

Historical Revisionism in the National Curriculum

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in Bill of Rights, Classics, Defence, Education, Eternity, Excellence, Governance, Leadership

Originally: <http://steveblizard.wordpress.com/2011/01/03/historical-revisionism-in-the-national-curriculum/>

The curriculum should ask students to identify the impact of Christianity on the development of human rights and constitutionalism in the West

In his extract from [*THE RELIGIOUS FOUNDATIONS OF MODERN CONSTITUTIONALISM*](#), Professor Augusto Zimmermann asserts that Christianity has played an enormously important role in the origins and development of modern constitutionalism. Indeed, Christian principles are enshrined in the most significant documents in Western legal history, including the English [*Bill of Rights*](#) (1689) and the [*American Declaration of Independence*](#) (1776).

THERE is nonetheless a deliberate attempt on the part of some academics and politicians to undermine the values and traditions of Western civilisation.

To provide a small example of this, take into account, for instance, the school curriculum that the Australian government has just prepared. The curriculum covers English, maths, science and history. In history, the curriculum focuses heavily on Australian Aboriginal history and Asian ways of seeing the world while failing to recognise the impact of Western values in shaping Australia's cultural, legal, economic and political development.

Rather than acknowledging that this is predominantly a Western nation, in terms of language, legal and political institutions, and history, the document defines Australia in terms of a "diversity of values and principles".

There is no mention whatsoever of basic concepts such as [separation of powers](#), the [Westminster system of government](#), or significant events in Western history such as the [Magna Carta](#) and the [English Bill of Rights](#).

Another incredible omission in this Australian curriculum is that concerning the [Christian foundations of Western civilisation](#). It refers to Christianity only twice, and only in the context of studying other religions, particularly Islam.

Here the document **deliberately underestimates the significance of Christianity** while overestimating any meaningful contribution that Islam may have made.

Rather than attempting to project a moral equivalence, the curriculum should ask the students, among other things, to identify the impact of Christianity on the development of human rights and constitutionalism in the West.

By way of contrast, the students should be asked to study why Islamic governments have imposed the death penalty as a mandatory punishment against adult converts from Islam.

But it is not just the importance of Christianity that has been neglected. The proposed curriculum makes not a single reference to the struggles for rights and freedoms prior to the advent of the United Nations, such as that which occurred in Western societies during the [1688 Glorious Revolution](#) in Great Britain and afterwards by American revolutionaries in the eighteenth century. In 1776, thirteen American colonies in their Declaration of Independence broke their ties with England, stating that they were assuming,

among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life,

liberty and the pursuit of happiness. . That wherever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government.

For them the whole purpose of human rights was to protect individuals against excessive government power.

The proposed curriculum for history completely fails to acknowledge any of these historical facts. It only asks the students to consider the role of the United Nations in promoting and protecting human rights.

One doubts whether these students will learn that, ultimately, the United Nations' [Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(1948\)](#) relies very heavily on a Western legal tradition in which our most fundamental rights are not regarded as government-conferred, but rather government-recognised.

Elaborated under the auspices of Eleanor Roosevelt and her commission, when Roosevelt, an avowed Christian, summed up the attitude of the framers of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, she commented that this was "based on the *spiritual* fact that man must have freedom in which to develop his full stature and through common effort to raise the level of human dignity.? According to Ngaire Naffine, "the Universal Declaration reflects the natural law view that rights inhere naturally in human beings: rights are not legal constructs as the strict Legalists insist. They are not the product of law, they are not posited into being by law, but rather precede law and indwell in human beings as a natural property?."

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- Foundations of Western Civilisation [program](#)
- [Heritage of Western Civilisation](#), Cardinal George Pell, Catholic Communications, Sydney Archdiocese, 1 April 2010