

CURRENT ISSUES

Brian Dykstra, a teacher at Hope Protestant Reformed School, has agreed to write regularly for this rubric in Perspectives. His intention is to provide a "short newsy article" for each issue. He might deviate from that on occasion; and, for that matter, his approach might change somewhat as he gets into the work. But for now you may look to this space for articles which, though they will ordinarily give some direction to our thinking about various issues in the educational world today, will not be in-depth analyses of those issues. We might add, incidentally, that if any of you in the course of your other reading run across the kind of "news" which you think deserves some comment, you are encouraged to send articles, or copies thereof, to Mr. Dykstra. His address is: 171 Baldwin Dr., Apartment D, Jenison, MI 49428.

Christian Practices Barred in Allendale Public Schools

Brian Dykstra

It has been the practice of several teachers in the public schools of Allendale, Michigan, to pray, read the Bible, and tell Bible stories in their public school classrooms. Michigan State School Superintendent Phillip Runkel, believing that such practices were not legal under the United States Constitution, threatened to sue the school system if such religious practices were not halted. A small group

of parents and teachers of students in Allendale Public Schools claimed that if they were no longer allowed to pray and read the Bible, their First Amendment rights of free speech and freedom of religious expression were being taken from them.

At the end of July of this summer the issue came before United States District Judge Benjamin F. Gibson. In a written opinion given on July 25, Judge

Gibson gave no opinion on the issue of holding Bible Club meetings on public school property during school hours since there were no U.S. Supreme Court precedents on which to base an opinion.

Several questions about this case come to mind. If the parents and teachers of these public school children are so concerned about the religious life of their children and students, what are they doing in public schools in the first place? Do we as Christians agree with Judge Gibson's opinion? Of course we support prayer and telling Bible stories in our Christian schools, but may we support prayer and the telling of Bible stories in public schools when legitimate questions can be raised about whether prayer is being done properly to the God of the Bible and whether Bible stories are presented in accordance to Reformed truth? Should we disagree with Judge Gibson's opinion because perhaps such activities in public school classrooms could bring conversion to a believer who has not yet been brought to the church? Should a Christian teaching in a public school do such things in class, or should he let the students know that he is available for these practices outside of school if they desire it?

While these questions might be

interesting to contemplate or discuss, they do not yet vitally concern us as teachers and parents of children in Christian schools. Is a decision such as Judge Gibson's an indication that the time is drawing near when there will be no toleration for the true worship of the true God? Hopefully the following quotation taken from the front page of the July 26, 1985 issue of the *Grand Rapids Press* applies to parents of public school students, but it has an ominous tone nevertheless. In paraphrasing Judge Gibson's written opinion, the *Press* states:

"While parents have 'liberty interests' to direct their children's upbringing and education, it 'is not absolute,' Gibson said.

"Just as teachers' freedom of speech and religion 'must yield to the requirements of the establishment (of religion) clause... so the parents' rights to direct their children's upbringing are similarly limited.'"

Finally, as teachers in Christian schools, are we sure that all of our teaching is distinctively Reformed, or are our classrooms "Christian" simply because we pray, read and study the Bible, and tell Bible stories? If this is all that Christian educating means to us, and God is not found in any other area in our classrooms, may we be satisfied that we are fulfilling our callings?

