

# The Lockout of God in Our Public Schools

A famous bishop who  
also is a lawyer favors strong  
action to counter the  
Supreme Court's prayer ban

By the Rt. Rev. JAMES A. PIKE  
Episcopal Bishop of California



**EDITORS' NOTE:** The U.S. Supreme Court's recent ban of a state-written, nonsectarian prayer in the New York public schools has created a nationwide debate. Bishop Pike's views on the subject are controversial, but his qualifications for expressing them are exceptional. Before entering the ministry, he practiced law. He is a member of the Bar of the Supreme Court, and for five years he taught in the field of church-state relations at the Columbia University law school.

WHEN WE CLOSE a church building that has been hallowed by generations of worship, prayer, and Godly fellowship, we conduct a service called the "Deconsecration of a Church." With this in mind, it seems proper to say that the Supreme Court has deconsecrated the nation.

Governments have three choices when it comes to religion:

1. They can establish one church as official, with or without full play for the activity of other churches.
2. They can secularize all public life. (This was the method chosen by the French Revolution and by Soviet Russia and other Communist countries.)
3. They can avoid establishment of any particular organized religious body, while still giving public recognition—by solemn declaration and by prayer—to God and His Providence.

Our Founding Fathers chose the third solution—and since that time we have followed this "middle way." It is not as clear-cut or strictly logical as the other two choices; but, by and large, it is workable in our pluralistic society. It recognizes the religious dimension of our common heritage without imposing any sort of conformity upon anyone.

Now the Supreme Court has made a profound change in the American experiment. By its recent opinion, "the middle way" is now out; and we are left, in logic, with the same approach as that of the Communist countries. Of course, the six members of the Court who voted this way did not have the slightest intention of favoring Communism. I am sure they sincerely thought they were achieving neutrality; but Godless institutions are no more neutral than Godly ones.

The justices interpreted the First Amendment to mean something it was never intended to mean. By prohibiting the "establishment of religion," the amendment meant to avoid—and rightly so—the first solution to the problem of religion: that is, church-state union. It did not intend to drive us into the second solution (secularization of our public institutions).

Instead, it left the way open for the third solution, "the middle way." With us, separation of church and state was never intended to mean separation of religion from society.

Fine as the brief New York prayer was, the saying of it is not crucial either to the churches or to education. It is the principle of this deci-

sion that is crucial. Let us look at some of the specific implications.

—In commenting on the opinion, President Kennedy urged the American people to pray more at home and to go to church more regularly. Here our chief public official, right out in the open on office time, is seeking to further religion! What would be the outcome of an injunction suit against the President to prevent a repetition? I know this sounds strained; but so is the reasoning of the Court opinion.

—Government-paid clergymen conduct services of worship for members of our armed forces in chapels built at government expense on government property, or in assigned space on government-owned vessels. Are we to say now that our young people in the armed forces are to be denied the opportunity for worship except when they are stationed reasonably near to parish churches or temples? Would this not interfere with the "free exercise of religion" clause of the First Amendment?

What can we do about the impasse to which the Supreme Court has brought us?

My answer is: the Court's decision should be erased by Constitutional amendment.

But great care should be taken as to the form of this amendment. I propose that the First Amendment be left just as it is, except for the three words which the Court has distorted—"establishment of religion." These should be replaced by words which would leave no doubt as to what our Founding Fathers intended: "the recognition as an established church of any denomination, sect, or other organized religious association."

This would forever cut the ground from under attempts to bar the "middle way" in all its traditional applications. At the same time it would protect us fully from an official favoring of any of the religious segments in our pluralistic society, including secularism.

CONSTITUTIONAL amendment takes quite a while. What do we do in the meantime?

The President's idea is good, and it always has been: there should be more prayer at home, more frequent church attendance.

But, in addition, why could not a teacher every morning take a coin out of his pocket and read from it the inscription, "In God we trust"? This could be followed by reading phrases from the Declaration of Independence that mention God and by singing the third stanza of "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Also (and here I speak half-seriously), school boards could declare that school officially opens three minutes after the now-appointed hour and let the children gather outside the school and recite a prayer under the leadership of their teachers (who would be "off duty") or volunteer parents. This would vividly demonstrate the lockout of God which the Supreme Court has recently achieved.

## COVER:

This hunter and his dog, photographed by Jim Pond, seem ready for the new hunting season. For tips on how you can be a better hunter by opening day, see story on p. 12.

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