

The history debates: Will they never end?

(The following article promotes the work of one TCF member, Alex Mills whose passion to see reference to the religious background of people and events in Australia's history remains a life long challenge. Alex is doing something about what he believes in and you also could act to not let such important matters simply pass you by.)

At one level the Mills argument is very simple. The writers of Australian history have not given due recognition to the spiritual motivation behind significant people, organizations and events in Australia's history. Led by some of the great historians like Patrick White, Mills accuses them of deliberately omitting the spiritual motivation to present a secular history of Australia that is not a true reflection of the Christian heritage of Australia or many of its citizens. He has some support within the history community, not only by Christians with some secular historians admitting this exclusion. But admitting this exclusion and getting the writers of textbooks who provide a mainly truncated version to include such information is a different matter.

Mills' main target has been the Commonwealth Department of Education where he has highlighted inaccuracies within and omissions from the Discovering Democracy materials. In NSW, he worked with the NSW Department of Education and Training to contribute and edit the resource *Belief in Action* support material for the K-6 HSIE Syllabus and has continued to lobby the Board of Studies about the history curriculum.

The Uniting Church has provided strong support for a number of campaigns and other significant organizations and individuals have lent their support to the cause.

Concerned that Australian children will grow up without knowledge of Australia's religious history, Mills has produced a First Edition Paper: *Teaching Religious Influences in History in Australia* which is aimed at the members of the Board of the National Curriculum to influence the National History Curriculum Framing Paper.

This Paper aims to *redress this situation and to help people to see things differently* by aiming to *deal with history properly*.

To support his argument, Mills submits 14 Documents. In these documents he reminds us that:

- That "secular" can and should include knowing about religion and that deliberate omission of religion is akin to secular fundamentalism.
- People of religious conviction have permeated Australia's history and that conviction as a motivating force should be recognised.
- That the curriculum provides many opportunities to enhance teachers and students understanding by explicit content.
- That there are many biographies available that provide the information teachers need to teach about religious influences
- The NSW Uniting Church Synod in 200 stated that *the Commonwealth Government funded Discovering democracy project does not give fair and reasonable representation of the important influence Christianity and other religions had in the development of Australia.*
- The US Civil Rights Movement emulated in the Australian Freedom Rides came from a sense of the spirit of Jesus Christ.
- That most US history books still fall well short of recognition of the role of religion in the American civil rights movement and that this form of omission is characteristic of Australia as well.
- The downplaying in the Discovering Democracy materials of the resistance of individuals and Christian churches to the Hitler regime.
- The lack of recognition in the National History Curriculum Framing Paper of the contribution of Christian people to immigrants and refugees.

While the Paper provides good fuel for the cause, it would benefit from the input of other Christians with an interest in this matter. The last document No.14 is a disappointment because it fails to give a comprehensive and explicit agenda for the curriculum developers. If the aim is to get this material into the curriculum and then actually taught by teachers, then explicit content must be provided for each Stage of the curriculum. This will not only provide help for the developers, but give a reference point to hold them accountable.

Alex Mills material can be accessed at www.midcoast.com.au/~aushistoryreligion

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