

Name	Ciril Kammermann
School	University of Berne
Class	Writing Skills
Group	A (Tuesday)
Topic	Religion in schools
Title	Is the US law against school prayers justified or not?
Words	723

---

## Is the US law against school prayers justified or not?

---

As one might have feared, the Supreme Court of the United States of America has, over the last years, completely denied allowing prayer to seep into their public school system. What many people do not know is that this decision is in contrast to the latest studies: According to an American national study made in 1996, 72 percent of polled people are of the opinion that schools should start off the day with a prayer. This discrepancy, of course, evokes the question if the Supreme Court's new law is justified or not, which will be the main subject of this discourse. In the following, I will prove that the US Supreme Court has taken the right steps with this contested law.

With the fact that the United States of America have one of the most diverse population in the world, the question arises, which religious beliefs should be taught at school. Due to the cultural and religious differences in America, it will obviously not be possible to just select one standard religion. This step would have weighty consequences: On the one hand, the educational profit of any child would drastically decrease, if it does not believe in the things that are taught. On the other hand, the United States were founded on the belief of religious equality, which means that all the different beliefs have to be treated equally. The Establishment Clause, located within the First Amendment of the US Constitution, has been set up to protect this right. It states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". According to the Bill of Rights, a public school cannot force a student to practice a certain religion. In other words, being forced to pray in a specific religion is against the Constitution. Apart from this, the non-supporters of religious exercise in schools, which are also called the Separationists, are concerned that, by allowing prayer in schools, children would no longer be attending an educational but a religious institute. Most of them hold the opinion

that public schools were built to educate the future leaders of the world and not to teach them religious beliefs. Religion, as a part of history and culture, should be taught either individually at home or at church. In addition, many families with sufficient earnings are able to send their children to church related schools in order to learn more about a specific religion. Apart from this, most American public schools provide some opportunities during the course of a day where students are allowed to practice their own religion, namely activities like after school clubs and organizations, but also graduation ceremonies. If, for any reason, these classes are not provided by a certain school, it goes without saying that students who wish to initiate a religious club, such as for example Bible Study, possess exactly the same rights as the other clubs within this school.

As long as prayer is not forced upon any student, his or her rights guaranteed in the American Constitution are upheld. In order to avoid any infringement of right, the children must realize that religion should be conducted in a manner that does not offend other students, but is not at all something to be ashamed of. In the Gospel of Matthew, this is stated very clearly: "And when thou prayest, thou shall not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corner of the streets, they may be seen of men. (...) When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou has shut thy door, pray to thy father in secret." This extract of the Bible confirms the ideas listed above, whereas, on the other hand, it stands in huge contrast to the opinion of people arguing that school prayer matches very well with the US values.

In conclusion, I prove the opinion of the Separationists as correct. By allowing prayer in school, students would be forced to practice a religion outside of their choice, which is against the Federal Constitution of the United States. Therefore, in my opinion, it would be beneficial to everybody, if the advice of Matthew the Apostle was followed not only in private life but also in public schools.