

# Saints and sinners: There's no baseball in Heaven

After the 1999 American League Championship baseball playoffs, I wrote in this column, "We don't know what a day in heaven will be like, but we can be sure of one thing. There won't be any sports played up there."

"If somebody so much as suggests choosing up sides for a little game of baseball, God will remember the near-riot that erupted at Fenway Park during the fourth game of the series and he'll break their bats in two."

Even the sports writers took off on their beloved city the next day. A Boston Globe writer emptied his bottle of venom on his fellow Bostonians in these words: "Every clod who threw a bottle in last night's fee-for-all, here's the final line on your performance: 'You're a loser.'"

This wasn't the only time that Boston, "the city of culture," acted like a bunch of rowdies. I was living in Boston when the Red Sox won the American League pennant in 1967. Jim Lonberg, who pitched the pennant-clincher, almost got his arm pulled off by the fans as he left the field. Autos were vandalized in Kenmore Square.

Some fans didn't want the Red Sox to win the World Series against the St. Louis Cardinals. They were afraid the celebration would reach the riot stage. Fortunately, the Red Sox lost the seventh and final game.

But, that was then and this is now. God is a forgiving God. "He pardoneth and absolveth all those who truly repent."

But, sad to say, things have only gone from



**george plagenz**

● saints & sinners

bad to worse. God has not changed his mind. The ban on sports in the heavenly places is still in effect.

That goes for football, too. If on some nice autumn day when he is walking through the clouds, the Referee in the Sky hears someone yell, "Hike!" and he senses there is a football game in progress, he will let the air out of the pigskin and

send the players in for choir practice.

He will recall the bottle barrage that went on at a pro football game in Cleveland last December. Instead of being repentant the next day, the fans were more defiant. One letter-writer said, "I really wanted to see a bottle hit referee Terry McCauley."

In the words of TV crime reporter and former prosecutor Catherine Crier, "Sports have gotten more violent in the last 10 or 15 years." She was speaking during the highly-publicized trial of a father accused of killing another father when the two got into an argument at their sons' hockey practice in Reading, Mass.

Much of today's sports rage involves parents and other adults. In a recent basketball game in Texas, a player chasing a ball ran into the grand-

stand and accidentally fell on a woman spectator. Her husband grabbed the player and choked him.

When I was a sports writer I once called for an end to night football games in the high schools after 11 beatings and a stabbing occurred following four high school football games in Cleveland.

But, the games - and the violence - go on.

We used to think sports built character. But, if we want our young people to develop character, having a paper route will do more for them than joining a Little League team.

A few paperboys may foment customer rage by throwing the paper in a puddle every chance they get, but the urge to kill is usually sublimated into something less severe.

# World history course in California draws criticism for section on Islam

By Michelle Locke

*Associated Press Writer*  
BERKELEY, Calif. — Complaints that California schools present Islam in glowing terms but shortchange Christianity are highlighting a classroom dilemma: How do you teach religion?

Conservatives have been outraged to learn that seventh-graders across the state studied Islam in September, in some cases dressing up in robes and playing games about pilgrimages.

"Can you imagine replicating baptisms in the Jordan River by Jesus and John the Baptist? The ACLU ... would be apoplectic," said Ken Connor of the Washington, D.C.-based Family Research Council.

State education officials defend their curriculum, considered one of the first to declare that students cannot learn about the great civilizations without looking at the spiritual forces that shaped them.

"You can't talk about and teach about history without bumping into religion," said Tom Adams, administrator for curriculum frameworks at the state Department of Education.

The course getting all the attention is seventh-grade world history, which runs from the Roman Empire to the late 18th century. The rise of Islam was being taught around the time of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Trouble started in January, with reports from religious news services that students in the northern California district of Byron were dressing up in robes, pretending to go on pilgrimages and taking Muslim names.

Elizabeth Lemings, whose son is a Byron seventh-grader, believes the course crossed the line separating church and state. "I do not want my child to be taught the religious faith and practices of any other religion," she said.

Peggy Green, superintendent of the

Byron Union School District, said classroom activities did not stray out of academic guidelines. She said students did not simulate going on a pilgrimage; they played a game where camels were moved across a bulletin board. They were given the option of putting on a play at the end of the three-week unit for extra credit. For that, some students wore robes and Muslim name cards, she said.

"Basically it's like doing a colonial report and dressing up as a colonist," Green said.

Adams said state guidelines forbid acting out religious practices. He declined to say whether it appeared Byron followed those guidelines because he does not have firsthand information and, in any case, day-to-day instruction is the responsibility of the local district. "Policing the teacher is not our role," he said.

Stacy Yount is the general manager of Interact, a southern California company which provides supplemental materials

for the world history course. She said the company cautions teachers against having children act out religious rites, and also advises schools to send parents an informational letter, explaining that the history of religion plays a role in the course.

In general, however, she defends role-playing as a teaching tool.

"Children's retention of the materials is far greater than if they were to just have a lecture and just have a test, Yount said. "We really believe that philosophically this is the right way to teach."

Also coming under fire was the course text, "Across the Centuries," published by Houghton-Mifflin.

San Luis Obispo parent Jen T. Schroeder filed an administrative complaint against her district. She objected to an exercise in which her son was asked to imagine himself as a Muslim soldier. She also says the text gives a glowing view of Islam but a critical one of Chris-

tianity.

"This book ... is a victim of political correctness gone extreme," said Brad Dacus of the Pacific Justice Institute, a conservative group which helped Schroeder file the complaint.

Houghton-Mifflin defended the book, which has been used in California classrooms for several years.

"We try very hard to cover history and religion in a way that's sensitive," said Abigail Jungreis, a company vice president and editorial director of the social studies text.

The text was reviewed by scholars from within the religions covered, as well as First Amendment experts, she said. It does not advocate simulating religious practices, Jungreis said. Asking students to consider events through the eyes of others is a standard teaching tool that helps develop critical thinking, she said.

As for criticism the book dwells on

Christianity's grimmer moments, such as the Inquisition, Houghton-Mifflin spokesman Collin Earnst said the facts presented cover the period under study.

And, he said, there is positive information about Christianity in the text, such as descriptions of the Roman Catholic church's charitable efforts and teachings to live morally and perform good works.

California, which overhauled its world history standards in 1998, appears to be at the forefront of a trend toward integrating information about religion into school curriculum, said Shabbur Mansuri, of the Council on Islamic Education in Fountain Valley, which recently conducted a survey with the Nashville-based First Amendment Center on the subject.

"This is how we learn about the world," Mansuri said. "We don't teach any religion in our public school classroom. We teach about religions."



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