In Jesus Name I Pray

Exclusivity in Public Prayer
And The Restrictive Contours Of Civic Pluralism
In The Early Twenty-First Century

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the increasingly challenging goal of faithful, authentic Christian public prayer in the antagonistic arena of a civic culture committed to the cult of pluralism. While attempting to answer practical questions about the changing nature of civic expectations for public prayer in the West, this paper will also present Biblical models and principles for faithful witness in prayer. Finally, this paper will also analyze current Christian responses to this critical challenge and provide possible alternatives for naming the name of Jesus Christ in public prayer.

There can be no denial of the culture wars in the early 21st Century. Scholars, authors, social observers, pundits, and entire institutes have all recognized the challenge and insult to give various opinions for the root of the problem, the description of the problem, and the possibilities for solution. Some are more optimistic than others. The red

1 An excellent resource for commentary on the continuing challenge of faith and culture is Executive Director Dr. Paul Kengor, The Center for Vision and Values | Grove City College. http://www.visionandvalues.org/. The Center won the 2010 Templeton Freedom Award and continues to produce excellent commentary and resources with great thoughtfulness, historic depth and Biblical worldview. Their Center has been a resource for this paper and I would like to thank Dr. Kengor and Fellows of the Center for the compendium of articles and scholarly work that helps shape my own thinking about the Church and Culture.

2 See, for example, these resources which all, from several points of view, helped to inform this paper: L.E. Adams, Going Public: Christian Responsibility in a Divided America (Brazos Press, 2002); W.A. Donohue, Secular Sabotage: How Liberals Are Destroying Religion and Culture in America (FaithWords, 2009); M. McGough, A Field Guide to the Culture Wars: The Battle over Values from the Campaign Trail to the Classroom (Praeger, 2008); ibid.; ibid.; R.A. Mohler, Culture Shift: Engaging Current
state/blue state division of our nation, so popularly put by political pundits on news shows, is only the beginning of the greater division that many believe we face. Yet political and cultural wounds in the flesh of our society are not alone. H. Richard Niebuhr in his book, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (1929), makes the charge that the gospel of the brotherhood of Jew and Greek, bond and free, white and black has sometimes the sound of irony, and sometimes falls upon the ear with unconscious hypocrisy..." is still felt by many in our country. The riots in working class neighborhoods outside of London also point to a woundedness that is festering—the challenge of a 20th Century social experiment which is no longer affordable.

Yet in the midst of all of these challenges of not being able to communicate with each other, there is an even greater challenge. It is the challenge of philosophical pluralism. I say "philosophical pluralism," for while plurality, or pluralistic, is simply a fact of the existence of diversity co-existing in one community, pluralism is an ideology. For

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3 I am particularly thankful, with so many others, for the outstanding contributions of Dr. Phillip Jenkins of Penn State University. His optimistic view of the future of immigration and its positive implications for Biblical Christianity in America, for instance, is one of the most hopeful and refreshing perspectives today. See P. Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford University Press, 2006). For a European take on the future of Christianity in a deeply secularized society, see P. Jenkins, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis* (Oxford University Press, 2007). In these books Jenkins proposes that the current fears of evangelicals, that immigration will dilute values, is turned upside down to show that Asian Presbyterians, Hispanic traditional Catholics—and the new Pentecostals of South America—, African Anglicans and others groups whose theology is decidedly more conservative than contemporary American (and European) Christians, will, in fact, return the nation to the founding values of America.

4 Bishop Thomas Curry, Los Angeles, has argued that the nation is facing a deep crisis because of liberal attacks that are reinterpreting the First Amendment. See T.J. Curry, *Farewell to Christendom: The Future of Church and State in America* (Oxford University Press, 2001).


philosopher John Rawls, pluralism as ideology is a “fact” of Post World War II western democracies.\textsuperscript{7}

"'Pluralism' goes further still, for its advocates reject exclusivism as 'presumptuous' and 'arrogant' and inclusive is him as 'patronizing' or 'condescending.'"\textsuperscript{8}

The charter of the European Union has a different way of putting it: “United Diversity.”\textsuperscript{9} It is also philosophical in the sense that it is a tenant, an ideal, and a commitment that has been largely embraced by the greater Western society.\textsuperscript{10} The ideology of the philosophical pluralism is being buttressed by popular mass communication. The political correctness and increasing secularism has produced what Professor Stephen Carter has called “A Culture of Disbelief.”\textsuperscript{11} In the name of tolerance, the culture of the West is becoming increasingly and unbearably intolerant for Christians. Whereas John Rawls proposed in his \textit{A Theory of Justice},\textsuperscript{12} that a liberal democracy is sustained by “restraint on the fundamentals,” that is, by the citizen recognizing that there are, in such a free society, overlapping ideas and therefore a need for “fair social cooperation” between the views for the benefit of sustaining the democracy. Pluralism, as an ideology, knows no such restraint, it seems, for those who are want to contribute to the society out of their faith. There are many facets of this intolerance one could examine. For this annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, I want to focus on only one of those: \textit{praying in the name of Jesus Christ in the public domain.}

As Christians consider the topic of prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, we do so with a constellation of case-studies moving in orbit: there is the decision by Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York City not to invite clergy to the tenth anniversary services of the \textit{9/11} attack.\textsuperscript{13} There is the case of the atheist group led by Mickey Weinstein that successfully shut down the chaplain-taught Christian Just War Theory at Vandenberg Air Force Base.\textsuperscript{14} There are other cases of legislative prayer complaints,\textsuperscript{15} prayer in

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\textsuperscript{7} T. Hedrick, \textit{Rawls and Habermas: Reason, Pluralism, and the Claims of Political Philosophy} (Stanford University Press, 2010).
\textsuperscript{8} Stott.
\textsuperscript{10} In Hedrick.
\textsuperscript{13} Thankfully the service included a reading of Psalm 42 by the President of the United States and references to God by former President Bush. See http://www.christianpost.com/news/obama-giuliani-read-bible-bush-mentions-god-at-9-11-service-55413/.
\textsuperscript{14} See my Commentary dealing with this matter: Michael A. Milton, "The Attack on Just War Is Not Just," \textit{Christian News Wire}, August 11, 2011 2011. This was published in numerous online journals including, Michael A. Milton, "This Attack on Just War Is Not
school complaints, prayers before football games, and many other situations, that not only deserve attention by those following the cultural wars but give rise to a deeper discussion on how Christians can maintain a faithful Gospel witness in public prayer. One might add that for every issue that is raised publicly, there is very likely a multitude of other cases that we never hear about. This writer was present in the very situation we are addressing—praying in Jesus’ name in public prayer—at a local Rotary club. There, the Jewish rabbi insisted that there should be no more prayers in the name of Jesus Christ. Since he made this resolution in a medium-size, southern town, where the president and all the officers of Rotary, are Christians, his resolution was bound for failure. His own constituency, members of his congregation, shrank as the young rabbi made the proposal. They knew it would go nowhere. That is not uncommon. For most of the United States, pluralism is now a way of life. And within that way of life there is an expectation of cooperation. There is, to use the phrase of the military on the title of the book that I wrote, “Cooperation without Compromise.” However, since that event happened, almost five years ago, the contour of tolerance in public pluralism has undergone a remarkable narrowing. Indeed, according to a former Rotary president and member of the congregation where I formerly pastored, that same club now prohibits use of the name of Jesus in the club’s invocation. There is growing evidence that this is not an isolated incident, but represents an unsettling trend regarding Christianity and civic discourse. It appears that all other religious prayers may be offered except for any prayer that is in the exclusive name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. How shall we respond to this? Is there still space in the public square or is it in fact now stripped bare of all references to Christ? There is much at stake in the answer. J. Howard Pew

