

Patrick H Gormley

Council Prayers

In many countries, prayers may be said before council meetings.

The councils may attempt to justify these prayers by saying that prayers only reflect how important of a role Christianity plays in civic life.

They also say that to oppose these prayers is simply an attempt to remove public expressions of faith from society and is discriminatory. Some may say that the prayers should be said if most members vote to have them or continue them.

Supporters will say that religious faith is a fundamental human right. They may argue that to oppose council prayers is to deny this right. But surely being in our natural state, nudity, is more of a fundamental human right and nobody says we should be allowed to shop in the nude?

If prayers are appropriate for council meetings then why not have them for Sainsbury or ASDA board meetings?

Believers in God do not have the right to even suggest public prayers at civic meetings. This is a privilege not a right. If it is a right, then council members have a right to pray to Satan or do magic spells as well. It gets silly. It is not hurting them to forbid such prayers. To say it is, is like saying that baptised people must be obligated by law to wear crucifixes.

If you believe in God you are expected to love him with all your heart and be willing to sacrifice yourself and your own child for him. If you are allowed to share your love between God and others then how could loving him more than them matter? You can love your child more than your wife and that does not matter to her. And it shouldn't. So it follows that religionists should not be saying, "Let us worship God at civic meetings for it is our right." They should be saying, "Let us worship God for it is his right." God would not want worship from people who were more worried about their right to worship than him and who asked the world to respect their right to worship and who showed less concern for God's right.

Where do you draw the line at religious rights? What about the burqa? Should we have a Queen who wears the Burqa? Or policewomen? Or bus drivers? Or teachers of children in primary schools? Secularists would believe that women can wear the burqa during religious meetings or in the home. But once they go out in public or work in the world it is then that problems arise.

Islamic women may pretend that they have a right to wear the burqa and that this is liberation. But for a woman to hide herself so completely means that nobody knows who she is, if she has been beaten by her husband, how she feels. The facial expression is a fundamental part of human communication. The burqa dehumanises women. No woman can pretend that it is liberation.

Religious people are almost always reluctant to give evidence for their beliefs. They can't tell you the best and most intelligent pro-religious books to read. They get defensive and embarrassed when they give you their reasons or thinking why prayer works. They say that if you trust your wife you believe anything she says. Yet when they read some command in the Bible from God that they think is immoral they refuse to obey it and just try to remember the good things they read in that book. Few really think about their beliefs. They want to believe - they want the faith to be true at least without the unpalatable and nasty doctrines such as that suicides go to Hell. They mistake wanting to believe for believing. Then they end up acting as if they really believe in the faith.

In reality, they are not really as religious as they act. He who thinks what he wants and believes what he wants and does what he wants is not following the Catholic religion and not a real member. Religion is about obedience to divine authority. For Protestants, this authority is the Bible. For Catholics, it is the Bible and the Church.

All these thoughts show that secularism enhances rights while religion pollutes them. Religionists want secularism though they ridicule it and though they may pick and choose what they like out of it.

When there is a conflict between secularism and religion, secularism has to take precedence.

What about leaving God out of prayer? Instead of saying, "O God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference" it could be said, "May I have the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference". This is a good idea. But the true believer cannot accept it. For her or him, its blasphemy to leave God out. Leaving God out would imply that we can programme ourselves to do well in life and be virtuous without God.

