



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on June 3, 2011

Texas Judge: No Prayer or Religious Words at Medina Valley Graduation

Graduation season this year has witnessed a number of spiritual battles as prayer and religious symbols at commencement ceremonies have been under attack by the Left. The latest effort against school prayer has been levied by Chief U.S. District Judge Fred Biery (left), who ordered that students in the Medina Valley Independent School District of Texas may not use religious words such as “prayer” or “amen” at their graduation ceremony.



Fox News [reports](#):

The ruling was in response to a lawsuit filed by Christa and Danny Schultz. Their son is among those scheduled to participate in Saturday’s graduation ceremony. The judge declared that the Schultz family and their son would “suffer irreparable harm” if anyone prayed at the ceremony.

Among the words and phrases banned by Judge Biery are “amen,” “prayer,” “join in prayer,” “bow your heads,” or “in [a deity’s] name we pray.” He also ordered that the words “benediction” and “invocation” be removed from the graduation program. “These terms shall be replaced with ‘opening remarks’ and ‘closing remarks,’” he decreed.

Judge Biery warned that the ruling is “enforced by incarceration or other sanctions for contempt of Court if not obeyed by District official [sic] and their agents.”

Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott called the ruling unconstitutional, adding that it was an

attempt by atheists and agnostics to use courts to eliminate from the public landscape any and all references to God whatsoever. This is the challenge we are dealing with here. It’s an ongoing attempt to purge God from the public setting while at the same time demanding from the courts an increased yielding to all things atheist and agnostic.

Abbott has indicated that the school district is currently appealing the ruling, and his office has agreed to file a brief in support of it. “Part of this goes to the very heart of the unraveling of moral values in this country,” he explained. He accused the judge of forcing school administrators to become “speech police.” “I’ve never seen such a restriction on speech issued by a court or the government,” he declared, adding, “It seems like a trampling of the First Amendment rather than protecting the First Amendment.”

Unsurprisingly, the attorney representing the Schultz family is delighted by the judge’s ruling. Ayesha



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Khan explained her clients' motives:

It caused [the student, the son of her clients] a great deal of anxiety. He has gone to meet with the principal to try and talk in a civilized way about long-standing problems, and the school district has continued to thumb its nose.

While the judge did permit students to make the sign of the cross, wear religious garb, and kneel to face Mecca, most students are still displeased with the ruling.

"It's just a big surprise that one kid can come in and change what's been a tradition since Medina Valley started," remarked student Abigail Russell. Alice Jade Guerin agreed: "At graduation, I would love to be able to speak from my heart. But in this situation, I feel my freedom of speech and my First Amendment is being infringed upon if I can't say what I feel."

The judge's decision found support in the person of Reverend Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. "This is a high school graduation. It is not a church service," he commented.

Similar [battles](#) are taking place across the country, including in New Jersey, where Neptune Township was told it must remove all religious symbols from its commencement facility before the ceremony there, after the American Civil Liberties Union filed a complaint on behalf of a single "non-district" individual.

Likewise, the ACLU threatened to file a lawsuit against Bastrop High School in Louisiana if seniors were led in the traditional prayer at the graduation ceremony. Responding to the threat, the school agreed to cancel the prayer.

The New American's Dave Bohon [wrote](#) of the event:

But during the ceremony May 20th at the school's football field, as graduating senior Laci Rae Mattice stood at the podium to lead a "moment of silence" that school officials had inserted to replace the prayer, she called an audible instead. "I respect the beliefs of other people," Mattice told the parents, family, and friends assembled for the graduation, "but I feel that I can't go on without giving glory to my Lord today. I want to ask for the Lord's blessings upon us." With the crowd cheering her on, Mattice then invited her fellow seniors to join her in reciting the Lord's Prayer "if they want to."



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