

Back to School, Back to the Bible

Hurricane Rita hit. It'll be more long weeks, just like after Katrina, before the Nation is breathing normally. By the time the news from the disaster diminishes, most of America's parents of school aged children will have been to 'back to school night'. Yet, I ask readers to consider the mundane for a moment, amongst all this stress for our Nation, about what is most profound for our Nation. Back to school should be back to the Bible for American students K-College. Knowing the Bible is fundamental to understanding what it means to be American. Believing in the Bible is an individual choice.

Spare the blather about the separation of church and state. Jefferson and the early Courts intended no Christian sect would be the official – Federal - state church, like the Church of England. States had official churches. Only in the 1960s did the activist Courts start using the phrase for the cultural cleansing of Christianity from public life. Jefferson fully intended for the Holy Bible to be a foundational document for every citizen's education and the moral-ethical basis of American Civilization. Thomas Jefferson wrote John Adams that in the pure principles which Jesus taught “there will be found the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to man.”

The good Deist wrote in Notes on the State of Virginia, “God who gave us life gave us liberty. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the Gift of God?” While he was President he supported paying for Christian missionaries and Bibles for Indians from the U.S. Treasury. Advancing Christianity was not advancing a church, but the foundation of the Nation. The deity mentioned in the Declaration of Independence isn't a generic higher power, the Force-like, non-denominational civic God. The God of “In God We Trust” motto of the United States of America, is the Judeo-Christian God of the Holy Bible.

Precisely because the God of American Civilization is the Judeo-Christian God of one time and place, America is based of English, Enlightenment, Protestant ideas of 'Christian' tolerance of all Christian sects and Jews, freedom of religion for all and those of no religion. Which is why understanding the Holy Bible is fundamental to understanding the Founding Fathers. Understanding the Founding Fathers is necessary to comprehend the context and original intent of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the cultural consensus that ruled until the 1960s. The Bible is not the only book to study, but it is absolutely key and essential to know what America is.

Fisher Ames, who suggested the wording for the First Amendment in the first session the Congress, complained in 1789 that “We are spending less time in the classroom on the Bible, which should be the principal text in our schools... The Bible states these great moral lessons better than any other manmade book.” Clearly, the author couldn't imagine black-robed priest-king Judges would use his First Amendment to ban Bibles from the classroom. I didn't look for Bibles in all of my back to school nights. Foolish me.

From first pre-school parents' night (1980) to last high school back-to-school night

(2001), and now anticipating last college parents' weekend, I never considered how important the Bible was in public education. I knew my children needed to know the Bible to know God. That was our responsibility as parents. I knew how daily Bible reading – beginning at age 32 – transformed my life. And, I counted as shameful loss all the earlier years not regularly reading the Bible.

Yet, I failed to connect the dots from my own education. My graduate studies at two very Liberal universities made me a politically Conservative Christian. The hours in libraries illuminated the threads of ideas for American Civilization. America isn't America without the Bible. Plenty of people lived in ignorance, rebellion or other religion's rejection of the Bible, but one unique Judeo-Christian culture is the basis of American Civilization.

The Bible for basic American education has a textbook (www.bibleliteracy.org). Beyond a single course, Biblical influence on America throughout our history, government, literature, art, music, and theater should be taught, not suppressed. The Biblical ideas of Judeo-Christian culture that shaped and energized American Civilization should be taught.

Finally, parents should know teaching their children the Bible is their responsibility. Reading the Bible with your child, daily, will make your child wise.

James Atticus Bowden