JUNE 15, 2013 THESKEPTICARENA.COM

WITH HIS SPEECH, VALEDICTORIAN BRINGS GOD TO GRADUATION

By Jessica Ravitz, CNN

*Leading up to Saturday’s ceremony, Roy Costner IV prayed on what he was going to do.*

Jessica, that's nice. Perhaps talking to himself helped to calm him down.

*Liberty High School’s 2013 valedictorian would soon find himself in front of a microphone. He’d have a pulpit from which he could address his small community tucked away in South Carolina’s mountainous corner. Only his father and pastor knew what was weighing on his heart and mind. Could he, should he, insert a prayer in his pre-approved graduation speech? He’d been told by the school principal that talk of religion wasn’t allowed, and so far he’d followed the rules. But as the day approached, the 18-year-old couldn’t deny what he felt he needed to do.*

*Roy said “I wanted to stand up for God. This is what God wanted me to do.”*

Jessica, isn't religion just the greatest? It wasn't Roy's fault that he wanted to break the law and go back on his word to give a speech that he had already agreed to. It was the fault of his imaginary friend. God wanted him to do it so how could he refuse?

What other philosophical system allows you to make your own rules and even break the law ... and then escape any blame?

No wonder people like it so much.

*So Costner, in cap and gown, stood behind the podium and ripped up his original speech.*

Jessica, I guess we now know how much Roy Costner's word is worth.

*Before he gave shout-outs to coaches, cheerleaders and friends, there was something else he wanted to say. Roy told his fellow graduates, a class of about 150, “One thing I am certain of is we’re all a sum of our experiences, both good and bad. All in all, those experiences, the people who mentored us, that we look up to, they have helped carve and mold us into the young adults that we are today. I’m so thankful that both of my parents led me to the Lord at a young age. And I think most of you will understand when I say, ‘Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name …”*

*The crowd before him began to cheer as he recited the Lord’s Prayer, drowning out a few verses. The school principal, sitting behind him, appeared uncomfortable and peered down at papers on her lap. The school district’s superintendent, a few seats over, couldn’t help but smile.*

*Roy said, “I was tearing up. I was overwhelmed by the response. … The clapping was so loud I couldn’t hear myself talking into the microphone.”*

*His father told CNN's Piers Morgan he was overwhelmed with pride for his son. The younger Costner approached his dad a few days before the speech and showed him what he wanted to do.*

Jessica, Roy admitted that his parents led him to the Lord, so it should come as no surprise that they would support their son when he violated the law as Christians often do. Our laws mean nothing to Ghost Worshippers because they believe they owe their allegiance to a higher power.

*Roy's father said, "Look, if you're doing this for political reasons, don't. But if you're doing it because you feel led to do it and you feel this is a part of your speech, then I want you to do it and I'll stand by you."*

Jessica, see what I said? His father just admitted that he told his son that it was acceptable to break the law provided that his son felt that an invisible ghost was telling him what to do. Christian parenting ... always an adventure.

*Some who were there heaped on praise. One called it “pretty impressive.” Another student said it “took a lot of courage” and that “people were proud that he stood up for what he believed in.”*

Jessica, courage? Courage? Are they serious?

Your story even admitted that the cheers were so loud they even drowned out his verses. Roy even admitted that the cheering was so loud he couldn't hear himself talking into the microphone.

How do they figure it takes courage to do that?

It takes zero courage to tell an audience what they want to hear.

It would have taken courage to have gotten up in front of a bunch of Christians and to have recited a Muslim prayer. It would have taken courage for someone to have stood in front of that crowd and proudly stated that they were an Atheist.

However, in the two examples I just gave, it would have been prudent to have an escape route planned out ... in advance.

*What he believes is that Liberty, a town with three stoplights and a population of 3,000, “fully supports prayer.”*

Jessica, that's because religion flourishes in small towns where everyone knows who you are and where you live. The anonymity provided by large cities allows people the freedom to be who they want to be, rather than being forced to submit to the will of their peers.

*He also believes that organizations such as the Freedom From Religion Foundation, a Madison, Wisconsin group dedicated to maintaining separation of church and state, should stop meddling in the affairs of the Pickens County School District.*

Jessica, that was so Christian of Roy. His parents have brainwashed him well. Like all religions, they must prevent outsiders from 'meddling' with their control of the people. I'm sure that slave owners felt the same way.

