

Hope and Heritage?

What has heritage got to do with hope, you may well ask?

Consider this, when God was preparing his people for the promised-land he gave them some very simple instructions.

The instructions as set out in Deuteronomy chapter six were so that “.....it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey”. God gave them great hope for the future.

It was all good news for the Jewish nation and their future and the future of their children. God wanted them to enjoy his bountiful provision. These instructions were for the parents, so that the parents would teach and inform their children of their heritage. Of how the Lord had saved them from Egypt and all the other wonderful things he had done.

In Deuteronomy chapter eighteen there were specific warnings against the evil activities practised by those whose land they were going to possess. The Israelites knew these activities were “detestable before the Lord”. All appeared to go well for about one hundred and fifty years.

“After that whole generation (Joshua) had been gathered up to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done in Israel.” These tragic words are found in the book of Judge, chapter two verse ten

After being promised a wonderful future in the “Promised Land” it all went terribly wrong. One generation had not carried out God’s instructions to teach their children about the Lord and what he had done for Israel. God had given such instructions to Moses in the book of Deuteronomy 6:1-7. The result of ignoring these instructions was a generation “who did evil in the eyes of the Lord”. They had forgotten or maybe had not even been taught “what the Lord had done in Israel” which is their *heritage*.

Could this happen in Australia? A whole generation pass on and the next generation grow up not knowing the Lord nor what he has done in Australia? I think many people would say, yes and in fact I would suggest that it has already well and truly begun.

There are many young (and older) people who would be doing “evil in the eyes of the Lord” because they do not know the Lord nor what He has done in Australia.

If we are looking to our government and the National History Curriculum to teach our children about what significant contributions Christians have made to this country, we will be sadly disappointed.

In the introduction page to *The National Curriculum – A Critique*, Chris Berg writes “The legacy of Western Civilisation is rich, complex and essential – the foundations on which Australia’s society and political system, our culture, and our history, have been built. So why are the basics of Western Civilisation absent from the national curriculum?”

Greg Melleuish also writing in, *The National Curriculum – A Critique* notes “For some reason, the crucial principle of Australia’s cultural heritage derived from Western Civilisation was not included. No priority has been accorded to the Western roots of Australia”.

Melleuish goes on to say “It is equally true to say that it (NHC) will not provide students with much if any sense of their heritage from Western Civilisation. In topic 1 for year 8 students the Islamic World and the Western World are listed as a single entity. This means that a primary focus is the relationship between Islam and the West, rather than the West itself. This curriculum is a hodge-podge driven by a variety of motives, but which misses out on the most important of all: to provide students with an opportunity to explore their significant past and the civilisation that has helped to create the world in which they live”.

So the question posed by Berg and others must be asked “Why are the basics of Western Civilisation absent from the National Curriculum?”

Is there a “conspiracy theory” to eliminate anything Christian from our public school system even if it is our heritage and truth?

The fact is that schools in Australia were started by people whom embraced the Christian faith in spite of the inactivity of the then government. The Reverend Richard Johnson started the first school in his church in Bligh St Sydney and there is a commemorative plaque on the corner of Bligh and Hunter Streets. One hundred and fifty children attended and there was no discrimination whether they were the children of the convicts or the freemen. By March 1792 he had set up schools in Parramatta and Norfolk Island.

<http://acl.asn.au/resources/richard-johnson-first-chaplain-to-australia>

Jennifer Buckingham in her paper, *The Rise of Religious Schools* from The Centre of Independent Studies sets out a brief history.

The first schools in Australia were Christian schools established by the Anglican Church (Church of England) in NSW in the early days of British settlement in the late 1700s. Free ‘charity schools’ run by other denominations gradually came into existence in the following decades. There were also some private commercial schools catering for middle-class boys and schools offering instruction in etiquette, art and ‘polite accomplishments’ for girls. These did not give religious instruction, which was assumed to be provided at home or in church. An attempt in the 1820s to establish non-denominational National schools for all students was defeated by the Catholic and Anglican churches. Charity schools run by clergy remained the major providers of education until the 1840s, when a dual system of denominational and National schools was established

As the teachers in the schools were Christian and often the clergy themselves would teach, the Bible was the “text book” for teaching the children. The overall effect on the society at that time should be noted and seriously considered.

From Col Stringer’s book, *Discovering Australia’s Christian Heritage* he reports the following comments from eminent persons such as Peter Cunningham, Senior Naval Surgeon and Author and Sir William Burton, Judge of the Supreme Court.

Cunningham writes in 1820 of the colony’s native born “.....they are little tainted with the vices so prominent among their parents. Drunkenness is almost unknown with them and honesty proverbial; the few of them that have been convicted having acted under the bad auspices of their parents and relatives.....”

Sir William reported in 1833 how he was impressed with the law-abiding nature of the native born. He wrote “There was not one of them ever tried before the writer for any of those atrocious crimes which are attributed to their country, but belong only to the convict class; nor did he know of any person born in the colony, being tried or even charged with, either the offence of rape or any other licentious crime; nor has he ever found any offence committed by any of them, such as to call upon him to pronounce sentence of death; and no such sentence has ever been passed with his knowledge, or any crime committed with such a degree of violence to justify it”

I believe that we as Christian parents and teachers have a God given responsibility to teach our children and those within our sphere of influence about our Christian heritage. Please note if you and I do not take on this endeavour, be assured no one else will and our children will suffer.

Please be encouraged to visit www.chr.org.au and feast on an array of resources that will help you in teaching the children about the significant contributions Christians made to the development of this great nation.

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References:

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- [The National Curriculum - a Critique](#), Monographs on Western Civilisation 1, Ed. Chris Bergin, 2010
- [The Rise of Religious Schools in Australia](#), Jennifer Buckingham, 2010