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Faith Is A Lesson Parents Can Teach

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It's nearly Christmas - er, "winter break." The so-called war on Christmas is in full swing, so it's a good time to consider what can be learned from the Hillsborough County School Board's flip-flop on religious holidays.

First, you have to admit it's a bit audacious to come to a country where a solid majority is Christian and expect the holidays of your minority religion to be observed at your kid's public school. Imagine going to a country like Iran or Saudi Arabia and demanding the same respect toward Christianity. Chances are, instead of deciding to nix observance of Muslim holidays along with other religions' holidays, the schools would just decide to nix you.

Still, it's wrong to force taxpayers of minority religions to have their government promote a religion they may disagree with.

What gives America this bent toward tolerance and inclusiveness is the very fact that it was established on Christian principles. Unlike many other religions, Christianity has an emphasis on free will.

Tolerance is also what makes the United States unique. It's a tolerance that doesn't disown the notion of an ultimate truth, as a liberal notion of tolerance would, but does acknowledge the right of others to determine their own belief system without coercion.

Neither the U.S. nor the Florida Constitution says anything about what religious holidays can or cannot be observed in public schools. The U.S. Constitution doesn't even mention public schools, and despite what the "freedom from religion" and "separation of church and state" crowds may claim, does not ban public acknowledgment of our country's religious heritage. Rather, it forbids Congress from passing laws that establish an official religion. The Florida Constitution is similar but adds that no state funds may go in aid of religious groups. So there was no constitutional dilemma there.

But there was still the moral and ethical dilemma. With varying belief systems represented in the community, there is a general sensitivity to discrimination and government's proper role in acknowledging religious aspects of its citizens' lives. Maybe what we've become more aware of in this latest incident in the religion in public schools debate is the unreliability of public one-size-fits-all schools to cater to the specific religious beliefs of individual students. Perhaps

this, together with the recent decision by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals that parents don't have a fundamental right to determine what or when their children are taught about sex, will further parents' desire to educate their children in an environment more suited to their own beliefs.

Adam Fowler attended a Christian school from kindergarten through 12th grade and graduated from the University of South Florida with a degree in political science.

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