*The foundation, over this past school year, has leaned on the district to keep Jesus and student-led prayers out of school board meetings.*

Jessica, if someone could figure out a way to get Christians to obey our laws, the organization would not have had to "lean on them." By the way Jessica, your choice of words is exposing your bias. Nice to see you upholding the current style of journalism in which objective reporting is considered passé.

*Other concerns went beyond board meetings. This spring, the foundation’s staff attorney sent a lawyer representing the district a letter about complaints of alleged discriminatory hiring and religious promotion in another county high school and praise music being played in an elementary school classroom.*

Jessica, see what I mean? Christians laugh at American laws. They attack our Constitution everywhere they can. They are the least patriotic of all Americans.

*The foundation said it learned of such practices by way of community members who are, in fact, not fully supporting prayer.*

Jessica, if you were looking for displays of courage, I think you just found some. If the names of those people who stood up for our Constitution were made public, we can be pretty sure that Christians would find a way ... to make them regret it.

*Costner said he set out to make a statement, one he hopes will inspire others to stand up, too, for what he sees as the good of this country.*

Jessica, criminal activity is never in the bests interests of this country. He isn't standing up for his religious beliefs; he could have done that in many legal ways. He was trying to impose his religious beliefs on a captive audience, not all of whom are under Christian control ... yet.

*“Taking prayer out of schools is the worst thing we could do,” he said.*

Jessica, you say this guy is the valedictorian? Their brightest student?

I don't find it very comforting that their best student finds value in talking to an invisible ghost; and even less comforting, that he feels it is acceptable to pressure other kids into talking to Him.

*Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation said, If Costner went to a Christian school, there would be no discussion. But in public schools, even in a place where there may be a religious majority, prayers such as his are clearly unconstitutional. What’s more, what he did shows contempt for school district policy and a lack of sensitivity for his audience. It’s aggressive. It’s supremely rude. This student is old enough to know that not everyone in the audience is Christian.*

Jessica, there's your story. Gaylor's remarks were dead-on.

*But Costner, who was bouncing between interviews and heading to New York for TV appearances, said he counts atheists among his friends.*

Oh please Jessica, what is he going to say next, some of my best friends are black? How patronizing.

*He said that even though he doesn’t agree with their beliefs, he respects them – and that they do the same for him.*

Jessica, unfortunately his actions contradicted that claim. If he respected them, he would not have violated the law and put them in the position that he did. How do you think it made them feel when he started reciting a Christian prayer and everyone went wild?

Included? Proud?

No. It made them feel excluded; and knowing what Christians believe Atheists deserve; knowing that Christians believe they deserve eternal torture; and hearing cheering so loud the speaker couldn't even hear his own voice, pride is the last thing they would have felt.

By doing what he did, Roy Costner used religion to divide his fellow students into those who are accepted and those who are reviled. It's what religion has specialized in for thousands of years.

*The elder Costner said his son had been inundated with messages of support, even from atheists.*

Jessica, if Atheists were supportive of Roy's divisive words, that only shows how frightened they are. Like I said, in a small town everyone knows who you are and where you live.

*He said he thinks the video of the speech resonated with people across the country because many people "really want something to hold onto for hope."*

Jessica, how does openly violating the law, and the rights of a minority of students give hope? Does he mean, hope that Christianity may rebound from its worldwide decline?

*The son said he’s experienced no blowback from the district for what he did. And a district spokesman suggested Costner won’t.*

Jessica, that's because Christians know they can push; they know they can violate laws openly, because they have the support of the masses. It's the same reason churches are now openly violating IRS rules against politicizing their pulpits. They have no fear because they still hold the people within their power.

*“He’s a graduate now, so there’s nothing we can do about it even if we wanted to,” John Eby told WYFF. “But the bottom line is we’re not going to punish students for expressing their religious faiths.”*

Jessica, how much you wanna bet Eby's tune would change if a Muslim tried that in South Carolina? Eby would be among the first to authorize bringing back the stake. You remember the stake, don't you Jessica? That practice only a few hundred years ago when Christians brutally burned to death poor innocent women; and were not held criminally liable because the Bible gave them permission; provided that one ignores "Thou shalt not kill" which apparently, they had no trouble ignoring.

