

# Takin' You to School:

## Issues in Education from a Historical Prospective

AHTC Summer Institute Lesson—2009

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### Part 2: Religion in Education

*Primary Source:* Letter from E.E. Reichwald (Secretary of the American Secular Union and Freethought Federation to Francis G. Blair (Superintendent of Public Instruction); October 23, 1912; Illinois State Archives, Springfield, IL

*Description:* This letter registers a complaint about the use of public school buildings for religious services. Also it includes the platform of the American Secular Union as it emphasizes the importance and purposes of separation of church and state.

*Prompts:*

- Focusing on the American Secular Union platform:
  - Summarize the “Nine Demands of Liberalism”.
  - Which of the “Nine Demands of Liberalism” deal specifically with schools?
  - Why are schools an important issue to the Secular Union?
  - Given the strict separation of church and state (since established by the U.S. Supreme Court), have any of the other “demands of Liberalism” been met? Why or why not?
  - What message is the “crest” of the Secular Union attempting to convey?
  - Why does the Secular Union include quotes from our founding fathers?
  - Our country was founded by Christian groups. How have Christian values made a clear imprint on our laws and society?
  - Would there be any potential benefits if religious values were presented in schools? Do these outweigh the costs?
  
- Focusing on the letter:
  - What specifically is E.E. Reichwald requesting?
  - Do you think that he already knows what the law states on the issue at hand?
  - How are these schools violating the law?
  - Why would communities use schools for religious practices?
  - Why would the law prohibit the use of schools in this way?

*Enrichment:*

Read the [First Amendment](#) and discuss the purpose of both the “*free exercise clause*” and the “*establishment clause*” that pertain to religion.

Examine three Supreme Court cases and their significance:

- [McCollum v. Champaign Board of Education](#): Use of school buildings for religion.
- [Lemon v. Kurtzman](#): Use of public funds for religious education.
- [Engel v. Vitale](#): Prayer in public schools.