

# Minister Looks at Prayer Issue

EDITORS NOTE—The issue of prayer in the schools, raised by the June 25 decision of the U. S. Supreme Court, was the subject recently of a sermon by the Rev. Gerald B. O'Grady, Jr., rector of Christ Church Cranbrook. Following is the text of Mr. O'Grady's sermon.

Our subject is "Prayer in the Public Schools," or, more broadly, "Religion in the Schools."

On June 25, there was an announcement of the supreme court's decision again the recitation in New York schools of a prayer written by the board of regents of New York. The result was a furor among both clergy and laity—with articles and editorials in both the secular and religious press—and with tremendous reaction in the letters to the editors of both.

A little earlier, right here in this community, we had had a furor of our own on the same issue, with an open meeting in which—on the issue of prayer, mind you—feelings rose to an incredible pitch. There was practically no sign of the Christian's ability to disagree in love and to enter into calm, concerned dialogue while scorching for a solution.

The Supreme Court's decision stands, and I gather that we may be in for another flurry on the local scene. I think it important, therefore, that we explore the issue calmly and quietly in a setting where we are aware of ourselves as established church, and required

the Christian community, living at every moment under God.

FIRST, FOR caution's sake, let's record that this issue is only one tiny thread in the whole tapestry of the relations of church and state. There are the little things, like the motto on our coins, like the recently added words "one nation under God" in the pledge to the flag, or more widely the issues of federal aid to education at all, and, if so, to church-related schools.

There is the issue of the observance of religious holidays, of chaplains in Congress and in the armed forces and in public hospitals, of tax exemption of church properties, of the form for being sworn in the courts, of the rights of clergy to double as civil officers by officiating at marriages and so on through a fantastic number of issues.

As a framework for this whole complex tapestry, let's record two large points and then zero in on the immediate issue of prayer in the schools.

FIRST, I AM convinced that the Founding Fathers were deeply religious men for whom there was no question but that this nation exists "under God." The assurances about freedom of religion which were written into the Constitution were never meant to be anti-religious. They were meant only to prevent there being one established church, and required

forms of prayer—two things they had come here to escape. With this constitutional guarantee of religious freedom, as by 20th century Christians, need have no quarrel.

The trouble comes not from the Constitution, but from the metaphor, used by one man, and it does not appear in the Constitution but it is probably the most frequently used set of words when talking about church and state. This figure of the "wall" of separation tends to dominate our thinking in this area.

"ON THIS point, each of us may take a pair of scissors and cut a Christian and as a citizen, I am against 'walls of separation' or whether in contemporary Berlin or between East and West generally, or in the relations of church and state here. Walls are by their very nature restrictions of freedom and it is freedom that the Constitution and our whole political philosophy is talking about.

Religion, be it any variety of Christianity or of Judaism, is a heaven to society and should be encouraged in every way by the state. At the same time, the state should provide safeguards for freedom and variety of religious expression which what the Founding Fathers were after.

BUT NOW TO zero in on the issue of prayers in the schools. I am convinced that the hue and cry have been out of all proportion to the issue involved and that even good church people are confused as to what is involved and the importance of what is involved.

Religion, be it any variety of Christianity or of Judaism, is an art in the "Diocesan Record," put it well when he says, "the perfunctory recitation of an innocuous prayer at the beginning of each school day may well do religion more harm than good. The observance of prayer in Scripture a short passage from Scripture (out of context) with no comment and often with little conviction much to relate religion to a place of irrelevance. The overall impression made upon young minds by such practices has in many instances been a negative one. In short, the cause of true religion has probably lost nothing at all by the court's decision."

WITH THAT calming thought in mind, let's swing quite sharply to the issue of the rights of minorities. This is a country which from the beginning, in its documents, at least, has assured equal rights to individuals and to groups of individuals.

In terms of this issue, it was at least a gesture in the right direction for the New York State Regents that children of non-believers or of members of particular sects who in conscience cannot participate in the prayer may either remain quiet or may be excused from the room. But I really think that this remains a kind of discrimination.

TAKING A parallel from integration in education, it seemed a great step forward a few decades ago to have a ruling calling for "separate but equal" educational facilities for Negroes. But it was certainly a greater step forward in the 1950's to realize that where there is separation there is inequality in the very fact of forced separation.

Similarly, it is a kind of discrimination to put an asterisk in prayer which makes John or Mary stand out as an odd-ball by grimly remaining mute—or by leaving the room while it's going on. Our is a pluralistic society in which a key word is freedom and the rights of minorities represent exactly the area in which we show whether we really mean it.

THERE WERE a number of fairly hysterical letters in the public and church press which said in effect that the court was "removing God from the school." This is nonsense. God is not dependent on the supreme court or anyone else. God is there whether He is publicly recognized in prayer or not. He is at work through His people. He is at work in the relationships of teacher and student, of teacher and teacher and of student with student.

This is a crucially important question for the ministry of the laity. This is what it means for you to be the church in the world: God is working everywhere, all the time, not just when being publicly prayed to. He is at work in His people, and at work through His people in whatever situations they find themselves.

