WE HAVE GOT A PRAYER
by
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On June 16, 1962, the United States Supreme Court, by a verdict of six to one, took prayer out of the public schools. The Supreme Court granted this decision in response to a petition filed by parents of ten pupils from a school district of New Hyde Park in the state of New York. The parents objected to the practice of reciting "the Regents' Prayer" (composed by the New York State’s Board of Regents) aloud in the presence of a school teacher at the beginning of each school day. The parents claimed that this practice was contrary to their religious beliefs. The Supreme Court ruled the prayer unconstitutional, "not only because it is an act of worship, but also because the prayer establishes the religious beliefs embodied within it" (Kik 7). The Supreme Court further stated that their decision reflected the writers of our Constitution's belief that, "religion is too personal, too sacred, too holy, to permit its unhallowed perversion by a civil magistrate"(7). This separation between Church and State reached deep into each and every citizen's life. The reinstatement of prayer in public schools has been pursued many times in the past thirty years, and it is time to lay the subject at rest. I consider myself to be a "prayer warrior," taking every opportunity to turn to the Lord for strength, advice, comfort, praise, or whatever the situation may warrant. When I initially considered prayer in the public schools I supported it, but
now that I have had time to look into the issues, I believe that prayer should not be allowed in the public schools.

Today, in light of the increasing moral decay of out society, Americans are requesting that public prayers be brought back to the schools. When this issue came to the Senate floor for debate on October 6, 1994, Jesse Helms, a Conservative Republican from North Carolina, chose to blame the liberals in Congress and the Constitution for “crime and pornography, mediocre schools, and politicians who cater to every fringe group that comes down the pike” (Helms 18). He also spoke of an article in Reader’s Digest that described a poll taken from the citizenry about opinions on prayer in school. He pointed out that this particular poll expressed the opinions of “Democrats, Republicans, blacks and whites, rich and poor, high school dropouts and college graduates” (18). The results state that 75 percent of persons polled, “strongly favor prayer in the public school and want it restored” (18). All of these issues seemed strong enough to me to support an amendment to the Constitution to allow prayer back in the schools. But as I began to reason out a defense, I realized these issues were nothing less than pointing the finger at someone else, passing the blame and looking for someone in authority to improve the ills of our society.

I thought about what those statistics might mean in my community. All kinds of oppositional ideas flooded into my mind. It occurred to me that it would be rather incredible if 75 percent of the people in Valparaiso even attended church, let alone prayed in public. In a recent interview with Pastor Jim Peterson, I obtained a quote from a survey from the Capitol Voice giving the following statistics on church attendance:

Out of all church members, 10 percent cannot be found, 23 percent never attend church, 25 percent never pray, 20 percent never read the Bible, 40 percent never tithe, 50 percent never attend church on Sunday night, 60 percent would never give to world missions, 75 percent never assume a ministry in church, 85 percent never attend a mid-week service, and 100 percent think they are going to Heaven. (Peterson)

With these statistics reflecting only church members, I wonder how many people do not belong to a church. Churches are the backbone of the Christian faith, promoting spiritual growth outside of the home. If people are not attending church, or do not belong to one, where are their religious beliefs being nourished? The first Thursday in May has been the National Day of Prayer. Apathy for religious expression has gotten so bad that for the last three years I have gathered with other people on the steps of the town hall in my community to participate in public prayer, and the attendance has always been a rather scarce ten to twelve persons.

I believe there is a massive outcry from the public, both in the religious and secular worlds, in search of answers to the problems of today. Ever since Vice-President Dan Quayle, in 1992, made a statement that he believed the lead character on the Murphy Brown show reflected the moral state of our society, (she wanted a child but did not want to be married) our values have been a hot issue. Although he should be
commended for his convictions, I believe with that statement he also committed political suicide. Sometimes the truth hurts. Gayle White of Publishers Weekly reports, "In his new autobiography Standing Firm, Quayle writes, 'In the four years that I was Vice President, nothing generated more mail and phone calls to my office than the Murphy Brown speech'" (34). White's article is written to emphasize society's hunger for "answers in the areas where faith and politics mingle" (34). But I say that reinstating prayer in the public schools is not the answer. We should not be looking towards the government for guidance on faith issues. Our great government was framed on principles of neutrality when it comes to religion, as stated in the First Amendment. Without this neutrality we would not have the freedoms we all tend to take for granted at times. The separation of Church and State is a key ingredient for harmony within this nation. In light of the fact that this world's history has been ravaged with religious wars, we are very blessed not to be persecuted by our government for our religious beliefs. Here in America we have a government that allows for each and every individual the freedom to worship the religion of his or her choice.

