

**Submission
No 80**

**INQUIRY INTO EDUCATION AMENDMENT (ETHICS
CLASSES REPEAL) BILL 2011**

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This submission by Dr Arthur R Gilmour,
is made to the General Purpose Standing Committee No 2
of the NSW Legislative Council
with reference to the EDUCATION AMENDMENT (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011.

Briefly, the points I make are:

- Ethics classes do not achieve the social purpose of teaching Scripture,
- There is already provision for parents to withdraw their children from Scripture, but this should be discouraged by the State because it denies the children involved an understanding of the principles upon which our Nation is based,
- The right of Christians to teach Scripture in State Schools was I understand a condition under which churches handed over responsibility for Education to the State,
- The great majority of Australians correctly identify themselves as a Christian in the broad sense because our society operates on the principles taught by Jesus Christ,
- Scripture gives opportunity for students to make an informed decision concerning whether they want to become Christian in the narrow sense of being one who personally and vigorously pursues deeper understanding of the teaching of Jesus that they may serve society in His name,
- It is appropriate that Scripture is taught by volunteers endorsed by a local church rather than by state paid teachers because this is a community responsibility, not a state responsibility.

The author, Dr Arthur Gilmour, formerly Principal Research Scientist, NSW DPI at Orange Agricultural Institute retired in January 2009 after almost 42 years Public Service. He runs a small olive grove at Cargo, NSW, is part time (40%) Senior Research Fellow at University of Wollongong in the School of Maths and Stats, is an elder of Orange (Christian Brethren) assembly, a registered marriage celebrant in NSW, treasurer of Canobolas Christian Broadcasters (Community Christian radio station where he has presented a daily Scripture reading with commentary for 12 years), and teaches Scripture at Cargo Public School (16 students K-6 in 2011). Since retirement from DPI, he has maintained his international profile as a lead developer of ASReml (<http://www.asreml.com>), undertaking international consultancies and training courses, but has also undertaken 3 visits to Bangladesh to support Christian workers there by Scripture teaching.

The word Christian was first used of the disciples of Jesus in about AD 44 in Antioch (modern Lebanon). It is used today in two main ways: In the broad sense it applies to countries like Australia whose national ethos is strongly influenced by the teaching of Jesus. In the narrow sense, it is used of individuals who have personally committed themselves to living as Jesus lived every day in whatever circumstances they find themselves.

Jesus taught,

- 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35). A recent news item reported Australia had slipped from first to third (behind USA) in international rankings of the most generous nation, New Zealand just behind us. Our generosity is based on need, which is why our Federal government was wrong to impose a 'flood levy' because it denies our national character and so undermines our society. As a nation, we gave huge amounts to the Asian tsunami appeal. Furthermore, I understand research has shown that the more committed a person is to following Jesus, the more they are likely to give.
- 'Hunger and thirst for righteousness' (Matt 5:6) Australia expects the highest standards from politicians and public figures. We have corruption commissions, and put Chief Justices who lie under oath in prison.
- 'Love your enemies' (Matt 5:44). We expect our soldiers to treat our prisoners with dignity. Our soldiers in Afghanistan are not just killing, but are mainly building infrastructure and training people.

- 'And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise' (Luke 6:31). It is no accident that the main humanitarian organisations in the world, and in Australia, are faith based organisations: Red Cross, Salvation Army, St Vincents do Paul, Uniting Care and many others.
- 'Forgive one another' (Ephesians 4:32, Matthew 6:12) Our society is very much geared toward giving people a second chance when they acknowledge failure.

But in non-Christian countries, the standards are much lower: Christians are sometimes persecuted for no more than believing in Jesus, Police routinely stop cars for a 'safety check' until a bribe is paid, prisoners are treated cruelly, beggars are kept as beggars.

In the narrow sense, Christian refers to individuals who have personally committed themselves to living as Jesus teaches. It is the presence of these people in society acting as salt and light that allows our society as a whole to operate under Christian values. Again, it is no accident that people of (Christian) faith have better health, better outcomes from sickness, lower incidences of anti-social behaviour, alcoholism, gambling and substance addiction, violence, divorce, etc than those individuals who have no personal commitment to Jesus Christ.

Therefore, it is very much in the interests of Australian Society that children in this state continue to have the opportunity to learn Scripture at school, taught not just as another subject by teachers, some of whom have no commitment to Jesus Christ, but rather taught by people endorsed by local churches with a personal commitment to Jesus and His ways.

Teaching Scripture does not force children to be Christian in the narrow sense. Most of my generation went to Scripture but 80% are not active as Christians in the sense that they regularly attend places of worship to be further instructed as adults in the teaching of Scripture. This is why I have taken the opportunity of reading Scripture on a local community radio station every day for the last 12 years, completing now three runs through every verse. Nevertheless, only 10% of the local Central West community, identify 'No religion' according to Census (2006) data, 32% identify Catholic and those that attend Catholic schools receive teaching of Scripture as part of the curriculum, 29% Anglican, the balance identifying other Christian groups. Some of the children from these families attend 'Christian' schools of various types where they have Scripture instruction. It is important that students at state schools not miss out. Scriptures classes give them basic information about what the Scripture says, through the many stories of people's lives. Upon that information they can choose whether they will commit personally to Jesus, but in any case they learn through these stories, the consequences of the wide range of actions and ideas considered.

