

Banning Prayer in Public Schools Has Led to America's Demise

by Gary Bergel

A recent statistical analysis by David Barton graphically illustrates how America has plummeted from righteous living, prosperity and success in the last quarter century.¹

As you might have already noticed from Mr. Barton's research that **America's moral decline rapidly accelerated following one event—the U.S. Supreme Court's removal of prayer from our nation's schools.** On June 25, 1962, 39 million students were forbidden to do what they and their predecessors had been doing since the founding of our nation—publicly calling upon the name of the Lord at the beginning of each school day.

The New York school children which prompted the *Engel vs. Vitale* ruling had simply prayed: "Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence on Thee and beg Thy blessing over us, our parents, our teachers and our nation."

America has experienced radical decline in each of the four areas which the children's prayer touched upon: youth, family, education, national life. Minor recovery has occurred only since 1980 when the election of President Reagan brought forth a renewed emphasis on "traditional" values.

The removal of prayer from our schools was a violation of the third commandment which commands us "not to take the name of the Lord in vain." By the judicial act of forbidding invocation, the Court audaciously elevated a secularized system of education beyond

the authority, reach and blessing of God Himself. **Worse than taking the Lord's sacred name in vain is treating it with contempt, denying it rightful place and stripping it from public use and even from the lips of children.** Jesus' own expressed desire, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them" was also violated by these judges, many of whom were raised in Christian homes.

But there was actually a gross violation of the third commandment by the U.S. Supreme Court a year earlier. A ruling in 1961, I believe, paved the way for stripping the Lord's name from our children's lips. In *Torcaso vs. Watkins*, the court overruled a provision of the Maryland Constitution which made "a declaration of belief in the existence of God" mandatory for holding public office.

Roy R. Torcaso, a Maryland resident and an avowed atheist, was refused a notary public commission when he would not subscribe to the required oath. His case was brought before the U.S. Supreme Court. The Court ruled to sanction atheism and overruled the Maryland Constitution.

Rev. T. Robert Ingram records columnist Felix Morley's shrewd observations on this 1961 ruling in his study, *The World Under God's Law*. Mr. Morley, writing in the *Nation's Business* September 1961, pointed out "the absurdity of having an official administer to others oaths in the sanctity of which he does not himself believe."

The effect of this ruling is not just to eat away at the sacredness of the name of God, but to eliminate the sacredness and thereby the substance of the oath itself. With solemn oaths and binding contracts between individuals removed, the state eventually sits where God ought, and only the state's cause is held valid. There is no longer an absolute and just legal basis for judging "between a man and his brother," much less a man and his neighbor (Deuteronomy 1:16, 17). All affairs of life become subject to state, rather than individual control.

Rev. Ingram documents and points out that "a broad, organized attack reaching into high places is under way to remove the third commandment from legal standing in the United States and throughout the world." He points out that, "the World Court, for example, presumably the new fountain of justice, or a prototype of the socialist dream of world government, has no provision for 'taking the name of God'—no oath." The Socialist agenda of world domination makes no place for solemn "swearing" between individuals.

Jesus' teaching on oath-taking recorded in Matthew 5:33-37, while often misinterpreted, is actually a strong affirmation of the third commandment and a clear warning that "the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain" (Exodus 20:7).

Besides forbidding perjury, (calling God to witness a lie) and false swearing, this passage also forbids all rash and unnecessary swearing, and especially warns against promissory oaths—that require a performance. Our "Yes" should be "Yes," and our "No" should mean "No." If understood, our word uttered in integrity

should of itself be a sufficient and proper bond.

The "evangelical prophet," Oswald Chambers (1874 - 1917), saw that the empty promises made by so many Christians actually result in great "spiritual leakage." He admonished his followers: "Always beware of vowing, it is a risky thing. If you promise to do a thing and don't do it, it means the weakening of your moral nature. We are all so glib in the way we promise and don't perform and never realize that it is sapping our moral energy."²

Think then, what happens to a nation rife with perjury, broken marriage covenants, unforgiveness, cults with demonic covenants, extortion, bribery, libel, slander, profanity, hypocrisy, idle talk, and lawsuits initiated solely for revenge and personal gain. **We are living witnesses that truly "the Lord does not hold such a nation guiltless."**

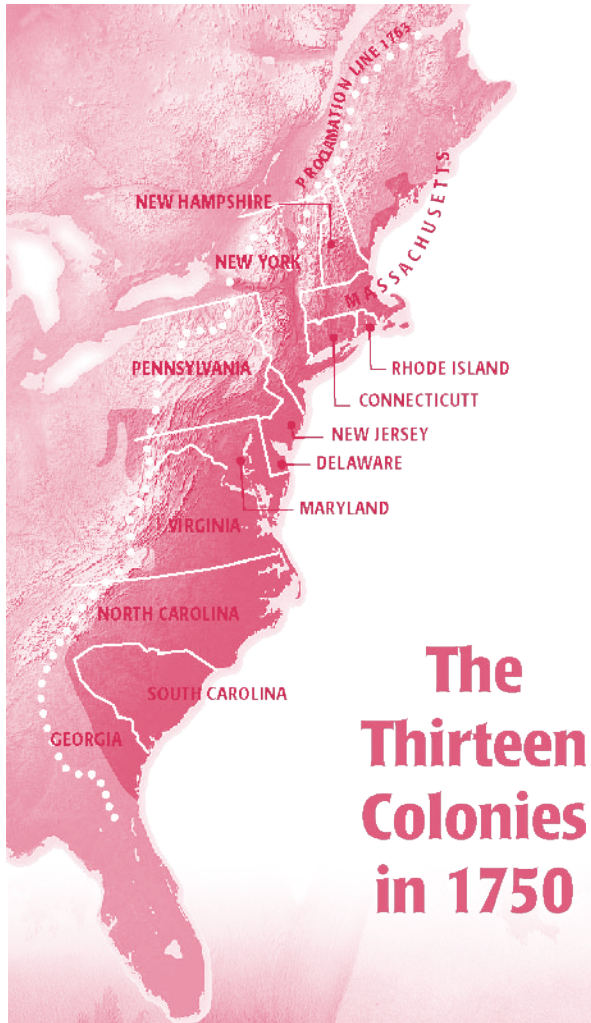
Regardless of how the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled, we must each, as Oswald Chambers declared, realize that "God's laws are not watered down to suit anyone; if God did that He would cease to be God. The moral law never alters for the noblest or the weakest; it remains abidingly and eternally the same."

After more than 25 years of severe moral decline is it not time to repent, reverence the name of the Lord, reinstitute and keep the third commandment?

1 David Barton, *America: To Pray or Not to Pray*, (Aledo, TX: Speciality Research Associates).

2 Oswald Chambers, *The Best From All His Books*, (Oliver-Nelson Books, 1987).

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The Thirteen Colonies in 1750



The Prayer Room in the U.S. Capitol Building features a stained glass window bears the prayer from Psalms 16:1.

