

Why are Liberals so Afraid of Prayer?

✖ The last two weeks have been anything but calm in the world of faith and religion. Conservative Christians are wondering whether they are being betrayed by both officials in the White House and in the court system. The ruling of a Wisconsin judge that the National Day of Prayer is unconstitutional and violates the concept of the separation of church and state has been like a blow to the solar plexus for battle weary Christians. In the much touted culture wars, there has never been such an open case of liberals throwing down the gauntlet in a specific area that has been deemed "Christian territory."

Perhaps the blame for this change in the political atmosphere should be laid at the feet of the current administration and its concept of pluralism. After all, President Barack Obama boldly declared last year that the U.S. was no longer a Christian nation. This remark infuriated the faithful and set the stage for millions of rank and file Christians to question his personal faith. Next, he did not attend the National Day of Prayer and refused to make a declaration or statement until late in the day last year. Conservative Christian powerbrokers watched tentatively as the administration attempted to bring new leaders into the president's advisory circle. These new leaders had no real national connections with the Christian masses. Despite the fact that the president attended a Congressional prayer breakfast earlier this year, his approach seems to have been aimed at "defanging" the politically powerful, religious right.

The latest debacle concerning the National Day of Prayer is even more volatile than the other issues. Uninviting Franklin Graham to speak at the Pentagon has raised eyebrows among the faithful from Maine to Mississippi and everywhere in between.

It almost goes without saying that Franklin Graham holds a very prominent place in the evangelical community because of the stature of his dad – Billy. Obama's visit with Billy Graham this weekend may be a sign that he knows that he has gotten himself into deep waters. The benign neglect approach to the conservative, religious community may backfire and create irreconcilable differences between this president and millions of the nation's Christians.

Who ever would have thought that prayer would have caused a national controversy? After all, in these turbulent times, we could use both divine wisdom and God's gracious intervention.

The need for the nation to pray about her problems would be high on my grandmother's to-do list. In fact, she often said, "Prayer changes things!" As a black woman who was also part Native American, she was very proud to achieve the status of licensed practical nurse. She was a natural caregiver whose profession was simply an extension of the way her mother before her had lived out her faith – visiting the sick and shut-ins her church. Her generation saw America change because of a non-violent civil rights movement that was fueled by civil disobedience and the power of prayer. Her personal life also changed because of prayer and faithfulness. In fact, she lived long enough to see her four daughters and her 15 grandchildren all graduate from college. Two of us even attended a prestigious Ivy League graduate school, with one of her grandsons becoming the chief justice of the Supreme Court of Virginia.

Perhaps political liberals believe that the religious right will be emboldened or strengthened, if they are allowed to pray in public places or on special national holidays. Or maybe they believe that some form of psychological harm will befall those who are not attached to one of the many Christian denominations. Contrary to the public myths, everyone is encouraged to pray to the God of their own religious tradition. More importantly, acts of hatred, name-calling, or

intolerant public jeering have never occurred at one of these prayer events.

It seems to me that the great faith of our leaders has not drawn the nation to prayer. Instead the huge needs of the nation have always driven men of faith and goodwill to pursue divine intervention. As I mused on this, I came upon a prayer offered up to God on behalf of the U.S. people in June of 1944. I have included just a snippet of this prayer:

“Almighty God: Our sons, pride of our nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve our Republic, our religion, and our civilization, and to set free a suffering humanity. Lead them straight and true; give strength to their arms, stoutness to their hearts, steadfastness in their faith.

“Many people have urged that I call the nation into a single day of special prayer. But because the road is long and the desire is great, I ask that our people devote themselves in a continuance of prayer.

“With Thy blessing, we shall prevail over the unholy forces of our enemy. Help us to conquer the apostles of greed and racial arrogances. Lead us to the saving of our country, and with our sister nations into a world unity that will spell a sure peace – a peace invulnerable to the scheming(s) of unworthy men. And a peace that will let all of men live in freedom, reaping the just rewards of their honest toil. Thy will be done, Almighty God. Amen.”

I am thankful that Franklin Delnor Roosevelt prayed this bold prayer in clear and understandable terms during World War II. I pray that President Obama will catch the spirit of prayer and follow FDR’s example. For the rest of us, let’s not be afraid of the power of prayer. Let’s use this awesome spiritual weapon to ensure the continued light and favor that America has enjoyed over the past 234 years.

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