

## Why God?

*"I believe in God, but not as one thing, not as an old man in the sky. I believe that what people call God is something in all of us. I believe that what Jesus and Mohammed and Buddha and all the rest said was right. It's just that the translations have gone wrong."*

*John Lennon*

Why write about God? With the millions of God books written by theologians, scholars and various other religiously qualified authors, not to mention the Bible itself, am I that delusional to think God needs more ink about Himself/Herself from *me*?

The intention of *God Wants Her Religion Back*, is to present, in my nonacademic way, what we have done to God by attempting to make God a human mutation in order that we may better project what God is thinking, feeling or doing – or *SHOULD be thinking, feeling or doing* onto God. Worse than this is what our religions have done to manufacture a God in conformity to their dogma, their rules and their regulations. Oftentimes a religion's doctrine has gone awry of God's message to His people, us.

Friends acquainted with my previous writing activities, have advised me to steer clear of the "God thing". One even suggested I pursue a more neutral subject such as sex: He suggested: "Just Google God, then Google sex. God has just over 1.6 billion listings but sex has over 2.6 billion listings. Case closed."

Probably great advice from a sales and marketing perspective; everyone knows sex sells. God? Not so much. However I have had an unquenchable thirst to become self-aware of the concept of God for years: actually my entire life.

I was born into a Christian family; which explains my strong Christian views; heavily seasoned with Catholicism. Most of my elementary schooling was in parochial schools operated by the sweetest and most strict (I still have the ruler-to-the-knuckle scars to prove it) nuns, the Religious Sisters of Mercy. All answers to any God related questions came from the Baltimore Catechism which was a vital part of religious training from 1885 until the 1960's. One example of a God question that we had to memorize early on was: Why did God make me? The catechism's answer was brief: He made me because He loves me."

Any wonder why my youthful view of God was this grandfatherly type of character in his workshop creating kids like me. How did I know he was grandfatherly? Easy, Sister Mary Augusta showed our 5<sup>th</sup> grade class a picture of an old man, God the Father. Perhaps my mental picture of God in the workshop was influenced having seen Geppetto creating the animated little wooden boy Pinocchio.

If this view of God, the Pinocchio creator, wasn't bad enough, sister hits us with God is everywhere and observes everything. Not really a headline, all parents use this to control their children when they are not physically present: "Where did you go after school? Don't lie to me, remember **God saw you.**" (If I wasn't so fearful of being on the receiving end of a slap I would have replied, "Why ask me where I was, go ask Him.") After a while our parents' *God saw you* notion, lost its punch, at least with me.

Sister Angela Marie my eighth grade teacher who was also the school's principal taught us about God being Omnipresent (the religious KO re-energizing the now insipid warning from my parents: *God saw you...* Omnipresent, geez, we're talking serious stuff here). In spite of it being fifty years ago, I remember the only thought that pulsed in my mind was when SAM (Sister Angela Marie) left the classroom to tend to her principal duties and I pulled Patricia Toohey's hair by using my lift top desk <<GULP>> He saw me?

Now what?

Am I going to be sent to hell? Grandfatherly God - *Who loves you? God loves me. Who made you? God made me.* - would be punishing me forever for one hair pull prank?

Throughout the years, my God view has changed radically. Two things have not changed: 1.) My belief that God exists and 2.) Who loves me? God loves me. And every other person on the planet now, in the past or in the future.

The evolutionary change in my thinking has occurred in the area of organized religion. Far be it for me to question anyone's religious belief, many times I question my own. What disturbs me are the distortions in attempting to make God into the likeness of a religion instead of the reverse.

Any religion purporting to be the one, true, holy, apostolic God-R-Us religion using their live link to the Almighty as a coercive measure to manipulate and control their followers by cutting and pasting select Bible verses to form their creed is nothing more than a churchyard bully.

As a Catholic, I was part of the real deal. After all, not to brag or anything but my Catholic Church dates back to Jesus (and judging by some of the nuns I had, they also went back that far). Not only that, we Catholics have all the statues to vouch for our antiquity. If you still don't believe me, what about the Bible and the gospels? Stick to the New Testament though; Catholics weren't around for the Old Testament.

