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English T-122

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Prayer in Public Schools

In the essay named “Banning Prayer in Public Schools Has Led to America’s Demise” by Gary Bergel, the argument is made that by removing prayer and any form of religious contemplation has caused America to plummet from righteous living, prosperity and success within the last quarter century. He states that from around June 25, 1962, when 39 billion students were forbidden to pray in school, America’s moral decline began to accelerate more rapidly. Bergel supports his claim by stating the main reasons behind the U.S. Supreme Court ruling and by issuing some religious tidbits. Even though Bergel lists some facts and names some general ideas, he has an extremely weak argument for the simple reason of the claims and warrants not being supported with factual or personal evidence. The opposing article that I have chosen is titled “Argument against School Prayer” by Adam Frucci. Frucci first starts out by saying that the article is not intended to bash God, or Christianity. But its purpose is to argue all forms of religion in schools, high school in particular. He states that high school is a place where you begin to separate from your parents and begin to form your own ideas. Keeping this in mind, it’s the absolute worst place to start forcing values and beliefs on you. He further states that religion will never be non-discriminatory; it can never totally include everyone. There will always be someone who doesn’t fit in simply because of a personal belief, and high school is not the place to institute isolationism and criticism on any level outside of an academic level. Again, I like this article but it is somewhat biased because of the writers status of a student in a catholic high school. I get the feeling that he is really bitter about having the catholic beliefs forced on him...but frankly he, or his parents, chose for him to attend the school so he might as well adapt, learn, and become stronger from the situation. Both of the arguments are weak in their own ways and strong in others, and I will attempt to acknowledge most of their faults.

Beginning with Bergel's argument of the demoralization of the US as a result of the removal of prayer from public schools, I get the sense that he is very adamant about getting his views across regardless of analyzing the other side of the story. The whole essay is just the ranting and ravings of a bitter Christian. No support is given to his main thoughts anywhere throughout the paper. In all of his main thoughts, he spouts some statistics and information about different factors that have influenced the topic, however there is no substantial evidence of factual data, but rather only his own opinion. In the first section of the essay, he mentions that there has been a decline in family and morality. How does one evaluate a decline in something so abstract and so subjective? It is clear that from here on out, he is making general assumptions based solely on his beliefs. Bergel goes on to argue that removing prayer from school creates the secular system beyond the power of God. This is a faulty argument for the simple Christian fact that if God is all powerful, how can anything be created beyond God's power. If anything, removal of prayer will keep children from experiencing God in more than a church setting. He also argues that in doing so, religion is being stripped from the lips and minds of children. It's not restraining a child from totally expressing or acting religiously, it's simply preventing prayer to be forced on those who aren't believers. It's, in essence, protecting the first amendment rights of those affected and moreover, is a gross exaggeration of the case in hand in addition to the fact that religion can't be totally taken from someone. At a point in the article, he mentions the *Engle vs. Vitale* Supreme Court case. The whole ruling has nothing to do with keeping kids from learning the religion, it's concerned with children who aren't believers of Christianity not being forced to participate in something that they don't believe in. Bergel seems to forget that the basic principle of separation of church and state is that the US isn't a professed catholic state therefore it can't just allow the use of one religion over another in any public arena. The *Engle vs. Vitale* ruling doesn't eliminate the learning of religion, it simply doesn't allow institutions to force the practice of Christianity on kids of other faiths. In general, his rationale appears to be based on passionate fervor rather than rational thought and analysis of the *Engle vs. Vitale* ruling and its surrounding issues. He never pinpoints the issues and examines them within his analysis. He never presents an argument against the opposition but rather rants and raves about what he believes to be

right thus stacking the evidence and therefore making it seem as if anything that is in opposition to his beliefs are wrong. In addition, he never mentions anything about his main idea of prayer in school prayer, thus committing a red herring.

In Frucci's article concerning the argument for the removal of school prayer, it has both good and bad aspects to it, thusly providing me with the evidence that this is a stronger argument than that of Bergel. Frucci suggests to us that high school is the worst time to impose such a subject for the simple reason that it's a time when one is learning about ones self and it's not the time to impose new mindsets. Firstly, Religion can't be imposed but rather be encouraged and taught...it's up to the educated whether or not to accept the knowledge. Frucci's statement is purely circumstantial because people learn at all times of life and new ideas are presented everyday. Therefore, the teaching of religion in schools can only offer more options rather than changing ones whole mindset. In saying that the setting is inappropriate, Frucci is clearly showing signs of his immaturity. In my own opinion, school is the one of the best places to teach religion. The child's inability to concentrate and focus on the task at had does not warrant removal of school prayer. If that's the case, school in general should be gotten rid of because of the child's inherent nature to be easily distracted and loose concentration. One of Frucci's strongest arguments within the paper is that prayer in schools does create a since of discrimination. However, he takes it to the extreme when saying that the since of community will be ruined because of their nonparticipation.

Overall, Frucci's essay is stronger than Brugel's in the since of me, the reader, being able to relate to the author's point of view, as well as the amount of support that was given to each point raised. Frucci's essay presents more of an argument, as opposed to Brugel's which is more of an outcry of ideas. However both essays are pretty weak in their persuasiveness, but since I have to choose on, I'd have to say that Frucci's is the stronger of the two.