

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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October 5, 2017

***Sent via U.S. Mail and Email:***

[governor@ky.gov](mailto:governor@ky.gov)

The Honorable Matt Bevin  
Governor  
700 Capitol Avenue Suite 100  
Frankfort, KY 40601

Re: Inappropriate gubernatorial video and Facebook posting re: Bring Your Bible to School

Dear Governor Bevin:

We are writing on behalf of our Kentucky membership, our Kentucky chapter, and our more than 29,000 members throughout the United States. FFRF works to uphold the constitutional principle of the separation of between state and church, and educates the public on matters relating to nontheism.

Many of our Kentucky members have contacted us in distress over your highly inappropriate October 3 Facebook video post encouraging school children to bring their bibles to school. The video, which is clearly tagged as “GOVERNOR.KY.GOV,” promotes *www.BringYourBible.org*, a scheme pulled together by Focus on the Family, which solicits students to engage in peer-to-peer proselytizing. In short, your video and posting encourage children to go into their classes to try to convert other students to your particular brand of religion.

In the video, you say:

Hi, This is Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin. I want to draw your attention to an event taking place on October the fifth. It's called Bring Your Bible to School Day. This is a student-led initiative. It actually has been taking place for four years now. I think this is the fourth year. Last year kids in 50 different states brought their bible to school to celebrate not only some of the foundational principles of this nation, but the importance of this document. You look at all the division, and all the vitriol, and all the animosity that's striking us in this nation. How fragmented people are. If we followed biblical principles like treating others as you would want to be treated, loving your neighbor like yourself, simple stuff, this is the kind of thing we should celebrate. I love the idea that young people are bringing their bibles to school. I want to encourage every young person in Kentucky on October the fifth to bring your bible to school. Use it as a point of conversation, and conversation with other students. This is absolutely your right to do this, don't let anybody tell you otherwise. There's a link on here that you can go to to learn more about this initiative. Student-led, unbelievable opportunity for us to celebrate

what it is that brings people together in America. Bring your bible to school, celebrate the wisdom of that book. We are Kentucky.

This is not, in fact, a student-led initiative. It's sponsored by Focus on the Family, as the website captioned on your video clearly shows.

Your video claims that the campaign to encourage students to bring bibles to school to evangelize other students is intended to end "all the division, all the vitriol, and all the animosity that's striking us in this nation." Of course, nothing is more divisive for schoolchildren than injecting religion into public schools.

For this reason, Supreme Court has reiterated in numerous decisions that preventing such divisiveness is a major reason why the framers of our secular and godless constitution wisely chose to separate from religion: "The Framers and the citizens of their time intended to guard . . . against the civic divisiveness that follows when the government weighs in on one side of religious debate; nothing does a better job of roiling society," and "the divisiveness of religion in current public life is inescapable." *McCreary Cty., Ky. v. Am. Civil Liberties Union of Ky.*, 876, 881 (2005). In fact, the "purposes of the First Amendment's Religion Clauses [are] to assure the fullest possible scope of religious liberty and tolerance for all, to avoid the religious divisiveness that promotes social conflict, and to maintain the separation of church and state." *Van Orden v. Perry*, 545 U.S. 677, 678 (2005).

The separation of church from state is a founding principle of this nation and of our constitution: our government and government actors cannot promote, advance or otherwise endorse religion. The Supreme Court has said, "The touchstone for our analysis is the principle that the 'First Amendment mandates governmental neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.'" *McCreary Cty. v. ACLU*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005) (quoting *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Bd. of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15–16 (1947); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985)).

When it comes to schoolchildren, the Supreme Court has been even more proactive in safeguarding their constitutional rights of conscience. More than 65 years of firm Supreme Court precedent bars officials from imposing religious ritual and indoctrination in our public schools. Parents entrust the public schools with the education of their children and, in return, parents retain control over the religious upbringing of their children. As the Supreme Court put it, "the preservation and transmission of religious beliefs and worship is a responsibility and a choice committed to the private sphere." *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 310 (2000) (quoting *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577, 589 (1992)).

The governor—holding the highest elective office in the commonwealth of Kentucky—has no right or business directing other people's children to bring bibles or any other religious books to public schools. Such irresponsible misuse of your public office appears to give the green light to school officials to likewise misuse their authority to promote religion to a captive audience of schoolchildren. The video will help breed an atmosphere of bullying, because it confers upon bible-believing students the status of "insiders," with non-Christian or nonreligious students targeted as "outsiders."

Imagine the consternation had you directed children to bring Korans to school to “celebrate the wisdom of that book.” It is equally inappropriate for the highest elected officer in Kentucky to endorse the bible’s use in our public schools. The government may not take sides in religion, but this is precisely what you have done.

Finally, as we pointed out in previous recent letters about your actions to inappropriately entangle church and state, the bible is a book full of violence, primitive teachings, sexism, racism and scientific and other inaccuracies. Bibles have even led to violence when forced into the public schools. American Christians have rioted and even killed each other over which bible to teach in public schools. In the 1840s, riots broke out in Philadelphia as Protestants and Catholics fought over which version of the bible ought to be taught in public schools. Some 20 citizens were killed, another five dozen injured, hundreds fled their home, and churches and property were burned down.<sup>1</sup>

When a fight over the bible in public schools erupted between Christians and Catholics in Wisconsin, the court observed:

“There is no such source and cause of strife, quarrel, fights, malignant opposition, persecution, and war, and all evil in the state, as religion. Let it once enter our civil affairs, our government would soon be destroyed. Let it once enter our common schools, they would be destroyed.” *Weiss v. Dist. Bd.*, 44 N.W. 967, 981 (1890).

It is imperative that you cease misusing your civil and secular public office to promote your personal religious beliefs.

Very truly,



Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor  
DB/ALG:als

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<sup>1</sup> Russell Frank Weigley, *Philadelphia: A 300 Year History*, 357 (W. W. Norton & Company, 1982).



**Governor Matt Bevin**

October 3 at 4:16pm · 🌐



You ABSOLUTELY have the right to do this—don't let anyone tell you otherwise...#BringYourBible on Oct. 5!

