



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on June 17, 2011

VT H.S. Principal Omits Religious Element of Valedictorian's Speech

This graduation season has revealed a heavy bias against spiritual Americans, as a number of school officials and judges have passed heavy-handed rulings indicating that anything remotely related to Christianity be barred from commencement ceremonies. The latest example of such violations of First Amendment rights can be found in Vermont, where a high school valedictorian's commencement address was redacted by the school principal to omit any reference to God's influence upon him.



The Blaze [reports](#):

Kyle Gearwar, the valedictorian of Fair Haven Union High School in Fair Haven, Vermont, (logo shown at left above picture of downtown Fair Haven) says that [he was told](#) by school officials that he couldn't include specific information about how God has changed his life in his commencement address.

After the school principal went through Gearwar's entire speech, he eliminated large portions but permitted the words "God" and "Jesus" to remain in Gearwar's address.

Fair Haven Union High School principal Brett Blanchard defended the school's decision:

It is a fine line here. Here's the freedom of speech and here's separation of church and state. The line is generally the difference between proselytizing and personalizing.

Gearwar contends that it was never his intent to start controversy, but hoped his words would serve as an inspiration to others. Though the valedictorian complied with the school's request, he made sure to tell his classmates that he was unable to deliver the full speech that he had written:

Today my valedictorian speech remains unfinished. I am submitting to those who have authority over me by not reading the half of my speech that has caused issues. I respect the administration for the decisions they have made and thank them anyways for the opportunity to speak. I have always dreamed of speaking about God in front of my school as the valedictorian. This was the message God gave to me, and I am not allowed to share it with you even though it is my testimony, the most important change my life has ever experienced, and the one thing that I stand for no matter what.

Following the commencement, *The Rutland Herald* elected to publish Gearwar's entire speech. The following is a portion of the speech that was barred from being read at the commencement ceremony:

I have my own unique issues and problems, but they can include others like substance abuse, relationship problems, anger, pride, or depression. The way to escape this is through submitting to God. I can't get through all my difficulties in my own strength, but with God I can, and there are many people in this world whose lives have changed because of Him. Jeremiah 29:11 says,



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“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, they are plans for good and not for evil, to give you a hope and a future.” I needed to let go of the things that I wasn’t proud of and give my life to the One who created me. God knew me before I was born and wanted a relationship with me from that very day. And trust me, it was well worth the effort to submit to God and not let the world get the best of me.

Now I can live in freedom from sin.

Now I can look at each new day with a smile.

Now I can face each trouble and problem with a glad heart.

Now I can live with God and not try to barely survive without Him.

Amen.

Gearwar was also forced to remove a segment of the speech that Gearwar called “the testimony of my life, to show what I have gone through and how I got here,” because it made mention of how God redirected him from anger and depression and helped him find peace within himself.

Gearwar’s clash with the school district is reminiscent of other conflicts throughout this graduation season. For example:

- Students at Louisiana’s Bastrop High School, for instance, were told that they would not be permitted to continue a tradition of [prayer](#) at their graduation ceremony, and that the school would risk a lawsuit if it engaged in the tradition. Students took matters into their own hands, however, by defying the ACLU’s threat and leading the prayer themselves.
- Likewise, the American Civil Liberties Union in New Jersey took [issue](#) with the presence of religious symbols at New Jersey’s Neptune Township graduation, even though the symbols were part of the Ocean Grove Great Auditorium, where the commencement ceremonies had been held for the past 60 years.
- In Texas, District Judge Fred Biery [ruled](#) that the Medina Valley Independent School District could not include prayer, or any language perceived to be religious in nature, in its graduation ceremonies. In an emergency ruling, that judgment was [overturned](#) by the U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals just in time for the ceremonies — which included several prayers and much cheering from the audience.



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