

Ruth Green

From: Ruth Green [ruthgreen@cox.net]
Sent: Monday, December 19, 2005 8:11 AM
To: 'Sue Stichel'
Subject: FW: Answer to how things are presently taught in India
Attachments: Essential Edits.wps.doc

Sue – we need to talk. I thought this issue was resolved and Charles keeps bringing it up.

From: Charlmunger@aol.com [mailto:Charlmunger@aol.com]
Sent: Sunday, December 18, 2005 11:45 PM
To: ruthgreen@cox.net
Subject: Re: Answer to how things are presently taught in India

Dear Ruth,

Thank you for your kind words; and I wish you luck in your continuing efforts to resolve the Hindu question.

At the risk of eliciting a reaction of "Oh, no, not that again!" I will admonish you, strongly, that in 12 months you may expect Christian advocacy groups to appear, in force far greater than the Institute for Curriculum Services or the Hindu Education Foundation, to demand an accounting for why the State Board demanded correct descriptions of the crucifixion narrative to be replaced with incorrect ones, to satisfy the demands of a Jewish advocacy group.

The position of the Institute for Curriculum Services is essentially that of the Anti-Defamation League, which is that Jesus of Nazareth was arrested by Romans, and executed on a Roman charge, to maintain the stability of the Roman military rule. Now the whole crucifixion narrative takes about 3 pages in toto in any one of the Gospels, and can be picked up and read in a few minutes by anybody in any number of English translations; and there is no way any disinterested party—Hindu, atheist, Buddhist, you pick it—could read those pages and say that the descriptions imposed by the Institute in the textbooks was an accurate summary of the narrative on those pages.

Imagine that the State Board demanded, at the request of some group called the Egyptian Historical Society, that all descriptions of the Seder meal that describes it as remembering the Exodus and the deliverance of the Hebrews from slavery be deleted, in favor of a bald statement that at the Seder (Passover) meal Jews specifically remember each and every one of the plagues that afflicted Egyptians, including the death of the firstborn in every house. Now, I have attended Seder celebrations, and it is in fact true that at the ones I attended each of the plagues is remembered in order; the celebrants spill wine to show their continuing sorrow for what the Egyptians endured; so on some tortured, hyper-legalistic, technical ground the statement is correct. But changing the textbooks that way would so distort the actual focus of the Seder on the celebration of deliverance, and would have such offensive connotations as written (that present-day Jews revel in recounting the harm done their enemies, a monstrous falsehood), that it would take no genius to foresee that the Jewish community would be justly up in arms as soon as they read it.

So yes, the narrative of one of the four Gospels mentions that part of a Roman cohort was in the crowd that seized Jesus in Gethsemane—but the rest of the crowd was sent by the Temple authorities, and it was to the house of the high priest, not the Roman authority, to which Jesus was taken and it was the Temple council that determined Jesus should die. Yes, the Roman officials wished to prevent an insurrection; but in the narrative the insurrection that was feared was not of Jesus or his followers, but of the crowd that was demanding Jesus' execution and would rise unless it was appeased—and so on. And the connotation that Jesus was executed because he led or threatened to lead an uprising against Roman rule is so offensive as written that it takes no genius to foresee that the Christian community will be up in arms as soon as they read it.

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Now I have profound sympathy with the desire of the Institute for Curriculum Service's desire to quell anti-Semitism, and in the present case, anti-Semitic feelings that arise out of the presentation of Christianity. But if the State Board goes so far in pursuing this aim as to insert what will be widely perceived as lies—a weaker word will not suffice—*about the crucifixion itself* into the textbooks the Board will create, as an unavoidable taint amidst a storm of legitimate anger and indignation, more anti-Semitic feeling than it could ever imagined it could allay. The least important byproduct will be to create widespread anger at the State Board and the whole adoption process.

Neutral language that respects the legitimate desires of the Institute for Curriculum Services and that is not incorrect exists. ("Jesus confronted political and religious authority. He was arrested and executed.") The whole future crisis is eminently avoidable. It is a great pity that the Institute, knowledgeable as they are about the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, and the history of Judaism, and about what stirs Jews to an honest passion, has put forward edits that appear to be ignorant of Christianity, its history, and what stirs Christians to an honest passion, that on the subject of the crucifixion what they put forward will defeat the very ends they sought to accomplish.

For the record, I spent four mortal days going over the full suite of edits from the Institute of Curriculum Services and the Council for Islamic Studies, program by program, page by page, and drafted what I recommended the Curriculum Commission do as a whole, and why. There are a number of edits with which I disagree with one or other group. The Commission essentially ignored all my work and frankly, the textbooks will all be the worse for a whole suite of unnecessary changes and deletions but there will be no severe backlash—*except* for the changes made in treating the crucifixion, where in my view a backlash, which I am afraid we will all deserve, will be certain. All the information needed to fix this one extreme problem—some five or six edits in toto is in the attached file (what I distributed to the Commission to consider before our meeting).

From a scholarly point of view, how the Institute wishes to treat the crucifixion is just wrong and shouldn't be imposed on the books. In the real world, one perhaps has to judge whether the blowback from the Institute for Curriculum Services not getting everything they want is more or less severe than the blowback Christian advocacy groups will deliver, given that the right and the numbers are on their side. The Institute for Curriculum Services may have reason to recall Admiral Yamamoto's comment merely days after his victory at Pearl Harbor; that all his victory had done was to wake a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve. I hope that much of the genuine good the Institute has accomplished will not be swept away by Christians as unheeding of the legitimate concerns of Jews as the Institute is apparently unheeding of the legitimate concerns of Christians.

Again, I am at your service in this or any other issue. — Charles

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