15 “Marsh V. Chambers,” in 463 U.S. 783, ed. ReligiousFreedom.lib.virginia.edu (1983). Concerning a complaint by a legislator named Chambers who sued that a chaplain’s prayer using Jesus’ name violated the establishment clause of the first amendment, “By a 6-3 vote the Supreme Court permitted the practice of beginning the legislative session with a prayer given by the publicly funded chaplain.”
19 For example, see C.H. Lippy, Faith in America: Changes, Challenges, New Directions (Greenwood Publishing Group, Incorporated, 2006).
believed, “from Christian freedom comes all of our other freedoms.”\textsuperscript{20} 21 22 If he is right then any restrictions of the use of Jesus’ name in public prayer should concern all Americans. Others like David Tracy, the Andrew Thomas Greeley and Grace McNichols Greeley Distinguished Service Professor of Catholic Studies at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, representing another view of Christianity in the public sphere, are pessimistic about any break-through as he wrote:

…Until...Christian[s] develop a public set of criteria based upon the communicative power of non-manipulative and emancipatory reason, the possibilities of an adequate public Christian theology of \textit{praxis} remain, I fear, remote.\textsuperscript{23}

Greely’s analysis, if correct, is chilling.

Why can’t Christians pray in Jesus’ name in the public sphere of our society? Do we really lack a “communicative power of non-manipulative…reason?” Is a Christian minister praying in Christ’s name at a national memorial no longer considered civil? Can’t a businessman—Christian, Hebrew, or otherwise—still pray in public according to his own faith and conscience? The questions are meant to be rhetorical, but there are many who would shout out an answer, as I have found in my own research. This too is disturbing if our freedoms are indeed derived from the freedom of religious expression in the public square.

The difficulty has been given a name by J.H.H. Weiler\textsuperscript{24} in chapter three of \textit{The Naked Public Square Reconsidered}.\textsuperscript{25} There, Weiler considers construction of the preamble to

\textsuperscript{21} Our founding fathers felt so strongly about the freedom of religion in the public square that, as in the case of the 1776 Constitution of North Carolina, they prohibited office from anyone who objected to Christ in the public arena. Article XIX of North Carolina’s 1776 Constitution reads, “All men have a natural and unalienable right to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences.” Article XXXII is specifically Christian in stating the following qualifications for public officers in the state: “No person who shall deny the being of God, or the truth of the Protestant religion, or the divine authority of the Old or New Testaments, or who shall hold religious principles incompatible with the freedom and safety of the State, shall be capable of holding any office or place of trust or profit in the civil department within this State.” See http://candst.tripod.com/cnst_nc.htm.
\textsuperscript{22} See also the arguments of J. Howard Pew in his work on the board of Grove City College to construct a curriculum which saw the essential connection between the doctrine of freedom in Christianity and the expression of freedom in a democratic republic: L. Edwards, \textit{Freedom’s College: The History of Grove City College} (Regnery, 2000).
the Charter of the European Union, which disallowed the inclusion of an invocation Dei, as an example of what he calls Christophobia, an unreasonable fear of offending others by using the name of Jesus. Weller demonstrates that the name of Jesus is used in constitutional language for numerous member states, including Ireland, Denmark, Greece, Spain, Germany, as well as Britain’s famous constitutional reference to the monarch as the Defender of the Protestant faith. Even the newer constitutions, like in Poland, recognize their religious heritage as being a source for their national values as well as those secularists who find those values originating from other sources (unnamed):

…We, the Polish nation—all citizens of the Republic, both those who believe in God as the source of truth, justice, good and beauty, as well as those not sharing such date but respecting those universal values as arising from other sources, equal in rights and obligations toward the common good…

Despite the fact that Europe (I do not speak of Europe as singularity as Norman Davies does rather as, say, Paul Thibaud does, when he states, “Europe remains an indeterminate political project that has not managed to legitimate itself independently of states.”) is a continent of nations crafted on Christian and Biblical principles and an indisputable Christian heritage. Despite a still present Christian majority, Brussels has sought to institute an economic-political alliance—a “normative supranationalism”—without mentioning the philosophical-cultural-religious relevance of European nation-state’s legacy, namely, Christianity. To accomplish this is an extraordinary coup of disturbing intolerance for the faith and history of the people the EU is presumed to serve.

24 Joseph Halevi Horowitz Weiler, Ph.D. (b. 1951), Joseph Straus Professor of Law; European Union Jean Monnet Chaired Professor; Director, Straus Institute for the Advanced Study of Law & Justice; Director, Tikvah Center for Law & Jewish Civilization; Director, Jean Monnet Center for International and Regional Economic Law and Justice; Director, J.S.D. Program, New York University School of Law, New York, New York.
25 Neuhaus.
How shall we think biblically, theologically, and humanly, about this trial—if I may call it such—that we face in our world today? I believe the words of Miroslav Volf are prophetic and good for us, when he writes:

A genuinely Christian reflection on social issues must be rooted in the self giving love of the divine Trinity as manifested on the cross of Christ; all the central themes of such reflection what have to be fall through from the perspective of the self giving love of God.

The cross of Christ therefore must be central in reflections on the use of the name in Jesus Christ in public prayer. Any thinking about opposition, any reflections on strategy, any opining about what to do or what not to do in this present state of affairs, must be radically grounded in the biblical identification of the apostle Paul's mission “to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2).” Such an approach to this problem or to any other assumes that the cross of Christ, the ruling motif of the selfless love towards sinners, which saved us, will save others. It also assumes that we naturally embrace the fundamental focus of the Scriptures—the supreme identity of Jesus as Lord and Savior. In doing so, we may be, in Christ, both uncompromising in our public faith and civil towards those with whom we disagree. We therefore agree with Demy and Stewart in their excellent work on faith and public discourse, Politics and Public Policy: A Christian Response:

… We believe that Christians operating in politics should be the exemplars of stability. Too much of politics is overheated rhetoric and ad hominem attack. Christians with a full understanding of the limits and possibilities of politics, and of the precarious state of their own souls should be the last to engage in such tactics despite the obvious temptations to do so.

With our own Gospel requirement for a Christian charity acknowledged, we are still left with the colossal present-day challenge that Lesslie Newbigin described:

…to commend the truth of the gospel in a culture that has sought for absolute certainty as the ideal of true knowledge but now despairs of the possibility of knowing truth at all.”

