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## RELIGION IN THE ISRAELI PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Of the many problems in the development of Israel which have attracted the attention of both domestic and foreign observers, possibly not one has been shrouded in as much misunderstanding as the question of the relationship of religion to education. Much has been said and written on this subject by those who regard the presence of religion in the public schools of a democratic republic as inconsistent with the principles of democracy as well as by those who are not satisfied that there is enough religion in the Israeli educational system. There are other shades of viewpoint. What the

following essay seeks to do is to present the problem in terms of its historical development and on the basis of documentary evidence.

During the past two or three years, Israelis have become immersed in a new educational controversy regarding the introduction of *Todaah Yehudit* ("Jewish Consciousness") into the curriculum of the public schools by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The parliamentary, journalistic and literary debates served notice that the earlier agreements and compromises on the religious question did not settle the issue. Hence, it is appropriate to look back and reconsider the place of religion in Israeli public education on its merits.

Informed readers of TRADITION need no orientation on the role of religion in Jewish history or even on the role of religion in the history of Jewish education. It does seem useful, however, to review the steps in the making of religion into an active force in the culture and life of the citizens of Israel.

#### UNDER OTTOMAN RULE

While Palestine was under the control of Turkey, from 1517-1917, the Jewish schools were either largely religious in nature or else their courses of study included traditional Jewish content, such as the Bible. In this respect the Jewish school policy paralleled to a very large extent the situation prevalent throughout Turkey and Palestine. In accordance with the Turkish educational tradition, "religious instructions was a part of the curriculum and some provision was made by law for other religions than the Moslem." During the nineteenth century, as European interests and influences began to assert themselves in Palestine, the Turks allowed the establishment of new schools, virtually all of which were controlled by one Christian denomination or another.

In 1913, the last Turkish law on education which could be applied to Palestine was passed empowering government school inspectors to visit private schools in order to ascertain, among other things, the state of religious education and conduct. Obviously, down to the date of the departure of the Turks, religious instruction was sup-

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posed to have a place in the program of all types of schools. Such was the tradition when the British moved in and set up the Mandatory government.

### UNDER THE MANDATE

The British continued the Turkish practice of official recognition of religion in Palestine. They agreed to ensure "the free exercise of all forms of religion," to see to it that "no discrimination of any kind shall be made between the inhabitants of Palestine on the grounds of race, religion or language," and to guarantee "the right of each community to maintain its own schools in its own language." The Arabs, accordingly, had their own system of schools, while the Palestine Zionist Executive, representing most Jews, maintained a tripartite school system, corresponding to the wings of the Zionist Party. Thus, the General Zionists operated the General Trend Schools; the Mizrachi, the Mizrachi Trend Schools; and the Labor parties, the Labor Trend Schools. The Agudath Israel movement, insisting that the Mizrachi schools were not sufficiently religious, opened its own schools.

It is clear that there were differences among the General, Labor, and Mizrachi Trends in respect to the curriculum of their schools. Nevertheless, they had at least three areas of knowledge in common: the Bible, most Biblical religious literature, and *moledet* (homeland studies, Palestinography). The Bible, reported Professor Ernst Simon of the Hebrew University in 1948, was a "major subject" in all types of schools, and Mishnah, Talmud, and medieval Hebrew literature constituted a minor field in the General and Labor schools. During 1945-46, the Herzliah Secondary School of Tel Aviv, which could hardly be classed as a religious institution, required eight years of Bible, six years of Talmud of most students, and eight years of Talmud of those following a literary course of study. In 1928, the acting director of the Department of Education of the Palestine Zionist Executive, Dr. Isaac B. Berkson, stated that in the Labor schools, "Bible . . . occupies a considerable place as the foundation of Jewish cultural life and as the basis of social idealism," even if "traditional religious forms are not observed." Regarding the General schools, Berkson said the following:

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These schools are in sympathy with the religious tradition as part of the whole of Jewish culture. The sacred subjects are generally studied in the accepted manner and religious practices are respected, but the inculcation of ceremonial religion is left to the home and finds small positive place in the school. Some of the fundamental prayers and blessings, considered as an integral part of the Jewish social tradition, are included in the course in *Heimatkunde* (Mole-det, Palestinography). Bible, regarded as the basis of Jewish literature, history and culture, occupies a central place in the curriculum.

It is not necessary to mention in detail the emphasis on religious content and practice in the Mizrachi schools.

The Mandatory period of Jewish history in Palestine was characterized by the inclusion of religious subjects in the various types of schools, even those not committed to a religious way of life. Evidently, the secularists and the ideological moderates were of the opinion that a *Jewish* education in a Jewish homeland must transmit to all children the historical heritage of Judaism. It was no doubt inconceivable to the non-religious educators and political leaders that a Jewish education in Palestine was worthy of the name without Bible and allied subjects. Granted that the motives were cultural rather than religious, the fact remains that all children were exposed to the Bible. Even if they were not taught a religious commitment, they were in a position of making some choice in favor of faith so long as they knew the content of the Bible.

