

## A GOD-SHAPE HOLE FOR THE PUBLIC-SCHOOL DAY

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

309 L.Eliz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636  
Phone 508.775.8008  
Noncommercial reproduction permitted

A place for you **tuus** & for me **meus**, but where's the place for God **deus**? He was expelled, leaving only a small hole, "the minute of silence." But that hole has his shape whatever is done with the silence.

Remember Hab.2.20? "The LORD is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him." And this, even more to the point (Zech.2.13 TEV): "Be silent, everyone, in the presence of the LORD, for he is coming from his holy dwelling place."

1 Get that? "He is coming!" And he needs a time-hole to crawl back in through. The executive of our local council of churches entirely missed the point in telling a reporter (who got it in a local newspaper a few days ago) that she's against a moment of silence: she had it as a child, & the kids just "used the time to write notes." So what? It's a moment of *free* silence, when everybody's unfree only to make noise (which is out-of-place sound, as a weed is an out-of-place plant). That is the **action** I am supporting when I say I believe in "school prayer" (in quotes, lest folks think I'm for their worst nightmares about school prayer).

2 Tough action? How're you going to keep the kids quiet for a whole minute? Actively or passively. Actively: You use a school-approved punishment on miscreants. Passively: You wait for social pressure to operate effectively against miscreants (the minute being open-ended, closing when there's been a full minute of silence). Whichever way, the minute's mandated, not optional: teach & the kids are forced to do something because of religion. (Not something religious, mind you.)

3 The mandated minute of silence fights the God-silence already there all day long in our public schools. The humanists, obedient to the 1932 Humanist Manifesto, have succeeded in convincing the school establishment that religion education is just too thorny for the PS to handle; so a great silence about God, enforced by unofficial sensitivity police, reigns. The daily existence of the minute of silence violates the present God-silence: the school must repeatedly explain to staff & students why the minute exists, & the answer is religion (God or facsimiles thereof). O blessed God-crack in the otherwise atheistical day! (No, I'm not being ironic.)

4 "School prayer" (my meaning) would move our public schools away from their present **sectarianism** (humanism being a sect). The present God-absence is surely a good fit for, satisfies, only atheists. Our public schools' original preferential option was for Protestantism, not atheism. Am I appealing for a return to that

## School prayer not state-established religion

Congress, state legislatures, and major courts. The God enshrined in the classics of the English language and in America's foundational documents, all of which are in English. Let's not quibble as to who that God is: It's a matter of record.

Why the ignorance? Because over the course of three generations, that God has gradually faded out of America's public schools. With amnesia, anything goes — as in the ayatollah, snake-charmer, chicken-sacrificer cartoon contiguous to your editorial. Such silly, egalitarian reductionism used to deprive our children of their Deum heritage. A tail-wagging-the-dog ideological illogic. The test of offensiveness myopically narrowed down to the single offended child, outweighing the clear fact that the overwhelming majority of Americans are offended by the absence of "school prayer."

It's specious to appeal to "the separation of church and state" as an argument against putting the third leg back on the stool in public education. In American history, nobody has ever wanted a state-established religion. What is novel, and anti-American, is the overreading of the First Amendment to separate the public-school child from the Deum leg of the American stool. We "school prayer" proponents are fighters against that novelty.

WILLIS ELLIOTT  
Craigville

A three-legged stool is stable even on uneven ground, but a two-legged stool is only a joke. In your lead editorial Monday, you imply that many other matters are now more important, but you are wrong in saying that school prayer is a "nonissue." The heart of that issue is the number of legs on our American cultural stool.

Historically, three, corresponding to deum-meum-tuum. Deum, what belongs to, is owned to, God; Meum, ditto for me; Tuum, ditto for you. Cut the deum leg off the stool and you have nonsense, which should never be treated as a nonissue. America is not "under God" if, as a two-legged stool, it merely adjudicates between your interest and mine without addressing the prior issue of who we are as we face not only each other but that first leg, or apex of the triangle, God.

From ignorance, despair, or cynicism, one may ask "Which God?" The cynic is arrogant, disdainful of my answer. For the despairing I have a word of hope. And the ignorant I can inform. My answer is, "The God who was the first leg put on the stool when it was made," 1620, 1776, 1789, and all that. The biblical God as understood in the minds and served in the lives of America's founders, and structured into America's primordial institutions. The God honored in prayers opening the sessions of

original option? No, but some are. E.g., Jewish author David Fromm said (21 Dec 94 NPR) it was better, & would be better, than the present system; the change would be to "unequal but just." And on p.1 of a recent issue of WSJ, a rabbi said virtually the same.

