

Respect Versus Acceptance

The year was 1949; Edward L. Schempp became very concerned over a Pennsylvania state law requiring the reading of ten Bible verses each day, followed by the students repeating the Lord's Prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. His concern grew, not out of a lack of belief in God (he belonged to a denomination called the Unitarians), but rather over a disbelief he and his family shared in Christ being God in human form, the Trinity, along with other teachings. In 1956, his son Ellory would protest this by reading from the Koran during the Bible reading period, which resulted in a trip to the principal's office. It was after this event that his father decided to file a lawsuit in federal court against the Abington school district with the support of the ACLU. In 1959, federal judges in Philadelphia ruled the Bible reading requirement was unconstitutional, and on June 17, 1963, after years of appeals, the United States Supreme Court in an 8-1 vote ruled the public reading of the Bible could no longer be required.

Supreme Court Justice Tom Clark, who voted in favor of restricting this practice, wrote in the majority opinion that the government at any and all levels must remain neutral in matters of religion “*while protecting all, preferring none, and disparaging none*” (374 U.S. 203 -1963).

Justice William Brennan, who also voted in favor of this restriction, wrote in his statement, “There are persons in every community – often deeply devout – to whom any version of the Judeo-Christian Bible is offensive. There are others whose reverence for the Holy Scriptures demands private study or reflection and to whom public reading or recitation is sacrilegious...”¹

The lone vote against this came from Justice Potter Stewart, who wrote,

If religious exercises are held to be an impermissible activity in schools, religion is placed in an artificial and state-created disadvantage.... And a refusal to permit religious exercises thus is seen, not as the realization of state neutrality, **but rather as the establishment of a religion of secularism**, or at least, as

¹ <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=US&vol=374&invol=203&friend=public>

governmental support of the beliefs of those who think that religious exercises should be conducted only in private (emp. added).²

Justice Stewart could not have been more correct. The replacing of Christianity in the public school system with the religion of secularism – teaching worldly values, morals, and ethics – has played a major role in the demise of morality in this nation. However, what is more concerning about this case, and others like it, is the teaching and implementing of the idea of tolerance and acceptance of others’ religious beliefs. That’s the basis for the government being “neutral.” Unfortunately, their “neutrality” has only led to an increase in other religions (i.e. evolution) being taught in the schools.

You come in contact with people who have different religious backgrounds (Muslim, Hindu, Wicca, Scientology, etc.) on a daily basis. As American citizens, we must respect the fact that according to the Constitution, they have the right to believe whatever they want. However, there is a dominant way of thinking that exists today which says, “I must not only respect them and their rights to believe what they want to believe, but I must accept what they believe as being just as truthful as what I believe.” Don’t get trapped into this way of thinking! The devil has gotten his claws into the minds and hearts of many in this day and age by this ploy. That’s why Paul could write, “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10: 5, ESV). God is telling us through His Word that the battle is for the mind. Whoever has your mind has your life.

This is nothing new for the devil. He has been using the weapons of doubt and confusion since the Garden of Eden. He first initiated doubt when he asked Eve, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” (Genesis 3: 1, ESV) He then smacks her with, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:4-5, ESV) With this infection of thought, Eve, like many today, made the decision to relax her knowledge of God’s Word and go with what she wanted – resulting in sin and separation from God.

² <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=US&vol=374&invol=203&friend=public>

The decisions that have been made in our nation's history have directly shaped the current culture. The invasion of "neutrality" and this way of thinking has infected America. However, we as Christians must never be "neutral" when it comes to standing up for the Bible as being the only inspired Word of God. Although, in the public school system, one religion is viewed as just as good as the next, the Bible simply does not teach that all roads lead to eternal life.