

An open letter to Tony Abbott about bible classes

Written by Simon Jester
Monday, 18 January 2010 13:27

Dear Mr Abbott,

Your comments that we should bring back Bible Classes in schools may not have caused much comment; they may have slipped underneath the radar of most people, but some of us did notice. We cannot help but applaud your efforts at promoting scholarship and learning. We do, however, have a few questions as to some of the finer detail.

I'm sure you won't mind clarifying these few, small issues; in your position you must have had plenty of need to expand on sweeping statements. Before you label my questions as nit-picking, or brush them aside as making fun of you and your beliefs, I am genuinely interested in knowing your answers – it is the reason that I have included, where I can, the correct references. I also sit writing with a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church to hand.

The first question I have is: Whose Bible? In the circumstances and being a Roman Catholic, you would defer to Clerical Authority? As a Catholic, I am sure you are aware that the Bible was, for a long time, on the list of Roman Catholic Church's banned books, the Index Librorum Prohibitorum – presumably to prevent people reading the wrong things, or to stop them questioning any contradictions or non-sensical passages, or from reading any passage which did not further the church's authority.

In fact, William Tyndale was executed in 1536 for heresy, much to do with him having the temerity to translate of the Bible from Greek to English. Can we be sure that children are taught the right version? There are any

number of versions, which contain errors, typos, even intentional mistakes by typesetters, such as the “Wicked Bible” of 1631, where the seventh commandment (

Exodus 20:14

) is written “

Thou shalt commit adultery

”.

Can we be sure which version of the Bible is the “correct” one?

2 Thessalonians 2:11-12

says “

And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie. That they all might be damned...

”

Although, obviously, different versions of the Bible word this differently – but the message is the

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same – believe the an intentional deception, be damned for all eternity.

Secondly is that, for any person, reading the Bible, let alone studying it, is an ambitious undertaking. Given the years of scholarship that it takes to read, much less understand it, should Bible classes be mandatory for all people, no matter their age or beliefs? Or is there something to what the Jesuits say about teaching children?

Will we require students to learn all of it, or just selected bits? Who, then, would decide which bits? If the whole Bible, how much time do you propose should be dedicated out of the limited school week?

Should we teach the Bible in Latin rather than English? Or Ancient Greek, the language that the older versions of the Bible would have been written in, which was the language of scholars at the time? Would the time required to learn these languages be included as part of the classes, or would additional time be required?

My third question is about the content of the classes: what about the Bible would be taught? Would it be taught as Allegory, Reality, or Propaganda? Would it be taught within its historical context?

Is your intent for the Bible to be taught as fact? What if what is written in the Bible contradicts reality? After all, it took the Roman Catholic Church several centuries to fully acknowledge that Galileo was right, although there is no word yet on their treatment of Giordano Bruno. Admittedly, they did accept Charles Darwin much quicker, and the fact that evolutionary and geological timescales require vastly almost a million times more than Bishop Ussher calculated from biblical lineages.

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Do you mean for the Bible to be read as an instruction guide for life and law? Does this mean the end of Throwing Shrimps on the Barbie (

Leviticus 11:9-12

,

Deuteronomy 14:9-10

)?

Admittedly, the end of poly-cotton blends wouldn't a bad thing (

Leviticus 19:19

), although some clergy may find it unacceptable to be banned from their profession for having bad eyesight (

Leviticus 21:16 – 23

).

And let's not mention that whole menstruation bit (

Leviticus 15:19-30

to start with), capital punishment for disobedient children (

Deuteronomy 21:18-21

,

Exodus 21:15-17

), or many other passages that permit slavery, genocide, and many practices most people nowadays would find abhorrent?

Perhaps some of your colleagues in both the Upper and Lower Houses might be particularly affected if Biblical punishments were brought back in, such as for adultery.

After all, even

Matthew 5:27-30

is quite explicit that even casting a wayward eye is adultery, that someone doing so should pluck out their offending wandering eye, or cut off the hand which causes them to sin.

Would the purpose of Bible classes be to teach Logic and Argument? Much of the Bible does seem to be filled with logical errors, such as Argument From Authority (the "I'm in charge, therefore I'm always right" error), or contain logic so twisted it is often completely circular. Contradictions abound, many passages require quite complex Apologetics in order to make them even vaguely possible, and things that are described do not necessarily reflect archaeology or historical records from other peoples.

Will errancy and editorialisation in the Bible be taught, or the fact that parts of the Bible were not written until centuries after the purported events?

Would the Bible be taught in as part of Comparative Theology – the Dead Sea Scrolls and other Apocrypha, Koran, Torah, Bhagavad Gita, Tibetan Book of the Dead, the Book of Mormon, the literal armada of works by L.Ron Hubbard, any of the books of the Discordia, the Satanic Bible? Plenty of people believe these to be Received Truth. Would these be dismissed

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purely on the grounds that they are not the Bible?

Which brings me to my fourth question: I'm curious as to what you mean by Australia being a land of Christian values. Does this mean the whole Bible (such as the Leviticus examples above), or just the New Testament bits?

What is a Christian

point-of-view, anyway?

After

all,

L

uke 14:26

clearly states that you have to hate your parents, wife, children, and your own life in order to follow Jesus Christ.

Matthew 10:34-35

is even more explicit: “

Think not that I am come to send peace on Earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance with his father...

”, repeated in

Luke 12:52-54

.

Even divorce is acceptable in Christ's teachings, according to

Matthew 19:28-29

.

Did you mean, maybe, that you want children, and indeed all people, to learn the value of such things as Charity, Respect, Understanding, Justice, Patience, even the Golden Rule from *Matthew 7:12*

“

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you

”?

Should we teach these things because some believe that eternal pain and punishment awaits us if we don't, teaching them out of fear?

Should we not teach that those are values are good things to learn, in and of themselves,

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irrespective of punishment or reward in an afterlife in which some do not believe?

Some might applaud your beliefs – the more cynical saying that it is unquestioning faith, belief, and obedience that allows people to march with a smile on their face, even to their deaths – or, just as likely, to the deaths of anyone who disagrees. Are you holding your position because you have Received Truth, because you have been told it is true, or because you believe it to be true?

If your beliefs are reality, then I'm sure that they would withstand being examined, and would not be affected by my questions.

I look forward to your response. Yours quite sincerely,

Simon Jester