

Four Letters

Being an attempt to speak directly to people
who are not in the Church

By and Based on the Books of Robert J. Cormier (www.thefaithkit.org)
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Introduction

Dear Reader,

The following four letters are just what the cover of this little book says they are: attempts to speak directly to people who are not in the Church.

These letters propose to be respectful of people who are not in the Church, and to make a start at addressing some of their rightful concerns—seeing the truth in their point of view—which is always the “secret” of reaching agreement.

The letters are offered to people who *are* in the Church for the purpose of explaining to them the rightful concerns of people not in the Church, and as an example of the way agreements one day will be reached.

Four Letters

Dear brothers and sisters in the Bible churches,

First of all, thank you for being willing to read this letter.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to address your doubts about what the Church is teaching to people whom you care about just as much as we do.

We understand some of our teachings must seem to you blind about sin and completely un-Biblical. We understand that it must seem dangerous, if not blasphemous, to tell people that they should love themselves, because God has made them who they are so far. So, God has made us sinners?! And if God's plan is guiding us all to heaven, why are we here?

This is our response: It is our own deep conviction that God is very great, and that many of our ideas about Him have NOT acknowledged how great He is.

It is our deep conviction that since God is God, He must be behind all things, and not just the things we call good and always attributed to grace.

It is our understanding that we were given life in order to grow, and to grow into an ever deeper understanding of the world and life and God Himself.

It is our understanding that we are here, not so simply to choose for or against God—why would anyone who knows the score choose against Him?—but rather because God is giving us the opportunity to participate in our own creation... why, because it is better for us, and greater of God, if we do.

It is our understanding that we are actually here to make ourselves into the *family* we will be in heaven because only a family could fully share the life of Him whom we address as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

To us this bigger idea of salvation makes sense of the centuries' struggle of human history, and the lives and deaths of countless people who did or do not have a real or realistic opportunity to know about Jesus.

To us this bigger idea of salvation does justice to the fact that all our lives *are* owed to human history.

To us God's plan looks like a brilliant idea—by sending what He sends into our lives knowing how we will respond, God is getting us to be the family best prepared to share His life while at the same time involving us in our creation.

And we would also point out that when people accept that they are loved for who they are, they love back, not from selfish fear but from their hearts, and this is how they participate in their own creation; and it does begin with faith!

Of course, we also understand that these ideas change how we see the Bible, which we can no longer just quote in order to think we have proved the truth, but we were never really able to do that anyway (not honestly), and now we have an idea of the Bible that has grown along with our idea of God. The alternative is what? to profess faith in a condemning God who is no longer the Person we experience in our prayers? to reject the testimony of creation about how it works? to threaten people with hell when sin being selfishness and small-mindedness is already punishment enough?

Dear brothers and sisters who have found in Jesus the love of God our Father, we recognize that your faith contains much truth. All we ask is that you consider that there might be something more to see. All we ask is that you consider the fact that “life is growth” applies not just to individuals but to our whole human family, and that growth always leaves something behind. Please think about it. There is so much to be gained! We can be the one family in faith that we know God wants us to be.

Brothers and sisters, children of Allah, Father of us all,

First of all, thank you for being willing to read this letter.

We wish to begin by acknowledging that we see much truth in Islam. You are sure and you are right that God is one, and, historically, you have been even more sure than we have that God is God and behind all things.

We also praise Mohammed for the beautiful simplicity of his teaching of a way of salvation that was good for people and could be followed by everyone who heard it, so all God's people could feel that they could find their way to Him. And we praise the tradition of Islam for its insistence on justice, mercy, generosity, and wise living.

But we ask you to consider this: As Islam has its genius in making things simple, Western religion has tried to tackle the complexity of things. We have tried to answer fair questions about God, His ultimate responsibility for everything, His boundless goodness, and the "why" of the human struggle here on earth.

Please do notice that our answers are as deep as the questions are fair. Please notice that we have made sense of everything by coming to see that all of us are one family. Please understand that we owe all this to Jesus, whose life, death, and "resurrection"—this means his appearance after his death—give the human family what it needs in order to be a family in faith.

We understand that the phrase "Son of God" seems to you sacrilegious, and more than is called for by the facts. But please take notice: All of us are God's children—made in His image, and made of His love. If indeed Jesus was sent to make this known, he is rightly called the Son of God.

Of course, we acknowledge that God's plan also sent the Prophet, and certainly he had an essential role to play in the spiritual journey of the original Islamic peoples. To our way of thinking, he was your Moses.

But, in Jesus, God was calling the Jews, and He is also calling you to continue the journey. None of your unique wisdom needs to be denied. We need but to agree that "life is growth" and it is meant to make us one.