### THE STATE OF ISRAEL

The State of Israel came into being May 14, 1948. The proclamation issued that day stated that the new state "will be based on the principles of freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the Prophets of Israel. . . . will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants, irrespective of religion, race, or sex; . . . will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education, and culture; . . . will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions. . . ." The Ministry of Religious Affairs provides for the promotion of the religious institutions and courts of all faiths. The *Shabbat* and the Jewish holidays are official days of rest, and the Christians and Moslems are legally entitled to observe their holidays and days of rest. As Professor Janowsky recently remarked,

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"historical precedent and the character of the population have imposed religious functions upon the state."

After the State of Israel was established, the Agudat Israel party decided to join the government, and its schools, which were instructing about 4000 children, received recognition as the fourth Trend. The schools in this movement were now on "an equal footing" with the schools of the General, Labor, and Mizrachi Trends. Some religious schools, which were associated with other Orthodox religious groups who frowned even upon Agudat Israel, kept aloof from the national system.

### THE FIRST LAW: THE TRENDS

The first act of educational legislation was passed by the Knesset on September 12, 1949. This was a compulsory education law which included the following provision:

Parents discharging the duty imposed on them to register a child or adolescent may, at the time of registration, declare that they wish the child or adolescent to attend an educational institution for elementary education belonging to a certain recognized trend or that they wish him to attend some other educational institution for elementary education. Where no such declaration is made, the parents shall be deemed to have declared that they wish the child or adolescent to attend the official educational institution which is nearest to the place of residence of the child or adolescent.

The Neturei Korta were exempted from the Compulsory Education Law, and they sent their children to their own religious schools.

At once a struggle ensued among the Trends. Since political leaders believed that "whichever party succeeded in getting more children into its own schools would thereby also gain the votes of their parents at the polls," they did their best to attract as many children as possible to the schools operated by their respective Trends. This competition even extended to the *maabarot*, where the immigrants were usually ignorant of the nature of the Trend system. In March 1950, the Knesset decided that the portion of the law dealing with the selection of Trend schools was not applicable to the immigrant camps. From the standpoint of the religious groups, there was considerable dissatisfaction regarding education in the *maabarot*, where, they charged, religious immigrants were

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persuaded or pressured to send their children to non-religious schools. There were also protests against pressures upon immigrant parents to enroll their children in religious schools.

### ABOLITION OF THE TRENDS

The rising sentiment in many quarters for the abolition of the Trend schools—an apparent anomaly in a modern nation—resulted in the passing by the Knesset, on August 12, 1953, of a State Education Law to replace the Trends with a national system of schools. The new law recognized two types of state schools, one secular and the other religious. The former division embraced the General and Labor Trends, while the latter consisted mainly of the Mizrachi schools. Most of the schools belonging to the Agudat Israel Trend refused to join the state school system, but they were nevertheless given status as “non-official recognized educational institutions,” in accordance with paragraph 11 of the law. These schools received a grant from the government, which paid for 60 per cent of the teachers’ salaries in 1953 and 75 per cent in 1956.

The State Education Law of 1953 declared its intention “to base elementary education in the State on the values of Jewish culture and the achievements of science, on love of the homeland and loyalty to the State and the Jewish people, on practice in agricultural work and handicraft, on *halutzic* (pioneer) training, and on striving for a society built on freedom, equality, tolerance, mutual assistance and love of mankind.” This statement of aim is expressed in secularistic terms. Perhaps the sense of the wording is not stretched too far when “values of Jewish culture,” “love of the homeland,” and “loyalty to . . . the Jewish people” are interpreted as encompassing the religious values, to some extent at least.

But the law is more forthright with regard to religion, since it recognizes the coexistence of “State education” and “religious State education” in the national school system. It defines “religious State education” as meaning “State education, with the distinction that its institutions are religious as to their way of life, curriculum, and teachers.” Under the law, a Council for Religious State Education was to be appointed by the Minister of Education and Culture, from a specified group of religious educators and leaders, and be required to consult this Council before “exercising

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any of the powers . . . relating to religious State education, including the power to appoint the Director of the Religious Education Division in the Ministry of Education and Culture and the power to appoint inspectors, principals and teachers of religious State educational institutions. . . ." Further, there is the "supplementary program" for the religious State schools, "comprising the study of the written and oral religious law and aimed at a religious way of life, and includes religious observance and a religious atmosphere within the institution," which is prescribed by the Minister with the consent of the Council for Religious State Education. The Council is also empowered, "on religious grounds only," to disapprove the appointment or dismiss an inspector, principal or teacher at a *Bet Sefer Mamlakhti Dati* (religious State School).

The Minister of Education was also charged with introducing and supervising the basic program in the non-official recognized schools. That is, he has the power of prescribing the secular curriculum of the schools of Agudat Israel, now incorporated into the *Cinuch Atzmai* (independent education) system. However, it stands to reason, even though the law does not say so, that he has nothing to do with the supplementary, or religious, program. The right of supervision by the State, in return for the grant, cannot be extended to the spiritual side of the school.

Finally, the Minister is required to adapt "all or any of the provisions of this Law to the requirements of non-Jewish pupils and the establishment of councils for such education." This statement applies to the Moslem and the Christian schools, which follow, in general, the basic program of the Israeli school system, but which also enjoy autonomy with respect to the religious atmosphere and teaching. The Arab schools, whether Moslem or Christian, use Arabic as the language of instruction and teach Arabic history and literature, and the geography of Arab countries.

It is interesting to note that the Ministry of Education and Culture places no legal obstacles in the path of parents who send their children to such schools as the Talmud Torah Eitz Chaim on Jaffa Road in Jerusalem. In this institution the pupils are taught in the Yiddish language and only two secular subjects are offered—*Dikduk* (Hebrew grammar) and arithmetic. Apparently, the government does not oppose this type of school because its program covers thoroughly such fundamental subjects as reading, writing, Bible,

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Mishnah and Talmud. The principal of Eitz Chaim told the writer in 1957 that a number of parents of the pupils were prominent figures in the labor movement and in the Mapai party. Other religious schools, such as many in Meah Shearim in Jerusalem, likewise are regarded as offering the equivalent of a compulsory education program. All schools which do not offer a systematic secular course and prefer to devote virtually all of the time to sacred subjects come under the heading of *Mosedot Pitur*.

### CURRICULUM: LOWER GRADES

During the year or more following the passing of the State Education Law, the Ministry of Education and Culture published a detailed course of study for the elementary schools. This *Tokhnit ha-Limmudim* appeared in two parts, the first for grades I-IV being issued in Adar B, 5714, and the second, for grades V-VIII, in Kislev, 5715. It was designed for both the *Bet Sefer Mamlakhti* (State School) and the *Bet Sefer Mamlakhti Dati* (religious State school). The reader can take it for granted that the curriculum of the religious schools, owing to the safeguards in the law, was satisfactory to the religious leaders and parents who favored this system of education. It would be most interesting, however, to examine the course of study for the general state schools to note its relationship to religious teaching.

The first volume begins with a statement of the aims of the various subjects. In the general state school, "the aim of teaching the Bible—the basic book of Jewish culture—is to have the children acquire the basic values of Judaism as expressed in the commands and laws; in the good deeds of the Patriarchs, prophets, heroes, and other great men of the people; in the words of the spiritual leaders of the people, and in the vision of the future concerning the nation and the entire world as foretold by the prophets of Israel; and to implant in their hearts a longing to incorporate these values in their lives." The second aim is "to impart to the children the basic knowledge of the spiritual image of the nation and of its struggle for physical and spiritual existence as the bearer of the word of God in the ancient, idol-worshipping world." The third aim is to "implant in their hearts the love of the homeland where our ancestors lived and the Jewish people was formed, where our seers



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prophesied, and poets sang, and the Book of Books was created, and where the heroes of Israel sacrificed their lives; and a love of our people which lived and created its culture there." The fourth deals with the acquisition of the "literary-esthetic values of the Bible," while the fifth and final aim is for the children "to acquire love and reverence for the Book and the desire to read it constantly, and the inner stimulus to derive inspiration from it."

It might be relevant, just in passing, to contrast this formulation of the objectives of teaching Bible with that for the state religious schools:

"The written Torah and its oral interpretation which was given to Israel by the Holy One, blessed be He, the words of God through the Prophets, and the Writings which were expressed in the Holy Spirit constitute the core of the life of the Jewish people, both as the book of instructions for its daily conduct in every particular and as a treasury of its wisdom and culture.

"The instruction of Bible in the primary school aims to implant in the hearts of the children the faith in God the Creator of the universe and the Giver of the Torah, Who revealed His words to His people in this Book; to implant in their hearts the beliefs of the Torah and its outlook on all aspects of life. . . ."

Certainly there is a deep contrast between the two statements. However, it is difficult to overlook the religious wording of the aims of teaching the Bible in the secular state schools. This seems to be much more than teaching the Bible as literature or without comment, practices which have been part of the American tradition in public education.

