

OBSERVATION POINT

DISSENT

Why Can't My Kid Pray In School?

By Philip H. Power

"Why can't my kid pray in the schools?"

Remember when that was one of the hottest topics going just after the Supreme Court laid down the school prayer decision some years ago?

There was a lot of criticism of the Court then, and lots of people said it was anti-religious. Gradually, however, tempers cooled down and people realized that the separation of church and state that the Supreme Court wanted was fundamentally a good thing in our pluralist American society.

ALL THIS CAME to mind over the weekend, when I attended a National Newspaper Association convention in Washington, D. C., which was briefed by Associate Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas.

Now one of the senior Justices, Douglas is a white-haired man in his 70s, with a face seamed with the lines of amusement and hard thought. He combined a gentle humanity with a breadth of vision and concern that left his audience—a pretty skeptical group of newspaper publishers—deeply impressed.

One publisher asked him a question: "How come my children can't pray in our schools?" It was pointed and direct, and it expressed some of the worries that must have concerned parents in this area.

Douglas answered: "In most communities, the

school boards control school policy. Often, this included just what prayer policy was to be in the school.

"Now, I'm a Presbyterian. If we Presbyterians got control of the school board, we'd have Presbyterian prayers.

"If the Catholics got control of the board, we might have Catholic prayers. If the Methodists did, we might have Methodist prayers.

"If the Jews got control, we might have Jewish prayers. And if the Moslems did—remember there are 26 mosques in this country—we might have Moslem prayers.

"Now I've been in Moslem schools. And they have prayers there. They read the first verse of the Koran. And you know what that says? It pledges every Moslem believer to go out and kill all the infidels (ie. all non-Moslems).

"Now it seems to me that that's a heck of a way to start the school day with a prayer!"

The audience gave Justice Douglas a standing ovation.

WHAT DOUGLAS was getting at, of course, is that in America we have a melting pot of all kinds of various religions. If we start linking the state (through the school boards) with religion (ie. school prayers), someone is bound to have his religious beliefs offended.

School authorities in this area report that most parents have accepted this point of view.

Southfield Superintendent of Schools John English says that "once the Supreme Court speaks, people are pretty reluctant to speak out against it. There may be some who felt the decision was not correct, but by and large most people in our pluralistic society understand the problems regarding school prayers."

Plymouth Superintendent James Rossman reports no difficulty. "We've had no problems. I have had no complaints on the policy of separation of church and state since I came to Plymouth.

"We talk about religions—all of them—in the schools, and the members of the Plymouth Ministerial Association have been very

cooperative in sending speakers over to help us out."

Rolland Upton, Livonia's Superintendent, reports that he has received only one complaint since assuming his post.

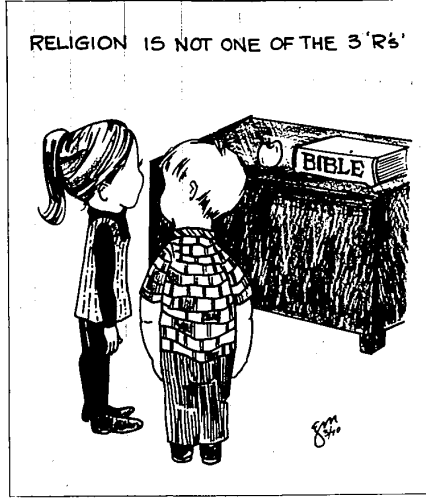
"The Board's policy is that of separation of church and state," Upton said. "We teach honor for all religions in the schools, and I think the parents understand it very well."

I SUSPECT Upton is right. Although many parents may have been startled and upset when the Court ruled on school prayers, the vast majority seem to have accepted the verdict in a sensible way.

People seem to understand that we live in an open society, where each person's freedom of religious choice is guaranteed by the state's separation from religion. You can't teach respect for another man's religious beliefs by cramming them down someone else's throat—in school or anywhere else.

The schools in this area appear to have taken a sensible and responsible course in administering the Court's ruling. And most parents appear to have accepted it.

That's something that's going right. And in a time of turmoil and strife, it's good to realize that there are some things which are going well.



Is College Board Overstepping Powers?

The elected trustees of Schoolcraft Community College can't seem to follow basic concepts of management and are dangerously close to aborting everything thus far created at that "commuter school."

The board of trustees presently serving will be expected to discharge the responsibilities of nearly \$5 million of taxpayer money next year.

Yet, as a group, the board cannot yet properly handle its own regular monthly business meetings.

ONE REASON is that as yet the board, again—as a group, does not seem to realize just why it hired professional administrative personnel: a president, a vice president for business affairs, a dean of instruction, etc.

