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April 25, 2010: National Day of Prayer Constitutional

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Title: National Day of Prayer Constitutional

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4/25/2010—Last week, Federal District Judge Barbara B. Crabb ruled that the federal statute establishing the National Day of Prayer is unconstitutional because it violates the Establishment Clause. The Judge held that the statute's "sole purpose is to encourage all citizens to engage in prayer, an inherently religious exercise that serves no secular function." Most legal observers expect the decision to be reversed on appeal and I doubt that the case will ultimately go to the United States Supreme Court. But aside from political prognostication, what exactly was wrong with the decision? I think the error is in calling prayer inherently religious and without a secular function. Clearly, prayer can be addressed to a supernatural being, a God. But, just as clearly, prayer can reflect intense self-examination and an attempt to place oneself in a penitential mood. Prayer can be a recognition that we do not control everything. As for a secular function, that depends on what the judge thinks secular functions are. A nation that repents of its ways would be a great country.