

# Letter to God

A few years ago, I received a group email from a very religious relative who began by asking God about the children who died in a series of school tragedies, one of which is mentioned below. I inserted my responses within his message and sent this reply to him and to everyone who received his email.

**Dear God: Why didn't you save the school children shot at Littleton, Colorado?**

**Sincerely, a Concerned Student**

Good question, but why not ask about children killed in accidents on their way to church or church camp, or why a tornado destroys a church and those who seek shelter within it while tearing up a town? How about those who died in Katrina? How about GWB?

**Reply: Dear Concerned Student: Sorry, I am not allowed in schools.**

**Sincerely, God**

God, according to believers, is everywhere, and no restriction against his, her or its presence will have any effect, so to say that God is not allowed in schools is an evasion of the religionists' real gripe.

In public schools, school-sponsored or school-led Christian, Muslim, or Jewish prayers — or the prayers of other sects — are not permitted because they promote one religion over all other views and are, as a consequence, divisive. If children want to pray, no one forbids it — but they must keep it private by keeping it inside their heads. Prayer is allowed, but the proselytizing effects created by school-approved, audible prayers are not — and there is a difference. That difference is usually ignored by those who are always pushing prayer.

The email continued, "I think this started when Madeline Murray O'Hare (sp) complained about prayer in schools. Then, someone said, you better not read the Bible in school — the Bible that says "Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Love your neighbor as yourself."

The Bible, one of many "holy" books, says a lot of things, many of them quite horrible and hard to defend as practices of a supposedly loving god.

To blame our troubles on Madalyn Murray O'Hair is simplistic and heavily biased. The problem is rooted in the old practice of Bible reading in public schools — which always used the King James Bible, which upset Catholics because they used a different version. In response, Catholics started parochial schools to prevent their children from being exposed to Protestantism. Those schools and the divisions they represent are still with us. Now we also have "faith-based" schools — all of which damage the best melting pot we ever had — the public school.

You want the Bible in school? Then offer a comparative religion and ethics course taught by an unbiased teacher. Where this has been tried, it has usually been opposed by parents who do not want their children exposed to other beliefs — or worse yet, taught how to employ critical thinking. Instead,

most parents want their children to be clones — to hang onto beliefs that were drilled into their once open minds.

I did not always think like this, having once been an elder in a large Presbyterian church, but exposure to other beliefs began to make a difference, and I now look at religion as I do at politics or buying a car. I'm now from Missouri — the “show me” state.

Perhaps the only thing of value in the email was a quote near the end — “WE REAP WHAT WE SOW,” which is often true. Unfortunately, many ill-informed people who won't change their minds despite the facts keep sowing these biased half-truths to advance their one and only true theology while ignoring the dozens of competing theologies that also claim to possess the truth.

In response to the email's biased question “Why can't our children read a Bible in school, but can in prison?” I'd again note that they can read it in an appropriate, balanced course on religion and philosophy guided by an unbiased teacher.

In addition, if all students were required to take a course in critical thinking and ethics, fewer would end up in jail — like convict Chuck Colson who, while in jail, memorized one book and — voila, took up a new and profitable occupation upon his release.

Most freethinkers know the Bible better than those who push it but refuse to read anything that disputes its validity. The contents of books by Sam Harris or Richard Dawkins, or my *Time Traveling With Science and the Saints* will never enter their minds.

On the other hand, it's more fun (and much easier) to just forward every badly-researched, biased and distorted email, as long as it advances one's programmed-from-childhood bias. No work or study is involved. Just be a faithful cog in the great proselytizing machine fueled by those who preach about love but are the first to pound the drums of war.

Comedian George Carlin, whom I manage to enjoy despite his often “salty” language, is an expert at poking holes in our pretensions and sacred beliefs.

Carlin says that he has “begun worshipping the sun for a number of reasons. First of all, unlike some other gods I could mention, I can see the sun. It's there for me every day. And the things it brings me are quite apparent: heat, light, food, a lovely day. There's no mystery, no one asks for money and I don't have to dress up. Furthermore, I noticed that of all the prayers I used to offer to God — or even Joe Pesci — are being answered at about the same 50% rate. Half the time I get what I want. Half the time I don't. Same as God — 50/50. Same as the four leaf clover, the horse shoe, the rabbit's foot, and the wishing well.”

If there is a god that takes an interest in human affairs, he must really like Mr. Carlin, because Carlin has done very well, which must prove what many conservative pastors (who have apparently forgotten Jesus' views on the rich and the accumulation of wealth) have been loudly preaching: God wants you to be rich! Given the choice between some God preferring these guys to Carlin, I'd bet on Carlin — and give odds of fifty to one!