



Discussion Board



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One of the characteristic features of the postmodern society is the crucial role of the tolerance concept. The social unity, in accordance with the idea of equality of all people, is very important in all spheres of human life. In such a way, the connection between religion and the state becomes extremely disputable because of the intolerant character of religion (faith is not compatible with the tolerance; as Jesus Christ said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6, King James Version)). It makes communication between those who practice some religion and those who do not somewhat problematic. On the other hand, those who believe in God need religious support at every step of their life. The discussions regarding prayers at sport events held in the educational entities represent this contradiction. The position of a Christian coach who wants to pray before the play in a public high school is very uncertain because of some legal problems.

Certainly, the coach has to regulate his activity according to the US Constitution. Its First Amendment includes two aspects regarding the situation. The official discrimination between the religious sphere and the American secular life forbids any religious propaganda in government entities (the Establishment Clause). Nevertheless, everyone is free to worship any god, and there is nothing unconstitutional when some sportsmen want to pray not because of the coach's command, but by their own will (Gillentine, Goldfine, Phillips, Seider, & Scott, 2004). Consequently, the main legal problem is that a religious person can violate

the rights of the representatives of other religions and atheists. The solutions to it can be either secular or religious. Iowa State University offered a good secular solution to this contradiction, which consists in the replacement of the sport chaplain by the Life Skills Assistant, who performs most of the chaplain's functions (moral support and so on), but does not represent any religious institution. In such a way, the Life Skills Assistant can freely share his religious views with the athletes and pray with them as a free person, not as a representative of some church as a sport chaplain is (Waller, Dzikus, & Hardin, 2008). This precedent is helpful in interpreting the situation of the Christian coach who can also share his or her own religious purpose of prayer with those athletes who belong to the same religion.

Besides, another problem is the division of the sport team the collective prayer can lead to (Zirkel, 2008). For example, some athletes would pray and some would not. In such a way, these people can come into opposition. Certainly, there is nothing separating in a prayer itself, but the main root of every religious struggle is the low level of tolerance. Both Christians and non-Christians can be intolerant toward each other, that is why the decision of a Christian coach to pray can have harmful consequences. Furthermore, when Christians need a prayer in order to get some spiritual support according to their traditional way of life, non-Christians may feel despair because of the specific social appreciation of Christianity. That is why there are many risks related to even such a prudent and benevolent activity as the Christian prayer.

Through the arguments concerning the issue, the best way to resolve this contradiction was offered by Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount:

“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matthew 6:6, King James Version). Therefore, the best way to address this issue is to provide separate rooms for the athletes where they can pray before the play. It would not offend anybody and would correspond to the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ.