

FROM WASHINGTON OFFICE
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June 29, 1962

President Explains Nature of Prayer

WASHINGTON (BP)-- President Kennedy said, in effect, that the answer to the public school prayer problem in America is not legislation but for the people to pray at home and to attend their churches.

At his press conference the President was asked his opinion of the Supreme Court decision banning "official" governmentally written prayers in the public schools. The question also asked about legislation that has been introduced in Congress to make it constitutional to have prayers and Bible reading in the public schools.

The President said that he had not seen the proposed legislation and that his opinion would have to be based on the language it used and what effect it would have on the First Amendment.

As for the Court's ruling Mr. Kennedy said that some would agree and others would disagree with it. But, he continued, "in the efforts we are making to maintain our constitutional principles we will have to abide by what the Supreme Court says."

"We have a very easy remedy here," the President declared, "and that is to pray ourselves. We can pray a good deal more at home and attend our churches with fidelity and emphasize the true meaning of prayer in the lives of our children. I hope as a result of that decision all Americans will give prayer a greater emphasis at home."

The President, who is a Roman Catholic, made his statement on the "true meaning of prayer" in spite of vigorous attacks on the Supreme Court's ruling against "official" prayers by two Roman Catholic Cardinals. Francis Cardinal Spellman and James Francis Cardinal McIntyre earlier issued stinging rebukes of the Court's decision.

It is significant that the only Roman Catholic member of the Supreme Court, Mr. Justice William J. Brennan, did not go along with the philosophy of the hierarchy, but voted with the majority to outlaw "official" government prayers for America.

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JFK Restates Views On Aid To Church Schools

(6-29-62)

WASHINGTON (BP)-- President Kennedy again emphasized his position on separation of church and state by stating that public aid to parochial schools is unconstitutional. However, he declared that a different situation holds in the question of aid to higher education.

At his press conference the President was asked which of the two bills (Senate or House) he preferred, in view of the fact that one of them provides for grants to church-related as well as to public colleges.

(The Senate bill on higher education provides for loans to private colleges, while the House bill provides both loans and grants to both public and private schools. The Conference committee is now trying to iron out the differences between the two.)

In reply the President said that "my opinion is very clear, on the basis of the Supreme Court decisions, in the case of elementary schools." On the other hand, his view that aid to church-related colleges is constitutional is based on a legal brief prepared last year by legal experts in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare in cooperation with lawyers from the Justice Department.

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Mr. Kennedy said that elementary and secondary schools are compulsory and universal. "There is a tradition connected with the public school system that has placed them in a special place in the life of our country," he said.

The colleges are in a different category, the President said. For this reason he emphasized that, in his opinion, aid to higher education is basically a matter of public policy rather than constitutionality.

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