The syllabus for the general state school goes on to insist that "beginning with grade one there should be a nurturing of a personal relationship to the Book of Books of the people of Israel and to the heroes of the nation. In the kindergarten, as in grade one and in all the other grades, there should be a volume of the complete Bible in a beautiful and ornamental binding, kept in a permanent place for the use of the class on all holiday occasions and at every opportunity." It is also noteworthy that the syllabus states that "the children should be enabled to acquire, in a systematic and graded way, the basis for self-study and concentration in the Book, so that they could study themselves any chapter not studied in school." It is obvious, once more, that it is the intention of the syllabus to make

the Bible as significant as possible, short of complete personal commitment, in the lives of the Israeli children in the secular public schools as well as after school. This is a far cry from the common impression that the general state schools are not concerned with religious values if not indeed antagonistic to them. Naturally, there may be a gap between curriculum and classroom, but it cannot be denied that the government syllabus does lay down principles which reflect a respect for the religious heritage of the Jewish people.

Let us now briefly examine the course of study in the general state schools, grade by grade. In grade one, the Bible stories are supplemented by such greetings as *Shabbat Shalom*, "Happy Holiday," and "Happy New Year;" such proverbs and sayings as "Honor your father and mother" and "Sabbath came—rest came"; and riddles involving religious holidays. The reading vocabulary in the Hebrew language is taken, in part, from the Bible and from the prayers, blessings, and holiday laws.

In the study of *Moledet*, the children of some secular schools may be taught blessings, prayers, and religious laws and customs. All of them learn the significance and the customs of the Sabbath and the major and minor holidays. The difference between holiday instruction in the purely secular schools and in the secular-religious schools (that is, secular schools that lean toward more positive religious instruction) appears to be a matter of degree.

The arithmetic instruction in the first grade of the secular school introduces the child to the number concept, and quantity is illustrated not only by the environment but also by such specific religious practices as the "*Minyan* at prayer" and the "*Mezuman* at the meal." Among the themes for art is the Sabbath at home and in the synagogue. Music teaching comprises also the singing of religious holiday songs and hymns.

The second-grade Bible course in the secular school stresses a number of values, the first of which is the following: "The universe was created by a command in six days, and, after God completed His work, there came the day of Sabbath which is full of holiness and rest." Also to be given stress is "the promise of God to Abraham that He will increase his seed like the stars of the heaven and like the sand on the shore of the sea."

Some religious content and references can be found in the *Mole-det*, language, drawing, music, and arts and crafts courses in grades

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two through four, and in the science-agriculture classes in grades three and four. As in previous instances, the syllabus makes possible the addition of deeper religious teachings in those secular schools which wish such instruction.

In Bible, in grade three of the secular public schools, the pupils learn such concepts as "the Israelites before Pharoah; . . . strengthening of the belief in God; the dividing of the Red Sea and the Song of the Sea." The third grades' Bible study also comprises "the Sabbath in the wilderness," "the Presence at Mount Sinai—from the midst of smoke, thunder, and lightning, Moses brings to his people the Torah of God," and "if the people will not keep the Torah, God will turn his face from them" and "The Sabbath—a compulsory day of rest." Let it be remembered that all of these examples are in the secular portion of the syllabus.

The fourth-grade Bible program for the non-religious schools covers, amongst others, the following concepts: "God orders him (Joshua) to keep the Torah and to meditate on it—then he will be strong and successful"; "the miracle of the revolution of the order of creation for the benefit of the Israelites"; and "Joshua warns the people to be loyal to God and to His Torah for the reason that, even if they should choose another way, he and his family would remain loyal to God." It is also pertinent to cite the summation by the syllabus of the "central thought" of the Book of Judges: "Whenever the Israelites turn aside from the way of God, they perform evil deeds and become assimilated with the worshippers of idols, and they are weakened and fall under the yoke of alien peoples." This thought is repeated under Aggadah, where the pupil is also taught such concepts as "self-sacrifice for the study of Torah," "sanctification of God's name," "the power of the Torah," and "the essence of the Torah—love of human beings."

### CURRICULUM: UPPER GRADES

The second volume of the elementary school syllabus contains the outline of subject matter for grades five through eight. As in the lower grades, a distinction is made between secular and religious public schools. Again, the statement is made repeatedly that secular schools may select some of the religious content which is taught in the *Bet Sefer Mamlakhti Dati*.

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The aims of the teaching of Bible and the other subjects remain unchanged. In the fifth grade, the pupils of the secular schools are taught the function of the Holy Temple and of the Prophets in the life of the Jews in biblical times. Specifically, Elijah, Elisha, and Isaiah are presented as wonder-working messengers of God who were constantly raising the moral level of the Jewish people and vigorously combatting idolatry. The concepts to be derived include such as the following: "God promises the preservation of the Temple and the Kingdom of Israel if Solomon will continue to uphold the commandments and laws of the Torah with righteousness and integrity," and "Ezra is deeply shocked by the iniquity of the people in Jerusalem—he regards the mixed marriages as a source of the uncleanness and abomination, and a danger to the existence of the people on its soil."