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32 Demy and Stewart.
Some theologians see the present secular resistance to Christians praying in Jesus' name as specifically related to the “powers” of this “present evil age.” With our difficulty now stated, a motivation for discovering an answer identified (namely, our faithfulness as Christ’s servants as well as our freedom as citizens in a Western democracy) recognized, and some Gospel sensitivities affirmed as we move along, I would like to approach this paper with a simple thesis that Christians should pray in the name of Jesus Christ in public prayer. I do not mean to imply such a recalcitrant view that those who offer public prayer and sincerely pray to God in Jesus’ name yet omit a closing phrase should be held to theological libel! Many of us, I think, have prayed, perhaps through extemporaneous forms, and omitted the name of Jesus in our “prayer closet,” yet praying in His name from the heart. I believe that this is a necessary qualification lest anyone suppose that I'm advocating praying in Jesus’ name as a sort of incantation. That would, of course, amount to Jesus’ warning about heathen prayer and their wrong-headed assumption that many words (and that could be applied to other religious prayer rituals that) can bring about greater effectiveness in prayer. Indeed, the pleasant familiarity of being in a Christian context reinforces the possibility of omitting the phrase, “in Jesus’ name I pray,” since we assume that our audience is “with us” in our faith. I would respectfully contend, however, that such a thought is a naïve assumption in these days (not only in public prayer in a broad civic context, but even in many churches that are called Christian and some identified as evangelical). My thesis also has a sub-text: that believers should not feel any civic guilt for witnessing to the authority of Jesus in their public prayers in this increasingly pluralistic age. I will seek to acknowledge the difficulties with my proposition (and its subtext), which are held and defended by other fair-minded believers. In order not to set up a “straw man,” I will seek to document Christian rebuttals to any necessity of praying in Jesus’ name in public—not for the sake of picking a fight, for I agree with much of what others have

34 “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6.12 ESV)
35 “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, Galatians 1.4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,” (Galatians 1.3–4 ESV)
37 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.” (Matthew 6.7 ESV)
said on the subject, but for an attempt at fair-mindedness and for the utmost appreciation of objectivity among Christians. There are indeed those who sincerely disagree with what I propose and I want to give them their due, at least through several representative voices. I also want to move to my main concern by providing a response—I trust a Biblical response—to those objections. In my rejoinder, I hope to demonstrate my argument by showing that a Christian prayer in the public realm rests on the three-legged stool of authority, context, and witness. Finally, I will seek to provide some practical responses to the growing sense of Christophobia in public prayer.

Objections and Responses

The crisis, and I believe I’m justified in calling it that, over public prayer in the name of Jesus Christ evokes responses from within the church that are, not surprisingly, diverse. Some of the responses have included objections, or at least cautions, about public prayers in the name of Jesus Christ for theological, political, or even missional reasons. There have been objections to prayer in the name of Jesus in the public setting because, theologically, some have said (we will document these as we come to them in the paper) that there is no example in the Bible where one prays in the name of Jesus. That much is admitted if praying in His name is using the phrase in question, “I pray in Jesus’ name,” or “in Christ’s name I offer this prayer.” Secondly, there are some believers who maintain that praying in the name of Jesus outside of the Church (or church) is to unnecessarily push the idea of separation of church and state, or more charitably, to dilute, or even adulterate, the spiritual mission of the Church in the world. Under the rubric of “don’t mix faith and politics in the public domain,” other sincere Christians believe that we simply should not participate in public prayer where there is the tendency to surrender doctrine for the sake of civility. Approaching these objections to public prayer using Jesus’ name one thinks of Richard Niebuhr’s classic work Christ and Culture (as well as D.A. Carson’s recent update) and his analysis of five normative responses in the Christian faith. Indeed, DA Carson is helpful, in expressing the problems that we face in his first chapter on Christ and culture revisited: DA Carson and his Christ and Culture Revisited introduced what he called “the contemporary challenge.” Carson wrote:

In the move from the Old Covenant to the New, the locus of the Covenant people passed from the covenant—nation to the international covenant—people. That inevitably raises questions about the relationships this people should have with the

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40 In Christ and culture, helmet Richard Niebuhr proposes 5 responses to what he calls, “the enduring problem.” These common responses within the church include “Christ against culture,” “the Christ of culture,” “Christ above culture,” “the theology of the dualist,” and Christ the transformer of culture.” See Niebuhr, Christ and Culture.
people around them who were not part of the new covenant. In political terms, Christians had to work through the relationship between the church and state, between the kingdom of God and the Roman Empire. Somewhat different answers were called up by different circumstances: contrast, for instance, Romans 13 and Revelation 19. But the issues the church face by being an international community claiming ultimate allegiance to the kingdom not of this world were much more than governmental. They also had to do with whether Christians should participate in socially expected customs…

The Constantinian settlement eased the persecutions that resulted from these challenges to the early Church, but did not completely remove the tensions. Carson went on to say that it was not his intention to treat the history of these debates, except to note in passing that we must never fall into the trap of supposing that we are the first generation of Christians to think about these things [This is a point well remembered for many contemporary challenges we face]. My focus is on how we should be thinking about the relations between Christ and culture now, at the beginning of the 21st Century. We have the same biblical texts that earlier generations of Christians thought their way through, of course, but our reflections are shaped by…[new] factors. This paper does not have the luxury of further interactions with Niebuhr or Carson’s diagnosis of the problems we have faced and face now as citizens of Another Kingdom living in a kingdom of this world, other than to agree that there remains the classic, differing answers from within the Church. Some would meet the tension of the two kingdoms by withdrawing from culture, thus, withdrawing, in our case, from the potential land mines of civic discourse and faithful witness. There are also those who assert that prayer is communication with God and therefore to be so pre-meditatively intentional about inserting the name of Jesus in a prayer before the Lion’s Club of a high school football game, is to corrupt the essential nature of prayer—of communication between creature and Creator, and, therefore, is to leave the sphere of prayer and to enter the

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41 Carson.
42 Ibid.
44 CS Lewis in his Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer writes about the essence of prayer being between creature in the Creator. This question related to the prayers of the reprobate, or an unbeliever, is particularly interesting to us. The issue could merit further study and discussion. One helpful thought for this paper, at least for the writer of this paper, came from CS Lewis when he wrote, “Where there is prayer at all we may suppose that there is some effort, however feeble, towards the 2nd condition, the union of wills. What God labors to do or say through the
sphere of evangelism. Some believe that entering into this fray in the public square amounts to an unnecessary squabble. Some have decided that praying in Jesus’ name is just forcing the issue, and crossing the lines of civility. Let’s get to some specific examples and some hopefully helpful responses that will guide us in prayer in the public square.