Ethics classes fail to achieve the real benefits of teaching Scripture because without the historical basis of the lives of real people as recorded in Scripture, and from the minority perspective 'there is no God', there is no foundation on which to build morals and ethics. Those who teach atheistic ethics have no rational basis for their ethics other than self interest. Self interest does not lead to generosity, righteousness, forgiveness or compassion but rather to greed and selfishness. I suspect that those who would construct ethics courses fail to appreciate just how much their values have been influenced by our Christian heritage.

Education for the masses is a Christian (Biblical) idea. The Scriptures themselves reflect a society educated through the teaching of Moses, and the Prophets leading up to Jesus. Solomon was a philosopher as well as a natural scientist and people in his time came from around the world to study at Jerusalem. (1 Kings 10:1-10). It was Christians who set up general schooling in Australia and it was only 50 years later that the government got involved. Even then, it only took over the non-Catholic schools, and funded the Catholic ones. Today, it is pre-eminently Christians who provide education in third world countries, especially to the poor. But education is incomplete

unless students are given responsibility to think for themselves, and given information so that they can choose. Scripture is therefore an essential component of a rounded education. It does not brainwash the students; 30 minutes a week in most cases is hardly enough time to introduce the ideas.

The media would have us believe that God is an outmoded concept, but this is just the view of a noisy minority. I as a scientist with a PhD in Animal Breeding, and past significant input into animal breeding in Australia, nevertheless, am convinced that the Biblical record of Creation by a benevolent designer, albeit subsequently severely disrupted by evil, is completely consistent with known data, although completely contradicted by the atheistic/agnostic evolutionary theory. Sound education allows both ideas to be presented, and students to decide individually. It is not helpful for education administrators to unilaterally declare such teaching invalid without showing it is so. As Jesus said, 'if I have spoken evil, bear witness to the evil' (John 18:23). Now, I am not advocating that every idea be given equal time. But I do recognise Scripture as having a special place because this is a book that

- has influenced millions of people, for good, over thousands of years,
- is the most (read and) studied book in the world,
- provides the foundation for our society

Some argue that we should have nothing to do with religion because it just causes conflict and war. There is an element of truth here because religions that do not follow Jesus' teaching, will use violence to get their way. Indeed, in history, 'Christian' nations have gone to war for their own material gain (e.g. Opium wars), contrary to the teaching of Jesus. So I cringe at reports of US patent laws being used to defraud Asian Universities of inventors rights, because the Asian University shared information openly with a visitor who took it home and patented it! This corruption is however only overcome, not by protecting children from learning about Jesus, but rather by teaching them what He taught. Ultimately, righteousness of a nation is predicated by righteousness of its citizens.

Of course, under the present arrangements, I understand that atheists and humanists could set up classes for their adherents, recognising that atheism/humanism is as much a religion as are denominations of Christianity and other theistic religions. I understand there are some Moslem classes held (but Moslems should not have a problem with their children learning what is in Scripture since they formally recognise Jesus and Moses). However, such classes are likely to be less useful to society at large because they deny children the right to become aware of Jesus' teaching, and may promote concepts which are contrary to principles on which our society is based. By 'Jesus teaching', I mean to infer all Scripture since Jesus said, 'Search the Scriptures ... they speak of me' (John 5:39), and 'Moses ... wrote of Me' (John 5:46). Further, I see the responsibility of Scripture teachers is to make students aware of what the Scriptures say, not to recruit for a particular denomination. But the teachers personal perspective will no doubt become evident.

Some argue that allowing Scripture to be taught in schools, contravenes a principle of separation of church and state. My understanding is that the Constitution intended to protect against the State being the agent of any particular denomination or religion. Historically, some Protestant, Catholic, Communist/Atheistic, Muslim and Hindu countries have used state powers of arrest and coercion, to force people to adopt their particular form of religion. Australia strongly holds the State must not favour any particular religion. For this reason, we must resist recognising sharia law at the State level. However, this principle does not mean that the State must oppose religion, it can't because everyone has a belief system whether it be Atheism, Buddhism, Christianity in some form, Islam in some form, or whatever. Rather it must cooperate with the free choice of individuals. Teaching Scripture in State Schools does not contravene the principle, but rather enhances the opportunity students have to consider for themselves whom they will serve (Joshua 24:15).

The final issue to discuss is that lay people generally conduct Scripture. I strongly believe this is appropriate, assuming the person has accreditation from their church. If you are to teach sport for example, it is best to have a teacher that has played the sport in question. It is therefore appropriate that volunteers who teach Scripture, be first of all, those who have a recognised interest in learning themselves the teachings of Jesus with a view to living them out. There is of course great diversity in these people but my experience is that Scripture teachers seek to establish personal rapport with the students, thereby modelling Christianity to them. In some cases, since these people are generally not trained teachers, class discipline may be an issue, and regular teachers should provide support where this is needed.

In summary, Scripture is a critically important component of State education. It is in the interests of our society that it be strengthened, and not undermined by pseudo alternatives which deny children the right to see for themselves what the Scriptures say.

I thank you for your patience,

Arthur Gilmour
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