

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 4/21/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

The Texas Senate this week approved a bill that would require public schools in the state to display the Ten Commandments prominently in every classroom. The sponsor of the bill, state Senator Phil King said that this action “will remind students all across Texas of the importance of the fundamental foundation of America.” Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick stated, “Bringing the Ten Commandments and prayer back to our public schools will enable our students to become better Texans.”

A couple of thoughts on this. First, I'd like to ask Lt. Gov. Patrick if the same thing would happen if the Ten Commandments and prayer were brought back in classrooms outside his state—that the students would be better Texans, even if they lived in Iowa or Oregon. Second, and more seriously, a fundamental foundation of America, recorded in the constitution is the Second Amendment which states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” While this bill is an action of a state government and not of our national government, it seems to fly in the face of a “fundamental foundation of America.”

While encouraging the sharing of the Christian faith is an activity to which all Christian are called, freedom of religion is a tremendously important and highly valued freedom in the United States. Many of those who first came from Europe to settle in what became the United States did so to gain the freedom to worship as they chose, or not. This tenet is reflected in the fact that freedom of religion appears in the very first amendment of the Constitution.

I recognize that there are some who believe putting prayer in school or promoting Christian beliefs in the places where our children go to study might be an important step toward keeping or bringing back Christian values to our society. But carrying that belief further reveals some of the dangers that would accompany such action. There are those who would celebrate the government making Christianity the national religion so that everyone has to become Christian. But what if, rather than Christianity, it got more specific to say, the Baptist faith. What if Baptist became the national religion? That means no more infant baptism. Baptism doesn't happen until the person decides to be baptized, no, make that, accepts JESUS CHRIST as their personal LORD and SAVIOR and then received baptism. And Holy Communion becomes, not the real presence of JESUS' body and blood as Lutherans believe, but simply a remembrance of that supper two thousand years ago celebrated with soda crackers and water.

Here's another example of what could happen. For a time, my late wife, Lori, taught kindergarten at a Greek Orthodox church school. We were able to enroll our children there and did so knowing that they would attend the Greek Orthodox chapel service each week and would have prayer in their classrooms each day. One day, our daughter, Rebekah, came home to tell us that her teacher who was leading the classroom prayer did not believe in Greek Orthodox Christianity, or in Christianity at all, but Wicca, or white witchcraft. Since leading prayer was a requirement of the role of teachers, this school could have asked applicants about their beliefs before hiring, but for some reason, they didn't. Religion in public schools certainly has implications for the hiring of qualified teachers, and potential other governmentally influenced profession as well.

School, generally, and public school specifically should not be where parents send their children to learn faith. Religious beliefs should be taught, first in the home, and second, in the church where the

parents choose to bring their children to worship. We are blessed in our country to have the freedom to choose what we will believe and how we will worship. We should stand up for that freedom, even when it means that my neighbor chooses to worship in a different faith than I do. Again, as Christians, we are called to share our faith with others. We do this both through our words and through our actions of service to others. This is our witness. Therefore, we should not look to public schools, or anyone else to carry out this responsibility.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey