

Prayer Ban Misconceptions

By LOUIS CASSELS
United Press International

Public school officials thousands of American communities have overreacted to the Supreme Court's 1963 ruling on classroom religious exercises.

They have interpreted it as a ban on prayer and Bible reading.

It is not, and never was intended to be.



Cassels

The court went out of its way to make that clear.

All that it held unconstitutional was the formerly widespread practice of starting each school day with a mini-worship service, which typically included a devotional reading from the scriptures and unison recitation of the Lord's Prayer.

This practice, the court said, infringed religious liberty and transgressed the line of separation between church and state drawn by the First Amendment to the Constitution.

Despite the care with which the court formulated its ruling, one still hears — even from school officials — the preposterous statement that it's now unconstitutional for children to pray or read the Bible while they're on school property.

In an effort to clear up such misconceptions, Oregon's state superintendent of education, Dale Parnell, has issued a set of guidelines for public school officials in his state.

They are clear, sensible and entirely in accord with the spirit and letter of the Supreme Court ruling. They could become a model for similar action by other state departments of education.

Here are the Oregon guidelines with some parenthetical comments by this reporter:

1—The teaching of religion is to be distinguished from teaching factually and objectively about religion. Religion is often a factor to be considered in history, art, literature and music. Religious holidays such as Hanukkah, Christmas, Passover, and others should be explained to students.

2—Instruction in morality, ethics and values is encouraged, but instruction shall not resort to partisan religious sanctions. (In other words, a teacher should tell children it's wrong to steal, but she may not say that you will go to Hell if you do steal.)

3—Bible reading for historical or literary instructional purposes is encouraged, but it is improper to require pray-

ers in classes or assemblies, to say grace before meals or to distribute to individual students religious literature on school property for any purpose other than for clearly identified school curriculum purposes. (The Supreme Court explicitly recommended that public schools offer objective courses in Biblical literature and religious history, and a few already are doing so.)

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(Photographically reproduced from *News of the World*, March 23, 1969.)

BBC ASK LENNON TO PLAY CHRIST

BEATLE John Lennon is to be asked to play Jesus Christ in a £325,000 TV colour series to be screened by the BBC. Freelance producer Peter Graham Scott, who is to make the new series, told me yesterday

"I know we shall be upsetting some people by our choice of Lennon, but I think he would be ideal as Jesus."

"It may seem daft at first, yet it's not: John has an immense following."

"I want to take him out of his Beatle context; take away the nonsense and publicity surrounding him and here, surely, is the sort of



JOHN LENNON
"It may seem daft"

By Weston Taylor

character we want for this ambitious television series."

Referring to Lennon's long Biblical-style locks, Mr Scott added: "Facially he's not bad. Certainly everybody knows he's a good actor."

Lennon will be asked to preach the Sermon on the Mount, take part in the Feeding of the Multitude, and act out the agonies of the Crucifixion.

These are some of the dramatic highlights in the 13-week serial, which begins production within four months in the Holy Land.

"Our modern version of Christ will look nothing like that of the Renaissance painters who made a fortune out of portraying contemporary people to look like Jesus," said Mr Graham Scott.

"We shall show Him physically as a man who didn't wash too often, never shaved, didn't have many changes of clothes and spoke to primitive people in a language they could understand."

"We shall, of course, show Him full face on the screen."

John Lennon caused an international outcry when he made disparaging comments on Christianity a few years ago.

"Christianity will go," he forecast in 1966. "It will go. It will vanish and shrink. I needn't argue about that. I'm right and I will be proved right."

"We (the Beatles) are more popular than Jesus now; I don't know which will go first, rock 'n' roll or Christianity."

"Jesus was all right but His disciples were thick and ordinary. It's them twisting it that ruins it for me."

Mr Graham Scott has already chosen locations in the Holy Land for the serial. The project is being financed jointly by Howard and Wyndham Films and Television Ltd., of which he is managing director, and the BBC.

"It is being produced by the same division which created *The Forsyte Saga*," he said. "It could almost be called *The Jesus Saga* and can easily be as popular as Galsworthy's drama."