

Engel vs Vitale

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Facts About the Case

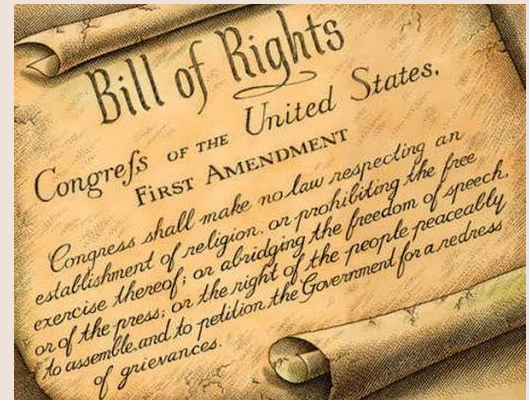
A New York state law required that public schools opened with the pledge of allegiance, and a nondenominational prayer. The students recognized the dependence upon God. But the students were allowed to not participate if they found it offensive.

A parent then sued on the behalf of his child and claimed that the law violated their first amendment right and the due process clause of the fourteenth amendment

The Issue

The issue regarding this case was the fact that, weather school sponsored non-denominational prayer in public schools violates the Establishment clause of the First amendment.

To give brief background *the Establishment clause of the First amendment* prohibits the government from making any law “respecting an establishment of religion.” This clause not only forbids the government from establishing an official religion, but also prohibits government actions that unduly favor one religion over another.



Ruling

In *Engel v Vitale*, the Court ruled that for public schools to hold official recitation of prayers violated the Establishment Clause.

The ruling did not prohibit schools from writing or choosing a specific prayer and requiring all students to say it.



Judges

Concurrence

- Justice Douglas
- Justice Black
- Justice Warren
- Justice Clark
- Justice Harlan
- Justice Brennan

Dissent

- Justice Stewart

Statements

Justice Douglas argued that “any type of public promotion of religion, including giving financial aid to religious schools, violates the Establishment Clause”.

Justice Black stated that the school prayer recitation violates the Establishment Clause.

Justice Stewart argued that “that the Establishment Clause was only meant to prohibit the establishment of a state-sponsored church, such as the Church of England, and not prohibit all types of government involvement with religion.”

Thus, he believed that because the prayers were nondenominational in nature, removed constitutional challenges.

Reasoning behind the 6-1 Decision

Establishment Clause of the first Amendment was violated because the school's endorsement of a specific religion was equivalent to the government's endorsement.

Impact on Society

In the decision of Engel v. Vitale, many argue that the official recitation of prayers in public schools violated the First Amendment's Establishment Clause. To some, the ruling is viewed as a victory for religious freedom, while others criticize that it had struck a blow to the nation's religious traditions.

Works Cited

"Engel v. Vitale." Oyez, www.oyez.org/cases/1961/468. Accessed 29 Oct. 2020.

"Engel v. Vitale (1962)." Bill of Rights Institute, 13 July 2015, billofrightsinstitute.org/educate/educator-resources/lessons-plans/landmark-supreme-court-cases-lessons/engel-v-vitale-1962/.

"Facts and Case Summary - Engel v. Vitale." United States Courts, www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/facts-and-case-summary-engel-v-vitale.