

Prayer isn't government business

AS WE CELEBRATE the bicentennial of the American Constitution, we salute this glorious charter of freedom, the wisest of documents that provides for government of law and rights.

Those who are committed to a religious way of life particularly cherish the First Amendment that has shaped the society in which freedom of religion is respected.

Because government remains neutral with regard to religion, Americans have enjoyed unparalleled freedom of religion, freedom from interference by government. This freedom has allowed religious groups to flourish here with a strength and diversity unmatched anywhere in the world.

recognized the serious dangers of such legislation.

AMONG CONSIDERATIONS that defeated these bills were:

- School prayer is legal today. Any child can pray silently in any classroom under existing law. Any child can pray out loud, in a classroom or lunchroom, or anywhere else on school property so long as it does not disrupt the school's activities, or interfere with other children's rights to privacy. There is no objection to a child praying on school grounds, only to the government — through the school — organizing school prayer activity.
- Public schools are an inappropriate forum for religious instruction. If this legislation is passed and implemented, students will inevitably raise questions about religious belief, God and prayer in the public school environment, which is not designed or suitable for such discussions. Such discussions appropriately belong in the home, church or synagogue.
- This legislation does harm to minority groups. Prayer in the public schools will inevitably place unfair pressure on those students who wish to abstain from group prayer either because they do not wish to participate in prayer activity, or in the case of vocal prayer, do not believe in the words of the prayer selected for the class. Why should children be subjected to such discrimination and alienation?
- Public schools should teach about religion, but not mandate student participation. The constitutional promise of religious liberty is nurtured by a corresponding tradition of religious tolerance.
- Educating students about the diversity of religious expression in America can help promote understanding, alleviate prejudice and prepare students to participate in a pluralistic society. Whether the



moral perspectives
Rabbi Irwin Groner

lected for the class. Why should children be subjected to such discrimination and alienation?

study of religions is incorporated into the study of history or social studies, the subject matter should be presented objectively as part of the general program of instruction.

The academic study of religion should be given an important place in public education. It is a disservice to our students and our society to neglect the role of religion on human history.

Rabbi Irwin Groner is with Congregation Shaarey Zedek in Southfield.

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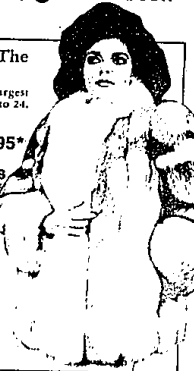
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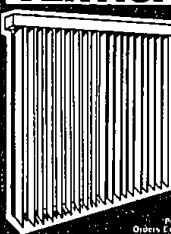


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