Being a Catholic kid, I thought everyone was either Catholic or a Catholic wannabe. My prejudiced religious point of view worked out well for me during my early years before moving to Windsor, Connecticut. Our next door neighbors were Protestants. Prior to Windsor, I was always parochial schooled without a clue that a non-Catholic religion existed. A Protestant, what's up with that? What does Protestant mean anyway?

It didn't take long before I found out. My new Protestant friend's parents forbade their son from playing with the Catholic boy next door. To make matters worse, that Catholic boy had divorced parents and everyone knows what a threat that was to traditional families. Not to mention destroying the morality of the entire virginal neighborhood. (That was vintage 1962 thinking. Somewhat similar to the argument of today along the lines of marriage equality being a threat to traditional marriage. Yeah, as though over fifty-percent of traditional marriages are not already being threatened by adultery and astronomical divorce rates.)

I'm sure our neighbors had a divine view into God's mind that their religion was the one, true, holy and apostolic one. Oh, wait, that's weird as it is exactly what we were taught about Catholicism. Saddle up the horses, there's going to be a Holy War on Preston Street.

Terry and I became friends and forged an alliance between the Catholics and Protestants against the Jewish kid down the street. Then we got to know Ira. Put down your lances and shields, guys, the Holy War is over, let's play hide and seek.

I was twelve at the time. An early age to realize religious differences didn't matter to us. Later in life I came to the realization that it probably didn't matter to God either.

My spiritual tolerance stretched into the secular world as well.

Since our parish's parochial school, St. Gabrielle's in Windsor, would not accept a transfer student during the school year, we searched for another nearby parochial school. The closest one accepting mid-year transfer students was St. Michael's in Hartford. Not knowing the area very well, most of the pre-enrollment was completed over the phone and arrangements were made for me to start classes the following Monday.

Monday arrived along with a severe case of new schoolitis. Driving to St. Michael's, my mother's expression changed from "isn't it great starting a new adventure" as we drove out of our driveway to one of sheer terror once we pulled up in front of St. Michael's: We were smack dab in the middle of a colored (the term black was not used in those days) neighborhood. Through gritted teeth, she said: "Let's at least see the school. If you don't like it, we can leave."

In spite of being the third of only three white boys in our class of 24, I stayed. When St. Gabrielle, our parish school, contacted us over the summer about transferring there in September, I insisted on remaining at St. Michael's. Beyond the obvious learning experience of attending school, deciding to remain at St. Michael's taught me a valuable life lesson at an early age: everyone is the same. (Sadly, we were the last eighth grade graduation St. Michael's would ever have as the school closed due to both lack of students and lack of funds.)

Let me recap for those just tuning in:

1. There isn't one, true, holy and apostolic religion. God loves them all.
2. People come in all shapes, sizes, lifestyles and colors. God loves us all.

And that is why I chose to write about God.

Over the years, some Christian religions have gone off the rails including my own Catholic religion. Those literalists who take the Old Testament, such as Leviticus, literally will pick and choose verses to suit their particular point of view. Passages they don't like, they leave back thousands of years "BC"; passages they like will become applicable for them today as though they were written yesterday. Kind of like a biblical buffet: take what you like, leave behind what you don't.

Unfortunately there are those who will use their religion to espouse bigoted prejudices; perhaps most notably the racists who still host a white only Christian gathering featuring a cross illumination (burning) as the highlight of their service. Then there are those who see others trying to do good for the poorest among us, such as the *Nuns on the Bus* and will demonstrate against these dedicated women waving welcoming placards that read *Bums on the Bus*.

For what we religious people have done to distort God's religion, I'm amazed that God has not demanded it back. *Yet*.

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God, the Spiritual Essence, is genderless. The concept of male or female gender is a limiting human attribute which cannot apply to a limitless God. Whenever I use the term "He" in *God Wants Her Religion Back*, please read it as "S/He" or simply God.