

# THE SOUL OF THE SCHOOLS

The on-going battle over the soul of the schools got off to a quick start this fall. In Virginia, the issue is whether a minute of silence is constitutional; in schools down south, the question is whether students have the right to say a prayer in the huddle before a football game; in New Jersey, there is a protracted dispute over whether a first-grader can read a passage from the Bible to his classmates; and in Chicago, a fight has ensued over religious book covers being distributed to students.

Since July 1, the ACLU has been lying in lurch in Virginia waiting to sue a school over the “minute of silence” law that was passed on that day. No sooner were the kids back in school when the ACLU went into federal court arguing that the schools were endorsing prayer by listing it as an option for students. Whatever the initial outcome, both sides have said they would appeal if they lost.

Ever since the Supreme Court announced last spring that schools may not facilitate formal prayer sessions before football games—even if led by students—a number of southern communities have indicated displeasure with the high court ruling. So in places like Hattiesburg, Mississippi and Batesburgh-Leesville, South Carolina, football players decided to initiate prayers themselves. The ACLU has already entered the fray and the courts will be next.

In 1996, Zachary Hood was asked to read a story to his first-grade classmates. He decided to read from *The Beginner's Bible* and in doing so set off a firestorm. Zachary's parents sued claiming free speech rights but lost in court. They appealed. Just before the start of the new school year, they lost again, this time in federal appeals court. Now the case is headed for the Supreme Court.

Over the summer, a religious group called Total Living Network decided to distribute more than 100,000 religious book covers to students in Chicago when they returned to class. Immediately, People for the American Way warned school officials not to endorse this practice. What upset the Norman Lear founded activist organization was the inscription on the book covers: it listed the Ten Commandments.

None of this has anything to do with what the framers meant when they adopted the First Amendment. To understand what's going on, keep in mind that there is a significant portion of elite opinion thinks it necessary to obliterate from the schools every last vestige of our religious heritage. That's okay, we're prepared to fight them tooth and nail.