Some individual members do seem to understand that the basic operating function of an elected board is to set policy and the basic function of administrators is to recommend and carry out board policy. These, however, are also remiss in that they don't

impress their fellow board members with this fact.

Others seem more bent on administering their own pet ideas—before even seeking a consensus of their fellow board members.

While paying professional, and apparently qualified, administrators in the neighborhood of \$20,000 annually to do a job, these board members constantly and consistently insist upon questioning every thought that goes into an administrative decision, and suggesting new ones.

ONE ADMINISTRATOR suggested at last month's board meeting that it would help if the trustees would set some policies by which the administration could gauge the desires of the board.

POLICY MUST COME first in the order of priorities. The trustees must set the policy. Until the board does this, it cannot expect the administration to function properly.

DAN J. GILMARTIN WRITES

Lenore Best Forget Vietnam

When Eisenhower announced that "he'd go to Korea," it wasn't considered such an outlandish political ploy, although for a time many wondered how they would get that private railroad car aboard a C-54.

However, if this corner were advising Mrs. Lenore Romney she'd be told to try Majorca, Vallarta or Capri. Vietnam isn't exactly the Yacht Club.

And whoever is paying for the trip, be it the Republican National Committee or her husband, should first consult either an astrologer or an analyst.

MRS. ROMNEY'S declaration to "go to Vietnam" is just about the poorest piece of advice that could be offered to the lady. And when she compounds the flap with the statement that "she wants to reassess" the situation, there'll be a lot of credibilty to be un-gapped.

"I'll talk to a plumber and find out," he answered.

The outcome was predictable. The downstairs looked like Niagara Falls after the self-styled "Mr. Fixit" had a go at the valves and pipes.

But somehow, you always want to recoup your losses, particularly if you have suffered painfully at the hands of not only your immediate family but relatives and neighbors as well.

You guessed it. The basement faucet went on the fritz again.

"I'm going back to the basement," was the declaration.

"You blew it last time," I was told. "Keep the hell away from the basement."

"I was brainwashed," I said.

"Brainwashed?"

"Yes, the plumber gave me some poor advice, which I, a trusting soul, bought hook, line and sinker," I retaliated.

"I'm warning you," the wife

said. "Keep the hell out of the basement."

"I MERELY WANT to reassess the situation," I said. "I know more about leaky faucets than I'm given credit for."

"I don't think the neighbors will buy it if the basement pours out onto the lawn" again," she said.

"It'll never happen," I countered.

"I'll give you one last chance," the wife said. "Leave the basement alone. We'll call a plumber this time."

"It's too late," I told her. "I've already given a statement to the neighbors telling them I'm going to fix the faucet."

"That does it," she said. And began to leave the room.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"I'm moving all the furniture to high ground," she told me.

Emory Daniels Writes...

Do Sports Bridge Generation Gap?

A recent editorial on this page made the claim that high school athletics does more than anything else to help bridge the generation gap. The claim was followed by an observation that the "hippie" type student was notable by his absence from athletic events.

That notable absence, it seems, is an indicator that high school athletics can do very little to help bridge the generation gap. It seems to me that high school athletics fosters continuation of that gap by excluding the element many find it difficult to communicate with.

IN FACT, just the opposite may be true. High school athletics, instead of being a magnet drawing people together, is a burner of our great melting pot to make everyone come out all-American boys.

Athletics encourages and strengthens the position that to be

a typical American boy we must have blonde hair, blue eyes, a crew cut top, and be approximately six feet and 180 lbs. Conversely, the long-haired type is considered by some as un-American.

To be a member of a football team, the candidate must exemplify this image, and very few coaches are pleased by a "hippie" type member on the team.

Thus, athletics is responsible for further polarization of the student body and community. The communications gap grows wider.

IT IS STRANGE that North Farmington High School, for example, can find enough faculty members to provide a coaching staff for football, basketball, wrestling, baseball, etc., but cannot find one faculty member to sponsor a group of students op-

posed to the Vietnam War wanting to form a club.

Likewise, Livonia School District pours thousands of dollars into its athletic program and has actually outdated student political groups in its schools. The paradox is striking.

The point to be made is that athletics is being used as a tool by the establishment to mold the type of youth it thinks best for society. If hippies are notable by their absence, it is because they do not wish to be cast into the mold.

Nothing wrong with melting pots. It's a little too much to acclaim high school athletics as a valuable tool in bridging the generation gap.

It is a tool of the establishment to continue the attributes of its generation and does nothing to foster communication between the majority and minority groups in the high schools.

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Philip H. Power, Publisher

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