*The district, Eby explained, is in a “nearly impossible position. federal law, under the Establishment Clause, is clear that public schools cannot approve in advance a student’s prayer or carve out time specifically for religious expression. But, under the Free Exercise Clause, we can’t punish students who do pray.”*

Jessica, did you catch Eby's deception? There is no problem with students praying. But Roy Costner didn't just pray, he imposed his prayer on all his fellow students, a clear violation of law; and his cohorts loudly cheered the marginalization of their fellow students.

Those kids make me want to puke.

*Gaylor doesn’t expect there to be any punishment. But without issuing some sort of statement expressing disappointment and reiterating school policy, she said, the district is making a mistake.*

*Gaylor said “It’s one thing if a school doesn’t have a policy but when they do, they really need to enforce their policy because otherwise it’s just a wink and a nod.”*

*Eby has an answer to this “I do want to reiterate that we don’t approve rule breaking, but we are very serious about protecting our students’ rights to express themselves religiously – or refuse to.”*

Jessica, like I said, all we need to do to show this guy's dishonesty is to have someone give a Muslim prayer. If that happened, the only question would be, how long before Christians would be lighting torches before the graduation ceremony ended.

http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/06/06/hear-what-valedictorian-said-for-cheers/

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

First Documented Case of a Child Cured of HIV

The case involved a two-year-old child in Mississippi diagnosed with HIV at birth and immediately put on antiretroviral therapy. At 18 months, the child ceased taking antiretrovirals and was lost to follow-up. When brought back into care at 23 months, despite being off treatment for five months, the child was found to have an undetectable viral load. A battery of subsequent highly sensitive tests confirmed the absence of HIV.

According to researchers, comprehensive tests have confirmed beyond doubt that both mother and child were HIV positive when the child was born, and today no signs of HIV infection in the child can be detected by the most sensitive means available.

The only other documented case of an HIV cure to date remains that of Timothy Brown, the so-called "Berlin patient." In 2006, while on treatment for HIV, Mr. Brown was diagnosed with leukemia. His physician was able to treat his leukemia with a stem-cell transplant from a person who was born with a genetic mutation causing immunity to HIV infection. Following the transplant, Mr. Brown was able to stop HIV treatment without experiencing a return of his HIV disease.

This new case points to the tantalizing possibility that different populations of HIV-positive people might be cured in different ways. While Mr. Brown's case was the outcome of a complex, high-risk, and expensive series of procedures, this new case appears to have been the direct result of a comparatively inexpensive course of antiretroviral therapy.

Given that this cure appears to have been achieved by antiretroviral therapy alone, it is also imperative that scientists learn more about a newborn's immune system, how it differs from an adult's, and what factors made it possible for the child to be cured.

The Mississippi case also underscores the importance of identifying HIV-positive pregnant women, expanding access to treatment regimens that can prevent mother-to-child transmission, and of immediately putting infants on antiretroviral therapy in the event that they are born HIV positive.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

FAMOUS QUOTES

Jaakko Wallenius 1958-2013 (4 days ago) 55 years

He taught himself to read in Finnish at the age of 6, and later learned German, Swedish, and English. Jaakko Wallenius worked mainly in journalism and blogging, as well as computer repair. He had eight blogs in two languages and nearly 40 Facebook fan pages for secular philosophers, writers, and scientists.

He was diagnosed with inoperable cancer in November of 2011. In his last entry to his blog "Being Human" on April 14, 2013, 2 months before his death, he wrote:

"I am still here thanks to chemotherapy that has given me an additional year and a half, but the therapies were terminated a week ago because their ability to fight my cancer has waned off. I am on my own now, but nobody knows how soon the end will come. However, it is quite certain that I will not see my 56th birthday in January."

Jaakko Wallenius considered himself an Epicurean Stoic Humanist as well as an atheist.

"Success is about how others evaluate you,

but your true value depends on how you really develop yourself.

Sometimes enhancing this value of oneself

does produce success that is appreciated by others,

sometimes not."