5 The issue's not going away; under Newt G., it'll heat up. It was the first headline in the Dec.19 CAPE COD TIMES: "Cape debates school prayer." A principal calls school prayer an unacceptable "mandated intrusion": the Excluded One threatens to intrude!....Here a conservative CCT columnist takes up my stool:

## Retreat into absurd secularism

**A**TTACKS AGAINST all religious symbolism at Christmastime have become as predictable as Christmas itself. In fact, when it comes right down to it, the assault against religion in general has taken a heavy toll in a nation that historically has prided itself on its religious faith and religious tolerance.

The latest flap on Martha's Vineyard over the secular symbol of Christmas, Santa Claus, is the most recent sign that anything with the remotest connection to Christianity is unfit for a public classroom. Santa Claus, a k a St. Nick, has been banned along with Jesus, Mary, Joseph, hosts of angels, the Three Wise Men, adoring shepherds, the Star of Bethlehem and Christmas carols.

This local ban of the Jolly Old Elf seems to complete the retreat into absolute secularism and total absurdity. This bold step of kicking Santa out of public classrooms and corridors may help make public education impregnable to the insidious invasion of religious thought and culture through symbolism.

The majority of Americans, Christians and non-Christians, do not object to public recognition in public schools or on public lands of the dominant religion in the United States at Christmas, as long as there is no attempt to proselytize people of other faiths into accepting the religious precepts of the majority.

The rooting out of anything and everything that might be interpreted to be "religious" is, when thoughtfully analyzed, aimed at the Judeo-Christian heritage, which is inseparable from our Western heritage. In fact, the dominant forces that shaped our early history are rooted in Protestant religious thought. The work ethic, hope, charity, public prayer, morality and the very laws that govern us stem from the religious beliefs of our forefathers. Religious tolerance and an absolute prohibition against the establishment of a state religion are



Francis I.  
Broadhurst

15 Dec 94

powerful and good influences that have distinguished America from other nations where the state prescribes what religion will be accepted and proscribes any attempt to deviate from that religion even if it be secularism.

What's continuing in America today is the drive to erase religion or mention of it from the public schools. It is, as Dr. Willis Elliott of Craigville, a learned theologian, wrote recently, "egalitarian reductionism used to deprive our children of their Deum (God) heritage."

Dr. Elliott is in the mainstream of the American majority who support a return of prayer, or at least the opportunity to pray, to the public schools. His analogy is of a three-legged cultural stool — stable even on uneven ground: "Deum-Meum-Tuum." What belongs to God is Deum; what belongs to me is Meum; what belongs to you is Tuum. "Cut the Deum leg off the stool and you have nonsense."

The religious scholar could have gone further. He could have noted that mention of "God" in public school classrooms is frowned upon unless, of course, it is paired with "damn." Then it becomes acceptable. Say "Jesus Christ" aloud in a worshipful way in the public schools and face expulsion. Use it as a common swear or an epithet and it, too, becomes acceptable.

It is impossible to read and understand the great literature of our Western democratic heritage without reference to and knowledge of both the Old and New Testaments. The same is true of the gods, goddesses, demi-gods and heroes who

figure into the pantheistic cultures of ancient Greece, Rome, etc. It is now acceptable to work into school curricula the religious teachings of indigenous native peoples for whom nature worship is integral.

Our children are taught mythology, encouraged to dabble in nature worship but forbidden to mention the "God of our Fathers." Bibles are banned. Prayer is banned. Pornographic rap is permitted (most adults don't understand the lyrics). A high place of respect for religion and tolerance for religious worship are denied, replaced with toleration for things promiscuous, banal and coarse.

Santa Claus in the school window? Prayer in the classroom? Political correctness forbids it. Why not expand curricula to teach our children more about America's Judeo-Christian heritage and encourage knowledge and respect for beliefs of growing numbers of Americans whose roots are in different world religions?

Why not prayer in public schools? And if not, then why not free economically hard-pressed parents to use their tax money in voucher form to send their children to sectarian private schools that reflect their own moral values? Already, in inner cities where African American children are being cheated wholesale by public schools, thousands who are not Roman Catholic attend parochial schools. They come out educated, not proselytized.

As a boy raised in the Catholic faith, I never felt damaged or scarred in public schools by recitation of the Protestant version of The Lord's Prayer or by readings from the King James Bible. I suffered more from fistfights with my co-religionists.

Before one condemns me as aligned to the "Religious Right," please ask yourself: Would you rather I join the Christian Wrong?

Francis I. Broadhurst, a free-lance journalist, lives in Centerville.