The Charge of Contrived Prayer by Praying In Jesus’ Name

We begin with the notion that to add “in Jesus’ name I pray” is unnecessary, or some might say even contrived, in the Machiavellian sense of that word. The ground of this argument is that the authority of the Name by the Christian need not be understood by anyone other than the one praying:

The objection is supposedly given greater support because nowhere in the Bible is there an example of a prayer concluding with “in Jesus name I pray.” This view has been advanced, for instance, by Mark D. Roberts in his article, “Praying in the Name of Jesus: What Is It? How Should We Do It? Should We Do It When We Pray in Public, Civic Gatherings?” Roberts’s argument, representing others, uses many of Scriptures that I would use to advance prayer in Jesus’ name. However, Roberts raises the issue of authority without admitting the Biblical testimony to witness and context in prayer. Roberts writes that he is praying in Jesus’ name, in public forms, whether or not he uses a phrase such as “I pray in Jesus’ name.” I do not for a moment doubt that is true. My concern is that the man comes back to God with the distortion which at any rate is not total.” See C.S. Lewis, Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002).


For a quick survey on this topic, including Mark Robert’s opinions and others who agree with him, see the article, Ruth Moon, "In Jesus’ Name: Must Christians Pray in Public Forums Using Jesus’ Name?" (2010).


To pray in Jesus’ name is not to speak a mantra for religious zeal, or self-identification, or proselyting, but to call on Almighty God through the only Mediator between God and Man, Jesus, whom the Bible names by other names as well. See Genesis 3:15; 49:10; Job 19:25; Psalm 118:22; Song of Solomon 2:1; Isaiah 4:2; 9:6; 23:14; 26:4; 33:2; 40:3; 5; 41:14; 42:1; 51:9; 53:1; 3; 55:4; 60:16; Jeremiah 23:6; Daniel 9:25; Micah 5:1; Haggai 2:7; Zechariah 9:9; Malachi 3:1; 4:2; Matthew 1:1, 21; 2:2; 15; 23; 8:20; 12:18; 21:11; Mark 1:24; 14:61; Luke 1:32, 69, 78; 2:11, 25; 9:20; 24:19; John 1:1, 3, 9, 14, 18, 29, 41; 6:32; 8:12, 58; 10:7, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1; 19:25; 20:28; Acts 3:14, 15, 22; 4:27; 7:52; 10:36; Romans 9:5; 11:26; 1 Corinthians 2:8; 15:45; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 1:22; 1 Timothy 1:17; 2:5; 6:15; Hebrews 1:2; 2:10; 3:1;
Scriptures go further than that and ask us to take a stand, if you will, when prayer is being made in a broad public square amidst the presence of competing gods. I will develop these ideas from Scripture shortly.

Roberts recalls the passages about praying in Jesus’ name and agrees that this is the way he prays. No one else may know that he is praying like this, but he seems to be saying that is not the point. The point is only authority and he meets the authority issue because that is what he believes. He could not pray in another way but in the name of Jesus. Of course, again, I agree with him as far as that goes. All Christians would readily agree that the Scriptures teach us that authority is the real issue behind prayer being offered in Jesus’ name. John records Jesus’ own words about how we should prayer through His authority:

Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son (John 14.13).

If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it (John 14.14).

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you (John 15.16).

In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you (John 16.24).

Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16.24).

In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf” (John 16.26).

The Scriptures are clear enough about praying in Jesus’ name as the Mediatorial authority we are given to access the throne of Almighty God. The dissenting point seems to be that authority does not need further testimony. But can it be self-evident to all that this is so? Is Jesus really the authority of my public prayer if I fail to mention His name, or allude to his Deity in my prayer?

For John Calvin there could be no other meaning in these verses but that prayer should be offered in the name of Jesus Christ:

This is not a useless repetition. All see and feel that they are unworthy to approach God; and yet the greater part of men burst forward, as if they were out of their senses, and rashly and haughtily address God; and afterwards, when that unworthiness, of which I have spoken, comes to their recollection, every man contrives for himself various expedients. On the other hand, when God invites us
to himself, he holds out to us one Mediator only, by whom he is willing to be appeased and reconciled.\textsuperscript{48}

Matthew Henry wrote:

As king in Christ’s name, is acknowledging our unworthiness to receive any favours from God, and shows full dependence upon Christ as the Lord our Righteousness.\textsuperscript{49}

William Willimon, \textit{Bishop, North Alabama conference of the United Methodist Church} agrees that one does not have to mention a particular phrase, but we do need to establish that we are praying in the name of Jesus:

In public praying, I think Christians attempt to be as hospitable as they can, knowing there are people from other faiths there. On the other hand, we pray in Jesus’ name, whether we mention Jesus or not. So whether Jesus' name is mentioned, we do have to pray in Jesus' name. That would mean when I pray a public prayer, I want to sound like a Christian, and I'm not offended if somebody comes up and says 'Gee, that was a Christian prayer.' I think, 'Well, you know I'm a Christian.'\textsuperscript{50}

Stanley Hauerwas, Professor of Theological Ethics, Duke Divinity School, and former colleague of Bishop Willimon, added:

We pray to God, and the God we pray to is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and we know God as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit because Jesus is the Son of God. So prayer must be directed to the appropriate subject. That means we pray not to some vague God but to the Father of Jesus Christ. So prayer is appropriately Christocentric, since it's to God.\textsuperscript{51}

Praying in Jesus' name does not require that I use a certain phrase that will get the e-mail there faster, as Walter Wangerin, Jr., responded,\textsuperscript{52} but it does mean that we make clear that our prayer is distinctively Christian.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{50} Moon.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} We will consider this more in the last section on practical suggestions.
It is good at this point to remember, however, that the name of Jesus is the most distinguishing qualifier in our public prayers. Whether one uses this precise phrase or not, the Name of Jesus Christ is central to the issue. Authority is joined to witness. The name of the Covenant God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose fullest revelation came through Jesus Christ, is not only the authority we must assume in prayer, but also the confession we must claim in prayer. The Name is not meaningful unless it is admitted in some way (speaking again, of public prayer). If we were to take a more in-depth look at this whole matter—in the matter of the name of God could go deep in to the Old Testament and New Testament theological understanding—we have to admit that authority and witness in prayer are joined. Either one approaches the Creator on his or her own merits, or on the merits of another. The Old Testament prayer was made for Almighty God based upon the invitation and the merits of God himself. This was so with the shepherd boy, David, indignant over the Philistinian siege of Israel. The concern of David, which he reminds us of, is that heathen defied—desecrated—the one and only God by defying His covenant people:

And David said to the men who stood by him, “What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1 Samuel 17.26 ESV).

This was the case on Mount Carmel when Elijah, in 1 Kings 18, differentiates himself and his prayers from the names of the gods of the Baal priests by calling on the One True God.

Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.” Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God. (1 Kings 18.37–39 ESV).