Dear fellow seeker of the truth,

First of all, thank you for being willing to read this letter.

We will begin with an expression of respect for your respect for the truth, and your unwillingness to believe anything for which you do not see the support of sufficient reason. Indeed, in a world where people so often believe only what they want to believe, your rejection of even some things you would like to believe because you do not see sufficient evidence is only to be admired.

We understand that is the reason that, even in the face of death, you cannot bring yourself to profess or even hope for faith in God.

We understand that you do not see sufficient reason to believe in God, that the traditional proofs provide no proof, and if there is something we must “just” believe in, why not the world? why not something we can see?

This argument, however, fails to understand the nature of human knowing. In particular, it mistakes the human person for a machine that analyzes everything—or should analyze everything—“rationally.”

To understand why this is false, let us look at how human knowing really works, i.e., how it comes about.

A baby at birth is not only ignorant, it is unconscious; it does not consciously feel its wants; it does not see.

In the days following its birth, the baby is bombarded by experiences. He is held, fed, and bombarded by light. These experiences cause the baby to develop. As the result, he begins to become conscious; he begins to see. Now, let it be clear: No one experience makes the baby see. Sight, indeed consciousness itself, is the result of his whole life’s experience to date.

But it doesn’t stop there. With more experience, slowly but surely, the child becomes self-conscious, conscious of himself. On the day it occurs to

him—that “I am”—it comes as a surprise. It is a new development—nothing that was latent in simple consciousness itself.

But it doesn't stop there. With more experience, slowly but surely, the person becomes conscious that he exists in a world which is bigger than himself. On the day it occurs to him, he takes a moment to doubt it—to wonder if perhaps the whole world is his dream. He finds it frustrating to discover that there is nothing he can do to prove to himself that he is not dreaming, that the world out there is really out there. Nonetheless, he “just” knows it. It is the verdict of his whole life's experience.

But it doesn't stop there. With more experience, slowly but surely, the person becomes aware that the world is not only “out there” but “dependable”; in other words, the world will do what we have discovered it to do; it will be what we have discovered it to be. Here is the basis of science and of reason itself. But this idea is not itself “rational.” There is nothing inherently self-evident about it. It is not scientific. There is nothing that a person can do to prove that any particular thing must happen tomorrow. Nonetheless, he knows what he can count on; he “just” knows. The basis of science and of reason is something a person “just” knows based on his whole life's experience.

But it doesn't stop there. With more experience, slowly but surely, a person comes to realize that the world is not only “dependable” but “dependant”—it must have come from somewhere. It cannot explain itself—and it needs explanation. The result of no one experience, this is something we “just” know. Like all the other “steps” through which we pass, it involves something new, something more.

Though necessarily less sure than the ideas upon which it is built, the existence of God is still evident to the person to the person who is open to see it.

Now, we realize that evil is out there too, and that evil would seem to contradict the happy conclusion of faith. But if faith is right about God, there must be a reason for the imperfection of the world, and providing this explanation is the purpose of doctrine. (Christianity makes the case that imperfection is the pre-requisite of the purpose of earthly life—God is giving us a chance to participate in our own creation.)

We would also like to respond to the suspicion that faith lets people believe they are going to have what they desperately want. Perhaps this seems a little too convenient, or maybe it makes sense! After all, if certain desires are indeed built into us—like the desperate desire to live—doesn't it make sense that the author of life built into us the desire for what He plans to give us?

Think about it. Look at the nature of human knowing. And don't disbelief just because you didn't believe before!

Dear uncommitted,

First of all, thank you for being willing to read this letter.

We will begin by stating that we accept your sincerity when you say you believe but are not so sure about any one religion. We understand that it is hard to know what to believe when we are surrounded by so many people who say things that contradict. And we acknowledge that no religion that has done a great job at making clear it comes from God!

Of course, if we humans are necessarily imperfect so that we can participate in our own creation... because God is giving us the opportunity to have something to say about who we will be forever... then surely imperfection will be present in anything we touch, including religion.

Nonetheless, doesn't your faith in God recommend certain things that require religion?

Isn't it better when people are committed to something? And doesn't our commitment to something imply that what we believe is an objective way true? And doesn't the embrace of one thing imply the rejection of whatever contradicts it?

How about humanity? Isn't it better if we believe together? Isn't it clear that we cannot be all that we might be unless we do? Isn't it obvious that this could never happen unless we had some reason to think that God wants us together in one place rather than another?

This sort of thing can be provided only by religion. Indeed, it can be provided only if we believe that God has spoken in a special way to endorse a certain walk of life.

Please understand: To reject this idea is, in effect, your stand before God. If you refuse to take a stand, this refusal to decide would become the defining decision of your life. How can this be good thing to do with the one life you've been given?