

# OHIO RELIGIOUS LIBERTY BILL ADVANCES

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a religious liberty bill in Ohio that is promising:

By a margin of 61-31, the Ohio House voted for a bill this week that would secure religious liberty for public school students; it now goes to the Senate for approval

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Timothy Ginter, allows the board of education in each school district to provide for “a moment of silence each school day for prayer, reflection, or meditation upon a moral, philosophical, or patriotic theme.” It also prohibits teachers from mandating that students participate.

Also permitted are classroom activities of a “moral, philosophical, or patriotic theme.” However, no student must be required to participate in such activities if he has a religious objection.

Finally, students cannot be prohibited from “the free, individual, and voluntary exercise or expression of the pupil’s religious beliefs in any primary or secondary school.”

The ACLU of Ohio is worried that if the bill becomes law, teachers may not penalize students who hold to a creationist perspective on the origins of the universe. One lawmaker, Rep. Phillip Robinson, said, “We already have religious freedom protected at the federal and state level.”

The ACLU fear is unfounded. This may come as a shocker to the civil libertarians, but Catholic school students in their science classes are expected to master the science curriculum approved by their state. Catholic school students do not mistake Genesis for Science 101, or vice versa. If this is not

a problem for the Catholic schools, it will not be a problem for the public schools.

Rep. Robinson no doubt believes we should have laws that bar racial discrimination at the local level, and not just at the federal and state level. Why, then, does he think we may not need laws barring religious discrimination at the local level?

This bill would not be necessary were it not for the machinations of militant secularists seeking to eliminate the most elementary examples of religious expression in the schools. The ACLU is a case in point. To cite one of many examples, its efforts to ban school performances of "Jesus Christ Superstar" is exactly why we need more protections for religious liberty.

We hope the Ohio Senate affirms the First Amendment rights of students and passes this bill.