Public prayer in the presence of other clergy demanded that the prophet be clear about his faith, His God and the object of his prayers. This continues in the New Testament with the fuller understanding that Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and man.
and therefore the way, the truth, and the life\textsuperscript{56} and the only way to pray. Peter and the early disciples preach, admittedly not prayer, and declare their faith in the name of Jesus Christ. When they are told to be silent, they appeal to the higher authority of God.\textsuperscript{57} Their right, if you will, to demonstrate both the authority of Jesus and to witness to Jesus does not come from human authority.\textsuperscript{58} They must obey God rather than man. Similarly, prayer, as an expression of the Christian faith, should admit that we have only One Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, and also confess that He is Lord before others, lest we be seen as religious window dressing for public forums, praying to an unknown God, or a Civic God, whom we believe does not exist.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{56} “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14.6 ESV)
\textsuperscript{57} “And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, “What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.” So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, Acts 4.20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4.1–20 ESV)

\textsuperscript{58} Acts 4.20.
\textsuperscript{59} Even if one is a heathen and discovers his or her own condition and cries out “Oh God save me,” that prayer is actually made in the name of another. That prayer of
No less than the great Princetonian, Doctor Samuel Miller, in his *Thoughts on Public Prayer* reminds us that the church father Origen spoke of the performance of public prayer and urged, "But when we pray, let us not *battologize* (i.e. use vain repetitions,) but *theologize*."60

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**The Matter of Mixing Politics and Religion**

Another objection made by some Christians to praying in Jesus’ name in the public sphere goes like this:

In the controversies over legislative prayer, Christians should be especially mindful to pray in a way that does not tend to associate the government with a particular religious perspective. Current controversies over legislative prayer come out of using a government forum to push a particular type of prayer. That pushes the boundaries of constitutional law and threatens to send the message that the government is a proper forum for pursuing particular matters of faith.61

One does not have to be a theologian to respond that bringing faith into the political realm is not exactly radical when considering the history of the United States, not to even mention the nations of the world. Is the First Amendment really threatened by praying in Jesus’ name?

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60 S. Miller and Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Board of Publication, *Thoughts on Public Prayer* (Presbyterian board of publication, 1849).

61 Hollyn Hollman, general counsel, Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, quoted in Moon.
Recently I was reading in the two-volume series, *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730–1805*, edited by Ellis Sandoz.\(^{62}\) There is simply no doubt after reading the 1733 pages of sermons and discourses from the Puritan Pulpit that the early public squares of America were gilded with the name of Jesus. Now one may say that the pulpit is not the public square and that no one is disputing the matter of preaching in the sovereign sphere of the Church, but the fact remains that the pulpit and meeting house were the equipping station for citizens to be sent into the public square. The force of this collection of American Puritan sermons is that Christians were being admonished to take their faith into the public square—indeed, to build the public square with the name of Jesus Christ. Detractors of the idea of such an American founding faith point to the uses of the word “providence,” “Creator,” and other non-specific designations of the Deity (and even make a case that this is how we might pray today in our pluralistic age). But one could equally point to the use of the name of Jesus Christ by George Washington,\(^{63}\) and an impressive post of other founders who used the name of Christ in official United States Government papers.\(^{64}\) Dr. David L. Holmes, the Walter G. Mason Professor of Religious Studies at the College of William and Mary, in a book advertised to demythologize the Fundamentalist notion of a Christian nation, acknowledges that founders like Samuel Adams made clear, cogent claims of saving faith (as evangelicals would understand it) in Jesus Christ while also using Deistic names for God. Deistic names of God were used because they were a popular expression of the Deity, but their usage did not deny true faith in Christ or restrict the use of Jesus’ name in public discourse by those same individuals.\(^{65}\) Holmes wrote:

> Until age prevented it, Samuel Adams walked to church on Sunday with his family, a sight that neighbors were accustomed to seeing. As early as 1765, John Adams wrote that his cousin possessed ‘real as well as professed piety.’ His religious language is also strikingly Orthodox. Like other Orthodox Christians of the time, he was able to describe God in terms shared with Deism. But most of his religious phrasing, even in state documents, is unabashedly Christian. He uses such terms as “the common Master,” “our Divine Redeemer,” “Him... who has given us his Son to purchase for us the reward of eternal,” and “all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” Even at the height of Deism, when governor of Massachusetts, Adams issued a Thanksgiving proclamation ‘that holy and happy

\(^{62}\) E. Sandoz, *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805* (Liberty Fund, 1998); ibid.

\(^{63}\) See, for example, G. Washington and W.H. Burk, *Washington’s Prayers* (Published for the benefit of the Washington memorial chapel, 1907).


\(^{65}\) Holmes.
period, when the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ may be everywhere established, and all… willingly bow to the scepter of Him who is the Prince of Peace.  

My point is not to press that our founders were all standard-bearers of evangelical faith, but as Steven Waldman has demonstrated, they were unanimous about religious freedom and the right to express that freedom in the marketplace. There simply is no record in the founding of our nation of any hesitance of bringing the specific name of Jesus Christ and to the public square. The reason? John Van Til of Grove City College in his *Liberty of Conscience: The History of a Puritan Idea* shows how deeply engrained liberty of conscience is in the American republic:

While liberty and sovereignty of conscience failed in old England, it flourished in America from the earliest days the colonial. In addition to persistent individual defenses of liberty of conscience, as in the case of Roger Williams, liberty of conscience was provided for in most of the 17th Century charters, Massachusetts Bay colony being the outstanding exception. By the end of the 17th Century it became clear that liberty of conscience in its parallel idea of sphere sovereignty were emerging as important elements in the formation of an American political ideology. During the years after 1689, when John Locke published an important defense of liberty and sovereignty, colonial Americans increasingly drew upon his writings, and those of other defenders of the idea, such as the Westminster Divines, to defend the claim of individual liberty. Liberty of conscience also was used in this period to argue for the separation of institutional spheres of jurisdiction… Liberty of conscience had its roots deep in the past, in the works of the Puritan, William Perkins. It's history to the era of the American Revolution, and beyond, is the history of a Puritan idea.

Others have appealed to the living principles of Western Democracy to defend the right of one to pray according to conscience and therefore to pray in Jesus' name. Indeed, to express one's faith, even argue for its logical and spiritual superiority over others, much less to simply pray according to one's own faith, forms the very bedrock of a self-governing society. Democratic civility demanded, then and now, that religious conviction be able to overlap with religious doubt or skepticism. Culture was stronger because of the expression of religion, not weaker. This is the point of Stephen Carter in his *Culture of Disbelief*.