Among the sixth grade concepts are "unity of the universe which was created by Divine command—joy of the Creator in His creation—unity and assurance of the human race—the blessing of the Sabbath and its holiness"; "God is the Lord of all peoples," and "the selection of Israel as a people places upon it a greater obligation and God will therefore visit their sins upon them." In this grade, the teacher is directed to introduce the pupils to the Commentary by Rashi.

The pupils in grade seven are taught such concepts as "the knowledge of the Ten Commandments as the foundation of society, religion, and ethics among the Jews and Gentiles."

The two major concepts in grade eight are "the warning against idolatry and imitation of the ways of other peoples, for this will result in the nation's annihilation" and "walking in the way of God will lengthen the days of the people in the Promised Land." The teacher is also to instruct the pupils in the order and customs of reading the Torah and to help them gain "the recognition of the Book of Psalms as the expression for individual and public prayer and for the utterance of their heart in misfortune and happiness."

The second volume of the syllabus mentions five major general results expected of the teaching of Bible in the final years of the elementary school, although they are also desired in all grades: "The knowledge of the basic content of the books studied during the school year"; "the love of and respect for the Bible, the Book of Books of the Jewish people, and readiness to study it always"; "the

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conviction that the ethical, social, and esthetic roots of the Bible are the expression of the spirit and vision of the Jewish nation"; "the knowledge that its moral laws are the foundation for the purity of ethics and for the realization of social justice, individual security, and world peace"; and "the knowledge that it is the most eminent esthetic creation in the world." A sixth desirable outcome is concerned with the proper reading and comprehension of the Scriptural content studied.

It will be recalled that the earlier grades contained religious references in subjects other than the Bible. This is also true of the four upper grades. Without going into detailed citations, it suffices to point out the fact that religious content is found to a varying extent in all four grades in Hebrew language and literature, art, music, and handicraft; in the last three grades, in Aggadah; and in the fifth grade, geography.

Mishnah, which is formally offered in grades seven and eight of the secular public school, aims "to open for the children the gate to the temple of this mighty creation of the spirit of our people . . . and which served as the basic source for spiritual development and elevation, for the determination of the way of life, social relationships, ethics, and conduct. It should accompany the child throughout all the years of his studies, beginning with grade one of the elementary school; it should help toward the recognition of the images and values of Jewish life as they are reflected in the Aggadah; and it should implant within him with perseverance the seeds of love of mankind, love of Jews, love of the Torah, love of the Land of Israel, and the love of life and of the universe." The syllabus then goes on to state that "the teacher should nurture in the heart of the pupils a love for the Oral Torah . . . and should consciously endeavor in his instruction that the pupils absorb the specific idioms and ways of expression of the Mishnah and the Aggadah. . . ."

As already mentioned, Aggadah is incorporated in all grades. The seventh grade, however, is the time when the pupil gets an opportunity, for the first time, to study the text of the Mishnah at first hand, rather than in the form of the *Sefer ha-Aggadah*, by Bialik and Rabnitzki. The pupils learn Mishnayot from tractates *Abot* and *Bikkurim* (grade seven), and from tractates *Sanhedrin*, *Bava Kamma*, *Bava Metzia*, *Bava Batra*, *Shabbat*, *Pesachim*, *Sukkah*, *Rosh ha-Shanah*, and *Peah* (grade eight). One of the aims of such instruc-

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tion from grade one onward is "the recognition of the place of the Oral Torah in the life of the nation as the continuation of the Written Torah."

History makes its appearance as a subject in grade five and continues to the end of the elementary school course. The objectives, as outlined in the syllabus for both the secular and the religious public schools embrace, among others, "the knowledge of the great past of the Jewish people—its spiritual heritage, achievements, and vision . . ."; "the knowledge that our people, which is among the smallest of peoples, preserved in the course of two thousand years of exile its religion, customs, and knowledge . . ."; and "the love for the exalted spiritual heritage of our people." In particular, the teaching of history in the secular public schools is designed to inculcate in the pupils the recognition that the "sublime foundations of the Torah of Israel, the vision of the Jewish prophets concerning the end of days, the zeal of the Jews for the public study of the Torah, their preservation of the unity of religious custom, their deep faith in the eternity of the Jewish people, their unbroken union with their homeland, and their faith in the redemption—these gave our people the strength to withstand all its enemies and to preserve its independence, and these led it to gather together these the exiles and to set up anew the State of Israel." Furthermore, the teacher is to implant within the pupils "the love for the State of Israel and the will to work for its benefit and to guard its existence, to develop and make it great in accordance with the spirit of the sublime values of the Torah of Israel and the vision of its prophets and in the spirit of the pioneering ideals of the reborn generation."

