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6228 – “Prayer in Public Schools”

Guest: Sen. Strom Thurmond (D-SC)

Morphew: You are among one of many lawmakers on Capitol Hill that believe this decision will extend further than just school prayer

Thurmond: Yes, Dick, I think this is one of the worst decisions the Supreme Court has ever handed down. Our nation is so intertwined with religion and God that it is impossible to separate it. Our founding fathers made it so. And beginning with the Declaration of Independence, I might say, and from then on down, God has been brought into our government; God is acknowledged. This Supreme Court decision would cast God out entirely. Karl Marx, the man in whose brain the germ of Communism arose was born in Germany in 1818 and who did not live to see Communism actually come into reality, when Lenin took over Russia in 1917, said he had 2 goals in life, one was to destroy capitalism and the other was to dethrone God. And it seems today that these goals, expressed back there, by Karl Marx, are being put into effect as much as possible in many facets of our government. They are attempts to destroy our private enterprise system and there are now attempts it seems to take God out of the life our government and our people.

Morphew: What does the ‘optional’ prayer say?

Thurmond: Well, I will read that prayer. It's very short. The Court ruled out this simple 22-word prayer, which reads this way: ‘Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon thee and we beg thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers and our country.’ That's all the prayer said, very short. But the Court found this to be an attempt to establish a religion in conflict with the first amendment to the Constitution which provides that Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. Now Dick, I would point out to you here this

wording and I want to read this one sentence to you because it's very significant. The Constitution says that Congress, Congress, not the states, Congress, shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. Well, Congress has made no law here. This was an action by the states which they had a right to take and it's a violation of states rights for the Supreme Court to come in and take such action as it did. It's depriving the states of a right reserved to them by the Constitution to have prayer in their schools if they desire to do so.

Morphew: Founding Fathers were guarding against establishment by the federal govt., not trying to tell the states what they could and could not do

Thurmond: That's correct. They were trying to put a prohibition, the states when they wrote the constitution, included this provision that Congress would make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. They were putting a prohibition on what congress could do, they were not putting a prohibition on what the states could do and all the powers they did not delegate to the federal government were reserved to the states and they did not delegate to the national government any power in this field.

Morphew: Does the decision go further than just prohibiting optional prayer in school?

Thurmond: Well I think the decision possibly is significant not just for the effects it will have on the NY prayer, but more importantly for the precedent it sets for more anti-religious decisions that might follow. I think this sets a precedent, Dick, for many other decisions that might follow that might go even much further than this. In fact, right here in Washington now, the school superintendent of the schools has called for an opinion of corporation counsel here (?) as to whether they can have prayer in the schools anymore, as to whether they can have Christmas exercises, as to whether they can have Easter exercises. In other words, in any facet of life, school or otherwise, where God is mentioned or religion is mentioned the question is now whether it is all taboo, and so, this sets a very dangerous precedent. And of course, in different Communities it will be construed in different ways. It's my hope that our schools will go ahead and have prayer in the schools as they've been doing because in my opinion, this decision is not a constitutional decision and I think that our people should continue as they have and pray to God and let the school children pray and conduct prayer in the schools because I believe that Congress will take action to reverse this majority opinion. I want to congratulate Justice Potter Stewart, the one man who wrote the dissenting opinion in this matter.

Morphew: Even the justices have taken oaths of office recognizing the supreme being, coin mottos; how else has government acknowledged religion?

Thurmond: Well that's true. You mentioned the coins. On coins we have 'In God We Trust.' There we acknowledge God. And in the oaths of office, there we say, 'so help us God' when we take an oath of office. And I might mention, in the Senate of the United States and in the House of Representatives we have chaplains and open our exercises

every morning with a prayer, now we're wondering whether this decision is to apply to those cases. Are we no longer to have a chaplain of the Senate and a chaplain of the House? Is he going to be allowed to pray in the halls of the Senate or in the halls of the House? And in the armed services we have chaplains. We have Catholic chaplains, we have Protestant chaplains, we have all kinds of chaplains for different religions. Are they going to be thrown out? It's interesting to know, however, that in 1952, a case went to the SC about these chaplains and the Court threw it out. Someone wanted to discard the chaplains and they wanted to prohibit the appropriations for the chaplains but the SC held it was constitutional. And in that case, I might say, that was the *Zorach v. Clauson* case, it was stated that 'we are a religious people, whose institutions presuppose a supreme being.' And what the Court was doing in that case was acknowledging a simple truth and stating, in effect, that we are indeed a nation which has a covenant with God rather than a nation which has ruled God out of its national life or one which has made a god out of the state itself and that decision was a sound decision. This decision just recently handed down is a very unsound decision. It's not only unsound because it meets unfavorably with public opinion but also because it's wrong. It's wrong, it's unconstitutional and I'm hoping Congress will take action to reverse it. Now, you asked about other matters. I might mention that in the pledge of allegiance only a few years ago, after the pledge of allegiance had been written, we added the words 'under God' if you remember. And another way that we have acknowledged God is in the national anthem, if you remember, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza of the national anthem, it refers to God, 'In God Is Our Trust', if you remember those words. Another thing is we have set aside a national day of prayer and that is official. Another thing, as I mentioned, is the opening of the Supreme Court itself. Every time the SC opens over here, why, the Court cry comes out, although it's not a law, it's a custom there, and says God save the United States of America and this honorable Court. They even, the SC all the years, since the days of John Marshall, the great chief justice of many years ago has acknowledged God. The Declaration of Independence, the document in which we declared our freedom from Great Britain, acknowledges God. And I might say, in a century and a half later after the Mayflower Compact, when the DOI was written, we acknowledged God in preparing the DOI. All throughout our entire history, our great documents upon which this government rests, we have acknowledged God. And I might mention that up at West Point, the United States military academy, they have a beautiful prayer, the Cadet Prayer, is that to go out? Can the cadets no longer use that beautiful prayer which has been used generation after generation? And here in the Capitol, since I have been in the Senate, we have established a prayer room for the senators and the members of the House of Representatives, is that no longer to be used? Is this SC decision going to say that the members of Congress can't have a room of prayer where they can go and commune with God, doing these terrific, tough, complex problems we have to face? If anyone needs to trust in God and show faith in God and ask God's help, I think it's the members of Congress. And I'm glad we have a prayer room here for that purpose. I would hate to see this decision of the SC attempt to abolish the prayer room in the Capitol. Now I can mention many others but those are a few of the instances in our government. I might say, Dick, that really this issue is what you might say a fight between those who believe in God and those who don't believe in a supreme being and it's right along the Communist line, too, because the Communists don't believe in God. A Communist can't believe in God and those who believe in God can't be a

Communist. That's one of the basic philosophies of the Communists and it goes back again as I said to Karl Marx's philosophy: destroy capitalism, dethrone God. And that seems to be the effort in this country today on the part of a certain segment of our population including some in high office.

Morphew: You believe this decision has aided Communism?

Thurmond: I don't think there's any question about it. The SC in this very decision is aiding the forces of Communism whether they admit to do it or not or whether it's wittingly or unwittingly they are aiding the Communists when they hand down a decision of this kind. Of course they have handed down many decisions within the past years that have given comfort to the Communists and have been against the best interest of the United States. Now that's a tough statement I'm making, but I realize exactly what I'm saying and I'm prepared to prove it. Their own decisions prove it. They are (Latin????), they speak for themselves.