The Issue of Witness in Public Prayer

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66 Ibid.  
68 Til.  
The objection that to pray in Jesus’ name, that is, to use the phrase “in Jesus’ name I pray,” is to engage in uninvited evangelism seems to me to be one of the most common objections. A surprising statement from a paper on public prayer published by the National Association of Evangelicals on civic prayers supported this position (and an excellent rebuttal from Russell Moore of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was given in Touchstone Magazine). The objection is easily addressed; we consider the following:

The 23-page Statement on Religious Freedom for Soldiers and Military Chaplains, which seems intended to uphold the constitutionality of chaplains praying in public at all, reviews the relevant law and the history of ceremonial prayer in the United States, starting with George Washington. It concludes with recommendations for specific issues, including not only the work of chaplains but also soldiers’ religious rights and the duties of commanders. An appendix offers some examples (presumably NAE-approved) of ceremonial prayer. With most of the statement, no traditional Christian will have a problem. The problem comes with its solution to the most contentious question. “A military chaplain may preside, preach, or pray in sectarian language with a likeminded congregation that has voluntarily assembled,” it states at the end of its section on general principles, but “the same chaplain ought to use the more inclusive language of civic faith when praying at memorials or convocations with religiously diverse audiences.” The reason the NAE gives for this is that: The purpose of the prayers offered at these events is neither to favor one religion over another nor to proselytize. It is to dignify and mark a public occasion by reflecting upon the deeper significance of that which has or is about to transpire. It is to honor the most basic human impulses of giving thanks and of invoking God’s protection, guidance, and blessing, and it is to reflect upon those religious values that unite the American people. Praying “in the name of Jesus” would both “exclude believers from other faith traditions” and “violate the Establishment Clause,” the NAE argues. “[C]ommon courtesy, pastoral judgment, and constitutional principle commend offering a religious message or prayer respectful of all present.”

Read more: http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=19-06-003-e#ixzz1Z5plj2rl

“For many Christians, including especially most Evangelical Protestants, a prayer not offered through Jesus is not a prayer. These Christians are “Christian” precisely because they believe with the Apostle Paul that “there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). They can appeal to God as Father only because they share the Spirit of Christ, through whom they cry “Abba” (Rom. 8:15). When Christians maintain this belief, they are not being bigoted against others, or even trying to proselytize. They are simply asserting what Christians throughout the ages have always defined as the way to pray to God. Christians have never, until recently, distinguished a way of public prayer from a way of private prayer.”

Read more: http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=19-06-003-e#ixzz1Z5oNuxMN
We all understand, as believers, that there are different contexts for prayer. There is the prayer closet, that is, devotional prayer, or private prayer. How we pray to God in private is markedly unlike the way we pray to God in public. Authority is still a necessary component in the devotional prayer, obviously. However, our hearts soar, and often our language is freely, and most personally, expressed before the Lord in such prayer. Our understanding that we are approaching the throne of grace through the name of Jesus Christ is understood as we come to God. While I still might want to conclude my prayer within Jesus’ name I pray, there is no necessity for a verbal acknowledgment in this scenario, for it is a heart acknowledgment. Witness is tethered to authority, but the witness is of one’s own spirit in the secret prayer. And God knows my heart as I pray. There is no other name which I can approach God except in the name of Jesus. Whether or not I say that is inconsequential.\footnote{The arguments that Mark Roberts makes are perfectly valid for private prayer.}

So private prayer, while demanding the same authority of the Mediator, namely, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the necessity of speaking that name, or qualifying and acknowledging that mediatorship, is not necessary. There is also prayer in small groups. And as I begin to think about the broadening of the audience for prayer (for we must remember the prayer is made in the context of others as well as privately), and I think about prayer in small groups, I begin to understand that the name of Jesus Christ as the authority for the approach to the throne of God in prayer is now needed. If I’m in the company of other believers there is unity in our faith, and an understanding that prayer can only be made to Almighty God in the name of Jesus Christ, the requirements for effective prayer may be made without mentioning a phrase such as, “in Jesus’ name I pray.” The same could be said for the pulpit prayer or for pastoral prayer in a public worship service.\footnote{For a study of pastoral prayers, see Hughes Oliphant Old, \textit{Leading in Prayer : A Workbook for Ministers} (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995).} However, I would add a caveat: there are often “God fearers”\footnote{“The term ‘God–fearers’ in Acts has traditionally been described as a technical term to designate Gentiles who attended the synagogue and were attracted by Jewish monotheism. They were not converts, however, because they did not submit to circumcision. Thus when Paul visited Jewish synagogues he found three groups of people: Jews, proselytes, and God–fearers. Paul was especially successful among God–fearers because the latter were reluctant to undergo the painful operation of circumcision, and they enthusiastically embraced Christianity because Paul contended that the rite was unnecessary.” See G.W. Bromiley, \textit{The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia} (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007).} who are present in the morning and evening worship services of our churches who do not understand the concept of authority and the need to pray in the name of Jesus according to the New Testament. Therefore, as a pastor, I seek to pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Thomas Cranmer (2 July 1489 –
21 March 1556) modeled this so well as did the other contributors to the Book of Common Prayer by grounding all of public prayer Collects in the name of Jesus.\textsuperscript{75} Even though prayers were going to be made in a Christian worship service, the framers of the Book of Common Prayer could not imagine making a prayer without using the name of Jesus Christ in the prayer.\textsuperscript{76} So it is interesting that as an audience is broadened, in that case, the classical Christian framers of the public prayer felt the necessity to mention the name of Jesus all the more. It is only when there is an absolute certainty that there is unity of the faith that one would omit the name of Jesus in prayer. Therefore, when one enters into the broader public square of different religions, and diverse expressions and understandings of the Christian faith, one might all the more seek to pray in the name of Jesus. It can no longer be presumed in our pluralistic society that hearers understand the Mediator for prayer. Within this context, one might also consider that there is an element of prayer that goes beyond speaking from creature to Creator; there is the matter of witness in prayer to others who hear the prayer. It is here, again, that so many objections are leveled. The objection that prayer becomes an evangelistic exercise or the objection that prayer becomes preaching or the objection that prayer becomes a form of coercive opportunism in the presence of others. It may be that a Christian unwisely forms a prayer in such a broad public context, but it does not follow that we should omit the name of Jesus Christ because of these objections. Injections are easily overruled when we begin to see from the Scriptures that their prayers were made with the intent of not only communicating with Almighty God in the name of Jesus, but also advancing the mediatorship, uniqueness and deity of Jesus Christ in front of others. I would point, for example, to the very prayer and work of Jesus Christ in John 11. In the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead we see an example of witness and public prayer. There we read":

Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. John 11.39 Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.” (John 11.38–42 ESV)

We hear the Lord’s phrase, “I thank you that you have heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe


\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
that you sent me." Jesus Christ prayed in a very broad context. All there at Bethany were not believers in him as the mediator of the new covenant. He indicates, unequivocally, that he was praying the way he did in order to be a witness before them. This is a prime example—and if we had no other examples except this example it would be enough. Prayer does indeed possess an important element of witness to Jesus Christ in public prayers. Yet we could also point to the Old Testament. We can point to the case of David who was indignant that the Philistine army and Goliath should defy the people of God and defined the very name of God. David’s diverse religious context had no problem whatsoever in announcing his intentions to do battle in the name of the Lord. Likewise, Elisha on Mount Carmel, before the pluralistic clergy of his day, made public prayer in the name of his God. Therefore, I reiterate my proposition that prayer in the pluralistic public square should be made in the name of Jesus Christ. The objections cannot overwhelm the demonstration of Jesus himself praying this way.