The history courses in grades five to eight cover a large area of what is essentially the history of the Jewish religion. Thus, grade five begins with "the giving of the Torah" and continues to "the Holy Temple." Grade six learns about the Hassidim and their struggle with the Hellenists and about the Mishnaic and Talmudic periods. Grade seven is taught the rich history of religious life in the medieval era, up to the period of Rabbi Joseph Karo, author of the *Shulchan Arukh*, the Ari, and "the yeshivot and the rabbinic literature in Poland." For grade eight emphasis is placed on more modern aspects, as Hassidism, the yeshivot in Eastern Europe, and the rise of religious Zionism.

It is of interest to note that only in grade five does the syllabus

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contain separate outlines for the teaching of history in the secular and in the religious public school. The question of quantity of religious details in the secular history course is not relevant. What is significant is that the material which is customarily regarded as belonging within the province of religious instruction in most modern nations is a regular part of the secular course of study.

The introductions to the two volumes constituting the curriculum of the elementary school are identical, both having been written by Professor B. Z. Dinur, the then Minister of Education and Culture. He stated that "this syllabus would become compulsory only after two years of experimentation and elucidation. It is based on the objectives of the State Education Law." He stressed in particular that "it is forbidden that anything should be in the syllabus and in the life of the school that is contradictory in the least to these objectives." Professor Dinur urged the correlation of subject matter from various areas. "In the higher grades of the school it is possible, for example, to teach the laws of the holidays and festivals in such a way that in connection with these topics the pupil will review lessons from the Torah, the Mishnah, the Halakhic Midrashim, and even the sayings of the Talmud and the Rambam. . . ."

#### EVALUATION OF THE CURRICULUM

Taken at face value, the curriculum for the secular public elementary school in Israel is a far cry from what is generally taught all over the world in such schools. Even the schools in a country where church and state are combined, such as England, where religion is legally part of the curriculum, hardly compare in religious content to the secular Israeli school. In describing what is taught in the Israeli schools, it is simpler to mention those areas of learning, such as mathematics, in which religion is not or seldom incorporated.

We must also remember that the Minister of Education and Culture made it abundantly clear that the religious element was an integral part of the secular course of study. Even if most teachers and pupils do not study the sacred subjects with their heads covered, it is probable that some of the religious content, if taught in accordance with the directives of the syllabus, would rub off on the pupils. Whether or not this is what has actually happened in a

majority of cases will be discussed on a later page. Suffice it to say at this point that the serious implementation of the secular syllabus would logically lead to an extensive knowledge and broad understanding of, and a deep sympathy for, the religious heritage of the Jewish people on the part of the children who attend the secular public schools. Certainly, there can be little doubt as to the official viewpoint of the State of Israel.

#### THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

During the summer of 1956, the Department of Secondary Education of the Ministry of Education and Culture issued "Proposals for the Courses of Study in the Secondary School (IX-XII)." The preface stated explicitly that Bible and the Oral Torah are "compulsory subjects." This applies to the secular as well as to the religious high school.

The teaching of Bible in the secular secondary school, according to the syllabus, is based "upon the objectives which were laid as a foundation for such instruction in the elementary school." The course of study for grades nine through twelve comprises chapters for intensive and extensive study in the Torah, all the major books of the prophets, the Minor Prophets (except Obadiah, Nahum, and Zephaniah), and all the *Ketuvim*.

Instruction in the Talmud in the secular secondary school aims to furnish to the student not only a comprehension of selected content, concepts, and modes of expression, but also a knowledge of the "religious, cultural, economic, and social life of the talmudic era." Grade nine studies extracts from *B. Metziah* and *B. Batra*; grade ten from *B. Batra* and *Sanhedrin*; grade eleven, from *Gittin*; and grade twelve, from one of several tractates (*Shevuot*, *Rosh ha-Shanah*, *Pesachim*, *B. Batra*, or *Ketuvot*). For the final year, the background material on the Talmud is organized according to ten topics, including: the Oral Law during the era of the Scriptures, the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel, the Babylonian and the Jerusalem Talmuds; the Thirteen Rules of Talmudic Interpretation, the logical foundations of the Talmud, and the Halakhah as the living Torah. It may be true that the total number of folio pages, a maximum of 36, studied in the four years of the Talmud course in the secular high school is very small as compared to the 100-120



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folio pages of Talmud in the religious high school, but it should not be forgotten that even the inclusion of a little amount of talmudic study is a sign of some religious content in an environment where one least expects it.