Those supporting prayer in public school fail to recognize that our schools are run by the government and if government controlled religion, their children may be required to recite prayers in school that would conflict with their families' religious beliefs. How many different kinds of prayer would there have to be to accommodate all faiths? It could possibly take a good amount of time to lead each group in prayer. What about those who choose not to participate? Would this "moment of silence" then be voluntary or involuntary? A statement made by a group from the Baptist Joint Committee in reaction to a proposed amendment to the Constitution justly describes the controversy in saying "We must not turn the sacred act of prayer into political football" (Facts 519). Today teachers throughout the country are struggling to instill basic citizenship values such as honesty, responsibility, self-control, and respect for justice and authority. This struggle alone is overwhelming at times when there is no reinforcement inside the home. Religion is actually acknowledged in public schools, contrary to what public opinion tells us. President Clinton issued a detailed set of guidelines for schools on the issues of religion, citing "confusion over what is legal in the emotional area causing many school officials to clamp down on all religious expression" (Times 1). Under these guidelines students:

have the right to pray either individually or in informally organized groups as long as they do not cause a disruption. They may also carry and read Bibles or other religious tracts in school, distribute religious literature and proselytize and wear religious clothing, including yarmulkes and head scarves. But organized prayer in classrooms or assemblies led by students, teachers or school officials, is not permitted. (8)

The teachers' role in religion in public school has also been defined by President Clinton in his set of guidelines. Surprisingly enough to me, I have learned in my research that a teacher is allowed to teach about religion. The President's statement includes this statement, "Teachers could give lectures 'about religion' but could not instruct students to abide by tenets of a specific faith" (Facts 519). Although I am sure there have been many issues in the past from our local schools regarding to what extent religion is allowed, I believe these guidelines will fill in a lot of gray
areas that needed clarification. The guidelines will now dispel the notion that religion is not found in public schools. Steven McFarland claims in a recent issue of Christianity Today magazine that “... the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment which prohibits government from establishing religion is frequently used to suppress religious expression” (Christianity 45). I understand this statement to represent today's conditions more adequately.

So where should our children go to pray? They can pray in school, if they have the nerve. It is very rare that I see a family bow their heads in prayer before their meal in local restaurants. So if the parents are not modeling the practice of prayer, why are the children expected to do it by law in public schools? They can pray at church or better yet, they can pray at home with their parents. I say that we should stop pointing the finger and looking to others to fix our problems in today's society, and start by looking in the mirror. If parents were as eager to teach their children about religion and the power of prayer as Helms claims, then they would not have to look to someone else to do it for them. Our society should look at individual efforts on how to clean this world of drugs, crime, corruption and materialism.

Prayer is an act of communication with God, and as a Christian, I believe it is a sacred form of worship. There are many passages in the Bible which show that Jesus Christ himself withdrew from the public or his disciples to a private place to pray. Jesus speaks to his disciples in the book of Matthew, chapter six, verse six: “But when you pray, go into your room, close your door and pray to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

I also considered the idea that maybe each community should have an individual choice of whether or not to allow prayer in the public school. After considering all angles of that idea, however, I believe that the threat of pluralism is far too great. In today's society, we do not need another reason to separate ourselves from our neighbors. When people of all religious denominations can come together in a neutral environment and accomplish a task, such as building a community playground, that itself is monumental. Because the government takes the stance of neutrality, the protection of all is insured. I would not want to send my children to a school system that persecuted them for their religious beliefs and I do not think other parents would either.

The whole concept of separation of Church and State is quite dynamic in itself, as there are the unique aspects of keeping our government neutral and at the same time allowing religion its freedom of expression. It is up to each citizen individually to decide what role religion will play in their lives. If religion plays an important part in your life, then it is your responsibility to develop your spirituality, and if religion is not a priority in your life (although I do feel sorry for you), then you too have the freedom of neutrality. Let us stop pointing the finger at others and deciding whose fault it is that our world is in such an awful state. Let us take the initiative upon ourselves to clean up this world but starting in our homes. We should encourage each other to spend a little more quiet time in our personal lives in prayer.
OUTCOME-BASED EDUCATION: THE PROBLEMS BEHIND THE THEORY

by

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Over the past ten years, outcome-based education (OBE) has been a major reform issue in America's schools because schools do not appear to be teaching necessary skills and reaching many students. These problems have educators and parents crying for a better system to prepare students for the world after formal schooling. Outcome-based education is being offered as one solution for this disenchantment. The concept is built around a list of outcomes, and students strive toward