Some Practical Models for Praying in Jesus’ Name in The Public Arena

It may be wise to seek to advance prayer in Jesus’ name through an appeal to the pluralistic ethic itself (which is hypocritical when it does not allow for Christians to exercise public faith in prayer while it may allow others; or for fear of it all, to allow for none). In other words, I don’t think it is enough, or as effective, to tell a group of unbelievers that we must pray in the name of Jesus Christ because that is our faith, with forms modeled after the New Testament, and principles given to us by Christ Jesus Himself. Therefore, we are bound to do so by the very Commandments and demonstration of the Scriptures. I believe the case has to be made using their own

77 On the matter of public prayer, whether extemporaneous or in said forms, a brief study of the Collects of the English Book of Common Prayer are helpful. There is a very exact and definite character in the structure of collects; so exact, that certain rules have been deduced from these prayers of the saints for the construction of others, as rules of grammar or deduced from classic writers. 1st, may be mentioned the characteristics which distinguish it this special form of prayer, and which had been loosely mentioned above:—1. I collect consist of the single., Seldom along Errie it 2. A single petition only is offered in it. 3. Mention is made of our Lord’s mediation; or else 4. It ends with an description of praise to God. These features of the collect at once distinguish it from the long and often involve forms of Eastern prayers, and also from the preparatory meditations which become so familiar to English people in the 17th Century; and the chastened yet comprehensive character of collects is owing, in no small degree, to the necessities imposed upon the writers of them by this structure. This general outline of the collect develops itself in detail on a plan of which the most perfect form may be represented by 2 of our finest specimens, the one as old as the Sacramentary of St. Gregory, in the 6th Century the other composed by Bishop Cosin and, more than 1000 years later.
Thus it will be observed that, after the invocation, a foundation is laid to the petition by the recital of some doctrine, or of. Upon this foundation so laid down, rises the petition or body of the prayer. Some fact of gospel history, which is to be commemorated then, in a perfect specimen... The petition has the wings of the holy aspiration given to it, whereupon it may soar to heaven. Then follows the conclusion, which in the case of prayer is not addressed to the mediator, is always through the mediator, and which sometimes involves a doxology, or ascription of praise." England and Blunt, *The Annotated Book of Common Prayer: Being an Historical, Ritual, and Theological Commentary on the Devotional System of the Church of England.*

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<tr>
<th>1. Invocation</th>
<th>Whitsunday</th>
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| 2. Reason on which the petition is to be founded. | Who as at this time didst teach the hearts of thy faithful people by sending to them the light of thy Holy Spirit; | And his blessed son was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil, and make us the sons of God, and heirs of eternal life; |

| 3. Petition. | Grant us by the same spirit to have a right judgment in all things, | Grant us, we beseech thee, that having this hope, we may purify ourselves, even as he is pure; |

| 4. Benefit hoped for. | And evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; | that when he shall appear again with power and great glory, we may be made like unto him in his eternal and glorious kingdom, |

| 5. Mention of Christ’s mediation, or ascription of praise: or, both. | Through the merits of Christ Jesus our Savior, WHO livesth and REIGNETH WITH thee, in the unity of the same spirit, one God, world without end. | Which with thee, oh father, and thee, Oh Holy Ghost, he livesth and reigneth, ever and one God, world without end. |
sense of fairness. To think more about this, I would turn to the philosophical–theological reflections of Nicholas Wolterstorff.\textsuperscript{78}

Nicolas Wolterstorff writes that our religious actions in the public arena should be conducted:

> As reasonable and rational, and knowing that they affirm a diversity of reasonable religious and philosophical doctrines, they should be ready to explain the basis of their actions to one another in terms each could reasonably expect that others might endorse as consistent with their freedom and equality.”\textsuperscript{79}

Another principle on being a faithful witness to one’s own convictions, while collating that conviction with the other “overlapping” convictions in a fair, liberal democracy, is summed up in Wolterstorff’s Chapter 11 in \textit{Practices of Belief, Volume Two: Selected Essays}, entitled, “On Being Entitled to Beliefs about God.” Wolterstorff rightly states that to have a religion is more than holding to abstract belief, but actually bringing faith propositions to the life through “obedience, worship, prayer, self-discipline, meditation and acts of justice and charity.”\textsuperscript{80} In a fair society, one may make claims, follow those claims within the social order yet concede that others may hold an opposite view. Again, this is “cooperation without compromise.” For our purposes, and with this presenter’s convictions, a believer should be able to pray in the name of Jesus in the public arena, and there must be ways to allow for the ability to defend one’s faith in that arena recognizing that others may not (will not) agree.

Stephen Carter has written much about the decline of civility in public discourse. If Carter is correct, and I believe that he is, then even in the appeal to liberal democratic ideals being applied to the matter of religion in public discourse, and the “rights” of a Christian to pray in the name of Jesus Christ, will be met with disdain. In fact, the Bible reveals that there is a diabolical agenda at work in the world “and I’m thinking of the use of the term this present evil age by the apostle Paul in Galatians” to remove the name of Jesus Christ, the authority of Jesus Christ, and the influence of Jesus Christ in this society. I would say even in this academic paper that we must be aware that there are powers at work within people unwitting as they may be to create hostility toward the name of Jesus and toward those who would use the name Jesus. Therefore after all appeals have been made for Democratic ideals to be applied, suitability to be practiced, and a “cooperation without compromise” approach to religious plurality, the end result may still be the same. In this case the Christian is faced with the same scenario Peter faced when he was told not to preach; we all remember that Peter asked whether we, believers, should obey God or man. The Christian in the broad public square must not

\textsuperscript{78} See his biography at http://www.yale.edu/philos/people/wolterstorff_nicholas.html.
\textsuperscript{79} Robert Audi, Nicholas Wolterstorff, \textit{Religion in the Public Square: the place of religious convictions in political debate} (96). See also \textsuperscript{80} Wolterstorff, \textit{Practices of Belief}, Volume Two, page 313.
allow the broad public square to remain naked, to borrow the phrase, but to clothe it with the authority of the name of Jesus in our prayers.

It is possible to do this without an intention of creating a stir, as it were. It is possible to do this with prudence. In fact, the whole matter of praying in the name of Jesus Christ in public requires a great deal of private prayer before addressing public prayer. It is interesting that the controversy of prayer itself in public is likely leading Christians to a deeper sense of prayer. In fact, the hostility of this present evil age so steeped in the ideology of pluralism, may become the very instrument that God uses to bring the church to its knees in our generation.

I mentioned civic associations as being laboratories for praying in Jesus’ name in public prayer, but nowhere is the issue more pointed than in the United States military. I’ve written earlier articles and a book on the matter of praying in the name of Jesus in public. Again, I want to say that even following this bit of wisdom one is not guaranteed insulation against the hostility of an unbelieving world. However, I have appealed to the First Amendment of the Constitution, and to the very ideals of pluralism, which would allow me, as a Christian chaplain, to pray in a way that is consistent with my faith, even as I would be expected, and would desire, to encourage someone of another religion to pray publicly according to his or her own beliefs. Therefore, whenever I pray, I pray like this:

… And thus, oh God, recognizing that there are many here of varying faiths and understandings about the relationship of man and God, I ask that your blessing would come down upon us, even as I make my prayer in the name of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ the only authority I recognize for coming to you this day. When you hear our prayer according to His name.