The objectives of history teaching in the secular high school lack any reference to religion, as in elementary education. However, in grade nine, at least half of the time is given over to Jewish history through the talmudic period. The higher grades seem to give less stress to the religious element in Jewish history; although grades ten to twelve do cover such topics as: the Gaonate, Jewish spiritual life in medieval Spain, the Ramban, the forerunners of religious Zionism, Messianism, Rabbi Alcalay and Rabbi Kalisher, Rabbi Mohilever and the Kattowitz Conference, religious Zionism, and the Chief Rabbinate. In general, the role of religion in the recent and current history of the State of Israel does not seem to get adequate attention in the secular syllabus, not so much for its own sake but rather in comparison with the relative emphasis in earlier Jewish history. Perhaps the curriculum designers felt that the place of contemporary religion in the State is a political, not a spiritual, matter.

Religious content may also be found in *Mada'ei ha-chevrah*, which might be translated as social science or social studies. One of the aims of this course is to furnish the high school student the requisite "knowledge concerning the social, economic, spiritual and political status of the Jewish people in Israel and abroad and to prepare him to understand the problems and functions of our generation."

In the citizenship class, which is given in grade twelve only, the student learns about "the religious life in the State and its organization (and) the Chief Rabbinate and its institutions" and "the place of religion and tradition in Jewish life in the course of the centuries." Under the Sociology of the Jewish People, the student learns "the signs of a religious revival in our days." The idea of "God as the King of the Kings" and the religious-political philosophy of Maimonides, are taught under the heading of History of Political and Social Thought, while religious Socialism is presented as the last topic in the course on the theory of Modern Socialism. Finally, the History of Nationalist Jewish Thought devotes some time to the Messianic idea, the commandments to settle in Eretz Israel, "the heralds of modern Zionist thought—Kalisher and Alcalay," and "the character

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of religious Zionism"—particularly the thought of Rabbi Kook, and the Mizrachi party. It should be noted that all courses in the social studies, except citizenship, are electives in the two humanistic and the mathematical-physical specializations. Moreover, the social science curriculum requires only two years of study in this area.

It is of particular interest to record that one humanistic curriculum offers a four-year sequence of Talmud two hours weekly, while the other utilizes most of the time saved by the omission of a second foreign language, four hours per week in grades ten through twelve, for adding to the instruction of Talmud and Jewish Philosophy. Since there is no indication in the timetable in the syllabus that this applies to only the religious high school, it may be inferred that secular high schools may offer additional Talmud.

### ADULT EDUCATION

Also significant is the fact that the course of study for the *Ulpanim*, or adult schools, comprises religious content. The introduction to the syllabus outlines the subject matter, which includes Bible and Agadah, for the training of adult immigrants from all parts of the world.

In the elementary education course, the teacher introduces simple stories from the Bible, the Talmud, and Jewish history, and Biblical and Talmudic expressions in the original. Most of the songs, as, for example, *Maoz Tzur*, have a religious content or source.

The intermediate level of the adult program contains very little, except for some songs, of a religious nature. On the other hand, the upper level offers content from various Biblical books "in order to bring the learner closer to the Tanakh" from a literary, cultural, and linguistic standpoint and "to help the student learn portions of the Tanakh which have become a part of the treasury of the knowledge and the personal life of the nation." The subject, Halakhah and Agadah, enables the advanced adult student to study selections from *Pirke Abot* and from the *Mishneh Torah* by the Rambam, and also to learn various tales and legends compiled by Bialik and Rabnitzki in their *Sefer Haggadah*. In the Jewish history class, the students learn, among other topics, the period of the Talmud and the Gaonim and the Messianic movements, while in the citizenship

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classes they learn in Hebrew about religious holidays and festivals. Finally, a few of the songs are derived from religious themes or sources.

### TEACHER TRAINING

The most recent syllabus, that of the secular teachers' colleges, is also of relevance to the present inquiry. Prepared by the Ministry of Education and Culture, this document describes the training of the future elementary teacher. In addition to the usual courses is included knowledge of the land and people of Israel and Jewish culture. In the introduction it is stated that the outline of the course on the methods of teaching the Oral Torah will appear "soon," and that later in the school year the outline of the course on the methods of religious education will be issued under the category of "Special Topics in Education."

The history of education, after covering the general field from Plato through Dewey and Montessori, concludes with the history of Jewish education. The Jewish content embraces the scriptural and talmudic periods, the contributions of Maimonides and the Maharal of Prague, and the Yeshivot.

Under the heading of Special Didactics, one of the courses deals with the aims and the syllabus of teaching Bible, specific procedures, and homework assignments. The main points in the course in the methods of teaching history touch on the preservation of the nation through the means of spiritual power. The syllabus states specifically that "religion and tradition, as well as the longings for a complete redemption, deepened the consciousness of the unity and solidarity of the people." This is an idea which is taught to the teacher-in-training and which he is expected to develop when he gets into his classroom. Several other ideas, related to this one, are also spelled out.

