

Letter to the Editor

I'm writing to express my dissatisfaction with the religious instruction/education my children have received from the State system.

As a parent of six children, four of whom attend a state primary school in Toowoomba, I'm writing to share my reasons for having recently ended their attendance (well, three of them) at religious instruction classes.

I am in fact a small "a" atheist, by which I mean that I do not presume an insight into the metaphysical dynamics of the universe, but that I certainly do not believe in a Terran scriptural God of any persuasion. For me it is just as arrogant to say that there *is* a God as it is to say that there isn't. Therefore in all humility I cleave to my ignorance—which however is sufficient proof against scary scriptural Gods. Please excuse these self-indulgent declarations, but they are vital context. Notwithstanding my atheism, I also cleave to a host of moral values, amongst which is a determination not to unduly impose my unbeliefs on my children.

My hope is that they will weigh up the evidence—they may of course experience a personal epiphany—and make up their own minds. It is not for me to indoctrinate but to guide, which for me means to share both my cosmic bewilderment and my intellectual bemusement with the parochial deities that are made to vie for our hearts and minds. At no point, I should add, do I ever stoop to demeaning or ridiculing the church (or any religion), for whose historical/cultural/spiritual significance I have a healthy and prudent respect.

I had supposed that this was a reasonable view that was backed up by a secular state that, withal its tolerance of dogmatic diversity, held similarly disinterested views. Experience, however, has disabused me of this trusting condition.

At my children's previous school I got to know the RI teacher and was just as surprised to fathom her want of education, or qualifications, as I was unsurprised to note her ardour. She was a fundamentalist Christian with no formal training or theological rigour and little education. What she had was obsidian conviction unmoved, bar by compassion for my doomed and benighted state, by any appeal to reason. Is not "reason" and "reasonableness" encouraged in Queensland? I was naturally concerned about her proselytising effect on my children but forbore to act due to the friendship that sprung up between her family and mine. Soon enough we moved away, however, and the incongruous affinity evaporated.

On my guard when we moved to Toowoomba, I hesitantly gave the go-ahead for what I once again hoped would be the religious *education* of my children—our previous experience was surely an anomaly—which I heartily approve as a kind of vaccination against the ravages of full-blown exposure. Happily, it proved effective. Three of my children said they were bored with the RI and wanted out, while the fourth wanted to keep going so that she could keep company with her friends.

Nevertheless I was disgusted again to find that rather than education—the scandalous history of religion, inquiry, discussion, sharing of ideas, even awe at the mystery of life—my children were being spoon-fed inane creationism and twee religious sentiment. Does this not outrageously conflict with the scientific paradigm that they will presently be expected to imbibe (or at least pay lip service to), and upon whose precepts our culture is built, even if it is observed in the breach?

Can someone please tell me exactly what the Queensland Government's conception of religious *education* is? Is the unabashed proselytisation of our children by zealots (however ineffective it may be) really sanctioned by the Bligh Government? And what brand of fundamentalism is it exactly?

Finally, how can my children obtain a balanced perspective on religious questions from the State System?

Sincerely,
Mark Dew