

Bible Classes in America's Public Schools?

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PINE BLUFFS — Edmund Burke, the Irish orator, philosopher and politician, during remarks to Parliament in April 1770, said: "All that's necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing." [Yes, that was Burke. Not Jefferson.] He was right.

The more or less constant battle between good and evil has been joined in America. Portions of our society are on a slippery slope of decline; disagreement, dissent, and discord abound. Paradoxically, in other segments, good things are happening.

One of the good things occurred recently in Atlanta, when Georgia's Governor, 'Sonny' Perdue inked a bill permitting Bible classes in public high schools. Here's a leader who has seen the rot attacking our youth and decided to try fixing the problem. Part of the solution? Put God back in the schools.

Approximately eight percent of the nation's schools offer some form of Bible study. This Georgia statute will be the first to establish statewide guidelines and set aside public funds for a Bible course. The State's School Board has until February 2007 to determine how the course will be taught. Surely there'll be bitter court battles waged by those who'd rather see metal detectors at the doors of our schools, and armed security guards patrolling the halls, than to allow our kids to begin their day with the calming influence of The Lord's Prayer over the PA system, or study the Good Book in a classroom setting a couple times each week.

So, if the Board follows through, what form will the course take? In prior years, where Bible study has been allowed on school property it's been done informally. Recently, however, two nationally-prominent groups have developed comprehensive curricula. One such group, the Bible Literacy Project, published *The Bible and Its Influences*, in textbook form. It's been approved by both Christian and Jewish groups. To date, 30 schools are using it in a pilot program, with 800 more interested districts waiting in the wings.

Another organization, The National Council for Bible Curriculum in Public Schools, supported by many conservative evangelicals — Pat Robertson is one — believes that its curriculum is being utilized in over 350 school districts nationwide.

Battle lines are already forming. "You can't turn a public school classroom into a Sunday school classroom," said a spokesman for the Texas Freedom Network, a euphemistic nomenclature for a group whose only idea of freedom is a limiting "freedom from" something — in their case, religion in the public square. They've gone so far as to pay for a study of the Council's curriculum. Driven by an erroneous interpretation of the so-called Doctrine of Separation of Church and State, others of the Madeline Murray O' Hare ilk will likely band together to litigate.

The Council's curriculum teaches the Bible from a conservative Protestant viewpoint, and the Council believes its approach is constitutional. However, it is offering free legal help to districts using it, should they need it. Georgia State Senator, Tom Williams, co-sponsor of the bill, used the Council's curriculum as a guide when he helped draft the legislation. "We simply have to teach, 'This is what happened'. [Now]

make your own judgment," he said.

As someone who believes that we should never have allowed God to be removed from our nation's schools — we've been experiencing the bitter consequences ever since — I'll be watching this experiment in Georgia and in the five other states considering taking the same tack, with considerable interest.

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