in the Public School Curriculum, Questions and Answers," it is endorsed by an impressive list of 14 religious and educational bodies, such as the American Federation of Teachers and the National Association of Evangelicals. The tract is a careful explanation of what kind and manner of religious instruction is acceptable under the U.S. Supreme Court guidelines for teaching religion in the U.S. public school system.

Kathy Palen, a Baptist Joint Committee spokesperson, told Hinduism Today that after the school prayer cases in the 1960's (in which organized school prayer was forbidden by the Supreme Court), school teachers and administrators became frightened about any teaching of religion and went "way beyond what the court asked."

The pamphlet aims to allay that fear by explaining that religion can be taught under certain conditions. Specifically, the approach must be academic and not devotional. Study may be required, but not practice. The school can educate about all religions, but cannot promote or denigrate any religion.

Hindus may rightly fear that aggressive Christian groups will descend on the schools en masse to take advantage of what appears to be a tunnel under the wall separating church and state. Palen assured Hinduism Today that, "The sponsoring groups are very interested to have a wide variety of religious representation. Their object was to better prepare American students to be citizens of the world by fostering understanding and respect."

Hindus can now approach their local schools with educational materials on

Hinduism for inclusion in their world religions classes. Hinduism Today can supply some of this material, including reprints of the popular "Truth Is One, Paths Are Many" poster section in this issue.

The free pamphlet is available by writing to the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, 200 Maryland Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C., 20002.

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