

## Chanukah vs. Forced Piety

BY ROBERT E. SEGAL

The spirit of Chanukah ran strong in the U.S. Senate this year even though few in the nation realized it. For Chanukah after all offers an undying definition of religious freedom. And when the Senate voted 51 to 48 a few weeks ago to table the proposal for prayers in the public schools, the majority of that body struck a blow against religious practices reflecting a true Maccabean spirit.

Paced by Senator Jesse Helms (R., N.C.) the smaller group of senators fought hard to break the filibuster on prayer led by two other Republican solons, Bob Packwood of Oregon and Lowell P. Weicker of Connecticut. The fight of the Packwood-Weicker forces, in a sense, epitomized not only what Mattathias and his little band of faithful Jews exemplified when they rebelled against Antiochus IV, but that Senate victory for religious freedom echoed a precept set forth by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: "When you pray, go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is there in the secret place."

Again, in lasting gratitude for the meaning of Chanukah, we would express the hope that President Reagan, who shares the determination of Jesse Helms to reinsert prayers in the schools, might become convinced now that the project is incompatible with our constitution's key guidelines. And may he recant his claim that "big spenders drove prayer out of our nation's classrooms."

Referring to Rosh Hashanah as "one of the holiest days of one of our great religious faiths" in his radio address in mid-September, the President said: "I urge the members of the Congress to set aside their differences and act on the simple, fair and long overdue measure to help make us one nation under God again."

Whether we are one nation under God is not

the issue here. The certainty is that we are one nation with a guarantee to worship or not worship as conscience persuades. Faced with strong political pressure to legislate school praying, many who may have been giving little thought to this campaign will awaken soon to the bundle of inconsistencies and dangers in the ill-advised movement.

Southern Baptists fall into that category of the newly - enlightened. After that denomination's convention, meeting in New Orleans, went on record as favoring the prayer - in - the - schools move, responsible, elected leaders pointed out that the Baptist convention was powerless to issue an order along that line. The prayer advocates were reminded also that the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs has been actively fighting the current and other government - imposed prayer proposals for two decades.

Wade H. McCree, Jr., a former U.S. Solicitor General, did his part during the summer to restore sense to the prayer issue. Addressing a Bar Association Prayer Breakfast, he advocated rejection of any prayer amendment proposal. Group prayer will do little to promote genuine devotion, he said even though it may prove the political power of its proponents. His advice to the barristers: "We as lawyers should go forth from this prayer breakfast resolved to save our nation from the consequences of forced piety."

Additional good counsel has come from President Donald W. Shriver Jr., of the Union Theological Seminary: For him, the public school prayer drive amounts to "theological nonsense." And he, too, can be said to be among the perpetrators of the spirit of Chanukah when he declares: "Had there been a public school in the Roman Empire at the beginning of the Christian era, the children of Christians would have been required to pray to Caesar."

AMSTERDAM (WNS) -- An anti-Semitic disturbance marred a football match between the Go Ahead football club of Deventer and the Feyenoord club of Rotterdam in Deventer.

## NO MOVEMENT ON TABA DISPUTE

JERUSALEM (WNS) -- Officials here noted that the meeting between Israel's Ambassador to Cairo, Moshe Sasson, and Egyptian Foreign Minister Kamal Hassan Ali, was an encouraging sign leading to a thaw soon in the chilled relations between Egypt and Israel.

There appeared to be no significant movement on the issues outstanding between the two countries, the officials noted of the 90 minute meeting in Cairo. They said Hassan Ali once again stressed Egypt's demand for prompt resumption of negotiations over the disputed Taba region near Eilat.

Sasson, on instructions from Jerusalem, indicated Israel's readiness to resume the talks on Taba, but only on the condition that the various stalled talks on autonomy and matters related to the normalization process be resumed at the same time. The dialogues have been frozen since Israel's invasion of Lebanon last June.

Meanwhile, Alfred Atherton, the U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, told reporters in Cairo that there were contacts in progress between Israel, Egypt, and the U.S. for a resumption of technical talks on Taba. Officials here disclaimed knowledge of any such contacts.

The Egyptians want the Taba matter resolved through the conciliation and arbitration process laid down in the peace treaty for disputes which cannot be resolved by negotiations. Taba consists of several acres of beachfront on the Gulf of Aqaba which Egypt claims is part of Sinai and Israel insists is on its side of the old international boundary. Israel recently opened a new resort hotel on the disputed land.

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