The major emphasis on religion is given in the course on the culture of Israel. The first part, on Jewish thought, pays much attention to the Torah, prophecy, Messianism, *mitzvot* involving man-man and man-God relationships, *Kiddush ha-Shem*, and the theory of *Musar* in the *Agadah* and Halakhah. The students are asked to consult as source materials various writings: *Emunot Ve-deot* of

such a furor about "Jewish consciousness." This was what the course of study stated it was aiming at. What happened? It is obvious that a tremendous gap must have developed between *intention* and *fulfillment*. If the teachers had carried out the directives of the syllabus, it is hard to conceive that such a depth of ignorance would have prevailed among Israeli children and youth about Judaism.

One might, therefore, make several inferences. In the first place, it is possible that many teachers lacked the fundamental religious knowledge. Another possibility is that many who had the knowledge lacked sympathy with the objectives of the syllabus, and consequently either ignored or subverted them, or at best taught religious values inadequately.

Another question might be raised. Just what were the roles of the school administrators, the inspectorate, and the Minister of Education and Culture himself? If there had been adequate supervision, the probability is that the teachers would have complied with the requirements of the course of study. It might be expected that a government does not go to the trouble and expense of preparing and publishing an elaborate set of directions for teaching and then permit a *laissez-faire* policy in practice. Yet this is what seems to have happened. Perhaps the inner tensions and conflicts of Israeli life may have been responsible for this situation.

At any rate, there can be no denial that some attempt seems to have been made to teach the religious values and content. This is what the present writer observed in his visits to schools all over Israel during 1957 and 1958. Practically all the secular classrooms he has seen have a *mezuzah* on the door. In a number of schools he noted the presence of Talmud volumes in the principal's office. The Bible classes, for the most part, were conducted in a manner of respect if not of reverence to the Torah. In some schools, there were pupils and teachers who wore skull caps—not a frequent occurrence to be sure, but clearly noticeable. Taking one consideration with another, however, it would seem that failure to teach religious values was more common than success.

It is worth noting that the *Todaah Yehudit* reform is one of deepening and widening. It does not by any means represent a *Todaat Yahadut*, a consciousness of Judaism, something which is the prime objective of the religious public school. Both the Minister of Education and Culture, Mr. Zalman Aranne, and other government

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leaders, have made this clear in their speeches and writings. Moreover, religious and religious-education leaders have pointed out the inadequacy of *Todaah Yehudit* to achieve its aims. Criticism has also been forthcoming from Mapai followers of Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and from the leftist political parties.

While all these developments are taking place, the Ministry of Education and Culture is proceeding in its campaign to make effective its program of *Todaah Yehudit*. During 1958-1959, "attention was also given to the deepening of the knowledge of Jewish values and a widening of the interest of the pupils in Jewish affairs throughout the Diaspora." This report also mentions that thorough discussions by laymen and teachers on "the methods of imparting Jewish consciousness," as well as conferences by teachers and administrators, preceded the adoption of the new syllabus, which included "Jewish Thought," "The National Tradition," "Knowledge of Jewish Religious Lore," "Contemporary Jewish Affairs," and "National Geography."

A review of the relationship of religion to education and the state in Israel must also make note, however briefly, of the fact that the public schools of the religious minorities instruct their pupils in their respective faiths. As is known, the other religions are guaranteed full freedom by the laws of the land, and this is reflected in the educational situation. The circular of the Ministry of Education enumerates the various Moslem, Druze, Bahai, Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Latin Rite, Maronite, and Protestant holidays, and directs administrators to cooperate with the teachers and pupils in enabling them to be absent from school on religious holidays.

That Israel is a democratic state, certainly a prime example in the Middle East, is a generally accepted fact. There, if anywhere, a most sincere and systematic effort is being made to give each person, regardless of origin, the maximum opportunity for educational growth and development that this young state, confronted by serious economic and international crises, can afford. The State of Israel is also committed to a program of religious instruction, even if not indoctrination, in all publicly supported schools. At the present time, there is a campaign to make religious values more significant in the education of children.

It is not at all logical to judge the status of religion in the public schools of Israel by the conditions and attitudes that prevail in

public education in the United States. It is more logical—and more objective and just—to keep in mind that other democracies, such as Great Britain and Holland, do not regard the practice of religious teaching in public schools as a violation of the principles of democracy. Only recently, the annual conference of the New Zealand Educational Institute, decided by a better than two-to-one vote not to oppose “religious instruction taking place in State schools during school hours” or the conduct of “opening devotional exercises.” New Zealand is one of the world’s democracies.

Every country’s educational system must be appraised in terms of its traditions, objectives, capabilities, and problems. From this standpoint, Israel is demonstrating that religious education in the public schools is fully compatible with democracy. It is not for Americans to impose their ideas or system of values on Israel’s educational system. Rather, they might rethink the entire issue of the relationship of the church to the school and the state to determine if there is anything they can learn, in connection with their own traditions and convictions, from the practices of other democratic countries.

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