BUT PRAYER is worship. Prayer is a function of believing individuals, either privately or when gathered together as the community of worship. It is not the function of the public schools to be a church. It is not the function of the state, through the schools, to be the church; it is not the function of the state, through the schools, to provide activities of worship, which are appropriate only for believers, nor to impose such activities on non-believers in violation of their rights.

Let me point two situations from my own experience which will lay a base for our conclusion.

IN MY FIRST position as Episcopal chaplain at Cornell I was assigned to work with the rabbi and the Roman chaplain to plan a Thanksgiving service to be sponsored by the Cornell United Religious Work. We spent hours in the type of consultation I hope never to repeat. Roman Catholics may attend, but may not participate in, worship with other religious groups. That meant no hymns, no prayers, no litany, no responsive readings, no people's elements of worship in which they would have to participate. Then because of our Jewish brethren there could be no specifically Christian touches and no reading of the New Testament.

I'll spare you the agonizing details of the discussion, but the result was a few verses of Luther's hymn and an address, flanked by (God help us) some sort of Alma Mater on one end and "Far Above Cassin's Waters" on the other.

WHEN OUT of respect for the various groups in a pluralistic society, you start trimming down to the lowest common denominator, you end up with something which while it may be offensive to none is also nourishing to none. Prayer and worship are functions of believers and those functions should take place in church and synagogue, where as a gathered community believers may express their relationship with God and with each other in terms of their common belief. That is the church, and the school must be attempted to function as the church.

The other situation which contains clues for understanding this business of prayer in the schools was during my nine years as chaplain of Trinity College in Hartford. A certain amount of attendance at chapel was required with point values on the various services and different totals, required according to your class. You can quickly recognize the theological horror here of accumulated merit, salvation by works, bookkeeping—the whole mechanism which is no longer vital to religion.

Secondly, that we must stress the positive—freedom of religion—and play down the negative implication of Jefferson's unfortunate "wall of separation" between church and state. Third, that the issue is not really worth all the emotion and division fuss and that perfunctory observances of this kind may do more harm than good to our children. Fourth, that the rights of minorities, in this case meaning those who in conscience cannot participate, must be protected.

FIFTH, THAT God is present in the schools whether or not there is recognition of this by prayer, and the real challenge is to the ministry of the laity. Sixth, we stress the fact that prayer is a function of belief and will take place most effectively and nourishingly in congregations of persons holding common beliefs—in church and synagogue, rather than state schools. Seventh, that the effective place for religion in the schools is NOT in watered down formulas of prayer and worship but in the curriculum where it will strengthen the personality and citizenship of all.

And then, eighth and last, let's recognize that the real challenge in all this is to you, in your family life and in your church life. Grace before meals, prayers at bed-time, a word of prayer with you before leaving for school, the weekly gathering here with the company of like-minded believers.

IT'S THE LIFE of family and church that the effective religious training will take place. And in your home, a discreet little crucifix or crucifix on the wall, a Bible that's out and dusted, a prayer book by the bed or in the living room in which the family prayers look used. It is these things which will be really formative in your child's life. They cannot be delegated to the school or anyone else. Only you can do them—and they constitute probably the greatest privilege you have.

THE JUDAEO-Christian roots of western culture are just as essential as the Hellenic. Going further, our history, our law, our ethics, our literature, our painting, music, sculpture—the whole panorama of our heritage and our present scene—it is impossible to understand this without understanding the strength of the Jewish-Christian stream with the Greek.

This is a perfectly valid educational goal in a democracy which recognizes that an intelligent and informed citizenry is essential and that they must be equipped by their education to deal with the problems of the present in the light of a deep understanding of the lessons of history. In relation to the schools THIS should be our goal: our cause—not a 22-word lowest common denominator-like prayer but a concern for the Judaean-Christian roots of our culture so that our culture may be understood all.

WE HAVE, THEN, these points: We reaffirm the position of our Founding Fathers that we should recognize that an intelligent and informed citizenry is essential and that they must be equipped by their education to deal with the problems of the present in the light of a deep understanding of the lessons of history.

## Officers Named By Association In B'field Association

Officers for 1962-63 have been elected by the Bloomfield Village Protective Association. They are John C. McCarty, president; William W. Slocum Jr., vice president; Colin Campbell, secretary; and Malcolm W. Welty, treasurer.

At the annual meeting, Robert E. Harvie was elected trustee for district one; Campbell for district two and Welty for district three.

In the area of responsibility assignments, Carl Abbott will work on water and sewer problems; Harvie on roads; Ralph E. Hunt, road signs; Slocum, planning; Ivan Ludington Jr., civic improvements.

The Ford-Lodge interchange in Detroit is three stories high and has eight overpasses. Counting the two freeways that pass through the interchange and the connecting ramps, it has the equivalent of 5.5 miles of two-lane highway.

THE ASSOCIATION'S October newsletter noted that a plan is being worked out regarding 25-mile speed limit traffic and stop signs on Broadway Boulevard, and Cranbrook and Covington Roads.

The newsletter also reported that during June, July and August, police patrol cars covered over 20,000 miles in patrolling village streets with only two accidents reported. During the period, 79 traffic violation tickets were issued.

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