

The Danville News
Robert John Andrews
Thursday, December 5, 2024
Bible in Schools
Word Count 750

There you go again. The wearisome debate has returned, where some school districts are conniving to push the Bible and their brand of Christianity into the public school curriculum. That's fine, if the subject for study is faith in historical context. That's appropriate, assuming it'll be taught forthrightly, discussing how faith motivated persons of varied religions to action, both good and ill. Note, the Bible was cited to justify slavery. The KKK loves quoting (misquoting) the Bible.

If, however, the various Departments of Education, such as in Texas, are snarky enough to violate the US Constitution by pushing their ham-fisted inclusion of the Bible into public school lessons, then we got a problem. How often must we explain how the purpose of separation of church and state is to protect religion from the effrontery and ignorance, arrogance and agendas of the state? Let's learn the difference between education and indoctrination. You'd think gun control would have priority. Or pregnancy deaths.

At Sunday school, we enjoy the benefit of differing interpretations. Education versus indoctrination. What brings us together is when we focus on what's called the kerygmatic message, the proclamation. We church folk appreciate how the Bible is a theological drama rather than an historical or scientific document. Our discussions ask about why is this written, what meaning is being revealed for us today, how does it apply to us, how do we apply it?

What isn't fine is folks teaching the Bible, or snippets of Holy Writ, who lack scholarship to teach the Bible. What are their qualifications? Will the teachers have some familiarity with the Bible's thousands of years of cultural context and Mid-eastern customs? Do they have training in the original languages in which the books were written? Greek? Hebrew? By what authority do they teach the Bible?

We hear that the Golden Rule will be taught little ones. Okay. You do realize the Golden Rule isn't exclusively Christian. You 'll find versions of it proclaimed by Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism. Hey, Texas, if you teach it, try living it.

Will the teachers teach how Genesis' two stories of creation aren't journalistic reporting of events? They are theological proclamations. The account in Chapter 1 is a priestly liturgy. The second, chapter 2, authored by a different school of theology, speaks about our humanity and our relationship to this verb we call God. Genesis isn't even the oldest Bible book, but a young work composed while the Hebrews suffered Babylonian exile. There they discovered that their temple was irrelevant to faith. What couldn't be destroyed was the story of God preserved in words, central for their identity.

Will the teachers teach how the Ten Commandments are based upon the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, and, according to Jesus, find their inadequacy fulfilled by the Sermon on the Mount?

Will the teachers teach how Noah's Ark is a parable? It never happened. Nor did it accomplish what God wanted it to accomplish: an improved humanity. Noah and sons remained selfish wretches.

Will the teachers teach how God warned against kings and the inevitable tyranny that results?

Will the teachers teach that the Book of Ruth, possibly written by a woman, depicts how a widow who immigrated from a despised people can become the great-grandmother of their cherished King David? It isn't about blood, but spirit.

Will the teachers teach how King Solomon was incredibly stupid, giving rise to civil war?

Will the teachers teach how Jesus was crucified for expedience sake by his own religious leaders in cahoots with the political leaders? Sounds familiar. Beware when power loves itself. The slogan 'Jesus died for our sins' is better understood as 'Jesus died because of our sins?'

Will the teachers teach that turning the other cheek isn't recommending docile servility but rebellious defiance? Counter-cultural Jesus was slapped by those authorities who didn't like what he said. So Jesus would present his other cheek and defy them to slap him again because he won't be stopped from telling the truth.

Will the teachers teach how Jesus wasn't born homeless in the wee hours? Similar to those Hallmark TV Christmas movies, our popular Hallmark version of Jesus' birth in a stable is a sweet and sentimental romantic fiction, invented by St. Francis. An accurate reading of Luke tells how Jesus was born in a kitchen surrounded and welcomed by a loving family, the way all children should be received.

If it's going to get taught, at least get its incendiary message right.