I’m certain that many of you are already employing this technique. Because I feel that it is important to pray in the name of Jesus Christ in public because of authority, because of witness and because of context. I’m also aware of stability and fairness also understanding of the overlapping of ideals and liberal democratic society. So I make my prayer in Jesus’ name rather than saying or assuming that “we pray in the name of Jesus.”

I have stated that it may be wiser to appeal to the very ethic that the pluralist proposes. I did not mean to be speaking in only a fleshly way but to be innocent as a dove and as wise as a serpent. But in the end, the only sure path is faithfulness to bear witness to Christ’s authority in our lives and in our prayers. This may meet with ruin in the world but will meet with favor in heaven.

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81 “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” (Matthew 10.16 ESV)
Summary

We have sought to present the problem of praying in Jesus’ name in 20th Century American experience, posited a thesis that we should seek to pray in the authority of Jesus Christ and with witness to His Deity. We have differentiated between classifications of prayer. We have sought to do this with a respectful presentation of objections to this thesis from other Christians. Our Biblical mandates remain, however, and I would hold to my thesis based on Scripture. We pray in Jesus’ name in public because of authority, witness and context. We ground our thesis in the Word of God, particularly, in the public prayer of Jesus in John 11 and in the ministry of the disciples in Acts 4. We also appeal to classical, Western democratic values of fairness and civility.

In Stephen L Carter’s *God’s Name in Vain*, the problem of faith in the public space—in this case—the broader issue of the state—is summarized with a simple and powerful last thought:

The trouble is that the state and the religions are in competition to explain to their people the meaning of the world. And the meanings provided by the one differ from the meanings provided by the other, it is natural that the one the losing would do what it can to become a winner. In today’s mass-produced world, characterized by the intrusion into every household of the materialistic interpretation of reality, religions often are just overwhelmed, which leads some of them to change and many of them to die. But more subtle tools are available in the assault on religious meaning. Indeed, all through history, the state has tried to domesticate religion, sometimes by force, simply eliminating dissenting faiths; sometimes through the device of creating an official, established church; sometimes—as in the 20th Century American experience—through the device of reducing the power of religion by combining its freedom within a state–granted, state–defined, and state–controlled structure of constitutional rights.

Religion, however, is no idle bystander.”

That final observation is powerful because it was a key component in the demise of the Soviet Union and Eastern Block nations held in captivity. It is the ever present witness of Christ, with humility and genuine concern for the world that opposes it, that ultimately has demonstrated that it cannot be quieted; and is seen in the ingenious way that Christians continue to bring Christ to the public square even in days like these.

82 Carter, *God’s Name in Vain*.

83 For example, see also “Crowd Says Prayer at Bell County Football Game,” *Associated Press article in Kentucky.com*, October 3, 2011. In this report, “A few weeks after Bell County Schools stopped its practice of having public prayer before high school
This is a statement that was read over the PA system at the football game at Roane County High School, Kingston, Tennessee by school Principal Jody McLoud, on September 1, 2000.  

"I thought it was worth sharing with the world, and hope you will forward it to all your friends. It clearly shows just how far this country has gone in the wrong direction.

"It has always been the custom at Roane County High School football games to say a prayer and play the National Anthem to honor God and Country. Due to a recent ruling by the Supreme Court, I am told that saying a prayer is a violation of Federal Case Law.

As I understand the law at this time, I can use this public facility to approve of sexual perversion and call it an alternate lifestyle, and if someone is offended, that's OK.

I can use it to condone sexual promiscuity by dispensing condoms and calling it safe sex. If someone is offended, that's OK.

I can even use this public facility to present the merits of killing an unborn baby as a viable means of birth control.

If someone is offended, no problem.

I can designate a school day as earth day and involve students in activities to religiously worship and praise the goddess, mother earth, and call it ecology.

I can use literature, videos and presentations in the classroom that depict people with strong, traditional, Christian convictions as simple minded and ignorant and call it enlightenment.

However, if anyone uses this facility to honor God and ask Him to bless this event with safety and good sportsmanship, Federal Case Law is violated.

This appears to be at best, inconsistent and at worst, diabolical. Apparently, we are to be tolerant of everything and anyone except God and His Commandments.

football games, the crowd who came recited the Lord’s Prayer.” Read more: http://www.kentucky.com/2011/10/03/1906304/crowd-says-prayer-at-bell-county.html#ixzz1ZkJJCaS

Nevertheless, as a school principal, I frequently ask staff and students to abide by rules which they do not necessarily agree. For me to do otherwise would be at best inconsistent and at worst hypocritical. I suffer from that affliction enough unintentionally. I certainly do not need to add an intentional transgression.

For this reason, I shall, "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's," and refrain from praying at this time.

However, if you feel inspired to honor, praise and thank God, and ask Him in the name of Jesus to bless this event, please feel free to do so. As far as I know, that's not against the law—yet."

The principal's complaint and ultimate concern to bring faith into the public square, even if he had to do it through the back door, was simply affirming the critical importance of not just having ideas about faith but expressing those ideas. He would no doubt agree with Professor Stephen Carter's assessment:

Only religion possesses the majesty, the power, and the sacred language to teach all of us, the religious and the secular, the genuine appreciation for each other on which a successful civility must rest. Without religion, civility, like any other moral principle, has no firm rock on which to stand. Civility that rests on the shifting sands of secular morality might topple with the next stiff political wind.

I maintain, from the Bible, from Western Civilization, the American founding and even contemporary legislation, as well as from the practice of civility and tolerance inherited from both the Bible and Western democracy, that public prayer in the name of Jesus is a cornerstone for all true tolerance and civility and from that free exercise of faith in prayer flows the right for others to pray, worship, and share their faith as well. Any claim of tolerance and true plurality that denies this practice is itself, intolerant, Christophobic.

85 This story is validated at http://www.truthorfiction.com/rumors/j/jodymcccloud.htm.
87 For example, see the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993. "The Religious Freedom Restoration Acts ("RFCA") of 1994 was a dramatic piece of legislation passed by Congress and signed by President Bill Clinton that sought protect religious express in American life. Professor William P. Marshall of the University of North Carolina wrote that "the only other legislation that even compare are with the protections provided to religion by RFRA are the provision soy the Civil Rights Act of 1964..." See William P. Marshall, "The Culture of Belief and the Politics of Religion," Law and Contemporary Problems 63(2000).
unfair, hypocritical, and self-defeating. Yet we remain hopeful as we seek to stand next to the jagged contour of public discourse in this age, because the truth of Christ is greater than deceits of the flesh, the devil, and the world; and untarnished freedom is better than prejudicial boundaries imposed on public prayer. We are encouraged by the words of Václav Havel:

My experience and observations confirm that politics and the practice of morality is possible.88

Yet we are even more emboldened by the words of our Savior:

I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name (Revelation 3.8 ESV).

References


88 Havel and Wilson.


Miller, S., and Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Board of Publication. *Thoughts on Public Prayer*: Presbyterian board of publication, 1849.


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