

ANSWERS TO THE MOST COMMON OBJECTIONS TO PRAYER IN SCHOOLS

(EXCERPTS FROM THE DENNIS PRAGER SHOW)

Dennis Prager is not a Christian. He is Jewish. He is one of the most respected Jewish authors, commentators, and radio/television talk-show hosts in America. In a television program dedicated to the issue of student prayer in public schools, Mr. Prager argues in favor of same and addresses the most common objections:

1. OBJECTION: We Live In A Secular Society And Prayer Is Not Appropriate: "We have so secularized American society! And, of course I am for secular government, of course. How can I not be--I'm in a minority religion. Of course I want a secular government; but I don't want a secular society. This is what I don't understand about those who oppose this. I want to raise kids to believe that they are accountable to a God who has a moral will. It's not enough to say, "I think it's wrong." My secular friends would want their kids to say, "Because I think it's wrong." That's not enough. I want a generation to be raised to believe there's even a God who thinks stealing is wrong."
2. OBJECTION: Religion Is Something A Child Should Choose For Himself or Herself; Prayer In Schools Should Not Be Forced On Anyone, It's A Matter Of Choice: With regard to a child choosing for him or herself, you don't choose what you're not exposed to. And the idea of raising kids with no sense of accountability--to a God, to a religious code--defies logic. The Supreme Court has ruled that you can't put the Ten Commandments in public schools. Do you think our society is truly a better place because of not being able to put "Thou shalt not murder and Thou shalt not steal" on a high school wall? Of course, I fear religious extremism, but I think that we have gone the other direction for too long--to a secular extremism.
3. OBJECTION: Kids Can Pray On Their Own: "Of course kids can pray on their own. So, I have a question. How come we sing the National Anthem at baseball games? You can sing the National Anthem on your own. Everybody at any time can say "Oh say can you see...." Why do we do it together? Because that is the way the society affirms an allegiance, a commitment to the flag, to the country in which we live. That's the same thing with regard to a prayer. It's not a statement that you must pray. I don't care whether you pray. I care whether you, student, understand that America was founded on the basis of a belief that there is a creator, and from this creator emanates our value as human beings. That's what I care about; not whether or not you pray; but rather that there just be an acknowledgment of something higher.
4. OBJECTION: Religion Should Be Taught At Home; Schools Are Not A Proper Place For Having Prayer: "I certainly believe that parents are the most important values transmitters in a child's life. Of course that's true. But, I think about my own parents growing up in the early part of the 20th century in New York City. My parents went to public schools. And you know something--My grandparents who were religious Orthodox Jews from Eastern Europe knew that their own essential moral values of life were being echoed at an American non-jewish public school. In my parent's generation, when you went to school, their parent's believed that the essential values of the home were being transmitted at school. Nobody believes that today. A lot of parents believe they're at war with their school's values; and at war with the media's values (television, etc.). That's why it's not enough to say, "Parents can do it all." I don't have my kids most of the day; a school does--other people do. I care very much what the values are in that school."
5. OBJECTION: What About Minority Religions Who Are Offended By A Denominational Prayer (i.e. a christian prayer made in "Jesus name"): "I think "offended" is too strong a

language. I'm not offended. Christianity is the majority religion in this country. And frankly, as a member of a minority religion, I'm quite happy about that fact. I've written a book on anti-semitism; I know how Jews have suffered--sometimes in European Christian countries. But not in this one [not in America]. American Christianity has been one of the most tolerant forces in the history of the world. I am afraid if it dies. I am afraid. This non-Christian is afraid to see Christianity die in America. When it died in Europe, we got Communism and Nazism."

6. OBJECTION: What About Atheist Students Who Would Feel Uncomfortable With Prayer Of Any Kind Being Said In School: "There are Jehovah's Witnesses who will not say the pledge of allegiance because their religious ideology forbids them from pledging to a flag. Should we drop the pledge because Jehovah's Witnesses in public schools are uncomfortable? The issue here is discomfort. But my task is not to make every student in every public school supper comfortable. Rather, it is to raise a good generation of Americans aware of what America stands for--without insulting them. This does not insult anybody."
7. OBJECTION: Religion Has Done More Bad Than Good So It Is Not Something That A Kid Needs To Be Exposed To At School: "I certainly have no problem with saying that religion has certainly done bad and continues, in parts of the world, to do bad this very minute. I will argue to you, though, that the greatest evil has been done by secular ideologies--namely fascism, nazism, and communism. Religion that is not used for good can be used for evil. I don't believe that this is a panacea. This is not a panacea. Religion can produce evil human beings. It is possible to believe in God and be despicable. However, when God and goodness are linked, you have a better chance of making good people."
8. OBJECTION: Let's Attack Crime And Gun Problems In Schools Rather Than Focusing On The Relatively Unimportant Issue Of Prayer In Schools: "I'm all for attacking the guns that go into classes. I think there should be metal detectors and anything else that will stop it. However, I have a very strong suspicion that we will get rid of more evil and cruelty in this society if, in fact, religion succeeds. Let me just be very blunt. The percentage of people in prison for murder, for rape, for violent crimes, who had been regular church or synagogue attenders is infinitesimally small. You have a better chance of producing good people with religion--and I'll give you one simple way of discovering that:

Imagine you are walking alone in a bad area. It's about midnight. You're alone. You're in a dark alley. And ten men start walking toward you. Would you, or would you not, be relieved to find out that they had just attended a Bible class? I suspect that you would be rather relieved."
9. OBJECTION: Wouldn't Student School Prayer Just Encourage A Lot Of Kids To Insincerely Pray (And Kids Who Normally Pray Are Praying Anyway): "Yes there will be students who are not sincere, and I don't care. There are people who insincerely sing the Star Spangled Banner--I know that. But I want the society to make a public statement that "God is important to the United States of America."
10. OBJECTION: School Prayer Wouldn't Change Kids' Behavior: "God means accountability. If there's a God, I have to answer for my behavior. That's exactly what's been lacking with kids in America today. They don't have to answer to anybody (i.e., "I feel like it, I feel like it"--that's all that matters--what I feel). But if there's a God, what you feel may

not be that important. What you do is important: "Thou shalt not steel, Thou shalt not murder, Thou shalt not trip the teacher as she walks into the room." That's the way it works. That's why I like the idea."